

Institutional CA: Analysis of a Sample

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Abstract

This paper considers the analysis of institutional talks and how they meet their institutional goals. It begins with offering the distinctive characteristics of institutional interactions. Then it is conducted by examining a sample in news interview in terms of the turn-taking organization, the sequence organization, the repair organization and the topic organization, the four basic dimensions of organization as sites of research on institutional talk. The naturally occurring data for analysis is from *Newsnight*, a weekday BBC Television current affairs programme. Consequently, it is suggested that the institutional CA procedures mentioned above can be applied in the analysis of different institutional talks to identify how they meet their institutional goals.

Key words: Conversation analysis; Institutional talk; Organization

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INTRODUCTION

Conversation analysis (CA) is a generic approach to the study of social interaction in situations of daily life.

Most of the early work in CA focused on “ordinary conversation”. With the publication of Atkinson and Drew’s (1979) research on courtroom interaction, the studies of “institutional talk” began to emerge since the late 1970s. Drew and Heritage (1992) offered three main characteristics of institutional interactions: specific goal orientations with relevant identities, special constraints on required contributions, and inferential frameworks and procedures in specific institutional contexts. Although a clear dividing line between ordinary conversation and institutional interaction cannot be drawn (Heritage and Clayman, 2010), the study of institutional interaction is essentially mandated by these distinctive features.

In practice, most institutional contexts can be characterized by a number of questions and answers (Heritage, 2013). Thus, learning to identify the specific data (the number of questions and answers) based on the primary dimensions of analysis is an essential first step in the application of institutional CA. Drew and Heritage (1992) offered six primary dimensions of analysis: (1) turn-taking organization; (2) overall structural organization of the interaction; (3) sequence organization; (4) turn design; (5) Lexical choice; (6) Epistemic and other forms of asymmetry. This paper builds on their work and aims to exemplify analysis of an institutional sample, i.e. news interview and show how an institution talk meets its institutional goal in terms of the turn-taking organization, the sequence organization, the repair organization and the topic organization.

1. BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE DATA

According to Drew and Heritage, “institutional goals” are characteristic of institutional talk (McHoul and Rapley, 2001). Thus, it is important to consider them in institutional CA. Also, studies suggest that much of our information is from news interviews. In this respect, the data which would be analyzed below was an institutional

setting of news interview and its institutional goals were to inform their audience and enable them to make judgements about the topic concerned without undue influence from interviewers (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998).

The data was from *Newsnight*, a weekday BBC Television current affairs programme specializing in analysis and often robust cross-examination of senior politicians. Its video and transcript (see appendix) could be retrieved in the following website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/newsnight/1722479.stm>

It was a conversation between Jeremy Paxman, the interviewer (IR) and Sharron Storer, the interviewee (IE). Paxman was the main presenter of *Newsnight* for 25 years, until announcing in April 2014 that he was stepping down. He usually interviewed politicians and experts, having a reputation for being a cut-throat news interviewer. So it seemed unusual this time for him to interview Storer, an ordinary person.

Storer's husband, Keith Sedgwick, was seriously ill with cancer, but there had been no bed for him at the hospital when he came in and he was sent to Accident Emergency where he spent half an hour on his feet. Storer was so angry at this treatment that she famously criticized Tony Blair (Prime Minister of the U.K. at that time) in public when he was visiting the hospital in Birmingham where her husband was being treated. Afterwards, Paxman interviewed her on it. The extract followed the explanation given by Storer of the reasons for her anger.

2. ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTION CA SAMPLE

The following analysis would focus on how the news interview meets such institutional goals. The data would be comprehensively treated in terms of the turn-taking organization, the sequence organization, the repair organization and the topic organization.

2.1 Turn-Taking Organization

"Conversation unfolds sequentially through participants taking turns at talk" (McHoul and Rapley, 2001, p.116), so a central feature of CA is a concern with the organization of turn-taking. In the news interview, the turn-taking system is conducted within a framework of IR questions and IE responses to those questions (Greatbatch, D.ed.in Drew Heritage, 1992, p.271) and three basic tasks can be managed in the turn-taking procedures, which "provide for the maintenance of the discourse identities IR and IE for the maintenance of the audience as the primary recipients of the talk and for the maintenance of a neutral stance by IR" (ibid., p.271).

