ASKING TO ASK: THE STRATEGIC FUNCTION OF INDIRECT REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION IN INTERVIEWS

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In a recent column one television critic for Toronto's *The Globe and Mail* bemoans the loss of "aggressive interviewing in Canadian television." He points out that "At their best, good television interviewers...have an edge and persistence that makes some subjects squirm and sweat. For viewers there is always the chance something revealing or unexpected will occur and it is this element of surprise that is altogether too rare in the painfully polite and well-behaved studios of both the state broadcaster (CBC) and the private networks." In her discussion of political interviews on Israeli television, Blum-Kulka (1983) likens such interviews to a game between speakers which "when the game is well played by all interactants, is drama" (146). "The goal of the interviewers," she states, "is not necessarily to corner the politician but to get him to state his opinions and analysis of political issues, in a manner that is quotable" (146). Blum-Kulka points out that political interviews represent a distinct genre or register wherein speakers adhere to Grice's Cooperative Principle and engage in supportive or non-supportive moves largely determined by reinforcement or non-reinforcement of presuppositions represented in the questions posed by interviewers.

In the data which I examine, which consist of 23 interviews done by four interviewers, two female, two male, three Canadian, one American, and which range from political to topical interviews on both television and radio, interviewers employ an extensive repertoire of speech acts which includes requests for information, assertions, requests for confirmation, rhetorical questions, Socratic questions, clarifications, and comments or evaluations. As one would expect, requests for information are the principal speech act employed by interviewers. Moreover, most requests for information employed by interviewers are direct requests. Nonetheless, a significant percentage of requests for information are indirect. Interviewers, in effect, ask to ask. For example, interviewers can state directly "Tell me about downsizing and your views on it, because it's certainly the buzzword on the current economy," using an imperative, but they can also employ a range of indirect forms such as

- (1) I want to ask you more about that festival.
- (2) I would like to know the relationship between repression of emotions
ah most specifically anger and depression.
- (3) Do you really think you can live to be I mean you're what in your late
40's close to your 50's biologically, do you think you can live to be a

100 ah 120?

- (4) But you know now that you're not going to change that by yourself.

It is not altogether clear what motivates these indirect forms on the part of interviewers, since the interview is by definition an asymmetrical discourse which privileges the interviewer and gives him or her the right to ask questions. Politeness, which is normally associated with indirectness, would seem to have little role to play in the negotiation of interpersonal meaning between speakers. And, indeed, it is desirable for interviewers to be seen as tough and hard-edged in their representation of requests for information. Asking to ask would seem to be a very strange sort of request made by interviewers, yet indirect requests for information make up between 20-36% of all speech acts for the four interviewers I examine. One interviewer, the most acclaimed of all Canadian interviewers, Barbara Frum, employs slightly more indirect forms than direct (direct requests 35%; indirect requests 36%). With rhetorical and socratic questions as well as requests for confirmation and clarification, interviewers possess a sub-repertoire of direct and indirect forms to effect the request of information.

1. Indirect requests for information

Indirect requests for information are little analysed in the literature. In their seminal discussion of questions in therapeutic discourse, Labov and Fanshell conceptualize questions in speech act terms as "requests for information," but they do not provide particular analysis of indirect requests for information, largely because requests for information are heavily integrated with requests for action, and analysed either as information requests or as potential indirect requests for action. The more indirect indirect request for information is not dealt with. However, Tanz (1981) notes that indirect requests for information like other indirect requests can be produced by invoking the preconditions for a direct request for information: "A speaker who says, *I'd like to know when the ferry is leaving*, conveys a request for information by literally asserting his desire to know the information. The speaker can convey the same request by saying, *Do you know when the ferry is leaving?* Literally, he queries the hearer's ability to provide the answer. So there are other ways to convey a request for information than by directly asking the pertinent question" (190).

Tanz' brief discussion is suggestive. We can formalize indirect requests for information through reference to preconditions for general directives. Theoretically, using Searle (1991), we can account for indirect forms through four principal felicity conditions for indirect directives: The preparatory condition, the sincerity condition, the propositional condition and the essential condition. The preparatory condition refers to the hearer's ability to perform a given request. Tanz above gives the example of *Do you know when the ferry is leaving?* We can analyse this as a query about a precondition for requests for information, but such a request is not technically about the hearer's ability to answer a question. What is really being queried is the state of knowledge of the hearer. Hearers, however, can be queried about their ability to answer a question:

- (5) I wonder if you could comment on that for us please
 (6) Answer that question if you can please

Speakers can also assert the sincerity condition for directives (desire, wish, want that an action be performed) as an indirect means of making a request for information:

- (7) I wanna talk about health care because that's one of the things you've had to tackle...

Further, speakers can assert the propositional condition for directives which concern the performance of a future act on the part of the hearer or his/her willingness to perform a future act:

- (8) Will you tell me more about your tactics?
- (9) Would you begin by sketching in the details of the Andes crash?

Lastly, according to Searle, directives can be understood by a hearer as indirect if the essential condition is queried. Searle analyses the essential condition in terms of efforts on the speaker's part to get a hearer to perform a given task. This category largely concerns reasons given by the speaker for the performance of a speech act. He includes, then, a very general class of behaviours in this precondition:

- (10) Dr. Chopra, I am interested in knowing where there are Arathetical alternatives for Aids-related problems.
- (11) I'm going to bring it up because it's still there, I am going to bring it up because Lucien Bouchard brings it up every day and says it's still not settled because of that issue.
- (12) But the question was why don't you like being interviewed?

In the last three examples, the speakers assert either the consequences of or reasons for the request for information. Speakers can also invoke purpose to effect indirect requests for information.

