Research Article

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWER'S COOPERATIVE TALKS DURING NEWS INTERVIEWS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine different discursive as well as interactional techniques used by an interviewer during news interviews in Thailand through the application of Conversation Analysis (CA). Despite having an institutional role as interviewer who has to follow the norms of conducting neutral and unbiased news interview (Clayman and Heritage 2002a), the interactional analysis of question – answer pairs from *CHO KHWAO DEN* - an interview session in famous Thai broadcasted news program reveals that the interviewer (IR) employed various discursive and interactional techniques to facilitate the interviewees (IEs) to respond. The findings also reveal that the interviewer discursively altered his role from being a questioner to a facilitator to the respondents. In detail, the interviewer's interactional cooperation in the news interviews is shown in three functions: 1) to invoke the IE's responses, 2) to make relevance and facilitate continuity of the IE's responses to the questions and, 3) to improve the IE's responses. The findings from the study help to construct an understanding of questioning patterns and interactional process of news interview, and serve as a guide for professional journalists to develop and improve their questioning skill in news interview and other contexts.

Keywords: conversation analysis, discursive and interactional techniques, news interview, question and answer

INTRODUCTION

Broadcast news interview is a spoken interaction-based information exchange. The activity is mainly accomplished through question and answer sequences between professional journalists and public figures or officials whose opinions could affect public interest. The activity of news interview is considered social interaction due to the participants' construction of sequences of talk. Also it is seen as institutional talk through normative practices which requires the interviewer (henceforth the IR) to be objective yet adversarial when probing questions while the interviewee (henceforth the IE) is obliged to provide information. Due to its liveliness and spontaneity, this activity receives considerable attention from audience (Clayman, 2004). Similarly, news interview in Thailand is conducted with main aim to elicit information from a responding party while the IR acts as a mediator of the activity to assure the naturalness and idleness of the process while controlling technical aspects such as timing (Srisumanant, 1998). Consequently, during the questioning act the IR typically employs different discursive and interactional techniques that not only function to invoke the IE's responses but also allow the IR to introduce arguments or accusations within questioning turn.

Heritage & Roth (1995) found that the IR produces questioning turn based on different grammatical structures such as yes-no question, tag questions, wh-question, declarative question with rising intonation and alternative questions. Other discursive techniques include using directives as question substitution calling for certain action from the IE (e.g. "tell us about it") and using declarative utterances that seek to question the IE on the issue that he/she may have primary knowledge of the information. Another study by Clayman (1988) found that various techniques used by the IR include simple question, embedded statement, footing shift and mitigating. The use of embedded statement allowed the IR to preface actual questioning with evaluative or opinionated statement. Besides, footing shift was used to attribute adversarial statement and/or opinion to the third party and mitigating allowed the IR to cautiously express opinion or evaluation in moderate forms. In Thailand, Theamsomboon's study (1998) unfolded that, through questioning in impromptu and prepared interviews Thai IRs received different types of answers from the politicians ranging from fully and relevant answer to irrelevant answer.

Although there are studies on political discourse, Ekström (2007) briefly mentions

that the studies which merely described it in according to pre-existing norms and practices alone seems inadequate. This is because complicated and interactive talk has been largely incorporated into journalistic productions. Therefore, theory of interaction should be applied in addition to cultural theories in order to explore contemporary media. Accordingly, this study which explores the IR's questioning turns through Conversation Analysis (CA) framework would disclose various discursive devices as well as interactional strategies employed and oriented to by the interview participants in order to handle the unexpected contingencies in live interview. Another significant point is that though the interaction between participants in news interview seems banal, the application of CA should reveal genuine practices of the IR in news interview in Thailand which may vary from that of other IRs due to different cultural practices and themes of the interview, for example.

