

Differentiating Winners and Losers Through Question Structures in Post-Competition Televised Media Interviews

Yuri Hosoda and David Aline

Abstract

This conversation analytic study examines how interviewers initiate initial questions to non-winning athletes in post-game media interviews. Although an increasing number of studies in conversation analysis (CA) has investigated interaction in news interviews with public officials and experts, the CA method has rarely been applied to analyze other types of media talk, such as interviews with athletes in relation to sporting events. This study explores how interviewers initiate interviews with non-winners of figure skating competitions and compares them with winners' interviews. The data come from 52 recorded interviews at major figure skating competitions. Analysis of non-winners' interviews revealed that while interviewers attempted to maintain objectivity and neutrality, some presuppositions of the athletes being non-winners actually emerged in the interviewers' question designs.

要旨

近年の会話分析研究では、政治家などに対するニュースインタビューの分析が進んでいるがそれ以外の放送トークの分析はあまり進められていない。本研究ではスポーツ競技の後、インタビュアーがいかにしてインタビューを行うかを検証する。特にインタビュアーは敗者インタビューをいかにして開始するのか、そしてその開始手続きは勝者インタビューとどう異なるのか、ということに焦点を当てる。この研究で検証されたデータは録画された国内外のフィギュアスケート主要大会の競技後に行われた52の日本語インタビューである。検証の結果、敗者インタビューではインタビュアーの質問を中立的に保つことへの志向が観られた一方、質問の非中立的な前提が表面化してしまう場面も観察された。

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Introduction

This conversation analytic study examines how interviewers construct the opening phases of post-game interviews. Over the past two decades, studies in conversation analysis (CA) have extensively investigated interaction in news interviews with public officials, experts, and those connected to current events (e.g., Clayman, 2002, 2016, 2017; Clayman & Heritage, 2002a, 2022, 2023; Clayman & Romaniuk, 2011; Heritage, 2002; Heritage & Clayman, 2010; Loeb & Clayman, 2018; Romaniuk, 2013), especially in terms of questioning sequences (Clayman & Heritage, 2002b, 2022; Clayman, Heritage, & Hill, 2020; Clayman & Loeb, 2018; Heritage & Clayman, 2013). These studies demonstrate how organizational structures of mundane conversation are adapted to the specialized task of news interviews. Discussing journalists' construction of questions, Clayman and Heritage (Clayman & Heritage, 2002a; Clayman & Fox, 2017; Heritage & Clayman 2010) list two professional norms of journalistic questioning: objectivity and adversarialness. Objectivity is con-

cerned with norms of neutralism, factual accuracy, and balance between opposing views, whereas adversarialness deals with the necessity to actively challenge an interviewee. The authors of these papers found that one of the ways journalists deal with the incongruity of the two norms is to invoke a third party, such as outside experts or the general public. Doing so enables interviewers to maintain neutrality while also producing something that might otherwise be construed as opinionated or controversial (Clayman, 2002).

Compared with the studies cited above, the CA approach has been applied less for analyzing other kinds of broadcast talk, such as interviews with sports players, with some notable exceptions (Caldwell, 2009; Emission, 1987; File, 2012; Hosoda & Aline, 2015; Okada, 2002; Rhys, 2014, 2016; Wilton, 2019, 2021). In a study that launched this avenue of analysis, Emission (1987) investigated after-game sports interviews in ceremonial settings and observed how victory or defeat is linguistically and sequentially handled by victors, vanquished, interviewers, and audience. Emission found that the most notable features of victors' interviews were interviewers' compliments and victors' self-praise avoidance, while those of losers' interviews were interviewers' avoidance of condemnatory comments. In a similar vein, Okada (2002) analyzed on-the-spot broadcasting of Olympic games and world cup games, finding that commentators' talk provides viewers who are not familiar with the particular sport with opportunities for learning what is occurring in the games. Furthermore, Okada observed that winners' interviews typically begin with adjacency pairs of "expressions of congratulations" and "acceptance."

