Assessing the Language of TV Political Interviews

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A Corpus-assisted Perspective

By

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To Alessandro and Lana

It's hard to get good answers to why most Young Voters are so uninterested in politics. This is probably because it's next to impossible to get someone to think hard about why he's not interested in something. The boredom itself preempts inquiry; the fact of the feeling's enough. Surely one reason, though, is that politics is not cool. Or say rather that cool, interesting, alive people do not seem to be the ones who are drawn to the Political Process. Think back to the sort of kids in high school or college who were into running for student office: dweeby, overgroomed, obsequious to authority, ambitious in a sad way. Eager to play the Game. The kind of kids other kids would want to beat up if it didn't seem so pointless and dull. And now consider some of 2000's adult versions of these very same kids: Al Gore, best described by CNN sound tech Mark A. as "amazingly lifelike"; Steve Forbes with his wet forehead and loony giggle; G. Bush's patrician smirk and mangled cant; even Clinton himself with his big red fake-friendly face and "I feel your pain." Men who aren't enough like human beings even to dislike—what one feels when they loom into view is just an overwhelming lack of interest, the sort of deep disengagement that is so often a defense against pain. Against sadness.

In fact, the likeliest reason why so many of us care so little about politics is that modern politicians make us sad, hurt us deep down in ways that are hard even to name, much less talk about.

It's way easier to roll your eyes and not give a shit. You probably don't want to hear about all this, even.

—David Foster Wallace, *Up, Simba*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This study takes a quantitative and qualitative approach to the analysis of the prolific genre of TV political interviews, represented in an *ad hoc* corpus sampling American and British texts compiled as the empirical basis for this research.

It is nowadays clear that being able to read and understand different types of media has become an essential skill in our society. In this vein, we often talk about 'media literacy' as the ability to access, analyse, evaluate and develop discourses that have undergone a process of mediatisation. Both adults and young people should thus be given the instruments to understand the complex messages communicated by television, radio, the Internet, newspapers, and all other forms of media.

The massive proliferation of screens in our daily lives, such as televisions, computers, tablets and mobile phones, has allowed people to easily and freely access a vast array of different 'multimedia texts[1]'. These devices are more and more attentively created to reach large audiences, for whom developing a deeper understanding of the mechanisms behind the surface of information presentation, and also from the point of view of language use, has become a crucial issue in the ability to critically and consciously evaluate what they are exposed to.

Among the wide range of screen-mediated interactions that we encounter, interviews make up one of the most frequently occurring types, on account of the fact that they are easily adaptable to many different purposes and knowledge domains. In particular, with the advent of television, interviews have undoubtedly become one of the most widely used, best-developed and long-lasting formats for spreading information worldwide (Ekström 2001). Indeed, whenever there is a newsworthy event, whether political, cultural or even sports related, the relevant individuals are interviewed. Consequently, most Western people are very likely to access information of various kinds and nature by means of televised interviews.

In this field of TV interviews, a pivotal role in the television programming of both the United States and the United Kingdom is covered

[1] The notion of 'multimedia text' is used broadly to refer to the possible outcomes of media production, encompassing movies, TV series, books, talk-shows, magazines or newspapers, advertisements, albums, and the like (Bell 1991: 34).

by interviews with politicians, as they are "the best and easiest way in which journalists can get commentary or information from politicians about current issues that can interest many" (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 1). At the same time, given the influential and dominant role of broadcast interviews for information spreading, "when politicians decide to appear in the mass media […] it is generally in the context of journalist interviews" (Ekström 2001: 564), since they know that the interview, with its simple, immediate, and repetitive structure can potentially reach an endless number of people. Both interactants participating in the TV political interview are, therefore, well aware of the fact that what they say will be appraised not only by their direct interlocutor, but by an external and indefinite judging public.

From the point of view of language use, all these variables and constraints at stake during the interaction, together with the possible prior rehearsals before going on air, clearly have an impact on how both the journalists and the interviewed politicians construct the interaction and resort to different discourses, ranging from planned and written-like discourse, and colloquial and spontaneous discourse, to specialised and professional discourses. The study of this complex and, presumably, hybrid interplay of discourses characterizing the TV political interview is what is addressed in the present research. More specifically, this work aims to shed light on this issue by answering the following general research questions:

(1) To what extent does the language of political talk show interviews reflect the spoken and the written modes?

