

1. Introduction

The previous two chapters have introduced key concepts and methodological principles for the analysis of media talk. On the whole, because this is where the bulk of the pioneering work was done, the focus of attention has been on 'news talk', especially the format defined by Heritage et al. as the 'news interview'. However, before we proceed any further, it will be helpful to recall two caveats in our discussion of this work. The first of these is that the news interview format is rarely found in contemporary news bulletins; set-piece interviews consisting of a series of turns are more a feature of news magazine or current affairs programmes. Secondly, as we have already seen, in this context the *frame* of the interview is not as tight, or as 'normative', as Heritage et al. suggest. It is possible for the news interview to contain a variety of speech genres, from political speech making to conversational banter.

In this, and the chapters that follow, we will be looking at developments in media talk which have become increasingly apparent since the 1980s. We will see that some of the classic formats have been modified, particularly in response to institutional and cultural changes. A proliferation of channels with increasing competition for target audiences, and a corresponding search for new formats containing cheap-to-produce 'lively' talk – all this has transformed the landscape of media talk. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the 'news interview', which is now much more than a format for the probing cross-examination of public figures. Indeed some contemporary news interviews raise really basic questions about what is meant, today, by the concept of 'news', and how we are expected to relate to the information contained in news bulletins.

These questions are not only brought into focus by news interviews, for they also relate to different styles of news presentation, which we will go on to consider. However, let us begin our exploration of contemporary news talk by retaining some continuity with the previous chapter, starting with a news interview which as an exceptional case, proves one of its basic rules.

2. Generic instability

Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, died at 3 p.m. on Saturday 20 March 2002, aged 101. Because of her great age this event was not, of course, entirely unexpected, and it was widely known that the BBC had been working on its coverage (codename: 'operation lion') for several years. As is routine for such events, normal schedules were to be suspended, to make way for a rolling news programme, containing a pre-constructed documentary as well as live news and comment. Of course, it is a sign of the enormity of a news story (elite death or major catastrophe) that 'liveness' is still used in this way; the status of the event is confirmed by a sense of bearing collective witness to its occasion. What is also sometimes controversial in such coverage, however, is the question of what it is appropriate to see and to say. There is the problem of public intrusion on private grief and, where coverage is live, unscripted and unedited pressures are placed on broadcasters to produce appropriate forms of talk.

I have to say that when I turned on my TV at 5.45 p.m. that evening, I was expecting the BBC's coverage, with all its pre-planning, to be a model of slick professionalism. Instead, the first hour was faltering, and widely criticised. A furore broke out in the British press, led (for its own purposes) by the *Daily Mail*. Peter Sissons, the programme's anchor, was judged to be inappropriately dressed in a burgundy, not black, tie. Another focus for criticism was a live interview, by phone, carried out by Sissons with the Hon. Margaret Rhodes, the Queen Mother's niece. Sissons was accused of being disrespectful, but, as a detailed analysis of the transcript shows, it is more true to say that he was placed in an embarrassing and contradictory situation, apparently compromised by the values of his own profession:

Transcript 8

PS: For the moment er Daniel thank you I believe we have on the (.) phone the Queen Mother's niece Lady Margaret Rhodes erm (2.0) L-Lady Margaret erm a-a very sad day for the whole nation.

5 Lady M: It is indeed I think that there has (.) really never been anybody who has (.) been held in such a huge amount of affection by such an enormous number of people as Queen Elizabeth. She was deeply loved (.) by all age groups and all kinds of people erm and I think there's a hole now that will be very difficult to fill.

10 PS: W-when did you last see her?

Lady M: I left at half past three this afternoon.

PS: Oh I see were you [were you

Lady M: I was there all day yeh

15 PS: You were at her bedside

Lady M: Yes

(3.0)

PS: [It must have been

20 Lady M: [=But she will just be greatly missed by everybody. She was a wonderful wonderful person

(1.5)

PS: It must have been a very private moment

(2.0)

25 Lady M: Sorry I didn't hear [Lady Margaret

PS: It must have been a very private moment [Yes it was a

Lady M:

very moving and very (.) very sad moment but luckily it was wonderfully peaceful

(3.0)

30 PS: And (.) without wishing to intrude too much who was there?

Lady M: No I-I won't go into that it was just a few members of the family but the great thing was that the Queen was there.

35 PS: And (1.5) after (1.5) Y-you all came out (.) what happened then?

Lady M: No I sorry I really don't want to go into those sort of details I just want to say how much she'll be missed and how much she was loved.

