

# NEUTRALITY IN NEWS INTERVIEWS: AN OPEN QUESTION

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## Abstract

News interviews have always been considered a setting where journalists are supposed to be neutral, since they are required to withhold from expressing their opinions in the interviewing process (Clayman 1992; Hutchby 2003, 2006). This paper explores the issue of neutrality in televised interviews involving journalists and diplomats/international operators; specifically, the study attempts to shed light on the role of WH-questions (*how/why*) in complying with and prioritizing the ethos of transparency in news interviews also focusing on the differences between native and non-native journalists in asking questions. The final aim of the paper is to assess whether and to what extent neutrality is still safeguarded by journalists in media interviews. To answer the research question, an analysis has been carried out on a corpus of televised interviews designed to cover one-to-one broadcast interviews from professional and non-professional journalists addressing diplomats on (potentially) sensitive topics, like Covid19, wars, climate change, health and wellbeing, and – more broadly – international affairs. Gathered between 2020 and 2022 from major English-language international broadcasting companies, the corpus (i.e. the *InterDiplo\_JD Corpus*, collected at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures – University of Verona, Italy) includes 80 interviews involving both native and non-native speakers that use English to communicate. Data was investigated using a mixed-method approach; indeed, a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of WH-questions was carried out, with special reference to *how* and *why* questions, to provide a quantitative and qualitative overview on their use by native and non-native interlocutors. Questions were extracted via corpus tags, tailored on the identification of interrogatives, as well as on metadata for speakers' nationality. Results testify to an ongoing trend in broadcast interviews where questions appear to express the journalist's point of view overtly, particularly when it comes to sensitive issues. This tendency appears to be more prominent in the questions asked by native interviewers vs non-native ones, who also use more neutral *how*-questions to elicit the opinion of the interviewee.

## 1. Introduction

One of the fundamental tenets on which the profession of journalist is based is neutrality (Clayman 1988: 474), whereby the journalist should avoid conveying their point of view in the reporting process (Lewis 1994; Clayman 1992; 2002; Hutchby 2003). Moreover, as Hutchby (*ibid.*: 443) argues, in their role of questioners, interviewers (including

\* The study has been jointly planned by the two authors. Silvia Cavalieri has written the article, Roberta Facchinetti has provided the complete supervision of its various stages.

broadcast journalists) have the task of eliciting “the stance, opinion or account of the one being questioned” without bias or prejudice “in the interests of a wider public in extracting information from individuals in the news”.

The evolution of the interview as a genre (Hutchby 2011: 349), especially with the advent of televised and online interviews, has witnessed a development towards a more personalized conduct of interviewing seen as “a lively means of informing millions of people” (Adams and Hicks 2009). This has resulted in the need for journalists to find a balance between entertainment and information that often makes it a challenge to maintain and safeguard impartiality and transparency when trying to elicit information from interlocutors (Facchinetti *forthcoming*).

Since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, trends towards greater adversarialism in news interviews have been noticed (Montgomery 2008; 2010); this tendency has further increased also on account of television news programmes, which favour more personalized forms of news interviewing and foreground the journalist as an ‘advocate’, an ‘inquisitor’ or even an ‘arbiter of truth’ (Thornborrow and Montgomery 2010; Ekstrom *et al.* 2018). Hence, media interviews seem to have become less neutral in presenting facts, often at the expense of neutrality and transparency, by reflecting the journalist’s opinion, albeit through strategies aimed at ‘masking’ this deviation from the rules of conduct.

Against this background, the present paper examines the topic of neutrality in broadcast interviews with media journalists and diplomats. The study aims to clarify the function of WH-questions (*how/why*) in upholding and prioritizing the transparency ethos in news interviews while also highlighting the variations between native and non-native journalists in questioning techniques. Our final objective is to determine whether and how much journalists remain committed to neutrality when questioning in media interviews.

