

## Political bias in TV-interviews

Handout XVII<sup>th</sup> International Seminar in Broadcast Talk: Belligerence in broadcast talk

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### Examples from the analysis:

Example 1: *Initiative*

(1) *Introduction to the question (IR=Paul Witteman, IE = left-wing party leader Jan Marijnissen)*

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IR: U<sup>1</sup> → *Jan Marijnissen, you did not take part in the debate ((i.e., a debate organised shortly before by the commercial network RTL)), because it was RTL's choice to organize a two-way debate.*  
U<sup>2</sup> → *Femke Halsema had some very angry words to say about that in 'De leugen regeert' ('A pack of lies', a TV-programme that exposes 'lies' in journalism)).*  
U<sup>3</sup> → *Andre Rouvoet stated this morning in De Volkskrant ((i.e., a national quality newspaper with a high impact)) that he regarded it as 'cheating the voters'.*  
Q → *Do you agree?*

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Example 2: *Directness*

(2) *Reference to interviewer (IR=Jeroen Pauw, IE = right-wing MP Rita Verdonk)*

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IR: Q → *May I ask you to read aloud a short passage?*  
IE: Yes.

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Example 3: *Assertiveness*

(3) *'Tilted' introduction and 'tilted' question (IR=Jeroen Pauw, IE=leader of a party in the political centre Alexander Pechtold)*

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IR: U<sup>1</sup> → *With regard to the death penalty, you could say that if Saddam Hussein is handed over to a tribunal,*  
U<sup>2</sup> → *with most of the parties agreeing to there being a tribunal, because the man should be tried by his own people;*  
U<sup>3</sup> → *if you know that capital punishment is at the top of the list in that culture,*  
Q → *then it is not so very strange that Saddam Hussein should actually get the death penalty?*

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Example 4 *Opposition*

- (4) *Opposing introduction (IR=Jeroen Pauw, IE=PM, and leader of a political party in the centre Jan Peter Balkenende)*

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IR: U → *Last night we had Amsterdam alderman Aboutaleb with us in the studio, and he got rather worked up about the fact that it is precisely this cabinet under your leadership that has paid so little attention to the problems Amsterdam is facing in working on solutions ((in problem areas with many migrants)). Let's take a look at that clip from last night's show.*

Q → *We'd like to hear your reaction?*

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Example 5 *Accountability*

- (5) *Accountability questions (IR=Paul Witteman, IE=right-wing party leader Mark Rutte)*

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IR: *Is there anything about this issue ((i.e., the position of the party with respect to Turkey joining the European Union)) in your party's electoral platform?*

IE: *No there isn't.*

IR: Q<sup>1</sup> → *How can that be?*

Q<sup>2</sup> → *Hasn't this been a major issue in your party for a long time? It was part of Bolkestein's agenda for years and years.*

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Example 6: *Persistence*

In the following fragment, the interviewers are dealing with a comment by right-wing politician Pieter Winsemius, a fellow party member of interviewee Rita Verdonk, in which he states that, in the next cabinet, he is willing to take over Verdonk's portfolio as Minister of Immigration and Integration because she failed to solve the problems in the city neighbourhoods.

- (6) *Repeating the question, commenting on evasive answering (CEA) and interrupting IE (IR1=Paul Witteman, IR2=Jeroen Pauw, IE = right-wing MP Rita Verdonk)*

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IR1: Q<sup>1</sup> → *And do you think it is a good idea that? Do you think it is a good idea that he will finish your job?*

IE: *Well, look. What I do think is that his report is an inventory he has made and we still have big problems in the neighbourhoods. But, to me, it goes too far, and that was your first comment, that it is all integration pro [blems. I have said there is a complex*

IR1: Q<sup>2</sup> → *[Yes. That is what you have said, but do you mind if he finishes that job?*

IE: *Well, look, that is I don't think that you can put it in this way. We are all dependent on formation [negotiations.=*

IR1: *[Hmhm*

= *Let's wait for these first and then see what [comes out.*

IR1: Q<sup>3</sup> → *[Would you be happy to get rid of it? Of this portfolio?*

IE: *(<) Uh I have to say that it has been spoken of as a headache portfolio. Well, it is not like that, but I get as far as the integration part is concerned you get gray hairs form that. [I mean.=*

