The Uncooperative Actions of Interviewees in News Interviews: the Analysis of Interviews with Donald Trump

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Yeeun Lim. 2017. The Uncooperative Actions of Interviewees in News Interviews: the Analysis of Interviews with Donald. *SNU Working Papers in English Linguistics and Language 15, 112-124*. The paper aims to examine uncooperative actions of interviewees occurring in news interviews with Donald Trump. The paper qualitatively analyzed the interviews by how the interviewee reacts to the interviewer's probing. With a bottom-up approach, there were three classifications of those actions such as the backhandedness, the avoidance, the challenge. First of all, the backhandedness explains examples about the interviewees not giving direct answers to the question. Secondly, the avoidance is related to the attempt of the interviewee to hastily close the current topic. Lastly, the challenge shows the turn of the interviewee who asks a question without pure intention of questioning. It is rather about showing an opposing position. Although the interpretation of the data was mainly ascribed to the turns and interaction between the participants, it was impossible to account for them keeping out power relations. **(Seoul National University)**

1. Introduction

Research on institutional conversations has been widely conducted by comparing them to ordinary conversations. Especially with the time when the field of Conversation Analysis developed, institutional interaction became analyzed more systematically and in detail. Institutional talks can be distinguished from natural conversations in terms of participants' institutional identities which are related to their work activities such as doctors-patients, attorneys-witnesses, etc.

The news interview is one of the most common institutional talks which people come into contact with. More specifically, it is an institutional discourse of more than two people, but the interaction is actually for the third parties, not for them. The news interview usually involves

participants, an interviewer and interviewee(s) whose roles are most of the time questioning and answering respectively. This interactional frame reveals that the interviewer has more power over the interview since he or she has more chances of questioning (Clayman & Heritage 2002). In other words, the interviewer is the one who formulates the agenda. However, there are some cases that the interviewee tries to gain power and manages the conversations, being uncooperative with the interviewer. Moreover, the identities outside the interview interactions cannot be downplayed in the news interview talks. Even though the interviewer runs the talk through questioning, the interviewee with a stronger identity seems to reverse the power relation in news interviews. The present paper analyzes the interview data with the help of the standard uses of the news interview formulation suggested by Heritage (1985). However, while Heritage covers interviewer's turns, this paper focuses on the uncooperative actions of the interviewee with respect to interviewer's probing. Moreover, the data presents how the interviewee interferes in the position of the interviewer with those actions and how they can be attributed to power relations engaged in social identities.

2. Previous Literature

The news interview has attracted attention from many scholars, and various kinds of studies have been conducted. For example, research on the formulation of the interview, turn-taking, neutrality, organizations, and lexical choices, etc. was carried out. In this section, one of the early and classical news interview-related papers is to be reviewed.

Heritage (1985) pointed out that it is hard to encounter some particular forms in news interviews that can be easily found in natural talks like newsmarker or affiliative assessment. Rather, a series of questions and answers are the characteristics of the news interview since those actions can exclusively be conducted in interview settings. By the interviewer's

asking a variety of questions, stories and opinions are elicited, fleshed out, and developed one by one. What must be noticed in this interactional process is that the interviewer stays neutral. To elaborate, the interviewer avoids accepting or rejecting prior statements that the interviewee makes or even keeps away from assessing them.

Heritage concentrated on the turn of the interviewer and he or she formulates the conversation. He presented three standard uses of the news interview formulation: the prompt, the cooperative recycle, and the inferentially elaborative probe. Firstly, a turn is called the prompt when the interviewer tries to make the interviewer to reconfirm and give the detail of their prior reports, using some inference. The excerpt (1) shows how the interviewer prompts the boy to expand the story about the ceremony.

(1) (Heritage, 1985:105)

1	Int:	Now why d'you think they did it.
2	Boy:	Well I don't know it's j'st a sort'v traditional:uh ↑cerem'ny that th'do=it's ↑ always 'appened at that School=
3	Int:	= did they do it to everybody?
4	Boy:	u-well all the newcomers ye:s (0.5)
5 →	Int:	So there were other lads as well (.) being thrown up in the air as well =
6	Boy:	=oh yes (0.4) quite a lot of them but not many of Them wer'urt (.) .hhh There w'z only:uhm me an' one of me pals (.) Andrew u simth … (continues by detailing the latter's injuries)

Secondly, the cooperative recycle stands for the interviewer's attempt to accurately represent the interviewee's current position and get a confirmation from the interviewee. In the excerpt (2), the interviewer just

restates the point by referring to the national Ministries of Defense and Education in order to compare it to the agriculture in EEC. Then, the commissioner confirms the interviewer's restatement and adds some more information to it.