(2) How do interviewers and interviewees use language to interact with each other and with the audience?

(3) What are the main differences between American and British political interviews?

Overall, in the existing literature on media reporting over the last decades there is unanimous consensus on the multifaceted nature of interviews, even though several different methodologies have been applied. From a general review, it emerges that three paramount methodological currents account for the majority of the studies, as is summarised in Table 0.1.

Table 0.1. Main methodological approaches in the analysis of TV interviews.

METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE	DESCRIPTION	MAIN STUDIES
Stylistic analysis	It looks for features in the lexico-grammar, punctuation and graphology that might distinguish media discourse in general from other genres. Scholars have tried to ascertain the existence of 'journalese' as a distinct style of English.	Crystal and Davy (1969)
Sociolinguistic analysis	It aims to discover the lexico-grammatical features associated with social categories in media language.	Jucker (1986)
Conversation analysis	This sociological approach attempts to unveil the procedural properties of 'talk-in-interaction', i.e., how participants organise their talk so that they can be understood and in turn display this understanding to each other.	Clayman & Heritage (2002), Ekström (2001), Montgomery (2007), (2008), Gubrium (2012)

Among these analytical frameworks, conversation analysis has been the most prolific. Studies in this field (Clayman and Heritage 2002, Ekström 2001, 2009, Montgomery 2007, 2008, Gubrium 2012 *inter alia*) mainly focus on their sequential nature and consider elements such as the turn-taking system and the adjacency-pair structure. This approach has allowed researchers to unveil how both the interviewer and the interviewee contribute to the building of narratives through their continuous exchange of questions and answers and, thus, to identify different typologies of interviews (e.g., the political interview).

Hence, the study conducted here has its foundations in the classificatory work described by conversation analysists, but adopts a multidisciplinary perspective, which also considers social, external and pragmatic factors in order to empirically explore linguistic choices in relation to the aforementioned variables.

This book is structured into two main parts. The first part includes two chapters that provide a description of the theoretical framework behind the

data collection, the methods of analysis and the genre of political interviews. Chapter 1 describes interviews as a macrogenre within which the TV political interview is a (sub)genre defined by its structure, and, most importantly, by the identity of the interviewee. Chapter 2 explains all the operations that led to the compilation of the corpus of political interviews upon which the analysis is based. Moreover, it also presents some relevant literature concerning the corpus-assisted methodology adopted for the study.

The second part of the research focuses on the corpus-assisted analysis, which is divided into corpus-driven (Chapter 3) and corpus-based (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Chapter 3 is chiefly based on the analysis of written vs. spoken discourse variation in TV political interviews. More precisely, it features a series of inductive counts and single- and multi-wordlist analyses conducted in a comparative way, meaning that various reference corpora are used in order to interpret the results. Chapter 4 stems from the results of Chapter 3 and discusses three case studies on some salient linguistic phenomena that were found to be particularly prominent. The last chapter (Chapter 5) brings the analysis forward, moving on to the level of discourse variation between interviewers and interviewees. The analysis is conducted firstly inductively, by means of an investigation of key semantic domains, and secondly deductively, with a case-study centred on the speech act of greeting, which emerged as a salient aspect in interview interaction. The work ends with some concluding remarks summarising the findings of the analyses and with some tentative answers to the research questions addressed above.

CHAPTER ONE

THE POLITICAL INTERVIEW IN SUNDAY MORNING TALK SHOWS

He knows nothing;
and he thinks he knows everything.
That points clearly to a political career.

George Bernard Shaw, *Major Barbara*

1.1. Chapter rationale

In this chapter, I describe the core object of this research, that is to say interviews with politicians that were aired on British and American Sunday morning talk shows. Specifically, I first introduce the concepts of linguistic genres, discourse and specialized discourse. Then, I proceed to discuss interviews as a macrogenre comprising many different subgenres. Subsequently, I discuss the journalistic interview on television, by commenting in more detail on its political typology. The final section expands on the talk show format and the Sunday morning shows in the United States and the United Kingdom, and ends with a summary of the main features of the talk show interview with politicians.

1.2. An overview of the concept of genre in linguistics: the relationship between interviews and genres

Before delving into the description of TV political interviews, it is worth clarifying the notion of genre in linguistics. In his ground-breaking definition, Swales (1990: 58) observes that

i. a genre is a finite class of communicative events;
ii. this class of communicative events shares a set of communicative purposes;
iii. instances of a genre will vary in their prototypicality;

iv. the communicative purpose of a genre influences content, position, and form;
v. the language used by a discourse community is an important source of insight.