Literature Review

News Interview as Institutional Talk

According to the studies of institutional talk, broadcast news interview is considered social interaction because there are norms of practice for participants to follow. In details, the participants normatively follow the predetermined roles i.e. as being an IR and an IE and act accordingly during the interview. While the IR performs the role of questioner to gather information, he/she strives to achieve professional goals of objectivity and adversarialness. For being objectives, the IR must position themselves as neutral and unbiased during the interview, for example avoid using token of acknowledgement or using direct assertion. On the other hand, the adversarialness of the IR's questions could be maintained through different discursive techniques, for example using presupposition. Other than grammatical elements which is typically used to produce questioning Heritage & Roth (1995) added that British and American journalists formed multiple turn construction units (TCUs) questions using four formats of introductory remarks i.e. background, relevance, counter or contrast structure to preface genuine question in order to avoid being seen as aggressive while asking questions. Using these remarks, the IR could incrementally connect to the prior turn thus completing the questioning.

In more recent study, Heritage & Clayman (2010) uncovered conversational techniques used by the IRs in news interview context to enhance level of aggressiveness in questioning. These techniques are question designs for example, presupposition – to

provide the audience with background information that may clarify and/or simplify the question, thus making it easier for the audience to understand. However, such presupposition could be adversarial since it is formed based on the IR's interpretation. Other techniques include justification which is used as prefatory statement to disclaim the right to question (e.g. "...I think the real concern that hasn't been addressed previously in this program has to do with the fact..."), and footing shift which is used when the IRs adopt only role of animator while attributing roles of author and principal to others (e.g. Reverend Boesak, Ambassador Beukes makes the point that you can't have any discussions... until the violence stops...Fair?). In other cases, the IR may employ a technique called *forks* which strategically increases level of adversarialness by restricting the IEs to select the IR's given yet undesirable choices of response.

Based on the previous studies, it can be concluded that broadcasting interview is an institutional communication. However, with its live and a wide range of audience, the patterns of question and answer may vary so as to gain the people's support as well as stay permissible within the institutional codes of conduct. Although there are previous studies which explored micro detailed analysis of the

social activities of news interviews, a number of them which were carried out in western context may yield different findings. With little account of how the interview is sequentially organized, how the interactional goals are accomplished, and the kind of relationship between the interactants, Thai news interview is much to be explored.

The Study

Given that the institutional interaction of news interview empowers the IR to oversee and control trajectory of the entire interview (Ekström, 2007) this study thus focuses on the IR's use of discursive and interactional techniques to actualize the goals of news interview in Thailand. The corpus of data was collected and transcribed from interview sessions of "cho-khwao-den"; an evening news program broadcast on Thailand's Channel Three. Five interview sessions with candidates were separately broadcast during Bangkok governor election in 2013. Besides political tension which was escalating during the time of the election (Areaaamy, 2013), the micro-analysis of the interviews with the Bangkok governor election candidates would be interesting because the actual candidates running for the governorship would actually gave interviews themselves rather than the leaders or the key persons of the political party. The IR's questioning techniques may

thus be sophisticated and complicated not only to gather as much information as possible but also maintain normatively permissible program. Therefore, to understand the IR's practice to balance institutional norms of being objective and adversarial, this study which explores discursive and interactional techniques used by Thai IR in broadcasting news interviews is conducted based on a methodological framework of CA with a focus on institutional talk of news interview.

METHODOLOGY

Conversation Analysis (CA) is a research approach developed in late 1960s by Harvey Sacks, Emmanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson to investigate how human structures and operates their social interaction. The approach was originally used for making organization of ordinary conversation explicit through analysis of recurrent patterns of conversation such as turn –taking and sequence organization which are logically produced by the participants (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). CA thus primarily focuses on both verbal and non-verbal features of talk-in-interaction. CA framework has later been applied to study institutional talk to explore how particular institutional setting influences participants to conduct talk in action and to enforce specific roles and relationships

through their talk (Liddicoat, 2011). Drew and Heritage (1992a quoted in Liddicoat, ibid.) add that the CA of institutional talk aims to reveal co-constructing institutional goals through talk, as well as allowable actions each participant could perform relatively to specific settings and goals. For example, in news interview, the CA results have primarily shown that the IR is determined to ask questions during the interview whereas the IE is expected to provide response (Heritage and Clayman, 2010). However, the pattern of talk could be more complex relatively to different settings and goals of news interview.