The current study builds on the research cited above, in which both Emission and Okada discussed sequences of after-game interviews, by exploring how interviewers initiate interviews with “non-winners” (i.e., those who do not gain an expected level of achievement) of sports events, specifically in figure skating competitions. In comparison with political news interviews, interviewers in sports interviews, at least in this data set, are apparently less likely to be adversarial. However, the very act of interviewing non-winners brings the athletes’ failure to the fore and is thus face-threatening. The question that arises then is, how do interviewers initiate such face-threatening interviews while avoiding adversarialness, and how do these “losers” interviews differ from “winners” interviews?

Data

The data come from 52 recorded post-performance interviews in major domestic and international figure skating competitions collected over a ten-year period. Both interviewers and interviewees are Japanese, with the interviews consequently conducted in Japanese. The interviewers are professional reporters or journalists working for major TV stations and the interviewees are amateur figure skaters representing the country of Japan in international competitions. Each interview lasted approximately one to two and a half minutes. Whether a particular interview is a winner’s interview or a loser’s interview is a matter that can be judged by the audience according to the degree of their prior expectations and the actual result of the competition, and audience expectations

are generally built up by mass media reports prior to a competition. Therefore, how the media treats the results of a particular athlete in a competition greatly influences how an audience might interpret the results, and an interviewer of a post-game interview is one among many (e.g., before-game documentary, newspaper articles, etcetera) representing the mass media. In this paper, we scrutinize post-game interviewers' orientations at the initial stage of the interviews to more deeply understand how an interviewer initiates a particular interview as a winner's interview or as a loser's interview. Whether the interviewee is a winner or not is constructed by the interactants themselves in the interview: It is important to note that it is not always consistent with the ranking they received in the competition. That is to say, the winner of a silver medal in a competition may be seen as a winner on some occasions but may be construed through the interview question and answer sequences as a loser on other occasions.

Transcription conventions for the data sets were adapted from Jefferson (1984) (see Appendix for transcription conventions). The transcripts are organized according to a three-line format, which includes the original Japanese utterance (in bold italics), a morpheme-by-morpheme translation (in plain type), and a vernacular English gloss (plain type in quotation marks).

Analysis

Analysis of the data revealed that while there are many characteristics consistent throughout all the interviews, there are roughly two dif-

ferent types of structures the interviewers employ while maintaining neutrality and avoiding adversarialness, and these two types reflect the interviewers' orientation to interviewing victors or vanquished. In the following, we first outline the common characteristics found in both types of interviews and then discuss the differences between the two sequence types in turn.

Common Characteristics Consistent Throughout All Interviews

In all the interviews under consideration for this research, the interviewers oriented to the perception of asking questions for the sake of the mass-media TV audience and as a representative of the general public, rather than from the viewpoint of their own personal interests. Such orientation was especially visible through their action of introducing the specific names of the interviewees. Introducing the name of an interviewee is an action that displays an orientation to having an audience for the interview in that it is an action that does not occur on occasions without an audience. Another common characteristic is that the interviewers' initial questions almost always inquire about how the skaters' felt during or just after their performance. These two characteristics are exemplified in Extracts (1) and (2). In the extracts, IR stands for Interviewer and IE stands for Interviewee. In first extract presented here, IR is interviewing a figure skater who finished the competition in first place.

(1) [Tatsuki Machida, Grand Prix Russia, 2013]

01 IR: *e:: Machida senshu desu. <yuusho> de (.) guranpuri*

- uh competitor cop: POL victory by Grand Prix
 02 ***fainaru o kimemashita. omedetougozaimasu. =***
 Final Acc decide: PST congratulations: POL
 “Uh, this is Mr. Machida. He won the championship and
 qualified for the Grand Prix Final.”
- 03 IE: ***=arigatou gozaimasu.***
 thank you POL
 “Thank you very much.”
- 04 IR: ***donna kibun desu ka.***
 how feeling COP: POL Q
 “How do you feel?”
- 05 IE: ***ssou desu ne. a: no...***
 right COP: POL IP uhm
 “Let me see. Well...”

