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Topic Management in the Interviews of Louis Theroux

Robert Jones

Louis Theroux has been described as 'the best interviewer of the oddball and bewildered' (White, 2007) and a man whose 'subversive style' (Day, 2002) has gained several awards for his television series. Through the framework of conversation analysis, this essay aims to investigate the topic management and questioning strategies used in his interviews with particular attention to how these strategies affect the participants' respective control over the interaction.

BACKGROUND

Robin Day, a veteran of British television who was claimed to have 'transformed the television interview,' (Taverne, 2000) wrote that 'an interview must not degenerate into a platform for a man's unchallenged opinions.' (Day, 1961: 105) Day argues that it is the interviewer's duty to oppose and challenge the interviewee. A journalist may attempt to avoid this by being 'disinterested and neutral in their questioning [but] because questions inevitably encode points of view and decisions about relevance, they can never be strictly neutral.' (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 29-30) This suggests that the television interview is an inescapably conflictual form of discourse in which participants constantly struggle to control the discussion and the topic it covers.

Conversation Analysis provides a framework for objective research of this control through analysis of turn structures: 'the organization of taking turns to talk is fundamental to conversation […] and for talking in interviews.' (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974: 696) Turns themselves are divided into turn-constructional units (hereafter TCUs) - 'the speaker is initially entitled, in having a turn, to one such unit.' (Sacks et al, 1974: 703) This entitlement is known as "the floor" and it is always transferable: in order for conversation to function, 'cues must be available for requesting the floor and giving it up.' (Goffman, 1964: 136) These cues are defined by Sacks et al (1974: 703) as transition-relevance-places (hereafter TRPs): places at the end of TCUs when transition to another speaker becomes relevant but not compulsory. Interlocutors are able to gauge these TRPs because every TCU anticipates and projects its own conclusion – though the original model of Sacks et al 'leaves open the matter of how projection is done' (ibid.), He (2002) suggests that 'sentential, clausal, phrasal, lexical, intonational, or pragmatic' features contribute while Heritage (2002) claims that 'each party (whether consciously or not) displays an understanding and analysis of the other's conduct through the production of a next action in a sequence' - that is, that a TCU is considered as complete merely by virtue of all participants recognising it as such, and that this recognition is shown in their following actions.

This highlights an important feature of the turn-taking system: that it is not a prescriptive plan but a sequential and co-maintained scheme developed on a turn-by-turn basis, with each turn being some form of response to those preceding it. The participants in the interaction co-operate to ensure that 'one party talks at a time.' (Sacks et al 1974: 700)

When a TRP is reached, there are three rules which dictate how the next speaker takes the floor:

> (a) that if a "current-speaker selects next", then transfer to the party so selected occurs; (b) that if such an allocation technique has not been used, then self-selection is permitted, but not required, at this place; and (c) that if another does not self-select, then current speaker may, but need not, continue. (Goodwin, 1981: 21)

These rules adhere to the one-party-talks-at-a-time convention, however 'to take "one-at-a-time" to be a basic design feature in participants' co-construction of talk-in-interaction is not to assert that it is invariably achieved.' (Schegloff, 2000: 2) Failure to adhere to the one-at-a-time rule can be a simple error on the behalf of an interlocutor who has mistakenly anticipated the conclusion of the speaker's TCU, a common misunderstanding caused by the problem of 'natural breaks' in conversation being indistinguishable from TRPs. (Mey, 2001: 139) However, unlike these natural overlaps, the act of contesting the floor during another's TCU can also be deliberate. In such a case, it is an interruption. Interruptions are 'starts by a second speaker while another is speaking and is not near possible completion,' (Schegloff, 1987: 85) which act as a 'violation of the current speaker's right to be engaged in speaking' (West 1984: 55) – they are, therefore, a strong expression of interactional dominance on behalf of the interrupter.