To reach these aims, we will first focus on the distinctive features of journalistic interviews as identified in manuals and described in academic studies, from the prototypical interview structure to the types of questions and the preferred turn-taking moves (Section 2); we will then illustrate the corpus exploited for the study, the *InterDiplo\_JD Corpus* developed at the University of Verona (Section 3); in Section 4, the corpus-assisted methods for the analysis of WH-questions will be described; finally, in Section 5, quantitative and qualitative results of the analysis will be presented and the data will be analysed and discussed with special reference to the difference in the use of biased HOW and WHY questions by native and non-native journalists.

## 2. Questioning in journalistic interviews: a theoretical overview

Journalistic interviews may be of different types depending on medium, setting, format, topic, and aim of the interview itself (Facchinetti 2023). However, there is a general agreement among trainers on the fact that the first words of a journalist are key to creating a relationship with their interlocutor; as a consequence, the interviewer (IR) should begin the communicative exchange with the interviewee (IE) introducing a topic that makes the IE feel not under pressure and rather inclined to talk (Morán García 2023: 33). Effective techniques to reach this purpose include, for example, creating a common ground through shared aspects and establishing a good rapport or physically mirroring the IEs’ body language (Grossman, quoted in Lee-Potter 2017: 76).

After creating a relaxed atmosphere, it is essential for the IR to start the interview with an uncontroversial question or with “a few straightforward questions that will get you and your interviewer warmed up and into the flow of the conversation. Leave the more sensitive questions till later on in the interview.” (*ibid.*: 64-65)

The next important factor to be considered when dealing with journalistic interviews is the types of questions that may be asked since different interrogatives may be used to achieve different aims. Generally speaking, questions can be divided into two broad categories: ‘open(-ended)’ and ‘closed(-ended)’ questions. Open(-ended) questions are those that enable IEs to give detailed answers, expand on the topic and/or voice their perspective, as in the following example:<sup>1</sup>

(1) so what can you tell us about this national holiday and how it’s celebrated; has pandemic changed how this day was celebrated in your home country or here or worldwide? [InterDiplo\_JD\_035].

As in (1), open questions usually begin with a *wh*-interrogative (e.g. *what, how, why*) and trainers agree that open-ended questions should be preferred to allow the IE to provide a free account on the topic under consideration (Morán García 2023: 37).

Conversely, closed questions require a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer and, indeed, they are also known as ‘yes/no’ questions, since they only prompt the interlocutor to a binary possibility of response, as in (2):

(2) is this the way X sees it; this is the way the war could end? [InterDiplo\_JD\_042].

These types of questions are considered to be helpful for the journalist because they produce detailed responses and shape the interview, preventing the IE from deviating from the core issue under discussion. However, since they limit the freedom of the IE, they should be used moderately during the interview (Sedorkin and Forbes 2023: 62). Two more kinds of questions can be found in the closed(-ended) category considering their syntactic realizations, namely ‘choice’ questions, also known as ‘polar’ questions, in which the IE is directed to choose an alternative between two possible answers (cf. (3)), and ‘requests’, which may take the form of either direct/indirect interrogatives (e.g. *I wonder if you can..., could you...*) as in (4), or of imperatives, as in (5):

(3) Will we be able to get back to some level of normalcy I mean X and the Y are long allies they have had breaches like X, Y the Z war **or is this something more lasting** you think? [InterDiplo\_JD\_038].

(4) Could you confirm some X were killed ten years ago? [InterDiplo\_JD\_057].

(5) Tell us what impact a general assembly resolution can have even with so much of the world agreeing with X on a peace plan when it’s not enforceable. [InterDiplo\_JD\_059].

<sup>1</sup> All examples are drawn from the *InterDiplo\_JD Corpus* that is also the corpus used for the analysis of the present paper. A detailed description of the corpus is in §3. Names of different countries and populations within the same excerpt have been replaced with “X” and “Y” to safeguard anonymity of data. Punctuation, bold characters and underlining are ours.