Presented in Extract (2) is an interview with a figure skater who completed the competition in second place.

(2) [Mao Asada, Vancouver Olympic Games, 2010]

- 01 IR: ***Asada Mao senshu desuhh. donna yonpunkan***
 competitor COP: POL how four minutes
- 02 ***datta desu ka?***
 COP: PST COP: POL Q
 “This is Ms. Mao Asada. What was the four minutes like
 for you?”
- 03 (0.4)

04 IE: *so::: desu ne hontoni: ...*
 right COP: POL IP really
 "Let me see. It was really..."

In both of these extracts, the interviewer introduces the name of the skater in the first turn of the interview, and then, as the initial question of the interview, the interviewer asks about the interviewee's feelings. In Extract (1), the interviewer asks, "*donna kibun desu ka* (How do you feel?)" and in Extract (2) the interviewer asks, "*donna yonpuncan datta desu ka* (What was the four minutes like for you?)." As seen in these two examples, as initial questions, the interviewers routinely employed open-ended questions beginning with "*dou*" or "*donna*," which are equivalent to wh-questions in English. By deploying such open-ended questions, the interviewers refrained from imposing any presuppositions on the questions, thus allowing the interviewees themselves judgement of their own performances. Consequently, the appearance of neutrality was maintained by the interviewers through the formatting of the question design. This phenomenon of neutrality of interviewers in post-match interviews was also reported in Caldwell (2009). Caldwell observed that in post-game interviews of Australian football games, interviewers remained neutral by distancing themselves from expressions of attitude. Similarly, in the present data set, interviewers avoided expressions that might have revealed their preconceptions and presuppositions.

Two Types of Interview Sequences

Through close observation and fine-grained analysis of the data, we

established that there are roughly two types of structure the interviewers employ in the beginning of the interviews. The first difference between the two types of structure can be observed in Extracts (1) and (2): Although the skater's name is introduced to the audience at the beginning in both Extracts (1) and (2), the result of the athlete's performance is introduced only in Extract (1), while no result is mentioned at all in Extract (2).

For the second difference, whereas interviewers often produced positive assessments in one type of interview, they refrained from producing any kind of evaluation in the other type of interview, simply employing the Japanese equivalent of wh-questions (e.g., *dou*, *donna*), and thereby maintaining their image of neutrality. Consider Extract (3) below and compare it with the interaction found in the transcript shown in Extract (4). Extract (3) comes from an interview with a figure skater who achieved first place in this competition.

(3) [Yuzuru Hanyu, All Japan, 2013]

01 IR: . *hhh migoto nirennpa.*

admirable two years of successive championships

02 *attoutekina tsuyosa de yuusho shimashita*

overwhelming strength by win a title do: PST

03 *Hanyu Yuzuru senshu desu. omedetougozaimasu.*

competitor COP: POL congratulations: POL

"{He} achieved admirable two years of successive championships, and won the title with overwhelming performance, this is Yuzuru Hanyu. Congratulations."

- 03 IE: *arigatou gozaimasu.*
 thank you POL
 “Thank you very much.”
- 04 IR: *soshite orinpikku ga kimari mashita.*
 and Olympic games Nom decide POL: PST
- 05 *ima donna omoi desu ka?*
 now how feeling COP: POL Q
 “And you have been qualified for the Olympic Games.
 How do you feel now?”
- 06 IE: *i ↓ ma kimari mashita to iware nakere ba hontoni*
 now decide POL: PST QT be said NEG if really
- 07 *kiz (h) ukan (h) i k (h) ur (h) ai. hh ano:: ...*
 realize almost uhm
 “If I wasn’t told that I have been qualified,
 I almost didn’t realize that. Uhm...”

In the following extract, IR is interviewing a figure skater who placed third.