Another method by which talk is organised – and therefore controlled - by its participants is the use of adjacency pairs. An adjacency pair is a codified structure of conversation in which an utterance from one speaker defines their expectations of the next speaker's turn: for example, a greeting is expected to be followed by a response. When first defining the adjacency pair, Schegloff and Sacks (1973: 296) stated that following the 'recognizable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type of which the first is recognizably a member.' Tsui (1989: 545) has added to this by stating that such pairs are often actually three part sequences, in which the second pair part is commented upon and responded to by the first speaker. Building upon this concept, Gardner (2005) argues that such embellishments are 'expansions' of the basic adjacency pair and can occur anywhere in the exchange structure: 'before the first pair part, between the two parts, or after the second pair part. These expansions can become very elaborate, with sometimes several minutes of talk hung on a single adjacency pair.' Thus, the introduction of a first pair part could allow one participant to shape and influence significant portions of the ensuing dialogue. The initiation of an adjacency pair sequence can, in addition to affecting the form of the second pair part, also influence its content through a system of preferred and dispreferred responses: 'many first pair parts have two principal possible second pair parts […] It has also been observed that there is a structurally inbuilt preference of one of these responses.' (Gardner, 2005) In giving a dispreferred response, speakers delay and qualify themselves, whereas a preferred response is 'straightforward and immediate.' (ibid.) Refusal to give a preferred response is therefore an uncooperative act and thus a potential source of conflict between speakers.

Greatbatch (1988: 401) suggests that the turn-taking structures outlined above are altered in certain institutional contexts: in interviews, 'constraints on the production of types of turns operate with respect to the institutional identities interviewer (IR)/interviewee (IE) and specify that the incumbents of these roles should confine themselves to asking questions and providing answers, respectively.' Greatbatch distinguishes between news interviews and celebrity and talk show interviews, arguing that the former adhere rigidly to these constraints while the latter are more flexible, but this depends on the topic under discussion: 'when

matters of public policy and public controversy arise […] they are generally much more guarded.' (ibid.: 426) According to Short (1996: 206-7), 'powerful speakers in conversations have the most turns, have the longest turns, initiate conversational exchanges, control what is talked about and who talks when, and interrupt others.' Since Greatbatch's model ascribes most of these qualities to the IR, this suggests that despite their conflictual nature, interviews of all types are structured so that they generally locate control in the IR rather than the IE. A deviation from these expectations would, following Short and Greatbatch's findings, indicate a significant shift in power relations between IR and IE. However, it is worth noting that Louis Theroux's interviews are not broadcast as news, nor as talk shows. They are documentaries filmed "on location" over several weeks, and as such may be expected to deviate from Greatbatch's model, which focuses on studio programming and does not account for this particular subgenre. Clayman adds to Greatbatch's work by proposing a system of evasiveness in IE responses: 'negative' resistance of the IR's agenda is achieved by refusing to fully answer questions, while 'positive' resistance is enacted by actively redirecting the topic itself. Both forms can be used overtly or covertly, depending on how openly aggressive the IE wishes to be. (Clayman, 2001: 403-412) Therefore, by classifying resistance features in this way, it is possible to measure the level of conflict in interviews.

Through the methodologies described above, Conversation Analysis provides a rigid and unambiguous system for the analysis of turn structures in relation to interactional control - making it highly relevant to this essay's aim of mapping power relations in television interviews. However, while these rules are well-defined and applicable, they are not without their flaws. There is some disagreement in the field over the application of contextual information to transcripts. Heritage claims that 'it is fundamentally through interaction that context is built […] the participants build the context of their talk in and through their talk' - contextual information is inferred from the text, rather than applied onto it 'from the outside'. (Heritage, 1998 (1): 4) However, Moerman (1988: 48) argues for the opposite: a 'culturally contextualized conversation analysis' which accounts for the notion that '[a]ll speech occurs in some particular socio-cultural setting that must be described if we are to understand what is said'. Following Moerman's approach, some contextual information is included to aid understanding because the transcripts used in this essay are short extracts from a larger whole and the television interview is a specialised situation.

