From Interview to News Text: A Study of Taiwan TV Political Interviews in Newspaper Reports

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Abstract

Mode and genre transformations are main issues in the digital era, especially apparent when news interviews are adapted into written news reports. This paper investigates how interactions in a television news interview are excerpted and adapted into a written news text in newspapers. Through a text analysis of two political interviews in Taiwan on television, and five newspaper reports based on the two interviews, this study discovered that the reporter focuses on the answers of the interviewee, and tends to extract those that fit the political news narrative and are salient in the interactions. Furthermore, this paper demonstrates how the oral interview is adapted into a written news text via various discursive techniques, how interviewee answers are quoted, and how the local interview context is constructed in the news text.

Index Terms: mode transformation, genre transformation, television political interviews, news reports

1. Introduction

In Taiwan, television political interviews are very popular, and have become one of the most important news sources often quoted by the press, even to the point of becoming the subject of news reports. The audience, not wont to watch these political interviews on television, is always able to access them through newspapers and broadcast news reports. As [1] said, “turning an interview into a story is at the heart of the journalist’s craft and is not an automatic skill.” A television news interview being adapted into a news text in the newspaper forces it to undergo two types of transformation; the first is genre transformation (from news interviews into news reports), and the other is mode transformation (from verbal interactions into written texts). Both factors are old issues, but have become more crucial in these digital times, where genre and mode transformations are basic, easy, and occur on a massive scale. This study focuses on how interactions in a television political interview are excerpted, and how they are transformed into a written news text.

2. Literature Review

Little research has been done on how television news interviews, their evident aim being the interview itself rather than being news material for news coverage, are excerpted and transformed into written news texts. Only a few efforts address how videotaped reporter-source interviews are de-contextualized and re-contextualized for television news stories [2, 3], which obviously concerns genre transformation more than mode transformation. Therefore, by focusing on how a television news interview is transformed into a newspaper report, this study will not only explore the genre change from interviews to news reports, but also shed light on mode transformation from oral interactions to written texts.

2.1. Considerations of extracting news interview material

A news interview consists of question-answer adjacency pairs in which the interviewer, as a professional journalist, issues a question, and the interviewee, having some connection to the recent news events they are being interviewed for, is supposed to provide an answer [4]. For the reporter, news worth exists in the reply of the interviewee rather than in the question of the interviewer, so most of the extracts are replies of interviewees.

Based on analyses of 124 Swedish broadcast news items, [2] found that 60% of the interview sequences were isolated answers and 80% began with the answers of interviewed politicians, which indicates that the interviewee’s reply is more important than the question of the interviewer, and the latter is often left out. Though the answer of the interviewee is of chief importance in news stories, [3] pointed out that the resistance of the interviewee and the reformulation were hardly presented in television news reports. On the contrary, only a portion of the interviewee’s reply that appeared to confirm the reporter’s presupposition was included in the news [3]. For example, during coverage of election campaigns, attacks politicians direct at their opponents are more likely to be extracted, to construct dramatic conflicts. In other words, the news narrative or frame decides what will be excerpted and how the interview material will be edited [2, 3, 5], as [3] noted: “The story that reaches the eyes and ears of the audience is no longer the interviewee’s, but the reporter’s.”(p. 531)

In addition to narrative relevance as noted above, [5] argued that two other considerations guide extract-selection in news reports. The first factor is extractability; a journalist has a tendency to excerpt the utterance that does not need an elaboration on its background. The second factor is conspicuousness; highly conspicuous interactions attract the attention of journalists, therefore having more of a chance to be excerpted. For instance, in a news interview, when the interviewee violates the interaction norm by refusing to answer the interviewer’s question, the chances of being excerpted will increase.

A number of other rhetoric techniques exist, which enhance the opportunity of being extracted. For instance, in a political speech, three-part lists and contrasts, metaphorical formulations, especially if they are colorful or unusual, are easier for the journalist to excerpt[5, 6].
2.2. Newspaper accounts of interview interactions

After extracting the answers of the interviewee from a news interview, the journalist must turn the spoken language into written texts with the use of quotations. According to [7], the journalist influences the utterances quoted at three levels, as follows:

2.2.1 Choice of words and syntax

Journalists always change the wording and syntax in the reported utterance to achieve their rhetorical aims [8].