(4) [Mao Asada, All Japan, 2013]

- 01 IR: *Asada Mao senshu desuuh. otsukaresama deshita.*
 competitor COP: POL tired: TL COP: POL: PST
 “This is Mao Asada. You finished.”
- 02 IE: *otsukaresama deshita: .*
 tired: TL COP: POL: PST
 “I finished”

- 03 IR: *kyou no engi o furikaette gojishin*
 today Gen performance Acc look back yourself
- 04 *de ikaga desu ka?*
 by how COP: POL Q
 “If you look back at your own performance today,
 how do you feel about it?”
- 05 IE: . *hhh hai. e:: (0.5) jibun ga: mezasiteta: ...*
 yes uh I Nom aiming: PST
 “yes, uh, I was aiming for...”

In Extract (3), in the initial turn, before introducing the name of the interviewee, the interviewer announces the results of the competition “*nirenpa* (two years of successive championships)”, and produces the positive assessments “*migoto* (admirable)” and “*attoutekina* (overwhelming)”. Conversely, in Extract (4), the interviewer neither announces the results of the competition nor produces any assessments in the first turn but merely introduces the name of the interviewee. Notice also that there is a congratulatory sequence (congratulations with an appreciative response) in Extract (3). The interviewer says “*omedetougozaimasu* (Congratulations)” in line 3 and the interviewee responds with “*arigatougozaimasu* (Thank you very much)” in line 4. This congratulatory sequence can also be found in Extract (1) above. After the interviewer has introduced the interviewee and announced the outcome of the competition, he utters “*omedetougozaimasu* (Congratulations)” in line 2, and the interviewee responds “*arigatougozaimasu* (Thank you very much)”. In contrast, in Extracts (2) and (4), there is no congratulatory sequence to

be found. Moreover, in Extract (4), instead of a congratulatory sequence, there is an exchange of “*otsukaresama deshita* (idiom of completion)”.

So far, we have discussed two alternate structures possible in this type of interview. The trajectories of the two types of interviews are summarized below. The first turn is signified with T1, and so on.

Type I

T1 (IR): Introduction of the name of the interviewee, results of the competition, positive assessment, congratulatory comment

T2 (IE): expressing gratitude (response to congratulatory comment)

T3 (IR): question inviting IE's self-assessment

T4 (IE): answer to T3

Type IIa

T1 (IR): Introduction of the name of the interviewee, statement of completion (*otsukaresama*)

T2 (IE): response to the statement of completion (*otsukaresama*)

T3 (IR): question inviting IE's self-assessment

T4 (IE): answer to T3

Type IIb

T1 (IR): Introduction of the name of the interviewee, question inviting IE's self-assessment

T2 (IE): answer to T3

In the Type I sequence, in Turn 1, besides introducing the name of the interviewee, the interviewer often summarizes the results of the competition, produces a positive assessment, and issues a congratulatory comment. In Turn 2, the interviewee responds to the congratulations, and following this, in Turn 3, the interviewer produces the first question, which inquires as to the interviewee's feelings about their performance.

In comparison, the sequences in Type IIa and Type IIb are much more concise. In Type IIa, the interviewer's first turn consists of only the introduction of the name of the interviewee and a statement of completion. The interviewee then responds to the statement and the interviewer initiates the first question. The sequence of Type IIb is even simpler: After introducing the name of the interviewee, the interviewer immediately proffers the first question. Therefore, in Type IIa and Type IIb sequences, it appears that by refraining from producing the outcome of the competition, a positive assessment, or a congratulatory statement, the interviewer displays their orientation to interviewing non-winners. Also, though not the focal point of this paper, it is clear that by participating in this format the interviewees themselves display an orientation to not being a winner. Furthermore, when the interview is initiated with the trajectory of Type IIa or IIb, the interviewer occasionally produced an account for the final decision on the event for the interviewee. The account is often negatively framed and is usually concerned with the atmosphere of the competition venue. This is demonstrated in Extract (5), which occurs after the IR introduced the IE.