40 PS:

I appreciate [that=

Lady M:

[thank you very much

PS:

=but can you just stay with us a moment

and tell us a little more about what sort of a gap there will be in our national life?

45 Lady M: (.) Well I think there will be a huge gap because she was interested in so many things erm and had was patron of hundreds and hundreds of organisations (.) all of whom she helped with her work and all of whom she gave a devoted a great deal of attention to. Erm so all these people will miss her hugely.

50 PS: And how will her passing (.) affect the royal family

and the way it's perceived [or is it too early to tell? [Well I think that any family

Lady M:

is sad when their mother and grandmother (3.0) d-dies it it's just a sad-sadness for any family (2.5) particularly

55

so for them.

PS: It was a (.) a tremendous life.

60 Lady M: It was a wonderful life spanning a whole more than a hundred years and one can hardly believe that somebody who grew up in the horse age (.) erm has er seen has seen people landing on the moon and (.) hh all the things that happen now.

PS: And as we celebrate th-the life Lady Margaret what will what when you recall it what will give you most joy?

65 Lady M: Just her as a person (.) She was just a wonderful a wonderful person to know that we'll we'll almost never see the like of again. She just was wonderful.

PS: Lady Margaret Rhodes=

[I think that's really all I need to

70 Lady M: say (.) thank you

PS: [we're very grateful for you to come on the line like this. Thank you.

Whether or not this interview can be judged to be 'disrespectful', it is apparent that it is conducted with a great deal of difficulty. Throughout the interview, a look of embarrassment is etched on Sissons's face, which is confirmed by several features of the talk. There are numerous hesitations, but also lengthy pauses between (lines 17, 21, 23, 29) and during turns (lines 35, 54-5), indicating that what is to follow might be problematic, or in CA terms 'dispreferred'. On a couple of occasions (lines 24 and 37) Lady M's dispreferred responses are mitigated by apologies, preserving a modicum of politeness. Equally, however, she is also prepared to interrupt Sissons (lines 19, 41, 69-70) particularly where it is apparent that her 'thank you's are intended as closing moves. Nevertheless, on the first of these occasions her closing move is rejected by Sissons who, for his purposes, very much wants this interview, however problematic, to continue.

What might these purposes be, that they can override the difficulties apparent in these exchanges? In terms of the standard practices for news interviewing, a very significant event occurs in line 13, where Sissons, the interviewer (IR), produces a news receipt ('Oh I see'). Heritage's (1985) analysis of news interviews insists that such utterances are inappropriate because they cast the IR as a primary recipient, whereas it is his role to elicit information on behalf of the overhearing audience. In this institutional role it is important that the expressions of personal reaction or alignment, which are routinely offered in ordinary conversation, are avoided. Here, however, Sissons reveals that it is news to him that Lady M was present at the bedside. Subsequent press coverage of this incident confirmed that he had not been properly briefed, for on this, the Easter holiday weekend, only a skeletal production team was available. More to the point, however, it is also clear that Sissons views this as a journalistic opportunity where Lady M can add some further detail to the narrative of this sad event.

The most excruciating moments of this interview then occur as Sissons invites Lady M to move from a public to a private terrain. The prompt itself, as a redundant statement of the obvious ('It must have been a very private moment', line 22) attests to the difficulty here. Clearly Lady M has no desire to enter the experiential territory which Sissons, however hesitantly, now wishes to explore. Her initial reaction to the prompt ('Sorry I didn't hear') is capable of two interpretations: it could be a straightforward apology, or it could be a very polite way of saying that she cannot indeed believe what she is hearing. The shifting news agenda is introducing a level of personal familiarity which she evidently wants to resist; and the fact that her resistance is expressed in a hearably aristocratic tone of voice serves to confirm the sense of inappropriateness.

Taking a broader view, I think this is an example of a news interview which has become generically unstable. That is to say, whatever infelicities might have contributed to its production, what is ultimately produced is a

clash of speech genres. Lady M appears on the programme as a representative of the family to make a public tribute. Sissons, however, opportunistically, spots a potential scoop: Who was there? What happened next? That this would involve an invasion of privacy which would be impolite and even face-threatening is betrayed by the very bizarre construction of the prompt, which Lady M either does not, or affects not, to hear. In the end, with her steadfast refusal to be drawn down this route, Lady M succeeds in returning to her tribute. But there remains the question of what is driving the journalistic agenda, in moments such as this, to the manifest discomfort of the journalist himself.