As shown in the examples above, ‘requests’ are more comparable to ‘open’ questions than ‘choice’ questions because they provide the IE with more room to respond than ‘closed’ questions, which somehow impose an answer on the interlocutor. One more category that does not appear in the traditional syntactic format of questions are ‘(stand-alone) statements’, “namely declaratives that function as comments or questions seeking confirmation” (Facchinetti *forthcoming*), as in (6):

(6) So you’re saying either a deal now or no deal [InterDiplo\_JD\_056].

In (6), the journalist utters a statement with no explicit request for information, to rephrase what the IE has said in the previous turn (*you’re saying*); such a statement serves as a prompt for the following answer.

Bearing in mind what we have illustrated in terms of journalistic questioning, in the following sections we will address the issue of neutrality in broadcast interviews involving native and non-native journalists and diplomats when using open-ended questions that are considered to be the least adversarial category and thus the most neutral one when eliciting information from IEs.

### 3. Corpus data

Our analysis was carried out on a subsection of the *InterDiplo Corpus*<sup>2</sup>, namely the *InterDiplo\_JD corpus*. The corpus is designed so as to cover one-to-one broadcast interviews from professional and non-professional journalists addressing diplomats on (potentially) sensitive topics, like Covid19, wars, climate change, health and wellbeing, and – more broadly – international affairs. All interviews were conducted between 2020 and 2022 in English, regardless of the speakers’ mother tongue, from popular international television broadcasting companies, for example the BBC, CNN, CGNT, Arirang, Sky News UK, and France 24 English. The intervening problems related to the geolocalization of the researchers’ devices which, in the case of some broadcasters, did not allow the downloading of their materials, also led to the exploitation of some well-known video-sharing platforms, e.g. YouTube and Conflict Zone, in which the same interviews have been uploaded for the international audience. Once the download process was completed, the project involved the following steps: first of all, the interviews were transcribed using the automatic transcription online service Happy Scribe<sup>3</sup>, whose transcription accuracy is between 85 and 99%; then, the transcribed texts were manually checked to correct any errors. Generally, human actions concerned either the final

<sup>2</sup> The *InterDiplo Corpus* was initiated at the University of Verona, Italy, within the research project “Digital Humanities applied to Foreign Languages and Literatures”, funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research within the framework of the Departments of Excellence 2018-2022. As a first result of the project, the *InterDiplo-Covid19 Corpus* was compiled as a pilot corpus (Cavalieri, Corrizzato, Facchinetti 2021), to test the methodology of data selection and tagging system. The subsection chosen for this paper relies on further data added to the *InterDiplo Corpus* within the nationally funded project “Communicating transparency: New trends in English-language corporate and institutional disclosure practices in intercultural settings” (Research financed by the Italian Ministry for the University – PRIN 2020 - Prot. 2020TJTA55).

<sup>3</sup> *HappyScribe* is an online platform for transcription, subtitles and translation available in more than 100 languages; it converts audio to text using online transcription software.

syllables of verbs in cases of the present continuous or past perfect tense, or syntactic inaccuracy in overlapping voices. The corpus consists in 80 interviews amounting to 159,888 tokens and it was tagged for metadata (i.e. interview title, channel, date, duration, format [video-mediated/face-to-face] speakers' name, speakers' gender and speakers' nationality), parts of speech and paralinguistic features (e.g. overlapping speech, pauses, repairs, restarts, hesitations) as well as for question- and answer-types according to the taxonomy 'open', 'closed', '(stand-alone) statement', 'request', and 'choice'.

The following criteria were used to choose the data. First, all interviews go beyond the fixed pattern of "question-answer-next question" to preserve a degree of interactivity between the interlocutors involved. Thus, we selected interviews that showed follow-up moves where the IR may ask for amplification of the prior response in order to get more information, clarification, or to go deeper into what the IE just said.