To practically apply CA in the study, Seedhouse (2004) suggests that researchers approach natural occurring data of social interaction obtained by means of recording. Then the data must be thoroughly transcribed using transcription convention. Next, the researchers should identify distinctive phenomenon of talk based on how the interactants manage their turns of talk. Once the focus is established the researchers inductively scrutinize the data in order to gather various instances of such phenomenon and then they could unfold the sequential organization which regularly occurs in the phenomenon and explicate how such phenomenon is actually produced. In addition, the researchers may propose

deviant case analysis as a measurement of the validity of the normative organization of the sequence of the phenomenon (Sidenell, 2002).

Data

The data analyzed in this study is part of interview data broadcasted in the televised program called "cho-khwao-den". Five sessions of interview with candidates running for Bangkok governor election 2013 namely M.R. Sukhumphan Boriphat, Pol. Gen. Pongsapat Pongcharoen, Pol.Gen. Seripisut Temiyavet, Mr. Kosit Suvinijjit and Mr. Suharit Siamwalla were retrieved from http://www2.krobkruakao.com on February, 2013. The interviews were separately conducted by Sorayudth Sutadsanajinda, a well-known news anchor and each session lasted approximately twenty minutes. The total corpus of the data was about 102 minutes and 33 seconds. The overall activity was mainly carried out in question-answer sequences focusing on several themes namely electoral campaigns, career achievements and personal experiences of the candidates. The live conversations were then transcribed in accordance with Jeffersonian transcription conventions and analyzed based on conversation analytic approach found by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). The analysis thus focused

on the underlying practices of the IR's questioning turns while contributing to the achievement of news interview. The data obtained during the time of the election could be seen as part of political mayhem in Thailand due to series of accusations and conflicts between two major political parties, Pheu Thai Party and Democrat Party. The competition over the governorship escalated and the victory of a candidate nominated by these parties was said to reflect their political bastion in Bangkok metropolitan. However, with the additions of independent candidates who were deemed fresh alternatives for indecisive voters, the competitive situation heightened (Arevaaamy, 2013).

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Research Results

The analysis showed that primary function of the IR's questioning in this study is to invoke the IEs' responses. Empirically, the IR initiates the IEs' responses through different techniques which partly; resemble the findings from previous studies, for example footing shift. According to Clayman (1988), the use of footing shift is commonly found in news interview context. This is because it allows the IR to avoid taking full responsibility from claims or assumptions embedded within his questioning turn. Therefore, the IR could

be seen as merely repeating other people's adversarial questions towards the IEs. Other techniques include invitation act and listing. It may rarely be found in other contexts, the IR in this study asked the IE for permission to invite him to respond. That is, instead of calling for the IE's response, the IR asked the IE to grant him a permission to particular elicitation. According to this, the control of the talk was given to the IE, while the role of IR was shifted to someone who needed to ask for an approval to ask question. For listing device, it was employed toward the end of questioning turn. Using this technique the IR could be seen as not only signaling the beginning of the IE's turn but also proving action relevance to the IE's upcoming response regardless to the content of that response (Jefferson, 1990 quoted in Liddicoat, 2007).

Another function of the IR's discursive techniques is to make relevance and facilitate continuity of the IE's response. To accomplish this function, the IR was found using back-channeling along the IE's lengthy response. Normatively the IR is abstain from using of back-channeling during the interview since it would alter his role from a questioner to a primary recipient of the talk (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2011). In this study the IR frequently used such technique thereby he may be perceived by some audience as not merely providing

acceptance to the IE's response regardless to its relevance to the topic under discussion.

When the IE's turn seems irrelevant or unconnected, the IR facilitated by using keyword from the question plus response. Extract 1 illustrates this in details.