3. News as narrative

One place to look for an answer to this question is the type of discourse which is produced when journalists talk to each other. Nowadays news programmes of all kinds contain dialogues, which are not interviews with public figures or institutional spokespersons, but rather exchanges with other journalists working for the same organisation. Foreign correspondents do not simply file reports, they are interviewed in live two-way satellite links. Routinely, they are invited to speculate about what they have just reported. Domestic journalists, either in the studio or on location, do not simply address the audience, they also respond to questions put by the presenter. Typically, the conduct of such 'interviews' is very far from the probing cross-examination of public figures with its more-or-less hostile formulations. For the journalists are on a mutually understood terrain, and, as we would expect, their talk is noticeably more co-operative. Often it becomes a way of investing the facts of a story with 'informed speculation' or even dramatic reconstruction, for the benefit, of course, of the overhearing audience.

On the day following the Queen Mother's death, the BBC's royalty correspondent, Jennie Bond, appeared on the evening news, where she was 'interviewed' by its presenter Fiona Bruce:

Transcript 9

FB: ... and Jennie Bond is at Windsor. Jennie you've been talking to people who were with the Queen Mother in her last days, indeed in her last moments.

JB: (...) Mm yes that's right. And I think they all knew that the fight back from the chest infection she got at Christmas was going to be a very very long haul, and she was getting frailer by the day. Erm in the last few days she became very breathless and that was a big problem for her. And also of course she hadn't really been eating anything more perhaps than soup for a few er some weeks. Yesterday morning she was still able to talk.

- 15 She was er lying in a large armchair and er talking to close members of her family. Er, at one point she did ask the Queen not to stay erm, the thought is that she knew at that stage that her life was er ebbing away(.) The Queen did return though at a quarter to three and er it was with the Queen at her side and other close members of her family erm and they were holding hands that she er died very peacefully. And I'm told that that peace was reflected today on the Queen Mother's face. Erm, someone who saw her before her body was placed in the coffin said she was dressed very beautifully. She had her pearls on and her earrings and erm she looked incredibly beautiful.
- 20 FB: And, Jennie, did she have any sense you know, in the last few days (.) that the end was close?
- 25 JB: (.) Well I think she probably did. Erm, she'd become rather reclusive, which was not characteristic at all in the last few weeks, she didn't want to see very many people. And er, those that she saw said something else had changed and that she began to reminisce a great deal in the way a lot of old people do (.) but it was something the Queen Mother erm hadn't done very much in the past. She wanted to talk a lot about Princess Margaret who died of course just erm seven weeks ago (.) Erm one other pointer perhaps to the fact that she knew the end was near was the day before she died, on Friday, she handed out a number of small presents to er very close members of her family who are now of course mourning her loss.
- 30 40 FB: Jennie, thank you very much.

Evidently, the BBC was very keen to broadcast an account of the deathbed scene and, if Lady M was not going to provide this, the task would fall to Jennie Bond. Her account is based on unattributed information from sources close to the event, an interesting linguistic reflection of which is the use of the definite article (the thought) in line 14. This avoidance of attribution, together with the passive voice (I'm told) mitigates her authorship of the account; but it also creates a space for Bond to deliver a crucial journalistic requirement. Her account is both a report based on what she has been told and a narrative reconstruction of the scene.

Later we will look at the use of narratives in other forms of broadcast talk. This is not a fully-fledged oral narrative based on personal experience, nor is it an anecdote designed to exemplify the character of a famous person. However, though this narrative is, by comparison, somewhat truncated, it does contain some of the key features of oral narrative, as defined in William Labov's much-quoted model (Labov 1972).¹ Thus, in her first turn, Bond begins by giving some background information ('orientation') to the Queen Mother's state of health and her physical situation. She then, at line 13, proceeds to key events ('complicating action') particularly the absence and then the presence of the Queen. Finally Bond delivers what in Labov's terms

is a 'coda': a statement of the climax of the narrative and its main point, the sense of peacefulness. This is reinforced (from line 19) by a description of the deceased's appearance, which takes the form of a rhetorical list of three ('pearls ... earrings ... beautiful', lines 22-3) and which is almost elegiac in its effect.

On closer inspection, however, the import of this narrative is paradoxical. Certainly, on one level, it serves to elevate the event, giving it a poetic quality as a 'moment of history'. On the other hand, however, the event is humanised by a familiar (from novels, films etc.) imagined family scenario. This element of the familiar, even the 'ordinary', is retained through Bond's second turn where the Queen Mother is characterised as a typical old person (line 31). There is an element of this also in Lady M's account (Transcript 8: line 53) where, even though she is not prepared to reveal the details, she is willing to humanise the family, in terms with which 'any family' could identify.