(2) (Heritage, 1985:106)

1	Com:	I'm all for having a common agricultural policy (0.6) but I think it's absurd to suggest that decisions of (.) immense Economic magnitude .hhh should be taken enti:rely by .hh (.) the ministers who are (.) most int'erested in one particular Segment of the community – I wouldn't want Ministers d-defense to take all the decisions on defense and I wouldn't want ministers of .hhhh of education to take all the decisions on education =
2 →	Int:	=.hhh so you're suggesting there that the farm ministers shouldn't decide this all entirely amongst themselves that It should be .hhh spread across the board amongst all Ministers.
3	Com:	Exactly I'm saying that one must find some way of (.) Of bringing other responsibilities uh (.) particularly those representing the tax payer and the consumer as well as the farmer .hhh much more into the picture

Thirdly, the inferentially elaborative probe is characterized by the interviewer's formulations to derive a stronger position from the interviewee compared to his or her prior remarks. The excerpt (3) exhibits how the interviewer tries to elicit an explicit criticism on the blenders from C, and it also shows that C rejects getting along with the interviewer.

(3) (Heritage, 1985:109)

1	C:	What in fact happened was that in the course of last year.hh the price went up really very sharply .hhh and-uuh the Blenders did take advantage of this:-uh to obviously to Raise their price to retailers (0.7) .hhh they haven't been So quick in reducing prices when the world market prices Come down (0.3) .hh and so this means that price tin the Sh- the prices in the shops have stayed up .hh really rather Higher than we'd like to see them (0.7)
2	→ Int:	so you-you're really accusing them of profiteering
3	C:	.hhh no they 're in business to make money that's Perfectly Sensible=we'r' also saying that-uh: .hh it's not a trade Which is competitive as we would like it = th're four (0.2) Blenders which have together eighty-five percent of the Market . hhh and-uh we're not saying they (.) move in Concert or anything like that but we'd like the trade to be A bit more competitive =
3	→ Int:	=but you're giving them: a heavy instruction (.) as it were to (.) to reduce their prices
4	C:	.hh what we're saying is we think that prices would come Without the blenders losing their profit margins that they Had .hhh before the big rise in prices last year

3. Data and Methodology

The present paper deals with uncooperative actions performed by the interviewee by analyzing the interviews with Donald Trump. The three

video-taped interviews uploaded on YouTube were extracted from some of the most viewed, irrespective of dates or presses. All the videos are twenty-five minutes on average.   The contents of the interviews covered a variety of political issues such as tax reform, building a wall between the USA and Mexico, vote fraud, etc. They were transcribed following the transcription conventions of Conversation Analysis.

A bottom-up approach was used, so the actions of the interviewer were categorized after reviewing all the transcribed data. Since the size of the data was small, only three uncooperative actions were found: the backhandedness, the avoidance, and the challenge. Thus, the paper qualitatively analyzed the data.

In the data, the interviewee refused to get along with the interviewer who probed into the issues. In the first place, the backhandedness classifies the actions that the interviewee does not give exact or precise answers or indirectly responds to questions. Secondly, the avoidance is the turn showing that the interviewer is reluctant to continue with the current topic and attempts to end dealing with it. Lastly, the challenge is the action that illustrates the interviewee's questioning rather than answering, which is not normally an expected turn from the interviewee.

4. Results and Discussion
4.1 The Backhandedness

The first classification is the backhandedness, which represents the action of the interviewee who does not give direct answers to the question. The extract (4) is part of the conversation concerning gun-firing in Chicago and Trump's tweet about the Feds. When the interviewer asks Trump about what his remarks on the Feds mean, he does not share exactly what the interviewer wants. However, he rather

evaluates the situation occurring in Chicago by saying that *Chicago is like a war zone*.

(4) (ABC News: Donald Trump)

1	→Tru:	=its carnage .hh you know (0.2) in my speech I got tre<u>me</u>ndous from (.) certain people the word carnage it is carnage its horrible carnage .hhh this is (0.3) afghanistan it is not like whats happening in Chicago .hh people are being shot left and right (.) thousands of people over a short period of time .hh this year which has just started is worse than last year which was a catastrophe .hhhh (0.3) theyre not doing the job (0.2) now if they want h<u>el</u>p (.) i would love to help them i will send in what we have to send in .hhh maybe theyre not going to have to be so politically correct maybe theyre being overly politically correct maybe theres something going on .hh but you cant have those killings going on in chicago, chicago is like a war zone, chi<u>c</u>ago is worse than some of the people that you report in some of the places that you report about every night (0.2)=
2	Int:	= so i [was saying
3	Tru:	[in the middle east=
4	Int:	=you mentioned federal assistance theres federal assistance and then theres sending in the feds im just curious .hhh will you take <u>ac</u>tion on your own¿
5	→Tru:	i want them to fix the problem (0.4) you cant have (.) <u>thou</u>sands of people being <u>shot</u> (0.2) in a city (0.2) in a country (.) .hh that i °happen to be president° of maybe its okay if somebody else is president

> (0.2) .hhh i want them to fix the problem (0.2) they
> have a problem thats very easily fixable…

Then the interviewer once again tries to prompt Trump to elaborate the comments of sending in the Feds, and he adds a question *will you take action on your won*. Even so, it is interesting to notice that Trump still does not give a direct answer. As shown in line 5, he says that he wants the Feds to fix the problem in Chicago, which seems to be irrelevant to the prior question. Moreover, this can be also heard and analyzed as he is not the one who takes action but the Feds. Thus, it can be concluded that Trump keeps beating around the bush, and he fails to be cooperative with the interviewer.