The second criterion for the selection of the data applies to interactants. With reference to IRs, the choice was to maintain a certain degree of diversification of journalists (i.e. the same journalist should appear no more than twice in the corpus) to limit the skewing of data due to possible idiosyncratic linguistic choices of single IRs. Finally, there appears to be a relatively equal distribution between native/non-native speakers of English<sup>4</sup> (57.8% and 42.2%, respectively), to detect possible sociolinguistic variations in the strategy of conducting interviews.

As for IEs, of the three professional categories covered in the *InterDiplo Corpus* – diplomats, politicians, and certified experts – only interviews featuring diplomats were selected for the *InterDiplo\_JD Corpus*, in order to avoid variations in the way IRs may handle different professional categories of IEs.

#### 4. Methods

Drawing on corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Partington *et al.* 2013; Ancarno 2020), the study adopted a mixed-method approach and data were investigated both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. Since the investigation focused only on open(-ended) questions, the first step was data preparation with the extraction of all interrogatives in the corpus marked with the tag <Q<open>></Q<open>> using the *SketchEngine* software. The extracted data were then further filtered thanks to metadata identifying only open questions uttered by journalists whose turns were labelled with the tag <profession="journalist" interviewer="true">. The output of this selection was subsequently divided into two sub-corpora always thanks to metadata including, on the one hand, native journalists (tag <native="true">), and, on the other, non-native journalists (tag <native="false">).

<sup>4</sup> In this regard, an observation is required to fully understand the choices made by the research team. Journalists were grouped according to the nationality of the speakers (i.e. the place of birth and the continent to which that place belongs) and interactants were divided into native and non-native speakers (Kachru 1988); neither exceptions concerning possible transfers from one place to another in childhood or adulthood nor cases in which the subjects could be defined as 'naturalized' were taken into account. Relying on information found on the web (whether on public websites or personal profiles), it was often not possible to define with certainty the relationship between the speaker and the use of English; in such cases a language-neutral identification was applied so as not to skew the data.

After this data preparation, the first phase of the investigation consisted in the bottom-up analysis that focused on open(-ended) questions starting with *how* and *when*. We decided to investigate *how* and *why* questions in this study because, from a first manual scrutiny of our data, they appeared to be the most frequently used types in association with presupposition triggers (Levinson 1983; Yule 2010). This stage of the research was performed with the use of the concordance tool in *SketchEngine* in the subcorpora using the CQL search <question type="open">[word="how"]and <question type=="open">[word="when"] and resulted in a compilation of concordance lines which were then sorted manually to identify all the actual instances of *how* and *when* questions that implicitly project disagreement. Subsequently, results of this stage of the analysis were scrutinized considering the two subcorpora thanks to the annotation of the journalists' nationality in the metadata in order to gain a comparative perspective on their use.

In the next sections, the findings obtained via the methodology detailed above are presented, focusing first on the quantitative overview and then on the detailed qualitative description of the results.

## 5. Results and discussion

### 5.1. Quantitative overview

The corpus exhibits 998 questions asked by journalists subdivided as follows: 38.1% open questions, 35.2% closed questions, 23% statements, 2.4% choice questions, and 1.3% requests. Interestingly, there is a perfect balance between the use of open questions and closed questions and this finding seems to confirm what Clayman and Heritage (2002: 29) argue in terms of "balance of perspectives" where, on the one hand, the journalists try to "to achieve factual accuracy" with open(-ended) questions and, on the other, they "actively challenge their sources" with closed(-ended) questions.

However, if we look closely at the quantitative presence of the types of questions in the two sub-sets native/non-native, the situation is different, as illustrated in Table 1:

The results of the quantitative analysis show that native journalists waive the rules of conduct detailed in Section 2 regarding the importance of using open-ended questions in interviews. As shown in Table 1, native IRs appear to exploit open-ended questions to a lesser extent (35.1%) while closed questions have been observed to occur somehow more frequently (37.1%). This indicates that native journalists tend to conduct the interviews by giving less freedom of response to the IEs, who are often guided in the disclosure of the information to be reported. In turn, non-native IRs seem to be more prone to respect the informative purpose of interviews with a higher presence of open-ended