(5) [Takahiko Kozuka, World Figure 6th, 2014]

- 01 IR: *ichiman hassen nin ga mimamoru naka de*
 10,000 8,000 people Nom intently watching inside in
- 02 *. hh saishu kassou tte no wa soutouna puressha*
 final skate QT NR Top considerable pressure
- 03 *datta n desu ka?*
 COP: PST NR COP: POL Q
 “Was it a lot of pressure for you to be the final skater
 while 18,000 people were watching?”
- 05 IE: *u: n sou desu ne ano: maa puressha kanjita to*
 uh right COP: POL IP uhm well pressure felt QT
- 06 *iu yorimo...*
 say rather
 “uh, let’s see, uhm, well, rather than feeling pressured...”

In this extract, in lines 1 to 3, by referring to a large audience (“*ichiman hassen nin ga mimamoru naka* (while 18,000 people are watching)”) and the skating order (“*saishu kasso* (the final skater)”), the interviewer infers that the skater (i.e., the interviewee) was under a lot of pressure and requests confirmation of this. In other words, this question encompasses the presupposition that the large audience and the order in which the competitors skated had an adverse effect on the interviewee’s performance. Therefore, although the interviewer does not refer directly to the results of the competition, by providing a possible account for an infelicitous outcome, the interviewer indirectly touches on the perceived failure of the skater.

So far, from the structural sequences of the interviews, it can be observed that the interviewers in Extracts (1) and (3) orient to interviewing winners, while the interviewers in Extracts (2), (4) and (5) orient to interviewing non-winners. It is noticeable that even though the interviewers infer the failures of the interviewees, the interviewees' failures are never mentioned directly. Hence, no direct mentioning of the interviewee's failure to achieve a higher score appears to be a norm of post-game interviews.

However, we found one case in which the interviewer explicitly mentioned the poorer-than-expected performance of the interviewee. This is an interview with a skater who earned a silver medal, second place, in the competition. It is presented here as a deviant case analysis.

(6) [Nobunari Oda, NHK Trophy, 2013]

01 IR: *Oda Nobunari senshu desu. otsukaresama deshita.*

competitor COP: POL tired: TL COP: POL: PST

"This is Nobunari Oda. You finished."

02 IE: *arigatou gozaimashita.*

thank you POL: PST

"Thank you very much."

03 IR: *✕saisho no janpu shippai de hiyaritoshita n desu*

first Gen jump mistake by felt a chill NR COP: POL

04 *kedomo: sono ato migoto deshita ne.✕*

but that after brilliant COP: POL: PST IP

"When you missed the first jump, it made our blood run cold, but after that, you skated brilliantly."

05 IE: *hh* ~~ʃ~~*sou* *desu* *ne* ~~ʃ~~*ano::* ...

Right COP: POL IP well

“Right, well...”

The beginning of this interview displays characteristics of a Type IIa sequence: The interviewer first introduces the name of the interviewee and follows this with a completion sequence. However, when the interviewer initiates the first question, instead of producing an open-ended question asking about the feelings of the interviewee, which is commonly observed in all the interviews in the data set, the interviewer explicitly refers to a mistake the interviewee made in his performance. The interviewer, nevertheless, does not end the turn constructional unit with this direct mentioning of the failure but immediately attaches “*kedomo* (but)” and continues with a positive assessment, “*migoto* (brilliant)”, with emphasis stressing the first syllable. Moreover, it is noticeable that the interviewer’s question is marked with a smiley voice from the beginning, and the interviewee’s response is also accomplished with a smiley voice. In fact, throughout this interview, the interviewer and the interviewee ask and answer questions with smiley voices punctuated with occasional laughter. Hence, although the interview begins in a way that is structurally similar to that of a non-winner’s interview, and the interviewer mentions the poor performance of the interviewee, the emphasized positive assessment along with the paralinguistic features such as the smiley voices and laughter of the question demonstrate that this is rather a celebratory event; the way the interviewee responds to the question also treats it as such. In short, the interviewer’s direct mention-

ing of the interviewee's failure occurred in a context in which the interviewer does not treat the interviewee as a non-winner but rather as a winner of the competition.