Bond's account, though, is based on second-hand information rather than direct experience or knowledge. With such accounts it is always interesting to examine the way they handle the maxim of Quality, and there are three aspects to this. First, and routinely, journalists defend the quality of such second-hand information in terms of the credibility of their sources: they might not have been there but their sources were, which counts as 'proper evidence' in this context. Secondly, however, where these accounts drift into speculation, which in this extract is almost inevitable following FB's question (Transcript 9: lines 24-5), this can be mitigated by shifts to less-definite forms of modality, here using adverbs like 'probably' (line 26) and the preposition 'perhaps' (lines 10, 35). The shift of modality modifies the speaker's personal commitment to statements of which she is the author.

Overwhelmingly, however, any doubts about the credibility of this second-hand account are dispelled by its apparent plausibility. With its familiar scenario, the narrative lends weight to this, as do commonsense references to 'what everyone knows' about old people. In news talk, such kinds of discourse are crucial in the construction of 'human interest', designed to lend additional colour to the reporting of facts and the delivery of public statements. Where those involved in the events are reluctant to do this, the journalists must step in – and it is noticeable that they do this in the most collaborative of environments where they are on first-name terms with each other and predisposed to produce preferred responses. Such is the force of this preference that Bond can only answer FB's question in the affirmative, even though this takes her into speculative territory. Clearly she is prompted to do this by the delivery of a question which recycles 'the thought' she herself reported in line 14, contains an element of sympathetic circularity ('you know') and, on the friendliest possible terms, addresses her by her christian name.

4. News as gossip

In more extreme versions of this type of journalistic exchange, news talk sometimes becomes a form of gossip. As a speech genre, 'gossip' has received much attention in work on spoken discourse, particularly from analysts interested in language and gender. Gossip has been traditionally defined as a species of 'women's talk' (Jones 1980; Coates 1989) but more recently it has been demonstrated that men too gossip on occasions (Cameron 1997). In this debate, something is at stake in the way gossip is defined: if, like narrative, it can be defined as a speech genre, its characteristics are nevertheless more difficult to define. In fact Cameron argues that gossip cannot be identified simply by its formal features, but also in terms of its content. In her definition it is 'discussion of ... persons not present but known to the participants, with a strong focus on critically examining these individuals' appearance, dress, social behaviour and mores' (1997: 446). In her view, the 'critical examination' is invariably negative, as co-participants form a collective identity which stigmatises those they are criticising.

In news talk, gossip occurs in exchanges between journalists, where previous news, already known to the participants, is up for further discussion. However, because this is produced not just for the participants themselves but also for an audience, it only works if the topic is already in the public domain. The audience must be included in the collective identity being affirmed. In this context at least, however, I would dispute Cameron's claim about the negativity of gossip, for it is also possible for a collective identity to be formed in admiration of the person discussed. Here gossip serves a useful purpose in the construction of fandom, where, for instance, the public appearances and actions of celebrities are routinely scrutinised.

Following her (1995) *Panorama* interview, the performance and appearance of Princess Diana was extensively discussed. We have previously observed how the content of some of her claims was interrogated on *Newsnight*, in classic 'news interview' fashion. However, not all news programmes take this form, nor are they designed for the same target audience. On the following day, another, very different kind of exchange took place on the ITV breakfast news magazine *GMTV*. In fact it took place at 9 a.m., just as the programme was passing from a news orientation to its morning magazine format, hosted by Lorraine Kelly, and targeted at a female audience. But this was still 'news talk' of a kind. From the studio Kelly had a live two-way link to Martin Frizell, then a regular journalist on the programme and subsequently its editor:

Transcript 10a

- 1K: Well more of that later on but first (.) well I was glued as the Princess of Wales admitted last night on television that she'd had an affair with former guardsman James Hewitt. So what happens next? Well Martin Frizell is outside her West London gym. Martin, she hasn't turned up this morning has she?
- 5 MF: Not yet erm (.) Lorraine but we expect she may well do because you have to remember she's off to Argentina tomorrow and er her routine is that she normally works out before she goes off on a trip so she could still turn up this morning we're ever hopeful as you can see we're not alone (.) there are several members of her majesty's press (.) queuing up here with their ladders from Texas and B&Q they've had a field day erm up against the er the fence to peer over and get a picture of her.
- 15 LK: Indeed I just wonder as a-as a sort of cynical old hack yourself, if Martin, what did you think of it, what did you think of her performance and what did the rest of the boys and girls behind you think?
- 20 MF: I think I speak for most of them >although they probably wouldn't say it because they still like to keep up the er the er appearance of being a hardened cynic< my jaw dropped (.) I'd seen hadn't seen anything like it before: probably because we'd never actually heard her speak but also, what she was saying. Some of the revelations that came across (.) the post natal depression, the bulimia confirming everything that was in Andrew Morton's book because we (.) took it with a pinch of salt but there she was on screen, prime time, admitting it all. And also the questions again (.) being a hardened cynical hack we had thought well she probably won't be asked about the love affairs all those sort of things and she was, and she answered. It was just the frankness that just astounded me.
- 35 LK: I was, I was the same I was astounded about how frank she was and actually like you say the kind of questions that were asked, because you know what it's like normally when you interview someone from the Royal Family, you really have got to it's usually they're there to talk about their charity work and nothing else:
- 40 MF: And also as you know Lorraine, er >we all, know those of us who work behind this side of the camera< erm appearing in front of a lens can be quite difficult. And these lenses don't really lie. I think we would have known if she was putting on an act and she certainly didn't look like she was putting on an act to me.
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Two principal features define this talk as 'gossip', over and above the precondition of shared knowledge of the person being discussed. The first feature is the high degree of mutual affiliation, which is absolutely the opposite of the neutrality normally displayed in the classic news interview.

says, and she is particularly fond of the minimal response 'indeed'. Sometimes her question delivery doesn't actually deliver a question (lines 35–40) but a statement which recycles a point the IE has made (for example, 'like you say', line 36). In the same way MF recycles a characterisation made of him by LK ('hardened cynic', line 22), which might have been potentially face-threatening, but is of course interpreted as banter, partly because of LK's hedge ('sort of', line 16) and her metaphorical characterisation of the journalists as 'boys and girls' in line 19.

Most apparent, however is the construction of a collective identity between the journalists themselves. In this extract, there is a shifting use of the personal pronoun 'we' by MF, which starts as a reference to himself and his fellow journalists on location, but extends to encompass LK herself, as a fellow broadcaster. Here 'we' (who work on this side of the camera) 'would have known if she was putting on an act' (lines 44–5). This collective identity is further reinforced by a second feature of gossip talk: its use of colloquialism and common cultural reference. There are two levels to this: first, there is the use of colloquial idiom in common circulation – 'my jaw dropped' (lines 22–3), 'pinch of salt' (line 28). But there is also an ironic characterisation of the profession, using terms like 'hack', reference to popular chains of DIY superstores, and the disingenuous label 'her majesty's press' (lines 12–13) which presumes a co-participant capable of reading its multiply ironic implicatures.

All of which raises an interesting question. To the extent that this talk is dedicated to mutual affiliation between members of the same profession, there is a danger of it setting up a barrier to the overhearing audience. There is a danger that the journalistic 'we' might become exclusive – for the audience of course would not have interviewed the Royal Family or worked behind the camera. But in fact MF starts to mitigate this effect in line 41, in the shift from 'you' (directed at Lorraine) to 'we all', which clearly is designed to explain to the audience what working behind a camera is like. But then, as these exchanges develop, a further interesting series of shifts occurs:

Transcript 10b

MF: We were here yesterday morning watching her going in to the gym and she must have known it was going to get a good reaction because she she almost skipped in she bounded in smiling and she left as well smiling as well. And then last night we got some pictures of her last night at this fashion charity do for the cancer charity. She turned up there looking absolutely stunning, smiling, apparently er she was having a wonderful time to all those people who were there she was mixing with Mickey Rourke and the wonderful supermodels too she thoroughly

she left as well again [LK: mm] waiving to the cameras which she talked about last night on the interview saying they had given her such a hard time.

LK: Indeed. There was one omission and that was that we didn't hear anything and nothing was asked about Will Carling. Were you surprised by that?

MF: (0.3) No, although I think she almost alluded to it where she talked about erm the men who come across her door at Kensington Palace er the trouble that they seem to get into (.) and that's why she was saying she was qui- I think quite happy being on her own there because of the trouble that men get into but, I mean (.) let's forget about the Will Carling thing we had enough didn't we?

LK: [hhh indeed
MF: [the Hewitts, the Gilbey, the Oliver Hoare, it was all explained

LK: It certainly was. Do we know what Charles was doing where he was watching it or indeed any reaction at all from that camp?