Fairclough (1995: 14) adds a more social dimension to the notion by specifying that, in linguistic terms, a genre is a "socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity (e.g., interview, narrative, exposition)". Adopting the same functional-driven framework, Crystal (2003: 201) specifies that, depending on the type of linguistic genre, there are several constraints on language use in relation to the "subject-matter, purpose, [...], textual structure, form of argumentation and level of formality". Bhatia as well (1993: 16) points out that "each genre is an instance of a successful achievement of a specific communication purpose using conventionalised knowledge of linguistic and discourse resources". In his view, it is thus predictable that a "change in the communicative purpose is likely to render a different genre, subgenres being distinguished on the basis of minor goal modifications".

One very thorny issue in the literature on linguistic genre theory, which certainly is relevant for the purpose of the present work, is the distinction between genres and text types. Lee (2001: 33) attempts to distinguish the two entities by maintaining that

> A genre could be defined as a category assigned on the basis of external criteria such as intended audience, purpose, and activity type, that is, it refers to a conventional, culturally recognised grouping of texts based on properties other than lexical or grammatical co-occurrence features, which are, instead, the internal (linguistic) criteria forming the basis of text type categories.

According to Lee (2001), genre is based on external and non-linguistic criteria, while text type is based on the internal linguistic characteristics of texts themselves.

As will be explained in more detail later on in this chapter, TV political interviews have a specific discursive structure and share a common set of communicative goals, which are, for example, the persuading and influencing of the viewing audience. In light of this, I consider them as a

specific subgenre of the TV broadcast journalistic interview[2], which is a genre marked by the use of different discourse types, i.e., political discourse (especially by the interviewees), spoken discourse (by both interviewers and interviewees) and professional discourse in the field of media (by the interviewer). A similar view is taken by Lee (2001: 52), who states that the "'broadcast interview' is probably best seen as a subgenre of 'interview', differing mainly in terms of the setting". On the level of discourse, Johansson (2007: 141) also confirms that "the political interview [on television] is a genre in which the construction of meaning occurs at the intersection of two institutional discourses, both of which are culturally produced: the discourse of the media and that of politics". Therefore, he considers the political subtype of the TV journalistic interview as a proper subgenre, in which discourses of different natures and kinds coexist.

When describing political discourse, van Dijk (2001: 5) aptly suggests that

> it is not a genre, but a class of genres defined by a social domain, namely that of politics. [...] Thus, government deliberations, parliamentary debates, party programs, and speeches by politicians, are among the many genres that belong to the domain of politics.

This idea of politics as a knowledge domain that frames different linguistic genres is precisely the approach followed in this work. The next sections introduce some key concepts in linguistics which help framing the area of study of interest for the subsequent analysis.

1.3. The complex notion of discourse

Throughout this book, interviews will be often referred to as typically mixing different discourses. Generally speaking, the term 'discourse' could be defined as an umbrella that covers a wide variety of research practices. In philosophical terms, the notion of discourse has traditionally been regarded as a "system of statements which constructs an object" (Parker 1992: 5), or as "a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events" (Burr 1995: 48). To put it simply, these studies conceive

[2] There are different viewpoints as to how representative political interviews are (or are not) typical of TV interviewing. For example, Montgomery (2010) asserts that they are not typical of news interviewing. In my view, especially in the last years, TV political interviews have grown to prominence and politicians are more and more present in the news coverage.

discourses as an ensemble of representations of the world produced by the artefact of language.

From the point of view of linguistics, Mills (1997: 1) introduces discourse as follows

> The term discourse has become common currency in a variety of disciplines: critical theory, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, social psychology and many other fields, so much so that it is frequently left undefined, as if its usage were simply common knowledge. [Discourse] [...] is often employed to signal a certain theoretical sophistication in ways which are vague and sometimes obfuscatory.

Her position clearly brings to light that the area of discourse is very wide and therefore quite problematic. In some seminal linguistic studies, discourse is broadly defined as

i. "language above the sentence or above the clause" (Stubbs 1983: 1);
ii. "language in use" (Brown and Yule 1983: 1);
iii. or, very simply, as a "continuous stretch of (especially spoken) language larger than a sentence, often constituting a coherent unit such as a sermon, argument, joke, or narrative" (Crystal: 1992: 34).