IR1 *[Yeh.*

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IE		= A complete cultural change has to be brought [about. (Under)
IR1:	Q <sup>4</sup> →	[So you don't mind if you leave it?
IE:		Well. I no I am terrifically interested in it. And it also keeps me very busy. So yes of course leaving it would definitely affect me. [Sure of course, but the same applies to immigration.
IE:		Well, that is not what I am saying. You know, I have just said, it's all about these formation negotiations. So [yes
IR1:	Q <sup>6</sup> →	[No. it's about I [asked what you want.
IR2:	Q <sup>7</sup> →	[No, but the issue is what you [want.
IE:		[No. Nohohohoho no yes and then after that you uh god and you say just with respect to mister Winsemius. I 'm getting to know you now, gentleman. Noho, this is not what is going to happen.
IR2:		No.
IR1:	CEA→	But, we uh simply ask questions and (then I [don't understand.)=
IE:		[Yes. = Either you say yes we I know you as interviewers and I would rather not give an answer. But we don't know you for this.
IE:		No, oh but I keep on giving I do [my utmost to give good answers.
IR2:	Q <sup>8</sup> →	[But fine. You just said I just discussed it with mister uh Winsemius, and so in my view you will have said just normally Pieter, before he said it on Buitenhof. So he probably also said like I do want to do that and I feel I might well say it on Buitenhof ((i.e., a political TV talk show)). What did you say then?
IE:		Well, I mean, he can say that if he wants to. And I can give my reaction to that, [the (weeks) erm [which I have.
IR1:	Q <sup>9+10</sup> →	[And it was? [And what was your reaction then?

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When the interviewer asks Verdonk whether she sees Winsemius taking her place as being a good idea (Q<sup>1</sup>), she doesn't provide an adequate answer to that question, i.e., she comments on the topic of the question, but does not answer the question in terms of the action that the question requires: a yes/no answer. This leads to the interviewers repeating the question six times (Q<sup>2</sup> to Q<sup>7</sup>), while also interrupting Verdonk in each case. Next, Verdonk evades the question openly, after which the interviewers comment explicitly on her series of inadequate answers (CEA). After an account of the interviewee, the interviewers continue repeating the question and interrupting the interviewee (Q<sup>8</sup> to Q<sup>10</sup>). By interrupting the interviewee, repeating their question, and commenting on evasive action, the interviewers demonstrate to the interviewee as well as to the audience that they regard the question as being answered inadequately. They display persistence in obtaining an adequate answer, thereby expressing adversarialness in the questions they ask.

### *Transcription conventions*

(<)	pause of a second or less
(only partly intelligible)	uncertain transcription
((clarification))	clarification, usually contextual information
[	beginning of overlapping stretch of speech
=	introduces latched turn
→	indicates line which is the focus of comment or discussion

**The potentially relevant factors investigated are the following:**

Five factors related to IE, not produced during the interview:

1. Gender of the politician (male or female).
2. Political position of the interviewee (party leader or MP).
3. Experience of IE. How experienced is the interviewee in Dutch political practice? (experienced (four years of experience or more), or rather inexperienced (three years or less)) .
4. Political position of the party that the IE belongs to (in power or in the opposition).
5. IE's party's support in the polls (support may be stable, increase or decrease).

Four factors produced by IE in the context of the interview:

1. Answering strategy. Has IE produced an answer preceding the present question? IE may either have given an answer, or have reacted evasively.
2. Politeness. In the turn preceding the present question, IE may either have produced a direct answer, or may have employed politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987). Polite answers are indirect answers or answers embroidered with politeness strategies.
3. Playing with turn-taking rules. In the turn preceding the present question, IE may have followed the turn-taking rules, or may have played with them. Interrupting is a form of not following the turn-taking rules.
4. Playing with discourse roles. In the turn preceding the current question, IE may have maintained the discourse roles, or may have played with them. When IE asks a question, he or she changes the discourse roles and puts the interviewer in the position of the interviewee.

Three factors determined by IR in the context of the interview:

1. Specific interviewer. There are two possibilities here: either interviewer Paul Witteman, or interviewer Jeroen Pauw may ask the question.
2. Topic addressed in the question I: The question may address a topic in national politics or another topic.
3. Topic addressed in the question II. The question may address a topic in international politics or another topic.