Another consequence of the exclusive focus on spoken language, as proposed by Heritage, is that it potentially overlooks the influence of non-audible modes of communication. Gesture and facial expression are not taken into account , since 'CA does not often concern itself with nonlinguistic turns' (Bramlett and Raabe, 2004: 187) despite a growing body of work suggesting that gesture is a significant communicative device (see McNeill, 2000). However, although gesture certainly complements spoken language, its role in turn-structuring is minimal and thus its omission from this essay should not have much impact.

NOTES ON THE DATA

The transcripts used here are taken from two Louis Theroux television documentaries: excerpt one is from *The Most Hated Family in America*, first broadcast in the UK in March 2007. Excerpt two is from *Louis Theroux's Weird Weekends: Looking for Love*, first broadcast in the UK in October 2000. Although both are unscripted, it is impossible to know how much planning went into Louis' questions beforehand and thus his speech cannot always be considered truly spontaneous – similarly, it is also impossible to gauge the preparedness of the interviewees. As with all television programmes, there is the danger that selective editing may leave the data biased and unrepresentative of the actual interaction – to negate this, each

excerpt was chosen specifically because, although they are part of an edited whole, the excerpts themselves are continuous and uncut stretches of discourse. As these programmes are available in the public domain, there are no ethical issues relating to their use. Throughout this essay, line numbers of transcripts are referred to in the form [x] where x is the number of the line in question.

ANALYSIS

The first extract is an impromptu interaction between Louis and Pastor Fred Phelps, known as 'Gramps', the head of the controversial Westboro Baptist Church. This church, run by the Phelps family, is the subject of Louis' film, *The Most Hated Family in America*. It takes place just after Gramps has delivered a sermon on the evils of homosexuality, and begins as follows:

(Excerpt 1.1)

1 LOUIS: pastor would there be five minutes for a couple of questions?

2 GRAMPS: well, uh (1) yeh five minutes (.) shoot=

3 LOUIS: =okay (0.5) you know I was struck by your preaching you you referred
4 mainly to (.) old testament and it was almost as though you felt we were
5 living in a time of biblical::: prophecy (.) is that accurate?

6 GRAMPS: no it's not accurate (.) if you had the (.) just a little knowledge of the bible
7 you would know that what you just said is stuPIDITY (.) in spades (.) I
8 don't know how to deal with a question like that (.) you're just (.) you're
9 just too dumb (.) sorry (.) EM er yer you got the duty to know the bible as
10 well as I do=

11 LOUIS: =why

12 GRAMPS: because you're a human being (.) because God all mighty made you (.)
13 and God all mighty's gonna send your ass to hell

Louis' first turn at [1] constitutes the first pair part of the 'request-grant' adjacency pair (Sacks et al, 1974: 716) – his initiation of the conversation is consistent with Greatbatch's assertion that the IR almost always takes the first turn in interview interactions. (1988: 405) This initiation is an act of interactional dominance according to Short's system outlined above, as is Louis' selection of Gramps as next speaker and simultaneous restriction of his choice in utterance form and content. However, Gramps' response at [2] shows that matters are not so straightforward. Although he produces the expected preferred second pair part by granting the request, he prefaces this reply with *well* – a particle which is often used to indicate disagreement with the previous speaker or to preface a turn in which a second pair part is not produced, or both. (Schiffrin, 1987: 117-125) Thus, the occurrence of *well* indicates a reluctance to comply, accentuated by the ensuing delay before the act of granting finally takes place. Gramps, although he agrees to the interview, does so in a manner which challenges Louis' authority. By ending this turn with the imperative *shoot*, Gramps frames any subsequent questioning on Louis' part as compliance with this command, rather than as Louis' own initiative. These first two turns serve as a pre-expansion, legitimising and

projecting the question-answer format of the turns to follow rather than transferring information, yet a conflict between the two speakers is nevertheless evident.