Bringing in a more socially-informed framework, van Dijk (1990: 164) refers to discourse as "language characteristic of different social situations", as in the case of 'advertisement discourse', 'media discourse', etc. and he also notes that discourse should be perceived as a proper action: "I understand discourse [...] both as a specific form of language use, and as a specific form of social interaction, interpreted as a complete communicative event in a social situation". Starting from a similar premise, Wodak (2001: 66), in her studies on politics and gender, also regards it as

> a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic, oral or written tokens, very often as texts, that belong to specific semiotic types, that is genres.

In this sense, the functionalist view overcomes the boundaries of language conceived per se to focus on how people use language to different ends (Schiffrin 2003). Indeed, both pragmaticians and discourse analysts usually use the term to refer to language in use, language as action, or language as interaction in particular social situations.

Another point that is worth some attention is the difference, if any, between 'text' and 'discourse'. The notion of 'text' is broadly conceptualised

by Brown and Yule (1983) as the verbal record of a communicative event. To say it briefly, they advocate that the main feature of a text is the presence of a series of cohesive ties between sentences that create a texture. One of the most relevant studies on the topic is the one by Halliday (1989: 29), where he expresses his context-centred theory, by maintaining that a text is

> a cohesive and coherent stretch of language in use which has a certain function in the context of situation. Thus, a text is a semantic unit taking part in a social exchange of meanings and may be regarded as a product in the sense that it is an entity that has a certain organization and can be recorded, and as a process, i.e., it is a continuous process of semantic choice dependent on previous choices and conditioning the subsequent ones.

Further on, he explains that what he intends by 'context' can be defined as the environment, both linguistic (also referred to as co-text) and extra-linguistic (social and physical), in which a particular text creates meaning. In particular, he specifies that the extra-linguistic context is the context of situation and he describes it according to three main parameters that are the domain (or field), the tenor and the mode. In other words, the notion of 'text' is very often understood as text without or out of context. In this way, it is a finite product and it is stative, whereas discourse is viewed as language in use/interaction or as text in context, more like a process, and it is dynamic.

In addition, Wodak (1997: 5) extensively characterises the main differences between 'text' and 'discourse' by claiming that

> By discourse are to be understood units and forms of speech, of interaction, which can be part of everyday linguistic behaviour, but which can equally appear in an institutional sphere. Orality, admittedly, is not a feature which holds true for all forms of discursive behaviour [...] but is very much the typical case. Regarded systematically, discourse requires the co-presence of speaker and listener (face-to-face interaction); this can, however, be reduced to a temporal co-presence (on the telephone).

Most importantly, she goes on to state that neither does text have to be in the written form, nor does discourse have to be oral. Especially in the last decades, this view according to which the range covered by the term 'text' includes both spoken and dialogic exchanges is the most widespread. Hence, written texts, such as advertisements, poems, etc. and spoken texts, such as a talk between a patient and a doctor, or a talk between university colleagues, can equally be labelled as 'texts'. Indeed, this view follows what Halliday (1989) claims: i.e., that what differentiates them is especially the situational context. This view is the same shared by van Dijk (1990: 164), who views discourse simply as "text in context" and by Dressler and Merlini

Barbaresi (1994), who conceive discourse as a set of interdependent texts that are joined together by cohesive bounds.

As far as this book is concerned, although the spoken dimension is the privileged focus of analysis, both the notions of 'text' and 'discourse' have been used to indicate instances of language "that shows unity of purpose" (Halliday and Hasan 1989: 10), where similar distinctive features are shared. Therefore, political interviews will be defined both as texts and as examples of (political) discourses in action. In fact, the aim of this research is not to carry out a mere description of words (i.e., textual point of view), but to understand also the 'how, when and why' of the speaker's choice (i.e., discourse point of view). This is the main drive behind the compilation of the corpus under study in this research as a modular and composite corpus (as described in Chapter 3). This is also in keeping with Halliday's idea that text (and discourse), in order to be understood, cannot be separated from context. Therefore, not only are the manifested results of the interaction at stake in this research, but also some of the elements that determined them.

After attempting to clarify the difficult and multifaceted notion of discourse, in what specialised discourse is also described.