Accordingly, the analysis is conducted to show how the tasks are managed in the exchanges between Paxman and Storer.

The extract begins with Paxman citing the fact that the hospital is on its way to improvement. This involves him

saying "it had a new cardiac unit." (See appendix lines 1-4). Then the conversation is mainly conducted within the framework of Paxman questions (lines 10, 19, 26-27, 38 and 43-44) and Storer answers (lines 11-18, 20-23, 28, 39-42, 45 and 47-52). So it is obvious that the discourse identities of IR and IE are maintained in such turn-taking procedures.

For the maintenance of the audience as the primary recipients of the talk, the most typical turn-taking example is in line 19 where Paxman questions with the statement "you didn't let him get a word in edgeways". However, it is not a "real" question, which "is designed to inform the questioner about something that he or she does not know" (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p.150) because Paxman clearly knows it already. Rather, this purpose is to inform the TV audience. In this respect, the turn-taking not only provides for the maintenance of the audience as the primary recipients of the talk, but also meets the institutional goal of informing an audience mentioned above.

There are two obvious turn-takings in the extract which can show that Paxman tries to maintain his neutrality as an IR. One is in line 10, where Paxman avoids taking his turn by stating his opinion but by directing another question "what something snapped when you saw him" to Storer when she asks "why can't Tony Blair come in to the real part of the hospital..." (lines 6-9) the other is in lines 43-44 where Paxman again takes his turn by asking another question "you want to have your cake and eat it, don't you...". Instead of answering it when Storer asks "why should they be taking money off the working man" (lines 41-42). By limiting himself to asking questions, Paxman avoids expressing his personal opinions, thereby preserving his neutrality and letting the audience make judgements on the event without his influence.

Minimal gap and overlap between the exchanges of turns are another two key points as turn-taking organization is concerned. Most utterances in the extract are delivered with no gap (lines 9-10, 18-20, 28-29 35-36, 44-45) but with only one overlap (line 46). It results from the characteristic of the news interview, in which IR maintains the role of report elicitor, so his/her task is to encourage IE to speak as much as possible. Therefore, IR seldom interrupts IE in the conversation. For the only overlap in line 46, Paxman incorrectly anticipates that Storer will stop after the first "everybody" (line 45), but she opts to further her answer, so the overlap occurs here. And the lack of any gaps indicates that Paxman can talk agilely. As noted, he usually interviews politicians and experts and is famous for aggressive questioning, so it is easier for him to manage the interview with an ordinary person.

2.2 Sequence Organization

Another noticeable facet of CA is that utterances at talk are organized sequentially (Ten Have, 1999). Adjacency pairs are the major instrument for the analysis in terms of the sequence organization (ibid.) The basic rule for

adjacency pairs is that “given the recognizable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speak should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type the first is recognisably a member of” (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p.40 cited from Schegloff and Sacks, 1973, p.295). The most familiar utter-pair sequences in conversation are question-answer, invitation-acceptance and greeting-return. Among them, “the question-answer sequence is one such powerfully routine conversation mechanism” (McHoul and Rapley, 2001, p.119), which can be mainly retrieved in the institution of news interview. Conventionally, IR uses a sequence-like structure of repetitive cycles of questioning to elicit information from IE and thereby reach the goal of informing the audience.

It is obvious that the conversation is steered via the form of question and answer. Such adjacency pairs are in lines 10 and 11-18, lines 19 and 20-23, lines 26-27 and 28, lines 38 and 30-42, and lines 43-44 and 45, 47-52. The chaining rule allows Paxman to elicit as much information for the audience from Storer as possible concerning the general topic of National Health Service.

However, “the parts of adjacency pairs do not need to be strictly adjacent at all” (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p.40). Occasionally, a first pair part is produced, but a relevant second part fails to turn up. In that case, inferences can be drawn about the non-appearance of a second pair part. For instance, in lines 6-9, to response to Paxman’s statement that the hospital is on its way to improvement, Storer speaks with relatively high amplitude and presents a series of interrogative sentences “why can’t Tony Blair come in to the real part of the hospital...” (lines 6-9), which can be considered as the first part of a question-answer adjacency pair. But what Paxman produces is not the second part of the pair but the first part of another pair “what something snapped when you saw him” (line 10). Similarly, when Storer directs “why should they be taking money off the working man” (lines 41-42), Paxman again takes his turn by asking another question “you want to have your cake and eat it, don’t you...” (line 43-44) instead of response. Paxman always avoids expressing his opinion overtly because “interviewers should refrain from expressing their own opinions and should not overtly affiliate with or disaffiliate from those expressed by interviewees” (Greatbatch, D. ed in Drew Heritage, 1992, p.270). By limiting himself to asking questions, Paxman avoids expressing his personal opinions and leaves the audience to make their own judgement without undue influence, which as noted, is the institutional goal of news interviews.