Extract 1 (21 Jan. 2013, IE$_1$)

1   IR: อื้อฮะจุดอ่อนมีมั้ย

      Urh. Okay. Do you have any weakness?

2   IE$_1$: $\longrightarrow$ ผมพูดไม่ค่อยชอบพูดอ่ะ

      $\longrightarrow$ I don't like to talk.

3   IR: อื้อ[จุดอ่อน

      Urh. [Weakness.

4   IE$_1$: $\longrightarrow$ [แล้วพูดไม่ค่อยเป็นอ่ะ

      $\longrightarrow$ [And (I) don't know how to talk (to=

      =others).

5   IR: พูดไม่ค่อยเป็นนะฮะ[แล้วจะปรับยังไง

      Don't know how to talk (to others). [So=

      =how would you adapt?

6   IE$_1$: [อื้อ ((พยักหน้า))

      [Urh

      ((nodding))

7   ก็ผมคือผมอ่ะครับ

      I am who I am.

In line 1, the IR uses a neutral interrogative to ask whether the IE has any weaknesses or not. This type of question shown in line 1*"Do you have any weakness?"* ("อื้อฮะจุดอ่อนมีมั้ย") normally requires *yes* or

no answer. However, the IE (line 2) responds with non-conforming action by giving a descriptive response to address his specific trait *"I don't like to talk"* ("ผมพูดไม่ค่อยชอบพูดอ่ะ"), without indexing the question asked. Despite unclear connection between the IR's question and the IE's response, the IE's answer (line 2) is seen as topic relevant because it is evidently accepted by the IR (line 3). Following his acknowledgement *"Urh"* ("อื้อ"), the IR (line 3) orients to lexical repetition repeating a keyword used in his earlier turn *"weakness"* ("จุดอ่อน"). The IR's action may ensure the audience that the IE's response is still within parameter of talk while allowing the IE to further develop his response.

According to this, the IE (line 4) could continue addressing his lack of talking skills *"And I don't know how to talk to others)"* ("แล้วพูดไม่ค่อยเป็นอ่ะ"). This continued response is again seen as topic relevant through the IR's (line 5) repetition and follow-up asking for the way to overcome the weakness *"Don't know how to talk (to others). So how would you adapt?"* ("พูดไม่ค่อยเป็นนะฮะแล้วจะปรับยังไง"). As shown from the extract, that the IR initiates his turn with repetition of the IE's earlier response could make relevance between the IE's response and his previous questioning.

Another example of the IR's discursive facilitating technique is to improve the IE's response by means of *repairing*. This technique allows the IR to repeat certain part of the IE's previous turn before adding a more relevant unit of information that could improve the quality of the IE's response. Accordingly, the IR's turn could be seen as *repair initiation* to the IE's response. Such case is shown in following extract.

Extract 2 (25 Jan. 2013, IE$_2$)

1 IR: เป็น: ผู้ว่าจะหาเงินๆเหรอ°ฟังดูแล้ว
   From what you said, you are going to=
   =be a kind of profit–making governor.

2 IE$_2$: ต้องหาเงินเข้าครับ
   $\longrightarrow$ (We) need to raise money.

3 IR: $\longrightarrow$ หาเงิน[เข้ากทม
   $\longrightarrow$ To raise money[for Bangkok.

4 IE$_2$: $\longrightarrow$ [ไม่ใช่ใช้เงินอย่างเดียวครับ
   $\longrightarrow$ [Not exclusivey=
   =spending the city's money.