This discord becomes more pronounced in Gramps' response at [6-10]: the utterance *no it's not accurate* is the minimum response possible to Louis' question at [3-5] and Gramps offers no justification to support this denial: in Clayman's terms, it is an act of negative resistance. A shift in topic immediately follows: rather than take up Louis' proposed topic of biblical prophecy, Gramps chooses to insult Louis' biblical knowledge and line of questioning. Clayman (2001: 423) describes such topic reorientation as an effective tactic - '[b]y attacking the question in this way, the IE both justifies his failure to provide an answer and deflects the discussion away from the substance of the question and toward the manner in which it was raised.' Gramps places the blame for his lack of co-operation on Louis by labelling him as *too dumb*. At [11], Louis' acceptance of Gramps' topic of biblical duty shows that he has relinquished the 'reserved right' of control to which the initiator of a conversation is entitled (Sacks, 1995: 264) and that Gramps is setting the agenda. His turn at [6-10] is the longest single turn in the entirety of the transcripts, at 61 words – long turns are characteristic of more powerful speakers (Short, 1996: 206-7). However, as noted by Hester and Francis, in most interview situations 'it is the views, actions and knowledge of the IE that are the *focus* of the interview.' (2001: 213) Therefore, Louis' concession of the right to speak in this regard may be intended to provide the viewing audience with further exposure to Gramps – instead of interactional control being taken from him against his will, Louis may have given it up deliberately to satisfy audience expectations.

Yet while interactional control is heavily disputed throughout segment 1.1, the participants nevertheless adhere to the roles of IR-questioner and IE-answerer, co-constructing their talk within the institutional constraints of the interview format. However, as the interview continues, this co-construction starts to fail, as excerpt 1.2 demonstrates.

(Excerpt 1.2)

14	LOUIS:	is it accurate to say that (.) you regard (.) the Westboro Baptist Church as
15		[the only church that's giving]
16	GRAMPS:	[is this ah:::]
17	LOUIS:	(.) biblical (.) [>that's preaching according to the word of God<]
18	GRAMPS:	[i- i- i- is this three] (.) is this three minutes up
19	LOUIS:	no [w-
20	GRAMPS:	[the answer to your question is yes=
21	LOUIS:	=no it was ⬆five minutes
22	GRAMPS:	well but I already talked two didn't I
23	LOUIS:	so there's three left?

When Gramps begins his utterance at [16], the syntactic and lexical features of Louis' speech clearly show his intention to continue talking: were he to stop at that point, his sentence would be noticeably incomplete. Thus, although the boundary of a TCU can sometimes be difficult to define (Have, 2007: 125) it is evident that Louis has not expressed the meaning of

his sentence by the point at which Gramps begins – therefore, by refusing to wait for a TRP in Louis' speech, Gramps commits an interruption. Yet he abandons this interruption before completion, while Louis also pauses after the word *giving* at the same time that Gramps stops talking. Bilmes explains this phenomenon as a consequence of the one-party-speaks-at-a-time rule: regardless of whether a speaker is the interrupter or the interrupted, 'when conversationalists find themselves speaking simultaneously, one will typically stop in mid-utterance or complete his sentence quickly, thus minimizing the overlap' (1997: 510) However, immediately following this, in [17-18] both speakers try to make their points again but neither relinquishes the floor until they've finished their TCU, irrespective of the fact that in doing so they violate the one-party-at-a-time rule. This may be because, having both seen that the other is willing to concede the floor in a case of simultaneous speech, each participant assumes the other will do so again and leave them free to speak. When they realise that the overlap will continue, they adopt different strategies to ensure turn completion: Louis speeds up his utterance, thereby reducing the duration of the overlap; Gramps, meanwhile, constantly restarts his utterance until he can complete it without interference. Since neither gains control over the interactional agenda, both end up adopting each other's topics. Thus, at [19] Louis is responding to Gramps at [18], whereas at [20] Gramps is responding to Louis at [17]. This situation is resolved at [21] by Louis' insistence on pursuing the topic of "the time remaining". Despite Gramps giving a response in [20] to Louis' earlier question, Louis does not perform the expected follow-up move by discussing it further (Tsui, 1989: 549). Instead, he deliberately ignores Gramps' topic – which was originally introduced by Louis – in favour of focussing on his previous turn, which addressed a topic of Gramps'. Coulthard refers to this practice as 'skip-connecting […a speaker] declines to talk about the previous speaker's topic and reasserts his own […] the last-but-one utterance.' (Coulthard, 1985: 82) His keenness to 'reassert' Gramps' topic can be explained by his slight adjustment of its terms: Gramps asked if the interview was over, but Louis' response focuses on the inaccuracy of Gramps' memory. Therefore, although Louis abandons his own line of questioning, he does not yield any control by doing so – because he replaces it with a topic that allows him to ridicule Gramps. In this striking display of power at [23], Louis not only regains control over topic shift but is also able to mock Gramps' logic. The mockery is all the more effective for its position immediately following Gramps' strong assertions in [22] of his own correctness, in which he again uses *well* to signal disagreement, along with *but* to indicate and emphasise the directness of his contradiction (Schiffrin, 1987: 317). Gramps also employs the tag question *didn't I?*, which adds to the 'directive force' of the utterance (Andersen, 2001: 26) by turning the statement into a question which encourages a preferred response of affirmation. By showing that all this reinforcement of opinion is unjustified, Louis casts doubt on the validity of all of Gramps' assertions.