IR	OPEN	CLOSED	(STAND-ALONE) STATEMENT	REQUEST	CHOICE	TOTAL
NATIVE	210 (35.1)	222 (37.1)	146 (24.4)	9 (1.5)	12 (2.0)	599
NON-NATIVE	170 (42.2)	129 (32.3)	84 (21.1)	12 (3)	4 (2.6)	399
TOTAL	380 (38.7)	351 (35.1)	230 (23.0)	21 (2.1)	16 (1.6)	998

*Table 1.* Question types in the InterDiplo\_JD corpus (% in brackets)

IR	HOW	WHY	TOTAL
NATIVE	79 (20.7)	41 (10.7)	120 (31.6)
NON-NATIVE	122 (32.1)	15 (4.0)	131 (36.5)
TOTAL	201	56	257

**Table 2.** HOW and WHY questions in the open-ended question subcorpus (% in brackets out of the total number of open-ended questions)

questions (42.2%), as a consequence exhibiting a less challenging attitude towards the IEs, who are given the opportunity to speak more freely.

Moving on to HOW and WHY interrogatives in the open-ended question subcorpus, we observe the following situation illustrated in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, there is a balance in the use of HOW and WHY open-ended questions by native and non-native IRs. The subsequent manual checking of each contextualized occurrence has made it possible to verify that many of these types of open-ended questions uttered by IRs could rather be considered as ‘closed questions in disguise’, since they are framed syntactically as open-ended ones, starting with a WH-word, but function as questions that implicitly project disagreement or give the journalist’s opinion (Facchinetti *forthcoming*) thus ‘leading’ the IE’s answer (84% in the native subset and 92% in the non-native subset). From a quantitative point of view, these results seem to suggest that both native and non-native journalists often tend to waive the rules of conduct described in Section 2 with reference to the use of open-ended questions that should strongly be favoured to elicit facts in the most neutral way.

In the next section, examples of ‘biased’ HOW and WHY questions found in the corpus after the qualitative observation of data will be discussed in order to identify the linguistic strategies employed by IRs to ‘disguise’ their personal perspectives into ‘neutral’ information-seeking open-ended interrogatives. Results from the native and non-native subsets will be also compared.

## 5.2. Qualitative analysis of data

### 5.2.1. HOW questions

Starting with the instances of HOW questions recorded in the two subcorpora after the manual scrutiny of the concordances automatically extracted, the first prominent linguistic pattern that we observed is HOW + adjectives such as “worried, concerned, difficult”, as shown in (7):

(7) Now that that is very interesting, how how worried are you by the leverage that nuclear weapons gives X, just as we can see, in a certain sense the leverage it has given Y because when NATO has shied away from any talk of imposing a no fly zone or indeed sending jet fighters to the Z military, they have cited the danger of escalation danger of escalating with Y with a nuclear power, which appears to be ready at some point to use nuclear weapons as part of its battlefield strategy, the very same could be said of X and that gives X a leverage which may come back to haunt W. [InterDiplo\_JD\_017\_N].

In (7), the IR – who is a native speaker – opens his turn with a comment (“that is very interesting”) that can be seen as a prefatory statement pointing from the very

beginning to a personal perspective on the topic further developed by the subsequent question. The HOW + “worried” interrogative is framed as an open-ended question but at the same time it puts forward the presupposition “you are worried” disguised as a request for information from the IE. The presupposition is then followed by factual evidence reported from other pieces of news shared by public opinion addressed with the pronoun “we” by the journalist (“just as we can see in a certain sense the leverage it has given Y because when NATO has shied away from any talk of imposing a no-fly zone indeed sending jet fighters to the Z military they have cited the danger of escalation”). By supporting their claims with verifiable data and widely accepted examples, IRs are able to give their presuppositions a “dressing” of impartiality. These common behaviours show that IRs are partially out of compliance with the rules of conduct while still making an effort to maintain professionalism when speaking with and pressing their interlocutors on sensitive subjects.

