Transcription conventions

Notes on contributors

1 Introduction: the relevance of talk
   Paddy Scannell

2 Referable words in radio drama
   Peter M. Lewis

3 The interview as social encounter
   John Corner

4 News interview openings: aspects of sequential organization
   Steven E. Clayman

5 Evasive action: how politicians respond to questions in political interviews
   Sandra Harris

6 Ideology, scripts and metaphors in the public sphere of a general election
   Greg Garton, Martin Montgomery and Andrew Tolson

7 The organization of talk on talk radio
   Ian Hutchby

8 Our Tune: a study of a discourse genre
   Martin Montgomery

9 Televised chat and the synthetic personality
   Andrew Tolson

10 Talk, identity and performance: The Tony Blackburn Show
    Graham Brand and Paddy Scannell

Index
News Interview Openings: Aspects of Sequential Organization

Steven E. Clayman

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

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

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

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

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

Data

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

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

The opening sequence

The only part of the interview that is explicitly addressed to the audience is the opening. In it the interviewer delivers his or her remarks directly to the camera, rather than addressing the interviewees or other programme per-
sonnel. Moreover, this stretch of talk has distinguishable components that regularly unfold in a fixed order of occurrence. This is not to say that specific openings are identical in structure; variations may be observed. Yet underlying these differences is a formal sequential organization that remains constant across the programmes examined, and across a wide range of topics and interviewees. The sequence and its components are briefly outlined. This method of initiating a state of interaction is then contrasted with openings in ordinary conversation, and it is shown that the differences are related to the non-spontaneous or 'staged' character of interview encounters.

**Headline**

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

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

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

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

[2] [Nightline 3 June 1985]

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

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

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

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

1. A major credit card forgery ring has been cracked by federal authorities.
[4] [MacNeil/Lehrer 11 June 1985a]

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

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

[5] [Nightline 23 July 1985]

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

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

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

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

1. We begin our focus sections tonight with a closer look at today's announcement that the United States will continue to observe the limits of the never-ratified SALT II arms control treaty.
[7] [MacNeil/Lehrer 12 June 1985a]

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

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

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

[8] [Nightline 24 July 1985]

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

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

[9] [Nightline 4 June 1985]

01  From the A-bomb of 40 years ago to the most sophisticated
02  undersea weaponry of today, what has motivated Americans
to steal US military secrets for the Soviet Union?
04  Good evening. I'm Ted Koppel in Washington and this is
05  Nightline.
Our topic, the Walker family spy case and its role in the continuing cloak and dagger war between the CIA and the KGB. Our guests include a former deputy director of the CIA, and from the federal penitentiary at Marion, Illinois, Christopher Boyce, the so-called Falcon of ‘Falcon and the Snowman’ fame, now serving 40 years for spying for the Soviets.

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

Story

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

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

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

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

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


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

Lead-in

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

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

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

1. We hear first from . . .

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

1. We pick up the debate now with . . .

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

[14] [Nightline 26 July 1985]

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

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

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

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

01. And that’s one of the concerns that makes junk bonds as troubling to some members of Congress as they are on Wall Street.
03. Senator Pete Domenici, Republican of New Mexico, is one of their most outspoken critics. He is the sponsor of legislation that would sharply reduce the use of junk bonds in hostile takeovers.
08. He’s with us tonight from Capitol Hill.
09. Senator, what’s the problem with using these things on takeovers?
This particular introduction is somewhat atypical in that it lacks a prefatory item. However, the last sentence of the story segment (01–03) implicitly prepares for the introduction by shifting the topic toward 'members of Congress'. Moreover, the ' ushering-in' task ordinarily done in the pre-introduction is here accomplished after the identification segment (08). At any rate, the end of the introduction marks the completion of the opening segment, after which comes the first question (09–10).