Following this, Gramps' strategy becomes more aggressive, perhaps to compensate for his timekeeping error. Whereas his uncooperative turns at the start of the excerpt contained 'reluctance markers' (Kotthoff, 1993: 201) such as *well* and *sorry* which gave the impression that Gramps was somewhat apologetic for his resistance, these markers are not found anywhere in his turns after [10] – Kotthoff argues that this, along with 'repeated tries to deny the relevance of the interlocutors' utterance for the discussed issue' is a sign of 'aggravation' (ibid.). This repetition-as-resistance strategy is evident below in Excerpt 1.3:

(Excerpt 1.3)

28 GRAMPS: [ah I ah ah] asked and answered (.) next question

29 LOUIS: okay (.) as far as you're concerned (.) are the people of this church the

30 only ones now living that wi- that will make it to the kingdom of heaven=
31

32 GRAMPS: =asked and answered next question

By claiming to have already answered Louis' questions, Gramps positions himself as an efficient communicator and Louis as a poor interviewer. His repetition reinforces his refusal to co-operate, as repeated phrases 'underline what was said previously, and thus turn this into a point or a conclusion. [They] may be a signal that the speaker is not willing or able to expand on the current matters.' (Svennevig, 2000: 190) Gramps' refusal to provide an adequate response to Louis' direct selection of him as next speaker further demonstrates his aggravation, as 'consistent turn-lapses on the part of a targeted other who is addressed by a speaker can signal […] hostility.' (Herman: 1998: 24) Faced with such opposition, Louis is forced to change his questioning strategy. His previous questions have been framed as statement truth-evaluations (such as *is that accurate?* [5]) but in [36-8] Louis takes a more direct approach:

(Excerpt 1.4)

36 LOUIS: you know isn't it an act of presumption a little bit on your part that when
37 you don't have all the information about all the other churches to assume
38 that you have a privileged [access to] (.) grace

Louis' question here relates not to the accuracy of a statement from which Louis is distanced – it is a direct accusation of *assumption*, although its force is softened by the modifier *a little bit*. Prefacing his turn with *you know* indicates 'that the alignment is presumed […] from current speaker to current hearer' (Andersen 2001: 83) – that is, it implies that Louis' view is shared by all participants and therefore true. The verb phrasing of Louis' question changes too. Vavassori (2001: 7) defines three question types: positive polar, which encourage a yes/no response; non-polar, which encourage any response; and negative polar, which use negation to elicit a preferred response of agreement. While Louis' previous questions are all non-polar or positive polar, this is the only one to use the negative polar – *isn't it* – and explicitly encourage Gramps to engage with the topic. This increasing desperation from Louis reflects a fundamental situational inequality in this interaction: Gramps' livelihood does not depend on his participation in the documentary, but Louis' does. The burden is therefore on him to ensure Gramps' involvement, despite his escalating aggression and overt resistance.