The same strategy can be observed in (8) retrieved from the non-native subcorpus:

(8) What you're saying to me here being a diplomat you have to be diplomatic presumably and there were times weren't there where you've been criticised for saying things that perhaps people thought you shouldn't have said **how** difficult is it to try to get the line right well the problem is now of course. [InterDiplo\_JD\_066\_NN].

Example (8) shows a question that is built upon a double presupposition. The first one is used as a prefatory statement to introduce the second part of the interrogative and reports the verbatim words of the diplomat (“what you are saying to me here...”). By doing so, the IR tries to create a common ground with the IE but at the same time makes a presupposition based on his own interpretation (“you’ve been criticised for saying things...”) that is also signalled by the use of the mitigators “presumably” and “perhaps”. In the second part, the journalist resorts to an open question with HOW where, however, he inserts his assumption that it is “difficult” to handle the situation detailed in the prefatory part.

Another interesting strategy found in the non-native subcorpus to mask non-neutral requests of information with the form of an uncontroversial open-ended HOW question is the one shown in (9):

(9) How would you measure that *most of the violence* that happens in this country is against X right when when there is no ceasefire when there is a reduction in violence **how would you measure** when *an X parents send their sons or daughters to school and there is reduction in violence apparently how they can really gauge whether it's safer or not*. [InterDiplo\_JD\_056\_NN].

In (9) the HOW-question is repeated twice with the same syntactic structure (“how would you measure”) and is used by the IR to ask for a measure on something that is not really measurable (“that most of the violence happens...”, “when an X parents send their son or daughter to school and there is a reduction in violence...”), thus implicitly assuming that the IE may have some difficulty in giving an objective definition of the problem. This presupposition also hides a criticizing attitude, and this can be seen in the management of the repetition of the same HOW question that is followed though by a different factual development. Indeed, while the first one seems to include a more

'neutral' denotative description of facts ("most of the violence that happens in this country is against X right when when there is no ceasefire when there is a reduction in violence"), the second one proposes a reformulation that is far more connotative by describing an everyday situation ("measure when an X parents send their sons or daughters to school and there is reduction in violence apparently how they can really gauge whether it's safer or not") that can emotively touch the audience as it represents ordinary events in which each of us may be involved.

### 5.2.2. *WHY questions*

Moving on to the use of WHY open-ended questions, the data show a difference in the line of conduct of native and non-native IRs. On the one hand, native IRs resort to a question design that contains one or more statements prior to the proper question anticipating their personal perspective. These are followed by a WHY question including a presupposition leading the IEs to a specific direction and thus leaving little ground for free speech. On the other hand, non-native IRs adopt a more neutral conduct by trying to balance the need for safeguarding professionalism and impartiality while challenging the IEs on sensitive topics. Indeed, non-native journalists largely anticipate their 'biased' WHY questions with quotes that provide factual and commonly shared evidence with the aim of 'dressing' their remarks with more neutrality. Examples (10) and (11) respectively show the two strategies:

(10) If I could just ask you if you could clear up a bit of uncertainty are significant numbers of your troops being removed from the area around X, I think it was it was just land removal; we were warning about it, we were saying that we are conducting training military training it had certain dates and it was supposed to last for some time so some part of our troops, as far as I saw on the internet, are being withdrawn, so there is nothing extraordinary, there just a routine which was planned before, but explain to me, I mean, since you know many of your colleagues have poured scorn on the warnings from president Y our own prime Z that you're poised to invade, why why on earth would the west make the charge that you're poised to invade X? What's in it for them to make it up? [InterDiplo\_JD\_009\_N].

(11) Multiple reports say that your troops and allies have has have been committing human rights violations and there's active bombing of X capital, why must you bomb civilians' installations? [InterDiplo\_JD\_024\_NN].