1.4. Specialised discourse(s)

Whenever native and also non-native speakers "employ English in a restricted range of social and thematic areas" (Gramley and Pätzold 1992: 246), they use it in order to communicate specialised information straightforwardly. To put it another way, when specialised knowledge "is shared and used among members of various kinds of scholarly or other specialised communities, defined not only by their specialised knowledge, but also by their specialised social practices" (van Dijk 2001: 87), discourse fulfils the need to express verbally, but not only, the exchange of specialised information or knowledge. This enables it to be easily understandable within a determined community of speakers, for example medical discourse is used and well understood among physicians.

Research in the field of specialised discourse is relatively recent, dating back to the 1920s-1930s with the studies on functional style carried out by the linguists of the Prague School[3]. However, although much work has already been done in this area, there is still an evident lack of consensus over a standardized term to define this field of research. Italian scholars in

[3] The Prague School of linguistics refers to a group of scholars, such as Nikolay Trubetskoy, Roman Jakobson, etc. who paved the way for a new approach to study linguistics that combines the major tenets of structuralism and functionalism.

particular, among whom Sobrero (1993), Musacchio (1995), Scarpa (2001), and Gotti (2011), have in fact explained the existence and persistence of a 'terminology issue'. Most commonly, the tendency is to use the terms 'special languages', 'specialised discourse' or 'language for specific purposes.' Musacchio (1995: 4-6) explains the issue as follows

> Nonostante i progressi degli studi, rimangono tuttora aperti i problemi relativi alla definizione del campo di indagine e della terminologia. […] Per quanto concerne l'aspetto terminologico […] non esiste univocità nella designazione di questi linguaggi: alcuni parlano di 'sottocodici' e 'lingue speciali' (Berruto, Sobrero), altri di 'discorsi specialistici' (Gotti 2011), altri ancora di 'linguaggi speciali', 'microlingue' (Balboni) o ancora di 'linguaggi settoriali'(Beccaria) […][4]

The preference for one term or the other, therefore, lies in the intention to foreground a particular aspect characterising such 'subcodes', for example their technicality, the fact that they are micro-languages within a larger language system, their context of usage among specialists, or their 'special' linguistic features.

A thorough definition of 'special language' can be found in Cortelazzo (1994: 8), who describes it as a variety intended to satisfy the specialised communicative needs of a restricted group of speakers. According to Scarpa (2001: 1), who moves from Cortelazzo's definition, 'special languages' is the most suitable expression among the ones suggested by various scholars over the last few decades to designate the different specialised varieties of a language, in that it simply refers to subsystems that do not exist on their own but are part of the common language system. Sobrero (1993: 237-239) as well agrees on the use of the expression 'special languages' to designate, in general, languages pertaining to specific fields (e.g., the language of aviation), but recommends the term 'specialised languages' to define those having to do with highly specialised fields, (such as medical language, business language, legal language, etc.). Gotti (2011: 15), instead, maintains that the term 'special languages' should be kept separate from the expression 'specialised discourse' as the latter "is distinguished from general language not for its use of special linguistic rules absent from

[4] Despite progresses in this branch of research, there are still open problems with the definition of this field of inquiry and of terminology. [...] With regard to the terminological aspect [...] there is no univocity in the designation of these languages: some speak of 'subcodes' and 'special languages' (Berruto, Sobrero), others of 'specialized discourses' (Gotti, 2011), others of 'special languages', 'microlingue' (Balboni) or even 'sectorial languages' (Beccaria) [...] [My translation].

general language, but for its quantitatively greater and pragmatically more specific use of such conventions."

Sometimes, in linguistics, the term 'specialised discourse' has been wrongly associated with the notion of "restricted language" (Firth 1957). In fact, the two terms are not interchangeable as the latter "is applied in particular to restricted codes that employ certain sentences of general language in specialised communication", while the former accounts for a variety that "exploits the language code in a far more creative and varied way" (Gotti 2011: 14).

In this work, I shall use the label 'specialised discourse' with the meaning given by Gotti (2011), as an umbrella term that reflects

> […] the specialist use of language in contexts which are typical of a specialised community stretching across the academic, the professional, the technical and the occupational areas of knowledge and practice (2011: 15-16).