Worth noting is the main difference between direct and indirect quotations. The former usually retains the deictic terms used in the original speech, including tenses, pronouns, spatiotemporal adverbs, etc., and uses the type of syntactic construction in which the quoted speech occurs [9], and the latter is usually a paraphrase of the original speech. However, all utterances rendered in the news text, whether in form of direct or indirect quotations, can be altered. For example, the editor often changes the words or syntax of direct quotations to fit the form of a headline [7].

2.2.2 Context

Since the meaning of an utterance depends on the context in which it exists, changing the context will change the meaning of the utterance. Even quoting an utterance and its context literally may be a rhetorical choice, calculated to impress members of the news organization and the public [8].

In the news text, three major types of quotation exist: direct quotations, indirect quotations, and a mixture of direct and indirect quotations [9]. In addition to putting the original speech in different types of quotations, the reporter uses various speech-reporting verbs, such as “say” and “criticize,” to define and reformulate the reported speech [3], changing the intended meaning of the quoted speech.

Furthermore, though in a news interview, the utterances of an interviewee are usually a response to the interviewer’s question, the reporter has the right to decide whether to quote the question. In a news story, rendering the local interactional question, the reporter has the right to decide whether to quote the question. In a news story, rendering the local interactional context of a news interview may have its special functions. [10] indicated that four functions of quoted questions exist: (1) To clarify the meaning and implication of quoted answers. (2) To emphasize the quoted answer is not volunteered. (3) To pinpoint the reply is quick or hesitated, confirming or rejecting the interviewer’s question. (4) To figure that the interviewee does not answer.

2.2.3 Modalities and discursive techniques

In oral communication, such as in news interviews, people apply stresses and paralinguistic signals to influence the meaning of an utterance. In a news text, a number of discursive techniques are employed in a corresponding manner, such as size, color, typeface, and other letter settings. (3) Choice of wording syntax: with the removal of words and changes in syntax, an utterance can be modified to increase clarity or to render the quote more dramatic. (4) Relating the utterance to the context: moving an utterance among other utterances or pictures can create a new relationship, emphasizing the remarkable or sensationalism of the utterance.

[11] has studied the usage of pull quotes extracted from news interviews and found that the tabloids tend to use the ballooning technique to display the utterances of politicians, in which most of the content is negative. With the practice of ballooning, [11] claims that the politician appeared to be engaged in a childlike argument rather than being a figure of authority.

3. Methods

The material analyzed in this study derives from a corpus that includes both newspaper reports and television political interviews which the news reports are based on. The news coverage, acquired from the four main newspapers in Taiwan, including Apple Daily, China Times, the Liberty Times, United Daily News, was collected between August 01, 2010 and December 31, 2010. To induce and compare the strategies of the news reporters, that of excerpting and transforming of television news interviews, the chosen news report appeared in at least three of the four newspapers reporting the same television political interview, and identifying the interview source in the news coverage. Thereafter, the televised political interviews the news reports are based on were collected and transcribed. In total, eight interviews are in the corpus.

Only two interviews were selected for this analysis because news reports on the date of July 23, 2010 yielded a variety of potential results. Both Apple Daily and China Times combined materials from the two interviews to form a single news report, United Daily News created a news report for each of the interviews but merged them to form a pseudo-dialogue, and the Liberty Times only chose to report one of the two interviews. In summation, of the four newspapers, five news reports were generated with regard to the two interviews.

Different news channels on TV broadcast the two televised political interviews for analysis. The first interview is conducted face-to-face on the news, with a runtime of 40 minutes, excluding advertisements. The interviewee was candidate Tsai Ing-wen, who is also the Chairwoman of the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), who at the time was running for the New Taipei City mayoral election. The other interview was conducted with several interviewers for one interviewee, with a runtime of 80 minutes, excluding advertisements. The interviewee was Chu Li-luan, the Kuomintang (KMT) candidate for the same election.

Because the news report focused on the replies of the interviewees, this study utilizes individually quoted answers in the newspapers as the primary unit of analysis. 36 quotations were compared with the original political interviews, to explore the tendency of excerpting interactions from a television political interview, and also to analyze how the two interviews were quoted and altered.