5 IR: นะฮะ
   Right?

6 IE$_2$: ครับ
   Yes

Based on the IE's proposals which concern several plans for generating income to the city, the IR asks (line 1) whether the IE would be a profit-making governor. The final

part of the IR's turn, *"from what you said"* ("ฟังดูแล้ว"), shows that his stance is inferred from the IE's previous talk. Thus, the question seems challenging to the IE because the IR's question contains a negative presumption about the IE's idea regarding the role of a governor. Although there is no confirmation token, *yes* or *no*, provided the IE's description that a governor has to raise money *"(we) need to raise money"* ("ต้องหาเงินเข้าครับ") in line 2 implies a confirmation of the IR's claim. It is interesting that, the IR's next turn is designed to clarify the meaning of the IE's answer that "to raise money" is for the city "to raise money for Bangkok" ("หาเงินเข้า กทม"), thus it helps lessen the possibility of severe criticism of the IE. In addition to this, the IE (line 4) provides another descriptive sentence to elaborate on the IR's clarification by saying, *"not exclusively spending the city's money"* ("ไม่ใช่ใช้เงินอย่างเดียวครับ"). This elaborated information produces a positive image of the governor, which is to raise money for the city, not only to spend money. In conclusion, though the IR starts with a negative presumption challenging the governor's role in the viewpoint of the IE, they finally work together through talk to justify the governor's role which is rather positive. As this example illustrates, the IE provides a description that implies confirmation and at the same time, adds information that initiates the IR's repair of the presupposition which is seen to be incorrect.

Based on the data, it is interesting that, though the IR's questioning turn was first produced to accuse the IE, the sequence of interaction was mutually developed to finally benefit the IE. The IR's feedback seems to show to the audience how he attempts to help the IE to improve the quality of his response. Although it might be advantageous for the IE in term of more complete and clearer response, the IR may be perceived by the audience that he takes side rather than taking neutral position. However, the IR's use of repair initiation as a means to improve the IE's response could yield negative result to the IE should it be applied in considerable amount as shown in extract 3.

Extract 3 (30 Jan. 2013, IE$_5$)

1 IR: คุณสุหฤทคิดว่าถ้าสมมติว่าเป็นผู้ว่ากทม. เปลี่ยน=

2   =กรุงเทพได้เฉียบพลัน(ใช่)มั้ย
       If you are elected governor, Khun=
       =Suharit could Bangkok be=
       =immediately changed?

3 IE$_5$: หลายอย่างเฉียบพลันหลายอย่างไม่ได้ครับ
       Many things could be immediately=
       =changed while others couldn't.

4 IR: อะไรที่เฉียบพลันเลย
       What could be immediately changed?

5 IE₅: →เฉียบพลันคือการ[-
   →Immediate change is[-

6 IR: → [คือ**ปี**นึงเห็นเลย**ชัดเจน**ว่า>ได้=

7   =แน่<เลย
   → [(whatever) that=
   =could **clearly** work within **a year**

8 IE₅: →ครับอันนึงก็คือการมีส่วนร่วมของ
   สังคมอ้ะครับ= 9 =มันมีข้อนึงที่ผมคิดว่า
   น่าจะทำได้เลย[แล้วจะ=
   →Yes. One (of the projects) is the
   social=
   =cooperation that could be
   immediately=
   =put in progress[=

10 IR: [อื้อ
   [Urh

11 IE₅: =เปลี่ยนชีวิต[คนกรุงเทพจริง ๆคือห้าสิบ
   เขตห้า=
   =what will truly change[the
   Bangkokians'=

12 IR: [อื้อ ๆ
   [Urh

13 IE₅: =สิบเสน่ห์[เรื่องนี้เป็นเรื่องระยะสั้น...
   =lives is Fifty districts fifty charms=
   =projects.[This is a short term...

14 IR: [อื้อ ๆ
   [Urh

Based on the IR's interpretation of the IE's discussion on fast-track schemes of development, his question in lines 1 and 2 presumes that the IE believes that the city

could be altered by his plans at once. The IE (line 3) replies with a confirmation in part with a keyword *"immediately"* ("เฉียบพลัน") provides topic relevant response. Because the IE's response suggests the quick success of some proposals, but not all *"Many things could be changed immediately whereas others couldn't be"* ("หลายอย่างเฉียบพลัน หลายอย่างไม่ได้ครับ"), the IR seeks more information through a follow-up question asking for clarification of what could be changed (line 4). Rather than answering directly, the IE responds by repeating the keyword in the question *"immediate change is"* ("เฉียบพลันคือการ"). The IE's turn results in the IR's interruption (lines 6 and 7) to define the term *"(immediate change) refers to the project that could be in effect within a year"* ("[คือปีนึงเห็นเลยชัดเจนว่า>ได้แน่<เลย"). Notably, the IR's interrupting turn might perhaps be seen as self-initiated self-repair rather than interruption *per se* because the IR merely provides the definition of the keyword that has not been provided in his earlier turn possibly to assure mutual understanding. Accordingly, the IE (line 8) switches quickly to clarify the exact situation that could be instantly changed.