4.2. The Avoidance

The extract (5) exemplifies the avoidance which explains the action of interviewee's evading covering the current topic or closing the conversation. The interview is pertained to illegal votes during the Presidential Election Day that he mentioned in a confidential meeting. He insists that he lost the popular vote because of illegal voters who are approximately three to five million. However, when he is asked about the existence of evidence, he attempts to avoid dealing with the topic after a few chains of questioning and answering.

(5) (ABC News: Donald Trump)
1   Int: =but three to five million illegal votes¿=
2   Tru: =well, we're gonna find ↑out (.) but it could very
            well be that much you have people that are
            <u>registered</u> who are ↑dead (0.2) who are ↑illegals (.)
            who are in two states you have people registered in
            two states they're registered in a new york and a
            new jersey (.) .hhh they vote twice (0.2) there are

		millions of ↑votes in my ↑opinion. Now .hh [im gonna
3	Int:	[but again=
4	Tru:	=[investigation. David, David
5	Int:	[youre now you re now the president of the [united states
6	Tru:	[of course i want the voting process to be legitimate .hhh [now
7	Int:	[but what im asking=
8	Tru:	=the [people
9	Int:	[but im asking when you are saying in your opinion (0.2) millions of illegal votes that is something that is extremely fundamental to our functioning democracy [a fair and free election
10	Tru:	[sure sure sure
11	Int:	.hhh you said you re gonna launch an investigation
12 →	Tru:	sure done

   Throughout the conversation, Trump keeps saying that he will launch an investigation into the case. In spite of Trump's statement, the interviewer seems to be unpleased with the answer from him. The interviewer gives a shot once again, as shown in line 3-9, but the interruptions and remarks that Trump made would be read uncooperative. Especially in line 12, he brought the conversation to a close by cutting off the interviewer's prior statement with the answer *sure done*.

4.3 The Challenge

This section is concerned with the challenge that the interviewee makes and the normal domain or the role of interviewer-interviewee is reversed

in interview settings. To put it another way, the interviewer most of the time in this kind of institutional context asks questions by controlling agendas since the interview is quite different from that of debates. However, the data demonstrate that the interviewee asks a question to the interviewer. Interviewee's questioning can be viewed as a way of answering the prior statement, but the interrogative sentence shown in the extract (6) seems more like a disagreement rather than a pure question.

(6) (ABC News: Donald Trump)
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1      Int:       what youve presented so ↑far (.) has been debunked
                  its been [called
2      Tru:              [no it hasnt
3      Int:       false=
4    → Tru:       =take a look at the peer reports=
5      Int:       =i called the author of the peer report last night (.)
                  and he told me that they found no [evidence of voter
                  fraud
6    → Tru:                                        [really then why
                  did he write the report?
7      Int:       he said no evidence [of voter fraud.
8    → Tru:                          [excuse me then why did he
                  write the report?...
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The extract (6) illustrated above is the continuation of the conversation about the vote fraud. The interviewer points out that the things that Trump presented so far are regarded false. In opposition, Trump asks him to go over the peer reports. The interviewer responds to Trump by saying that he still does not have any evidence, and then Trump somewhat challenges to the prior remark by asking what the point in writing peer reports is.
It is widely known that the interviewer makes the agenda and keeps the direction of conversations so that in a simplistic way it can be said he or

she has power over the interviewee. On the contrary, what can be inferred and argued from investigating the data is that power and identities of each participant outside the context of the interview cannot be ignored. In the examples provided in (4) through (6), Trump's identity or role is not only the interviewee but also the president of the United States. This is why the turns in the extract (6) could be produced. Furthermore, it will be much easier to understand the challenge that Trump made in his turn if the interviews with those without a high social status are brought in. Then, it might seem to be difficult to imagine people questioning rather than answering as an interviewee.

5. Conclusion

The paper examined the interviews of Donald Trump with the focus of the uncooperative actions that the interviewee took. They were categorized into three: the backhandedness, the avoidance, and the challenge. Even though the analysis brought to bear on only the turns of the participants, it revealed that it is hard to explain the actions excluding power relations outside the context of the interview. Therefore, uncooperativeness can be attributed to asymmetrical power between the participants as well.

The limitation of the present paper is the amount of data. Since it only contains three less than thirty-minute-long interviews, it was not able to see an array of questions and answers, which might allow additional classifications. Moreover, it would have been more valid to categorize the uncooperative actions with these more data or evidence. Despite the limitation, it is apparent that the paper could in a way observe and analyze the turns presenting uncooperativeness in news interviews.

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