**Implications: the news interview as a stage encounter**

When interview openings are contrasted with interactional openings in more 'informal' settings, such as casual conversation (see Schegloff, 1968, 1979, 1986; Jefferson, 1980), three features stand out as distinctive. These features combine to visibly mark the encounter as having been prearranged for the benefit of the viewing audience. First, many of the canonical elements of conversational openings are absent. In particular, there is no preliminary process through which speakers ordinarily exhibit their availability and readiness to interact (Schegloff, 1968, 1986). The problem of achieving coordinated entry into talk is a general one, and may be resolved through a verbal summons and answer sequence (Schegloff, 1968) or, in face-to-face interaction, through additional non-verbal processes employing gaze and bodily orientation to move toward interactional readiness (cf. Schiffrin, 1977; Heath, 1984). However, in news interviews no such process is observable; when the parties initially appear on screen, their physical comportment indicates that they are already 'primed' to interact. This pre-existing availability and readiness can be understood in light of the fact that interview participants arrive at the studio or are placed before remote camera links prior to air time; hence, they have already been aligned as interactants. And since they initially appear ready to proceed, but do not actually begin talking until they are introduced to the audience, the interaction appears to viewers as one that has been set up in advance expressly for their benefit.1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. We begin our focus sections tonight with a closer look at today's announcement that the United States will continue to observe the limits of the never-ratified Salt II arms control treaty.
Tomorrow the Reagan administration makes another stab at getting aid for the rebels or contras fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua, and tonight we have a preview of the debate in Congress.

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

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

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

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

In other openings, however, the event/interview relationship is not established quite so explicitly. Headlines do not always contain agenda projections with embedded events. Some agenda projections have more general themes embedded within them (see [7] above), where the connection to any recent set of events is not specified. Moreover, headlines need not contain agenda projections at all; some simply announce a news item (see [3]–[5]) without actually formulating it as a topic for discussion. Similarly, the pre-introduction need not contain advance information about the topic; some merely ‘usher’ the interviewees into the interaction (e.g. [12]; see also [14]). When these conditions are present, the interviewer announces a news item, elaborates background information and introduces the interviewees without ever actually stating that the interview will be dealing with the reported events. For example:

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

Introducing the interviewees

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

Person-description and introduction

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

[20] [Nightline 7 October 1986]

I. Joining us in our Washington bureau are

1. Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts,

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

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

Selecting descriptive items

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

The answer, illuminated by a range of conversation analytic studies (e.g. Sacks, 1972, 1974; Schegloff, 1972; Drew, 1978; Watson, 1978; Maynard, 1982) is that selection decisions depend upon what situated activity is being accomplished in and through the description. The practice of describing is not a detached activity performed purely as an end in itself. Actual descriptions are always produced in some specific context for some practical purpose, and are addressed to an identifiable recipient. Particular descriptive items are selected in accordance with what is relevant in this situated context, for it is there that the description must accomplish whatever work it is called upon to do.
for discussion. And if previous arguments about an event/interview sequence are correct, the agenda should coherently follow from events reported earlier in the opening. The interviewee’s identity should thus be formulated in a way that will align him or her to the focal matter, indicating the specific capacity in which he or she will be speaking to it. What is exhibited, then, is a topically aligned identity for the interviewee. This is clearly operating in the above introductions as only South African-relevant items are involved, and in particular those dealing with race relations there. (The only exception is in line (10) where the title ‘Doctor’ is employed, but titles have ritual significance which make them generally relevant on formal occasions such as this.) Accordingly, one principle governing the selection of descriptive items is the topical relevance principle, which operates as follows: select those components of interviewees’ selves that are most relevant to the forthcoming topic as it is foreshadowed earlier in the opening (cf. Schegloff, 1972).

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

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

[23] [Nightline 6 June 1985]

I. We’ll focus tonight on two of the issues raised by the ABC documentary ‘The Fire Unleashed’. Nuclear reactors and nuclear waste. The tradeoff between risk and advantage.

(Background segment – 100 lines.)

(Commercial break.)