Conclusion

This conversation analytic study examined how interviewers construct the opening phases of post-game interviews, and identified two alternative types of format that the interviewers employ to initiate these interviews: one type employed for winners' interviews and the other for less-than-winners' interviews.

In both types of interviews, those formulated for winners and those formulated for losers, the interviewers publicly displayed an orientation to asking questions as representatives of the general public for the sake of a mass-media TV audience. Such an orientation was demonstrated through their introduction of the skater's name at the very beginning of the interview. Beyond the initial identification of the interviewee for the audience, the other noticeable feature common to all the interviews is that the interviewer's initial question almost always inquired as to the skater's feelings or impressions about their own performance. Moving on from these common features, it was found that the interviews in the data set could roughly be divided into two types according to the interviewer's orientation to the skater's perceived success or failure as revealed in the structure of the interview. The first type emerges in the course of the unfolding of the winner's interview, with the second type being displayed through the question design in construction of the non-

winner's interview. One difference between the two types is that the result of the athlete's performance is introduced along with the skater's name in the first type, while no result is directly mentioned in the second type although the skater's name is mentioned. Here, we can observe the interviewer's orientation to announcing good news in a winner's interview while avoiding mention of not-so-good news in a non-winner's interview. The second difference is that whereas interviewers often produced positive assessments with an open-ended question in the first type, they refrained from producing any kind of evaluation in the second type, simply moving on to deployment of an open-ended question concerning the event.

Another noticeable feature is that interviewers occasionally produced accounts for the skaters' perceived failures, the failures often being attributed to the atmosphere of the competition venue. Mentioning of the account revealed the interviewers' presuppositions that (a) the skaters indeed failed somehow, and (b) the failure was influenced by the atmosphere of the venue. Thus, while interviewers maintained objectivity by avoiding explicit mention of any negative outcome and by deploying open-ended questions so as to allow the athletes to evaluate their own performances openly, the other features of the interviewing format nevertheless made their orientation to interviewing non-winners subtly visible. Thus, the non-winners' interviews revealed the interviewers' attempt at maintenance of neutrality, yet some presuppositions eventually surfaced in the interviewers' question designs in these post-competition interviews.

In this paper we examined only the initial phase of these sports me-

dia interviews. In the later stages, the interviewers' presuppositions may emerge from the data to a greater extent. This aspect of media interaction will be further examined in our future research.

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Transcript Conventions

[]	overlapping talk
-	cut-off, self-interruption
=	latched utterances
(0.0)	timed pause (in seconds)
(.)	a short pause
co: lon	extension of the sound or syllable
.	fall in intonation (final)
,	continuing intonation (non-final)
?	rising intonation (final)
ˊ	a rise stronger than a comma but weaker than a question mark
<u>underline</u>	emphasis
< >	slow talk
> <	fast talk
☺ ☺	smiley voice
↑	sharp rise
↓	sharp fall
hh	audible aspirations
(hh)	laughter within a word
(())	comment by the transcriber, including nonverbal conduct

- () problematic hearing that the transcriber is not certain about
- “ ” idiomatic translation of Japanese utterances

Abbreviations used in interlinear gloss

IP	Interactional particle (e.g., ne, sa, no, yo, na)
Nom	Nominative (-ga)
Acc	Accusative (-o)
Gen	Genitive (-no)
Top	Topic marker (-wa)
PT	other particles
QT	Quotation marker (-to, -tte)
Q	Question marker (ka and its variants)
POL	Politeness marker
COP	Copulative verb
NR	Nominalizer (e.g., no, n)
NEG	for marking negation
PST	past
TL	Title