2.3 Repair Organization

“The analytic strategy adopted by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) was to identify and describe the general properties of an organization for repair which allows participants to deal with the whole range of

trouble sources” (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998, p.59). However, there are instances of repair although no error occurs, such as incorrect word selection, mis-hearings and misunderstanding in the conversation. For example, Paxman executes repair (lines 29-30) on Storer’s words when Storer says that she did not vote because she thinks that all the leaders are as bad as each other (line 28). In fact, there is not any mistake in her words, but Paxman initiates repair, saying that it is not true to say that they all stay the same (lines 29-30). Consequently, Storer takes her turn conducting repair saying that it is true because they do not do what they promise to do when they get into the Government (lines 31-35). Then, Paxman takes the floor without gap by means of a topical shift to taxes (lines 36-38).

This suggests that instances of repair do occur on words which do not seem to be in any way incorrect, but are produced to introduce a new sub-topic. Thus, as Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) point out, repair tends to occur at the place where a new topic is introduced.

2.4 Topic Organization

There can be a couple of topics or sub-topics in a smooth conversation and they are organized via turns taken by participants. The point where a speaker is going to change the current topic is known as the transition relevance place (TRP). Conventionally, when a topic or sub-topic shifts from one to another, there will be some structural features, such as the use of lexical markers, phonological markers or an evaluation of the current topic, which indicate that a shift of topic or sub-topic will occur (Seedhouse, 2002).

In the extract, there are two TRPs. One is in lines 26-27, the other is in lines 37-38. The conversation moves from poor facilities in the hospital, to voting in the election, to raising taxes. It remains coherent within the overall topic of the National Health Service. As Paxman states “you didn’t let him get a word in edgeways” (line 19), Storer confirms it in a relatively lower pitch. Besides, there are some audible in-breaths (lines 21-22) and some short pauses (lines 20 and 22) in her turn. Finally, she repeats “he couldn’t get a word edgeways” in a low pitch (line 22-23). These cues as noted indicate that the topic has been sufficiently explored, so Paxman subsequently introduce another sub-topic---voting in the election--- at an eminently ripe place (lines 26-27) by means of asking “did you actually vote in the election”. By asking such a question Paxman wants to elicit information for the audience concerning which party Storer supports as it will affect her attitude to the current government. However, Storer does not do as Paxman expects. She says she did not vote because they are as bad as each other (lines 26-28). To continue the sub-topic, Paxman then initiates repair by saying that it is not true to say they all stay the same (lines 29-30). Consequently, Storer conducts repair by saying that it is true because no party does what it promises after it gets into Government (lines 31-

35). Afterwards, Paxman takes his turn by saying that raising taxes to fund the NHS is a real change of tone in the Government (lines 36-38). Thus, he shifts from voting to taxes. As mentioned, a topic or sub-topic can be introduced by means of repair.

2.5 Summary

The analysis above is conducted in terms of turn-taking organization, sequence organization, repair organization and topic organization. Accordingly, it is clear that this instance of news interview interaction involves the production of “talk for an overhearing audience”, is strongly constrained within the question-answer procedures and embodies a constraint on IR to withhold expression of agreement or disagreement in response to IE’s opinion. There are the primary features of the institutional setting of the news interview (Drew and Heritage, 1992).

However, it proves that though IRs may try their best not to reveal their personal opinions in the interviewing process, viewers can still deduce whether or not they agree with their IEs. “Such assumptions may be found on impressions that the interviewer has ‘given off’ (Goffman, 1959, p.2ff)” (Clayman, S.E. ed. in Drew and Heritage, 1992, p.174). It is found that the turn-initial “but” is frequently used by Paxman to begin with his turn (lines 1, 19, 24, 29, 36, 46). According to Clayman (1988), “but” indicates that a disagreement is about to be produced. Besides, the use of aggressive questions can mirror a personal hostility to the topic (Greatbatch, D. ed. in Drew Heritage, 1992). The most obvious aggressive lines of questioning in the extract are in lines 29-30 where Paxman initiates repair and in lines 43-44 where he directs another provocative question. Therefore, it can be concluded that Paxman does not agree with Storer in many points although he may have tried to be objective in his work.