4. Results

4.1. Extract selection

In Taiwan, the political news frame, which emphasizes dramatic differences and conflicts between opposing factions [5, 12] and constructs election campaigns as a stressful horse-
racing competition[13], influences not only news coverage but also broadcast news interviews [2, 14]. As a professional journalist, the television news interviewer is aware of newsworthy types of questions, and the types of answers that attract the audience, as well as the attention of other news reporters. However, because television news interviews permit interviewees to elaborate their opinions, also providing more airtime to debate with interviewers, though news interviewers can design their questions in advance, that the interviewees will provide newsworthy information as expected remains uncertain. In the data, the two interviewees were asked similar questions, including: (1) the reason the interviewee chose to run in this election; (2) opinions about the previous polls on Taipei County elections; (3) policies for New Taipei City, especially the relationship between New Taipei City and Taipei; (4) the difference between the interviewee and his/her opponent; (5) the interviewee’s future political actions or plans. For example, Chu was asked whether he would resign from running in the 2012 presidential election under the KMT’s request if he wins; Tsai was asked who would run in the 2012 presidential election for the DPP. When comparing the interviews, we discovered that the journalist ignored the first three questions while the latter two were selected, as long as the question received a direct answer. This indicates that the news prefers extracting information regarding of differences between candidates and their future political actions, which may cause political conflicts or strife, rather than reporting on past events and candidate policies. Under genre constrains, where a news interview consists of an interaction between interviewers and interviewees to elaborate their opinions, also providing more information regarding of differences between candidates and their future political actions, which may cause political conflicts or strife, rather than reporting on past events and candidate policies.

In addition to the fitness of a political news narrative, repetition and follow-up questions with the direct reply of interviewees receive more attentions and enhance chance of extraction. For example, different interviewers asked Chu on three occasions whether he could fulfill his pledges within the period of his mayoral service (4 years) if he won, and three newspapers excerpted his statement asserting his promise. Conversely, though the interviewee asked Tsai six times on how to define the success of the DPP in five metropolitan elections, she avoided providing a direct answer, which prompted the newspaper to ignore it and leave it unpublished. Thus, the reply of the interviewee is the key of selected extraction.

The focus of news reports primarily lies on the answers interviewees provide, instead of the question of the interviewer and the question-answer sequence. The data presented in this study shows that only 33.3% of the 36 quotations, extracted from the interviewees’ answers, were accompanied with questions (Q-A), and two of them consisted of a sequence (Q-A-Q-A). Though the answers the interviewees provide are more important than the interviewer’s questions, reporters often quote the reformulation and summary, which the television news interviewer shapes for the audience, followed by the interviewee’s approval.

4.2. Extract transformation

4.2.1 Modality and discursive techniques

Except for the Liberty Times, the other three newspapers reported both interviews and constructed a pseudo-dialogue between the two interviewees in separate televised broadcasts, according to typographical design and the headline. Firstly, a banner labeling the two interviews as “A decisive battle in five metropolitan elections” (決戰五都) or “Contending for New Taipei City Television interviews” (角逐新北市電視專訪) were placed above the news reports. Secondly, news coverage of the two interviews was either integrated into a news report or collapsed to create a dialogue form. Finally, all three newspapers used direct quotations as the headlines, with the China Times and the United Daily News representing the quotations with the same number of words, size, typeface and color, whereas Apple Daily used a deep color, bigger size and different typeface to imply that Chu’s speech was more important than Tsai’s.

In addition to the typographical design and headline, when combining the two interviews in a news report, the China Times made use of the lead to create a pseudo-dialogue, which stated that the “blue (KMT) and green (DPP) parties’ New Taipei City mayoral candidates separately received television interviews to challenge each other” (彼此叫陣）.

Furthermore, the voice quality, intonation, pauses, hesitations and expressions of the interviewee are often ignored. The data indicates that only 7 quotations, of which 5 were direct quotations, used reporting verbs and adverbs to describe the expressions of the interviewees, such as “Tsai Ing-wen says, smiling” (蔡英文微笑說) and “Chu firmly says” (朱鎔釘鉅地說). Concerning quoting follow-up questions, the journalist tended to describe the speech act with words such as “query” instead of representing the question-answer sequence directly. Therefore, in news texts, not only is the quoted answer affective and illocutionary, but the interaction and dynamics of television news interviews disappears.

4.2.2 Quotations of interviewee answers

Different from direct quotations, believed to be a replication of the original speech, indirect quotations allow the journalist to paraphrase and condense the original utterance to construct an economical news text because space is always limited in newspapers [9]. As indicated in Table 1, the usage of indirect quotations far surpassed the usage of direct questions, both in the lead and in the body.