MF: Yes he was watching it at Highgrove last night the country home that he and Diana used to share (.) and of course that was where Camilla held er held court so many times which really infuriated Diana, led her into that rampage of bulimia as she told us last night. He was watching it at Highgrove (.) and then in the middle of the night he left Highgrove to a railway halt, a siding in Gloucestershire erm quite a dramatic scene got on to the royal train there in the dead of night, nobody else around boarded it quietly and it's taken him now down to Cornwall this morning where in just one hour's time it's his first public appearance since this came out he's actually erm, at a fish er a fish quay in Newlyn.

LK: Very glamorous for him Martin thank you very much indeed thank you.

When, in line 51, MF starts to talk about last night's pictures of the Princess, the clips are shown on the screen. Interestingly, what seems, as a live two-way, to be developing spontaneously, turns out in part to have been planned. As was mentioned in previous chapters, the question of the scripting of 'liveness' is raised by some contemporary forms of media talk. But also of course this allows the audience to see these images for themselves; they are now included in the journalistic account. When LK in line 61 produces another collective 'we', this is clearly not exclusive to journalists but extends to include anyone who has heard the interview. And when MF in lines 70–1 refers to 'we' who 'had enough didn't we?', is this just a tag question addressed to LK, or is it, as it were through her, a statement about all of us who avidly consume celebrity gossip and scandal? I have previously argued (Tolson 2001b) that this kind of news talk is in

the business of constructing a 'communal' identification between broadcasters and their audience. It presumes that 'we all' share similar interests and (mediated) information. Note here how the 'public sphere' has shifted, from the principle invoked in Transcript 6 by Sir Robin Day. There, the audience was cast as a public judge of statements which it was the responsibility of the IR to elicit. Here, the audience is encouraged into a position of vicarious co-participation in the collective fascination for royalty as celebrity. The 'we' produced by LK in Transcript 10b: line 75, is therefore *both* a reference to journalists *and* to a public knowledge which might be shared by all. MF is then only too willing to supply this, and once again his discourse takes a narrative turn.

We noted, in the previous section, that it is the purpose of narratives in news talk to embellish reports with 'human interest' in ways which at times might be speculative. We also observed, in Transcript 3, that Nicholas Soames refused to go down that route, citing the maxim of Quality in his defence. Here, in the context of gossip news, MF has no such compunctions. Highgrove is characterised in terms reminiscent of soap opera, as the court of Camilla. The actions of Prince Charles are then narrated as a 'dramatic scene' which might be from a movie. It might have been the 'dead of night' but does anybody imagine that the Prince of Wales ever gets on a train with 'nobody else around'? Either by 'nobody else', Frizell is referring to the absence of the press, or he has simply made it up. But in the context of gossip news, quality of information is not always the point. A 'good story' can be informative, but it can also be entertaining – and sometimes the latter takes precedence.

5. Conversational news presentation

The forms of talk illustrated by Transcripts 9 and 10 are indicative of two, possibly linked, developments in contemporary broadcast news. The first development is the tendency for 'two-way' exchanges between presenters and journalists to dominate the dialogical possibilities of news. As previously noted, extended 'news interviews' of the sort discussed by Heritage et al. now seem to be marginalised in many mainstream news bulletins: the voices of politicians and public figures are reduced to 'sound bites' and ordinary people appear in 'vox-pops' of minimal duration. Otherwise, apart from the longer news and current affairs programming, news talk is virtually monopolised by the broadcasters, talking to each other in ways that display their mutual affiliation.

The second point is then that these kinds of professional exchange are, to varying degrees, open to the possibility of informality. Anchors and journalists are obviously colleagues, they are on first-name terms, and their collective 'we' is supported by shared frames of reference. Their dialogue

features colloquial idiom, sympathetic circularity and, at times, possibilities for humour, even banter. Transcript 10 presents an extreme form of this, in what is not, at this time of the day, a conventional news bulletin; but a degree of informality is generally apparent in live two-ways, on far more serious topics (Montgomery 2004). Such developments in news talk echo Fairclough's (1989, 1995b) argument about the 'conversationalisation' of public discourse, which he also extends to news (1995b, 1998). His point is that conversational forms of address are characteristic of 'marketised' public discourses, where the recipient is cast as a consumer. Health authorities, education, even the police, are now in the business of selling their services to potential customers. In the radio news programme (*Today*, BBC Radio 4) that Fairclough analyses, 'conversationalisation' is evident in a highly combative style of interviewing, where the IE (John Humphrys) takes the 'commonsense' perspective of the 'lifeworld'. His speech is highly colloquial, littered with conversational discourse markers (oh, well, right etc.) and in its collective 'we' adopts a populist footing shared with the audience.