In this case, the IR's repair of his own question seems to negatively render the IE as not knowing the meaning of the question. This is because the IR's repair was used to cut off

the IE's turn. Although the IE provided action and topic relevant answer without delay in line 8 to regain his public face, the IE's public self-image might already be impeded by the IR (lines 6 and 7). The interaction between the IR and the IE in this case showed that the IE may perceive the IR's turn (lines 6 and 7) as a threat and thus straightforwardly proceeds to respond rather than finishing his turn in line 5. However, the negative effect of the IR's turn may remain on the listeners' perception toward the IE already (Brown & Levison, 1978; quoted in Longcope, 1995). Therefore, the IR should withhold his definition in lines 6 and 7 and observes whether or not the IE's response contains a genuine answer after connecting his turn to the IR's previous turn via a lexical repetition. The IR's urgent action might be criticized as domineering and impolite.

Discussion

The activity of news interview is social interaction process which is actualized by participants' contribution through discursive as well as interactional means (Liddicoat, 2011). Following institutional practices of news interview, an IR should maintain neutrality by distancing his position (e.g. avoid using token of acknowledgment) from an IE and produce objective yet adversarial questions while an IE is expected to provide information sought after by the IR's questions. Such practices, thereby constitutes a highly formal activity

(Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2011). While the IRs in previous studies attempted to preserve the conventional practices of questioning through different discursive techniques, the IR in this study breaches such allowable conducts. From the data, it appears that the IR employed various discursive techniques to assist the IEs to provide their responses. The IR's interaction thus alters the conventional roles of questioner to facilitator of the news interview. It is presumable that because the news interviews understudy were conducted during a 2013 general election for Bangkok governor, the IR might feel the need to extract more information rather than having the IEs cornered for truth. According to this, the IR's various techniques function not only to prompt or signal the IEs to initiate their responses but also help the IEs to get their messages across smoothly. In some cases, the IR's contribution could be seen as if he were piecing bits of information thereby, complementing the IE's response. The positive and cooperative involvement of the IR also reflected even in a deviant case (extract 3) where the IR's level of adversarial of questioning increased. From the observation, the IR's adversarial question merely became hostile once it interactionally cut the IE's turn off despite the IR's attempt to clarify his earlier turn.

Also inferable from these extracts is that the IR's practices could affect the

IEs' social images possibly perceived by audiences. The IR's assistance on the IEs' responsive turns whether to signal the change of speaking turn, clarify and complete the IEs' ambiguous responses altogether could foster positive images of the IEs as being reasonable and trustworthy. However, once the IR's contribution is seen as hostile (e.g. repairing his previous question) the IEs may be put under pressure to preserve their social images while struggling to get their messages across. The IR's action, could thereby convince the audience to perceive the IEs as unintelligent or unprepared.

In sum, this study contributes to an understanding of news interview practices in Thailand. The empirical findings suggest that despite the institutional norms, it would be exaggerate to conclude that the IR follows such rules all the time. Based on the data, when the demand for information is extensively considerable as in the campaign news interview, the IR may discretely alter his role to gain access to more information from the IEs for public interest. The IR's action, could therefore transform a highly formal activity to resemble an ordinary talk to maintain enjoyable yet informative program (Ekström, 2007).

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Accordingly, the CA framework used in this study could be further applied to study news interview in other relatable contexts (e.g. news interview with controversial political issues) to understand the IR's alternative practices and gain insights into how and why such practices are implemented.

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