In effect, we can observe that this point of view comprehends both the 'field' (the special application), the 'tenor' (type of user) and the 'mode' (the setting) of domain-specific languages and thus it best reflects the complex and multi-layered nature of political discourse.

The next sections introduce the linguistic genre of interviews, presented as a sort of 'macro' genre including a vast array of different subgenres, among which stand TV political interviews.

1.5. Interviews as a 'macro' genre

The term 'interview' derives from the French words *entre voir*, meaning to glimpse or to see each other briefly (as in the *Online Etymology Dictionary*). *The Oxford English Dictionary* articulates the meaning as follows:

i. A formal meeting at which somebody is asked questions to see if they are suitable for a particular job or course of study at a college/university; (e.g., job interview);
ii. a meeting, often a public one, at which a journalist asks somebody questions in order to find out their opinions (e.g., television, radio, newspaper interview);
iii. a private meeting between people when questions are asked and answered (e.g., police interview, qualitative interview for research purposes);
iv. to give an interview is to agree to answer questions.

As these dictionary definitions testify, the interview is a very versatile 'macro' genre that can easily adapt to various communicative needs and purposes of our daily lives. This great communicative potentiality has been highlighted by Corner (1999: 37), who stated, at the turn of the twenty-first century, that "[an] interview, and in particular television interview, is one of the most widely used and extensively developed formats for public communication in the world". Indeed, most would agree on the fact that the interview is a format, or to speak in more linguistic terms a genre, which can be exploited to fulfil different functions. For instance, interviews can be instruments of research, a diagnostic tool (e.g., medical interview), a mode of selection (e.g., job interview), a forensic instrument (e.g., police interview) or, more generally, an information-gathering and news-making instrument (e.g., news interview, political interview, business interview, and so on). Kress (1985: 23) generally refers to interviews as a macrogenre by stating that

> [an] interview is always motivated by difference, and is not developed by 'agreement' but by 'direction'. The textual strategies are direction and questioning on the part of the interviewer, and response, information, and definition, on the part of the interviewee.

He, thus, conceives of all interviewing practices as interactions following a fixed textual strategy whose purpose is to even out differences in knowledge or level of information.

From a more pragmatic-oriented perspective, every interview can be seen as a highly structured and rule-governed speech event. In fact, even though different types of interviews may differ in scope, topic and, for instance, level of institutionality, they all share the same core notion of an interviewer who deliberately asks questions and an interviewee who engages in answering them: this is the *sine qua non* condition of all interviewing practices, no matter their specific typology. Therefore, Blum-Kulka (1983) maintains that interviewers and interviewees always follow a set of genre-specific rules; as a consequence, the interview is essentially made up of a continuous switch between the interactants.

To better account for the pragmatic nature of interviews, the notion of communicative activity type put forward by Levinson (1983) might be profitably employed. The concept of "activity type" (1983: 69) refers "to a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded […] events with constraints on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions". Hence, a communicative activity type is defined by its constraints upon the would-be participants, the

setting, and, most importantly, the speech-acts allowed. Some very prototypical examples may include a lecture or a job interview.

This framework applies perfectly to the interview, where the well-defined roles of the participants, the task to be performed and the corresponding speech act (i.e., questioning and answering) give rise to a highly complex 'activity type' made up of special verbal (but also non-verbal) practices, whose main peculiarity is the essentially dialogic nature. Another significant aspect of activity types which is reflected in interviews is what Goffman (1974) describes as 'framing', i.e., how participants understand specific interactional practices, how they understand what others are doing, and, finally, how they adjust themselves to the roles and goals of the ongoing activities. An interview can profitably be described in these terms, in that there is evidence that it works as a "form[s] of talk and interaction, closely related to the participants' own understanding of what is going on" (Linell 2001: 235) and, for this reason, it sticks to "a highly-systematised pattern of interaction" (Ekström and Lundell 2010: 1). Hence, it is especially this 'activity type' framework that makes interviews extremely recursive and repetitive in nature.

On the basis of the organization and the structure of interviews, Fontana and Frey (2005) classified them as communicative activity types, but distinguished three subcategories:

i. structured interviews;
ii. semi-structured interviews;
iii. unstructured interviews.

A structured interview is an interview that is conducted by relying upon a set of pre-established questions, which are eventually asked in the same order for all the interviewees, in the case where there is more than one. This fixed pattern is "intended to minimise the effects of the instrument and the interviewer on the research results" (Fontana and Frey 2005: 43). Interviews belonging to this type, e.g., research interviews, are more similar to surveys, except for the fact that they are normally oral encounters.