CONCLUSION

This paper demonstrates the analysis of institutional talks and how they meet their institutional goals. By examining the data of institutional interaction in news interviews in terms of turn-taking organization, the sequence organization, the repair organization and the topic organization, it shows how the news interview meets its institutional goals. Although it focuses on the institutional talk in the context of news interviews, its implication can be applied in the analysis of different institutional talks.

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APPENDIX

Transcription---

“Sharron Storer” (*Newsnight*)

2001

Participants: P--- Jeremy Paxman(interviewer)

S--- Sharron Storer (interviewee)

1. P: =Yeah? But the reason Tony Blair was visiting the hospital was because it
2. was a place .h where there had been a lot of investment, it had a new
3. cardiac unit, they are recruiting staff they are going to *rebuild*
4. the whole place.
5. S: OH? YEAH? THAT’S WONDERFUL? ABSOLUTELY
6. WONDERFUL. But wha-t is(0.5)why *can*’t Tony Blair come in to the
7. rea:l .hh part of the hospital. Which is *crying* out to be redeveloped, *crying*
8. out to have new .hh erm(0.5) equipment? Why *can*’t he come up there and
9. see what’s really happening?=
10. P: =What something snapped when you saw him? or what-
11. S: Well? To be honest with you, I-just(0.5)I(.)had gone up to Keith and
12. said “*Tony Blair*’s coming” and he said “I wish I could go downstairs
13. and tell him what for”.hh I just said to Keith .h urm (.) I said “I’m going
14. to the toilet”, I just went downstairs. Erm, *all* that time, *all* I could think
15. of was the *terrible* 24-hour ordeal that we had..hh (0.5) downstairs.Urm-
16. I just (0.5) *stood* there, and then next minute he was coming towards
17. me?.h And then(1.0) everybody knows the rest of (.) what happened after
18. that=
19. P: =Yeah? But you *didn*’t let him get a word in edgeways?=
20. S: =I know I didnt? I know, I realised that when I was (0.5) watching the
21. tape afterwards .h that here was his guy, and I was just going hammer for
22. tongue, .h and just(.) *telling* him exactly what I thought. And, no, he
23. couldn’t get a word in edgeways.
24. P: .h But you were *clearly* someone who was very angry, very distressed,
25. felt passionately that something had to be done to improve the NHS in
26. general. (0.5) You took it out on Tony Blair. (1.0) Did you actually vote in
27. the election?
28. S: No. I didn’t vote. I think they’re all as bad as each other? =
29. P: =But you *can*’t believe that, you can’t beli::eve that (0. 5) whichever party is
30. in government it all stays the same. Because that’s *not true*?
31. S: BECAUSE IT’S TRUE? BECAUSE THEY ARE ALL EVERYONE that
32. tried to get into the Government .h they all spends all this time saying
33. “We’re going to do this, improve that, make things better” and *once* they’re
34. in, not one of them does a *goddamn* thing to make it right, and to do what
35. they *promise* that they’re going to do.=
36. P: =()But since the election? there has been a rea:l change of tone in the
37. Government. They *are* now talking about raising taxes to fund the NHS.
38. You must be pleased about that?
39. S: .h Well? I am in *two* minds on that. because I think that .h yes, it’s a-a good
40. thing that they’re going to put up taxes to:: (2.0) put to the National Health
41. Service but then again (.) why should they be taking money off the
42. wor::king man?
43. P: ()You want to have your cake and eat it, don’t you? You want a much
44. better National Health Service(.) without paying more taxes for it?=
45. S: =Well, doesn’t everybody. everybody wants to be able to go to a *hospital*
46. P: //Yeah.But*
47. S: and get the *treatment* that they deserve. I have been in the hospital for eight
48. months .h an: d all that time that I was there I never seen any improvements
49. on the wards, I saw the doctors and I saw the nurses, .h working shifts all
50. around the clock, not even getting a break, not even getting a dinner break.
51. .h So (.) *if* that money was going in. surely those things should be
52. improving by now? but they’re not?