With a less openly aggressive IE, Louis is much more capable of maintaining interactional control. Ronnie Conrad is one such IE – he runs a marriage introduction service for British men in Thailand, which is the subject of Louis' documentary, *Looking For Love*. They are walking along a street in Thailand when Transcript 2 begins, and the interview focuses mainly on several statements made in Ronnie's promotional brochure:

(Excerpt 2.1)

1 LOUIS: why do you regard er the Thai women as so (.) as so preferable over the (.)
2 western women

3 RONNIE: because they still believe in looking after the man and they're brought up to
4 look after the man=

5 LOUIS: =okay what about (.) this thing in your brochure right (.) it says Thai ladies

6 have all qualities that have been forgotten and lost by the e:::quality crazed
7 wome:::n's li:::b western woman do you think women should cook and clean
8 and all that [stuff]

9 RONNIE: [no::] I don't believe that at [all]

10 LOUIS: [th]ey
11 shouldn't=

12 RONNIE: =no I don't believe that but for my (.) ⬆personal life (.) I like a lady who's
13 gonna fit round (.) my business life as I work a lot=

14 LOUIS: =but you do think they're equality crazed (.) that's established NOW [moving
15 on]

16 RONNIE: [some] (.) some

Ronnie uses a covert positive resistance strategy, described by Clayman (2001: 414) as '[t]he most subtle form of evasion.' In Ronnie's response of *I don't believe that* at [12-13], the anaphoric pronoun *that* refers deictically to the content of Louis' turn at [5-8] and thus qualifies Ronnie's utterance as an answer to that question. He then alters the terms of the topic: Louis' question encompasses all women, but Ronnie emphasises that he is referring specifically to his "personal life" and therefore suggests that those women with whom he is romantically involved are exempt from the category of "women in general" to which Louis refers. The qualification *but* implies that the material following it is thematically separate from that preceding it, thus implying that the phrase *I don't believe that* is the only part of his response that is relevant to Louis' question – as emphasised by the anaphoric pronoun – while the rest is not, as it refers to this other class of women. Ronnie is therefore able to completely deny any belief that women should confine themselves to domestic tasks and frame this denial as a complete and adequate response to the question – yet he simultaneously admits (albeit vaguely) that such a belief is evident in his own household situation. In Louis' next turn, the IR acknowledges Ronnie's tactic of slightly altering the terms of the topic, and negates its use by stating *that's established* – showing that there are no grounds for disagreement or redefinition. His emphatic *NOW* is an attention marker, used 'to presage both the forthcoming topic orientation' (Fraser, 2009: 896) while *moving on* provides that topic orientation, indicating that a new topic is forthcoming. By hurriedly introducing a change in topic, Louis explicitly denies Ronnie a chance to disagree; he must interrupt to do so. In Short's framework, Ronnie's interruption is in itself an act of power – as it also constitutes a disagreement with Louis' statement, it is an even more dominating gesture. In this moment, Ronnie asserts control over the interaction, which Louis promptly denies by using his next turn to skip-connect to his previous one and insist upon a topic shift:

(Excerpt 2.2)

17 LOUIS: number eight (.) when it comes to making love (.) for Thai women there is no
18 such thing as (1) I've got a headache