Semi-structured interviews, instead, are more flexible. They normally start from an interview guide usually including both closed-ended and open-ended questions. However, in the course of the interview, the interviewer has a certain amount of liberty to adjust the range of the questions to be asked and to add questions on the basis of the participants' responses. This is, in my opinion, the case of TV political interviews, where improvisation and planning coexist.

Finally, an interview may be totally unstructured, when neither questions nor answers are predetermined. In this case, the social interaction

between the speakers is totally spontaneous. Normally, this format is used more for interviews which are not broadcast live, where cuts and editing can eventually be made.

1.6. The TV journalistic interview

As previously stated, this work aims at broadening the scope of a particular investigation of a subgenre of interviews: the political interview broadcast within Sunday morning political talk shows, which I structurally categorise into the aforementioned group of semi-structured interviews. Considering that television is the channel and the institution through which political talk show interviews are disseminated, and that political interviews are essentially news-making instruments, this section provides first some historical notes on TV journalistic interviews and then summarises their main features. Such an account should help understand the nature of the interview intended as an information-gathering (and information-spreading) tool.

Nowadays, the usage of interviews for press and TV journalism is at the heart of the journalistic process, so much so that the TV broadcast interview may be looked at as the prototype of all interviewing practices. Indeed, the digital revolution and the massive proliferation of screens, such as televisions, computers, tablets and mobile phones, as well as the enormous spread of weekly magazines for different tastes, do not seem to have impacted on the dissemination of interviews nor to have affected their distinctive highly codified format. Rather, they may have favoured their spread and consumption (cf. Bell and van Leeuwen 1994, Ekström and Lundell 2010).

The proliferation of interviews used for gathering information, which would later be used for reporting in newspapers, started during the second half of the 19th century. It is in this period that the word ‘interview’ began to be used with the meaning of “a meeting between a representative of the press and someone from whom he seeks to obtain statements for publication” (Montgomery 2007: 114). Since then, the prominence of the interviewing format has constantly continued to grow, but it is only through the television medium that it has reached its peak of dissemination. In the words of Clayman and Heritage (2002: 28-9), this development stemmed from a sort of commonality of interests between public figures and journalists: “Journalists need access to public figures for their livelihood, while public figures need journalists to gain access to what Margaret Thatcher once called ‘the oxygen of publicity’”. This is what should attract the home audience and convince them to watch a certain TV programme.

Therefore, in every journalistic interview a sort of informal and unspoken 'interview agreement' is stipulated: journalists (i.e., interviewers) give public figures (i.e., interviewees) visibility in exchange for news-making content to be exploited to make a TV programme engaging and catchy.

Conversation analysis has been, so far, the approach taken both to describe the structure and to single out the features of TV journalistic interviews. According to Lauerbach (2007: 139) TV interviews are "all […] characterised by the same role distribution, all having an interviewer as a representative of a media organization and an interviewee". Within the same framework, when pinning down the distinguishing features of news interviews, Ekström (2001: 565) states that they work as an "institutionalised conversation that differs from normal conversation". In fact, he identified the following traits as basic and recurrent

i. the interviewer (journalist) begins and ends it;
ii. the journalist has the initiative and invites the respondent to speak;
iii. the respondent must take account of the fact that the interviewer has the power to set the agenda and decides what the conversation will cover;
iv. the interviewer assumes a formal and neutral position;
v. the interviewee is expected to cooperate by answering the journalist's questions: a refusal to answer is also a response to a question.

Another feature that particularly characterises TV-mediatised interviews, but is underestimated by conversation analysis scholars, is the fact that TV interviews allow simultaneity both in transmission and reception, so that viewers may also experience them as live communication. This obviously cannot happen with press interviews. Moreover, all the features pinpointed by Ekström (2001) are also to be conceived in relation to the actual target audience of these interviews: the audience at home. While noting that TV broadcast interviews, more specifically journalistic interviews, deviate systematically from ordinary conversation in their structure, Heritage (1985) first highlighted the "overhearing audience of interviews". He says that mediatised interviews are "a functionally specialised form of social interaction produced for an overhearing audience and restricted by institutionalised conventions" (1985: 112). Likewise, Montgomery (2008: 260), in more recent times, posits that "interviewers and interviewees know that what they say will be appraised not just by their immediate interlocutor but by who-knows-how-many beyond." This peculiar structure inevitably constrains the use of language of both speakers, which will be rather planned, more structured and performed for public purposes and will aim to create solidarity in the indirect interlocutors. For example, Ekström (2001:

565) suggests that the formal neutral position of the interviewer is linguistically manifested by

> the avoidance of speaking in the first person ('I') and in the interviewer's moving on to the next question or an entirely new subject without evaluating or commenting on the interviewee's answer to the preceding question

On the whole, the above-mentioned features form the basic conversational rules of the TV journalistic interview and can be regarded as a significant part of the prototypical TV political interview. It goes without saying, however, that not all TV journalistic interviews perfectly abide by these rules. The interviewee and interviewer's institutionalised rule of taking turns in succession without interrupting each other is something that is likely to be violated. For instance, when the interviewee interrupts the interviewer, it is considered a non-standard violation. Another rule that may be disregarded is the convention of the interviewee directing his/her talk towards the 'overhearing audience'. Therefore, when the interviewee disagrees with the interviewer and directs his/her disagreement to the audience itself, he/she violates the conventionalised 'norms' (cf. Montgomery 2007). In addition, even though the interviewee does not ask the interviewer questions, since his/her role is confined to answering them, this may happen in more informal interviews, such as those with people from the world of entertainment. Finally, there are also times when the interview deviates more severely from the conventions of turn-taking, thus becoming more of a confrontation, i.e., an overlapping talk in which the interviewee takes a turn before the question is posed. This, however, seems to me not to happen regularly in interviews with British or American politicians.

A further feature which defines all kinds of TV journalistic interviews is their 'format of talk', i.e., the "more or less predetermined forms of how a certain interview should be produced, integrated into the programme, and presented to the viewers" (Ekström and Lundell 2010: 73). In this respect, even though all TV journalistic interviews share the same 'format core', they differ in aspects such as

i. whether the interview is broadcast live or taped;
ii. whether the taped interview is shown in the form of longer sequences or soundbites integrated into a news segment;
iii. whether the interview is conducted face-to-face, via telephone or via a link;
iv. the length of the live broadcast interview;
v. how many interviewees participate in the interview;
vi. how the interview is filmed (presence of the camera in the studio, etc.).

These characteristics related to the format are part of the 'framing', the 'setting' and the 'social organization' of the interaction. They inevitably affect what both participants are expected to do, and also what is understood as a legitimate contribution to the communicative exchange. On the basis of these parameters, different TV formats such as 'a studio', 'a debate', 'a sync', etc. can be distinguished.

Though all TV journalistic interviews normally pertain to the category of semi-structured interviews, Clayman and Heritage (2002) further classify them on the basis of their purpose and distinguish between

i. in-depth interviews, which last up to an hour and focus on a detailed analytical approach to a topic which needs not be "up-to-the minute news";
ii. short interviews, which only last few minutes, are part of a programme, and focus on an immediate, topical subject arising out of a 'hard news' story.

Starting from this general classification, Clayman and Heritage (2002) further distinguish between 'information', 'opinion', and 'personality' interviews. Information interviews are about the 'who, when, where and how' of journalistic interview facts. News interviews and current affairs interviews belong to this group and they are normally short interviews. The opinion interview examines in great detail an individual's particular position regarding a specific issue. Hence, this type most often (but not always) belongs to the in-depth interview type. In this case, the interviewee is usually an expert in the area of the issue under examination. Political interviews, for instance, could be ascribed to this category. Finally, the personality interview has a variable length and deals with the private or professional life of individuals, or their emotional state.

In real life, it is actually difficult to find interviews that belong only to one of these subtypes. There are often cases where an interview contains features corresponding to at least two of them. In this regard, Ekström (2001) advocates that this is especially the case with the categories of opinion and personality interviews, where it is possible to hear an interviewee giving his/her opinion on a topic of public interest, although it is primarily a personality interview. This case of blurred limits between categories is undoubtedly represented by political interviews broadcast in talk shows. In fact, although they are opinion interviews in nature, in which a politician tackles issues of common interest, they also share features of the information interview, for example when the politician announces his/her near future plans. Moreover, details about the politician's personal life are very often elicited by the interviewer with the aim of lightening the