In this section, I will suggest that there is much to commend Fairclough's general point, and indeed it is precisely applicable to my example. To fully appreciate this, however, we need to take the arguments about 'conversationalisation' a stage further than he, and other analysts, have left it. Hitherto (and this includes the previous sections of this chapter) attention has focused on the interviews and two-way exchanges which accompany news reports, rather than the presentation of reports themselves. It has been assumed that reports are still introduced by anchors in the traditional style – that is, relatively formal reading from a script – before being passed on, as it were, for further interrogation or speculative comment. In fact, in his work on the live two-way, Montgomery (2004) formalises this distinction (with my addition in italics):

Table 3.1

News Report	Live Two-Way
Scripted	Unscripted
Formal	Informal
Unmarked modality	Marked modality
Statements of fact	Statements of possibility
Descriptive	Interpretative
Institutional voice	Personal voice
<i>Monologue</i>	<i>Dialogue</i>
Then (past)	Now (live)
Here (studio)	There (in the field)

But in the highly competitive environment of contemporary broadcast news, these distinctions are breaking down. As we have noted, news is packaged in different forms, at particular times of the day, for different target audiences. In addition, new possibilities have been opened up by 24-hour rolling news, on dedicated news channels, both on radio and (in the UK) on non-terrestrial TV. There is not the space here to investigate all these possibilities (and there is scope here for much further study) but we can briefly note three main developments:

1. Extension of the practice of using two presenters (previously a preserve of local/regional TV news, having been imported from the USA) to national TV news bulletins, in the early evening 6–7 p.m. slot. In this format, the presentation of stories may be alternated, or they may be co-narrated, with each presenter taking a successive sentence or segment of the narrative.
2. Greater use of support personnel, or 'secondary presenters' – and not only in their traditional segments such as sports or the weather. The use of multiple presenters and studio personnel offers increasing opportunity for dialogic exchange, including interpersonal banter, and shifts into what Montgomery calls the 'personal voice'.
3. Increasing likelihood, particularly in 24-hour news, that 'breaking' stories will not have been fully scripted, so that presenters are obliged to extemporise over raw, unedited visual footage. As one very suggestive account puts it, this changes the form of representation of news from 'reporting' to an act of 'witnessing' (Carpignano et al. 1990). The discourse of the studio personnel takes the form of commentary on a piece of jointly witnessed live action, just like a sports event, and again it invokes the collective 'we' who share a common position of spectatorship.

Suffice it to say that practices of news presentation are now diverse, ranging from scripted monologue to experiments with various kinds of verbal performance, as they seek to engage with target audiences. To give one illustration of the last point, let us now consider a fairly recent addition to the repertoire of TV news, involving a novel use of the 'secondary presenter'. The BBC, which generally uses this in its early evening, 6 o'clock news bulletins, calls it the 'big screen' presentation. It was introduced in 2001 as a strategy, according to Fergus Walsh, one of its presenters, of making news more accessible. Indeed Walsh describes it as a form which is

'much more conversational than conventional VT'.² It involves a secondary presenter, such as Walsh, standing in front of a graphic display, quite similar to the presentation of the weather. His performance mediates between the viewer and the screen by alternating direct address to and from the camera, with occasional hand

gestures in the screen's direction. Meanwhile the script, which is a collaborative production by Walsh and other production staff, is addressed to the viewer in a style which is much more direct and personal than a traditional news report. In these bulletins, therefore, rather than the traditional distinction between scripted reporting and unscripted dialogue, we now have a situation where the script itself is moving from a formal to a less-formal, conversational style. In 'big screen' presentations the script has become a hybrid of the two possibilities presented in Table 3.1 – a form of scripted conversationality:

Transcript 11

GA: So you can save money if you make the effort to shop around. Fergus Walsh is here. Fergus is it a complicated business changing your supplier?

FW: It's really not that difficult George [turns to camera] So why have millions of people, like me, simply not bothered to switch? Well it is a bit confusing the electricity supply market was opened up to competition four years ago. And there are now more than twenty suppliers. It doesn't matter where you live you can pick any of them. Now even supermarkets are getting in on the act. Sainsbury's is signing up customers for both gas and electricity promising big savings but shoppers told me they were sick of the hard sell.

[consumer vox pops]

So switching really can save money and this is how you do it. The consumer body Energywatch has a simple guide on its website which shows exactly how much you could save. If it's easier you can give them a ring on this number. Now if you do decide to switch companies you have to contact the new supplier and agree a contract. Give your old electricity supplier twenty eight days notice and of course pay any outstanding bills. Remember to read the meter the day you switch. That's all there is to it. But even the best deals don't reflect the massive falls in the real price of electricity. The companies that generate electricity have slashed what they charge by a whopping forty percent. But not all those savings have been passed on by electricity suppliers.