I. With us now live at our affiliate KOAT in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Don Hancock, administrator of
1. the Southwest Research and Information Center,
2. a group dealing with energy and environmental issues.

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

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

(Background information – 8 lines.)

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

He is now a senior fellow on
1. the Council for Hemispheric Affairs.
2. a Washington organization monitoring human rights and political developments in Central America.

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

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

Participant-observer Interviewees may be shown to have first-hand knowledge of the focal matter. This may be conveyed by identifying them as participants in the events or processes reported at the outset. For example, in the following discussion of US-Soviet summity, the interviewees are jointly identified as having played ‘key roles in East/West summit meetings in the 1970s’ (07-08). Each party’s specific summit experience is then outlined in turn (11-13).

[25] [Nightline 10 October 1986]

01 I. The practice of summity, it’s been going on for centuries,
02 but really, does the payoff match the pomp? . . . We’ll go
03 behind the scenes of summit meeting strategy tonight as we
04 talk with two men who in past summits have been directly
05 involved in getting US and Soviet leaders ready.

(Background segment – 100 lines.)

07 I. Joining us now are two men who played key roles in
08 preparing for East-West summit meetings in the 1970s.
09 Former Soviet diplomat Arkady Shevchenko helped brief
10 Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev for the 1972 Nixon–Brezhnev
11 summit in Moscow. Former National Security official
12 William Hyland was involved in that summit and others with
13 presidents Nixon and Ford.

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

[26] [Nightline 26 July 1985]

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

(Background segment – 150 lines.)
advocates come in pairs representing 'both' sides of the issue, and they are positioned to speak in an official capacity.

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

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

In the following, repair is initiated by the interviewee (18–21) after the introduction has been completed and the first question is posed.
Assembling the precipitating news story

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

Story formulations preceding informational versus debate interviews

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

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

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

[MacNeil/Lehrer 6 October 1986b]

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

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

[MacNeil/Lehrer 10 June 1985b]

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

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

[MacNeil/Lehrer 13 June 1985a]

01 I. ... The Reagan administration is pushing a new fund of some four million dollars to help community groups set up such tests.
But the move is being fought by the National Association of Realtors... We have both sides of the argument now...

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

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

[MacNeil/Lehrer 25 July 1985a]

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

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

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

(Cut to taped segment.)

FA. (Condensation statement by the French ambassador.)

DA. (Condensation statement by the Danish ambassador.)

(Return to the studio.)

I. The sanctions issue now as seen by two white South Africans:

Sheena Duncan, president of the anti-apartheid organization known as the Black Sash and John Chettle, director of the Washington-based South Africa Foundation.

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

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

[MacNeil/Lehrer 10 June 1985a]

I. We begin our focus sections tonight with a closer look at today's announcement that the United States will continue to observe the limits of the never-ratified SALT II arms control treaty. A decision was needed because the US strategic force is nearing a key treaty limitation, the number of allowed multiple-warhead missiles, which carries more than one nuclear weapon. SALT II allows each side 1200. The Soviets now have 1130; the US, 1190. The sea trials of a new US Trident submarine would put the US 14 missiles over the limit. That violation was avoided by the President's decision to withdraw a Poseidon submarine from service, which keeps the US level at 1198, two under the SALT II limit. As we reported, today's decision was made despite administration findings that the Soviets have violated some of the terms of the 1979 treaty.

With us for a newsmaker interview is Kenneth Adelman, director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

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

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

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

[36] [MacNeil/Lehrer 10 June 1985]

01 The United States will remain in compliance with SALT II despite violations of that unratified nuclear arms treaty by the Soviet Union. President Reagan's decision was announced today following weeks of speculation and advice on what it should be. The decision means the United States will remain under the nuclear warhead missile limits of SALT II by dismantling an old submarine when a new Trident sub is launched this fall. The announcement was accompanied by a warning to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to the Soviets must quit violating the treaty's terms. National Security Advisor Robert McFarlane did the talking and explaining for Mr Reagan this afternoon.