19 RONNIE: (2.6) it's basically just saying that er a Thai (.) lady is (1) not so independent
20 that's all

21 LOUIS: yeah

22 RONNIE: she's more likely [to go with the flow]

23 LOUIS: [oh come o:::n] Ronnie=

24 RONNIE: =she's more likely [to go with the flow that's all]

25 LOUIS: [to go with the flow (.) okay]okay is that code

26 RONNIE: it just means that the Thai lady goes along more with what the
27 man

28 LOUIS: yeah?=

29 RONNIE: =is after that's all (.) that's just how it is (.) nothin:::g more sinister than [that]
30

Though Louis does not ask a specific question, he leaves a long pause accountable to Ronnie, encouraging him to self-select and elaborate upon the new topic. However, while Louis does not explicitly demonstrate any expectation of how Ronnie should address the topic, the fact that the content of his utterance is read verbatim from Ronnie's brochure implies that he expects Ronnie to qualify this statement. Ronnie's acceptance of the topic [19-20] suggests that interactional control has returned to Louis – however, though he answers the question, he does not provide adequate information in this answer. He allows Louis to broadly define the topic, but not the terms on which it is discussed. His closing utterance *that's all* implies that his answer is complete and requires no further elaboration – however, in the very act of trying to prevent Louis from attempting to gain more information on this topic, Ronnie acknowledges that the answer he has just given is unsatisfactory. According to Schegloff, use of *yeah* as a one-word utterance (as Louis does at [21]) is a 'continuer' – a demonstration that the speaker has consciously noted that they could take control at a TRP and initiate a new topic, but that they wish to select the previous speaker to elaborate on their previous utterance. (Schegloff, 1982: 71) Again, Ronnie accepts Louis' selection of topic but refuses to address it on the terms Louis suggests – by using the idiom *go with the flow,* he avoids giving any concrete information at all. Louis adopts his strategy to compensate, using his high status as controller of the interaction to force Ronnie to provide a more specific answer. The act of interruption at [23] asserts his control and demonstrates a dissatisfaction with Ronnie's utterance which is reinforced by his use of the *oh* particle: 'When persons preface a second or responsive action with 'oh', they are commonly understood to have acted in a fashion that problematizes the action to which they are responding.' (Heritage, 1998 (2): 291) Furthermore, *come on* is a direct command ordering him to provide a more definite response. Like Gramps, Ronnie repeats his earlier utterance to demonstrate that it represents his total contribution on the matter and close down further discussion.

Louis adapts his strategy again: he interrupts at [25] but this time it is to repeat Ronnie's statement. By doing so, he mocks Ronnie's attempt to close the topic by portraying Ronnie's answers as predictable and drawing attention to his evasion. *Okay* functions as a receipt token (Heritage, 1985: 99) and by using it twice in rapid succession Louis conveys that he fully understands what Ronnie has said, that his point has been well made and that a change in the discussion is imminent. He shifts the topic to that of Ronnie's language and openly highlights his evasiveness: *is that code*. Ronnie does not answer the question of whether or not his answer was evasive *code* since an admission of ambiguity would be highly

damaging - '[a]nswering questions is treated as a basic moral obligation' and 'attempts to resist, sidestep, or evade can be costly in a variety of ways.' (Clayman, 2001: 403-4) However, faced with either admitting evasion or expanding on a topic he does not want to discuss, Ronnie chooses the latter – though he prefaces these expansions with *just* in order to 'downgrade' their importance (Clayman, 2001: 419). Therefore, although his refusal to engage with Louis' topic of "code" here could be seen as an act of interactional control, it is in fact a demonstration of Louis' power: by re-evaluating and altering his questioning strategy, Louis finally coerces Ronnie into addressing Louis' original topic of Ronnie's brochure, and to do so by offering the fuller qualification that he previously resisted.

CONCLUSION

In Greatbatch's terms, Louis' interviews are closer to a 'talk show' than to 'news' (1988: 401) but display features of both. As IR, Louis asks a lot of questions but he is not confined solely to that role: in the whole of both transcripts, he has 27 full turns of which 17 are phrased as questions. Greatbatch states that interviews '[do] not allow for an IR [producing] challenges, assessments, news receipts, or newsmarks.' (1988: 422) However, Louis uses *okay* as a receipt token five times across both interviews to acknowledge and/or challenge the IE. This suggests that existing models of interviews, with their focus on news, are not completely applicable to other genres of televised interviews although there are some similarities.

In both interviews covered here, interactional control is constantly passed from one participant to other and in each transcript there are examples of struggle for dominance over topic – justifying Day's comments that interviews are conflictual, as their aim is to make good television rather than co-operative conversation. In each, Louis adopts a variety of strategies, becoming more directly challenging to his IE when they show resistance to his inquiries. Through his choice of positive-, negative- and non-polar questions, he influences both the form and content of his IE's responses, using interruptions and receipt tokens to further control both the topic and the way it is addressed. The IEs resist this control by using covert and overt, positive and negative strategies.

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