[expert comment]

So we've only ourselves to blame here. Most of us could have lower electricity bills but it seems we simply don't have the energy to switch suppliers. George have Fergus thank you. Well to the United Nations now. Talks have just started on lifting the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq ...

In broad terms the verbal discourse of the big screen presentation is reminiscent of the characteristic forms of traditional of radio DJ talk (see Chapter 6). That is to say, it uses a highly personalised form of direct

address, in which the speaker refers to himself as well as to his audience, and where the 'me' (lines 5, 12) together with the 'you' (used throughout) constitute a collective 'we' of electricity consumers (lines 28–30). A quasi-interactive exchange is offered to the viewer, reinforced by deictic markers of co-presence and, as here, using the screen to reinforce a set of instructions ('this is how you do it'). One routine feature of this quasi-interaction is the 'So ... Well' sequence, where the script answers its own rhetorical question (lines 5–6). It also makes extensive use of colloquial idiom ('the hard sell', line 13; 'whopping forty per cent', line 26) and it is not afraid to resort to the occasional joke pun ('we don't have the energy', lines 29–30).

This particular big screen presentation followed a report on a review of electricity prices, carried out by a government-appointed watchdog. It was the first item in the bulletin, which, as we can see, preceded a report on the UN debate about economic sanctions on Iraq. It is perhaps not inappropriate to question what this might be indicating about the BBC's sense of its own news priorities. Indeed, by the time we reach Fergus Walsh, it is debatable whether we are still in the realms of 'news' at all, or have strayed into some kind of consumer advice programme. In fact, it would seem that the BBC has been reinterpreting aspects of its public service remit, to provide not only a public sphere of news and current affairs but also a quasi-educative function, which includes advice on consumer rights.

In some respects, this example would seem to offer a classic illustration of the 'conversationalisation of public discourse' in broadcast news. Not only does the big screen use conversational talk, it also uses this news item to reassert what Fairclough (1994) calls the 'authority of the consumer'. Indeed the marketisation of public services (here electricity) is taken as a political given, there is no residual debate about that, and, once again, no politicians are featured. Rather the agenda has shifted to the communal orientation; not, in this case, to a collective investment in celebrity gossip, but to a slightly more mundane interest in how much we all, as consumers, pay for 'our' electricity.

However, in his critical attitude to such developments, Fairclough, at times, takes a dubious theoretical stance. He refers to conversational public discourse as a form of 'ventriloquism', a kind of simulation of the voice of the ordinary person. He suggests that the relation between this simulated version and 'people's real conversation' is problematic (1998: 160), at times amounting to a manipulative strategy of pseudo-democratisation. It is clearly the case that there are political limits to the choices offered to consumers by this BBC news. But at the same time we need to remind ourselves that all broadcast talk is institutional talk, that it is a performance, and, however 'conversational' it may be, it can never be 'ordinary conversation' as such. Nor, for that reason, is it any less 'real' or authentic than any other form of talk; indeed broadcasters like Fergus Walsh claim

that they are extending the communicative entitlements of potential audiences.

A more constructive position, I think, will involve understanding the scope, but also the limits, of conversational discourse. To reiterate a very basic point: as far as news talk is concerned what seems to be occurring is a shift, perhaps an oscillation, between two different 'principals' on whose behalf the news is speaking. These are defined in terms of 'interests': there is the 'public interest' as traditionally conceived in public service broadcasting and a focus, as we have seen, for the formal news interview. But there is also a prevalent focus on a new kind of consumer-orientated 'human interest' in ordinary and extraordinary people. Contemporary news talk frequently addresses its audiences on the basis that 'we' all share this human interest, and are therefore avid consumers of the endless diet of speculative talk which the journalists produce to maintain it. But it takes the verbal equivalent of a slap on the wrist, such as that delivered by Margaret Rhodes, to insist that human interest ought to have its boundaries, and that there are necessary limits to the publicly sayable.

Notes

1. Further references to Labov's model for the speech genre of oral narrative are made below, in Chapters 3 and 7. Readers who are not familiar with this work might wish to turn to page 136 where the model is more fully explained.
2. Fergus Walsh was interviewed in 2002 by George Malsbury, a student of media studies at De Montfort University, for a research project on the use of 'big screen' presentations.