(RM) (Cut to tape of Robert McFarlane at a press conference.)

01 The pattern of Soviet violations, if left uncorrected, undermines the integrity and viability of arms control as an instrument to assure a secure and stable future. The United States will continue to pursue vigorously with the Soviets the resolution of our concerns over Soviet noncompliance. However, in the interests of assuring that every opportunity to establish the secure, stable future that we seek is fully explored, I am prepared to go the extra mile to seek an interim framework of truly mutual restraint. This is not an open-ended commitment in perpetuity. We will evaluate Soviet cooperation, Soviet building programs, their performance in Geneva - all of these things and, as milestones are reached in the future, the decision may be different.

This formulation contains few technical details about the treaty or conditions surrounding the decision to honour it; the only exception is one sentence (05-08) explaining what compliance will mean. Thus, unlike the pre-interview version, there is no direct mention of the treaty's specific terms, nor the numbers of warheads on each side, nor why a decision was necessary at this time. Moreover, the question of Soviet violations, which is treated as only one of the various situational conditions in the pre-interview version, here takes a much more prominent position. From the very first statement (01-03) the decision is framed as having been made 'despite violations' by the USSR. This highlights the controversial nature of the decision, a property which is further emphasized by noting that the decision followed 'weeks of speculation and advice' (04). And in addition to the decision itself, this story reports another event that 'accompanied' the announced decision (08-10): an official warning to Gorbachev to 'quit violating the treaty's terms'. This is followed by a rather extended taped segment (14-27) showing the warning itself as it was issued at a press conference.

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

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

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

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

The story leads toward this debate by reporting recent events that may alter congressional sympathies (04-07), identifying various positions within the House and Senate (07-10) and reporting Reagan's recent efforts to 'woo'
members of Congress over to his side by promising direct talks with the Sandinistas (10–13). These events each include temporal formulations relating them to the present occasion, and are arranged to temporally zero in on it: ‘last April’ (04), ‘last week’ (07), ‘tomorrow’ (08), ‘today’ (11). All of this is fitted to the final introductions leading into the interview proper, which begin with a prefix (‘We pick up the debate now . . .’) presenting the interview as the next phase of this developing debate.

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

[38] [MacNeil/Lehrer 11 June 1985]

01 President Reagan said today he is exploring the possibility of resuming direct talks with the Sandinista government of Nicaragua. He said it in a letter he gave members of Congress in a White House meeting. Both the letter and the meeting are part of the administration’s new effort to get some kind of funds for the anti-Sandinista contra guerrillas. The House is to vote on a 27 million dollar compromise proposal tomorrow. Several Democrats who voted against contra aid last month were at the White House today and said they could support the new proposal.

(Taped statement of Congressman Dave McCurdy follows.)

11 We will hear later from Congressman McCurdy and others in a focus segment on the contra aid question.

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

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

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

Concluding remarks

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

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

First, openings function to set an agenda for the interview; they both define and delimit the parameters of permissible discussion. This is significant for the social construction of news because, for a variety of technological and organizational reasons, news in both England and the United States is increasingly being generated through processes of spoken interaction (Heritage et al., 1988). Thus, relatively spontaneous interactional encounters are coming to replace fully scripted news reports, and the growth of the news interview is one manifestation of this trend. In this context, news content cannot be fully explained without first understanding how topical agendas are established and enforced within such interactional encounters. The present analysis of the
interview opening addresses one component of this process. It is important to avoid overstating the significance of the opening sequence; it does not create an impenetrable barrier within which participants are trapped throughout the course of the interview. However, it does establish a set of discussion parameters and makes them available to the participants as well as the audience of ‘overhearrers’, thus creating at least the necessary conditions for their enforcement. Future research should follow the lead of Greatbatch (1986a, 1986b) to determine how topical agendas are managed within the interview, and consider further how the opening segment figures in this process.

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

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