Table 1. The frequency of different quotation types in Taiwan four newspapers (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotations</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>1(11.1)</td>
<td>7(25.9)</td>
<td>8(22.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>5(55.6)</td>
<td>11(40.7)</td>
<td>16(44.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixture</td>
<td>3(33.3)</td>
<td>9(33.3)</td>
<td>12(33.3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

77.8% of the quotations used reporting verbs, including “say” (說), “express” (表示) and “think” (認為), and only 22.2% used reporting verbs, such as “promise” (承諾) and “emphasize” (強調). The results revealed that reporting verbs influence the journalist’s word choice, as well as the meaning of quoted contents. For example, when Chu answered, “I feel that don’t think the public as fools because no matter who wins, everyone will expect you to fulfill the mayoral four years service”, the China Times defined it as “Chu appealed to Tsai, saying” (朱向蔡致歉話說) and used a direct quotation, where “I feel” was deleted, and “no matter who wins” was changed to “you”, to make it appear as though Chu was against Tsai.
When comparing to the original interviews, the revised versions show that details have been added, and pronouns have been altered or deleted. For example, when Chu stated, “Magistrate Chou, in fact, we are good friends,” the China Times used a mixture of direct and indirect quotations, in which “we” was changed to “he and Taipei County Magistrate Chou His-wei” and “Magistrate Chou” was replaced with his full title and name, and it became: “Chu expressed that he and Taipei County Magistrate Chou His-wei are ‘good friends’.”

Secondly, the journalist tended to enhance the certainty and assertiveness of quoted contents either by deleting the verb expressing personal feelings such as “feel”, or by omitting modality, such as “may” and “perhaps”. The “corporate we”, which the interviewees used to speak for their parties, was also deleted, to eliminate the relationship between the interviewee and the referent, rendering the quoted speech more objective or general. For instance, the Liberty Times transformed Tsai’s statement, “we five candidates running in the elections” (我們參選的五個候選人) into “the DPP’s five persons” (民進黨這五人). With the aforementioned techniques, the journalist forces the quoted content to become more assertive and objective.

Lastly, to clarify the quoted answers, the journalist combines parts of a question with the answer. For example, the interviewer asked Tsai to describe the election situation in the five municipality council elections, according to the results of opinion polls conducted by the DPP. Both the China Times and the Liberty Times quoted Tsai’s answer including the context of the poll results, but failed to mention who conducted them. Conversely, Apple Daily extracted a part of the question content and inserted it into the quoted answer, creating a more complete content: “When being interviewed on television last night, she also said that according to the DPP poll, Kaohsiung was…”

4.2.3 Reconstruction of the local context

As mentioned above, the local question context accompanied 12 quotations (33.3%). Among the 12 quotations, 5 are direct, 4 are a mixture of direct and indirect quotations, and 3 are indirect. Theoretically, when using direct quotations, the journalist should always be faithful to the words and syntax of the original speech, and provide the reader with the context of the direct quotations. To accomplish this, simultaneously representing the questions and answers is best.

However, since the exception of a televised news interview focused on the interviewee’s questions instead of the interviewer’s questions, when mentioning the question context, the journalist was prone to deleting details and questioning strategies the interviewer used, such as using anonymous sources to keep the interviewer neutral and justifying questions. The results also showed that for news coverage, not only are the questions of the interviewer less important than the interviewee’s answer, but also that the interviewer is often ignored. In the data, 8 out of 12 local question contexts were switched to the passive tense, such as “when being asked about” (被問及), or shortened. Only 4 questions mentioned the interviewers, and two of them, consisting of the only Q-A-Q-A sequence, named the interviewer.

5. Conclusions

This study may be significant in exploring the mode and genre transformations from a television news interview to a newspaper report. This paper presented how news reporters focus on the answers of the interviewee, revealing two considerations for excerpting a political news interview: the framework of the political news, and the repetition and follow-up questions with the direct reply of interviewees.

When transforming utterances into news texts, the journalist tends to focus on content instead of the form and interaction comprising television news interviews, which is apparent due to a lack of reporting verbs describing how the interviewee replies, barely mentioning Q & A sequences, the basis of news interview interaction. This paper also shows how the abstracts from political news interviews are altered to enhance assertion, objectivity, and the conflict, with a quoted utterance.

6. References