In (10), the native journalist makes a lengthy introduction to his WHY question using a set of prefatory statements that can look like neutral facts but actually represent the IR's view of what is narrated as also evidenced by the self-mentions followed by verbs of cognition ("I think", "as far as I saw on the internet", "I mean") as well as by comments such as "there is nothing extraordinary" that clearly convey the journalist's viewpoint. The final part of the turn becomes far more challenging with the WHY question which is not an open-ended request for information but rather an overt critique of the interlocutor's actions in his role as representative of a country, as shown by its formulation that starts with the expression "why on earth". Moreover, the question also includes a presupposition that is the position of western countries towards the attitude of the IE, reinforcing the criticizing stance of the IR.

Example (11) shows the different strategy employed by the non-native IR who prefaces his provocative WHY question with objective evidence (“multiple reports say”) trying to keep a neutral stance in presenting facts. By doing so, the journalist backs up his claims with verifiable, widely acknowledged information and is able to mask his subsequent question with a sense of neutrality. Indeed, the WHY open-ended interrogative builds on what has been said in the prefatory statement (“and there’s active bombing of X capital”) but making a direct reference to the respondent (or in general to the nation he or she represents) with the pronoun *you* and then adding a presupposition –

the presence of civilians’ installation – reinforced by the use of the modal *must*, which makes the whole question adversarial. This strategy partially deviates from the code of conduct; nonetheless, it aims to protect professionalism and transparency when confronting and pressing their interlocutors on sensitive subjects.

## 6. Conclusions

The study presented in this paper seems to confirm an ongoing change in broadcast interviews that are becoming more biased at the expense of neutrality. Specifically, although the rules of conduct generally advocate the need for a prevalence of open questions in order to keep the channel open to dialogue and thus to an objective and cooperative description of factual evidence, the quantitative analysis of data shows a difference between native and non-native subcorpora; indeed, native journalists tend to conduct their interviews by giving less freedom of response to the IEs, who are often guided in the disclosure of the information through closed questions and stand-alone statements. Conversely, non-native IRs make more use of open questions, thus appearing to give their interlocutors the chance to voice their opinions more freely.

This tendency can also be observed in the use of ‘biased’ HOW and WHY open-ended questions, which occur frequently in both native and non-native subsets, and could rather be considered ‘closed questions in disguise’. Indeed, these interrogatives, which begin with the WH- question word, are syntactically open-ended but serve as queries that implicitly express disagreement or the journalist’s viewpoint, thus ‘leading’ the IE’s answers. Although journalists are advised to “be careful not to offer qualifications, opinion, or value judgments” (Morán García 2023: 51), the analysis shows that it is difficult for IRs to tread the fine line of adversariness without turning judgemental when discussing sensitive topics like wars, pandemics, and overall international issues.

Having a closer look at the data, non-native journalists seem to keep a balance between factual accuracy and the challenging attitude towards the IE (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 29) by quoting reports or sources that provide factual and commonly shared evidence with the aim of ‘dressing’ their remarks with more neutrality (Facchinetti *forthcoming*); in turn, native IRs design questions with a clear perspective also in the prefatory part, thus showing the IEs a specific direction and leaving little ground for free speech.

The differences in the use of biased questions between native and non-native interviewers can be attributed to a combination of cultural, linguistic, and educational factors. Native journalists possess an innate understanding of the subtleties and nuances of their language, having grown up immersed in its cultural context. They may navigate biased questions with ease, drawing upon their sociolinguistic awareness and

contextual understanding. On the other hand, non-native journalists, having acquired English through formal education or later in life, may face challenges in asking biased questions due to potential gaps in cultural familiarity and idiomatic expressions. Educational backgrounds, linguistic competence, and exposure to biased language during formative language acquisition years can contribute to variations in the ability of native and non-native speakers to navigate and comprehend the nuanced landscape of biased questioning in English.

Undoubtedly, further data must be checked to analyse more deeply what has emerged concerning the disregard for the rules of conduct as well as the discrepancies between native and non-native interviewers; yet this preliminary analysis has shown that expressive caution appears to be less prioritized in news interviews and, as a consequence, the ethos of neutrality and transparency is no longer fully complied with.

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