2. Strategic politeness in indirect requests for information

Searle's theory provides a useful and elegant mechanism by which indirect directives can be understood, but, of course, it does not focus specifically on indirect requests for information, nor does it take into consideration the context of situation of requesting information as a speech act. Searle is primarily interested in how hearers process speech acts inferentially so as to understand how a second illocutionary meaning can be conveyed by a speaker, that is, an indirect speech act. Labov and Fanshell, however, focus more attention on sociolinguistic variables and thus speaker's strategic choices in requests for information and thus give attention to interpersonal factors such as speaker's and hearer's rights and obligations. Questions are not in any way neutral speech acts, whereby there is simply a transfer of information from one party to another. By definition, requests for information are negative-face threatening and can also threaten the positive face of the hearer/respondent.

In his discussion on the pragmatics of answers, Kiefer (1988) delineates the "epistemic-imperative approach" which analyses questions as embedded within imperatives. The hearer is commanded to "bring it about" (imperative) that "I know" (epistemic) (264). The request for information imposes a condition of expectancy on the hearer who must fulfil it. Of course, there are occasions when hearers indicate that the speaker does not have the right to ask a certain question, that a given request for information is too personal or inappropriate under the circumstances. In general, however, requests for information carry with them a strong obligation on the part of the hearer. Blum-Kulka (1983) goes so far as to call them "control acts": "questions [whether or not interrogative in form] can also be considered control acts, since by requiring or demanding a response they often carry a strong command message [Goody, 1978]" (147). Bublitz (1981) notes further that "It is a characteristic feature of questions often overlooked that the speaker by asking is not only able to cause the hearer to take the floor and react in a certain way, e.g. to answer...but that in addition [and similar to directives] he is also exerting his influence as to the CONTENT of the hearer's response" (852).

Not only is the relationship between speaker and hearer asymmetrical in requests for information, but also the relationship can be coercive. Interviewers often downplay the power they have ("I just have questions"), and indeed there can be extensive struggles for control surrounding the speech act. Interviewees can even attempt to reverse the roles. In one interview the actor Marlon Brando almost achieves this before the interviewer, Larry King, finally reasserts his role and authority as interviewer: "Okay. Well, one night we'll have *Marlon Brando Live*. You'll host it. I'll guest...No, this night, you're the guest. Why did you choose acting as a career? Why did you choose to be other people?"

In their discussion of negative face, Brown and Levinson point out that there are many means linguistically by which a speaker can redress threat of negative face for a hearer. Indirect requests for information formed by invoking the preparatory condition concerning hearer's ability, the propositional condition concerning hearer's willingness, and the essential conditions concerning certain of the speaker's reasons all have the effect of redressing negative face. These are, in Labov and Fanshell's terms, mitigating forms in that they take into consideration the hearer's dispreference for impingement. By querying the hearer's ability or willingness to answer, or by providing the hearer with reasons for making the request, a speaker can mitigate imposition upon a hearer. For example, in an interview with Margaret Thatcher, the Canadian interviewer, Barbara Frum, makes the following request:

- (13) Will you let me ask two more quick questions?

Frum wants to continue what has been a very tough interview with Thatcher; Thatcher has grown impatient. Frum therefore redresses Thatcher's negative face by literally asking to ask. In this request for information, there is absence of coercion. Thatcher is free to say 'no'. Frum also minimizes the imposition by minimizing her goal. She has only two questions and further they are "quick." The threat to Thatcher's negative face is small, and so this indirect request for information as a politeness form has the strategic purpose on the interviewer's part of enabling the interview to continue. The indirect request for information serves a phatic function of keeping the channels of communication open at a time when

there is threat that they may close.

A speaker can also redress threat to negative face by querying a hearer's belief or knowledge state. Tanz above provides the example *Do you know when the ferry is leaving* to illustrate an indirect request for information. According to Tanz, this request queries the hearer's ability to answer the request. However, querying a hearer's knowledge or belief state is not the same as querying a hearer's ability. Speaker's can invoke the preparatory condition for directives to perform an indirect request for information:

- (14) Can you explain the difference?

Such a form is only marginally polite, because, although it redresses negative face, it has the potential to threaten positive face through the conventional implicature that the hearer may not have the ability to "explain the difference." Invoking the preparatory condition as a means of performing indirect requests for information is potentially problematic, since the hearer may lose face if his or her ability is put into question. Querying a hearer's belief or knowledge state, however, has far less potential to threaten positive face:

- (15) But do you think this is a justice denied, this is a Donald Marshall case after all this time?
(16) Do you know if the Soviet Union or the USA seriously considered dropping nuclear weapons on any country - for example, on Afghanistan, Vietnam, or Korea?

Such highly conventional indirect requests for information invoke the existential status of the information. When a speaker queries or asserts a hearer's belief state (*Do you think, you think*), s/he is, as it were, establishing the existence of the information s/he needs, desires, or wants. For example, to the request *Do you think/know* the hearer can respond either 'yes' or 'no'. Such requests constrain the hearer no further, unless the hearer chooses to elaborate.

In such indirect requests, a precondition prior to that of the hearer's ability to respond is being queried, since the speaker is first ascertaining whether the hearer has the desired information. If the hearer has the information requested, then it follows that s/he can answer. On the one hand, such an indirect request for information avoids putting the hearer on the spot as well as further challenging the hearer's ability and so positive face, while on the other, the social constraints of the interview as an asymmetrical discourse obliges the hearer to provide the information, realized either as "knowledge" or "opinion." Such indirect requests for information are highly polite forms serving the interests of both the interviewee and the interviewer. For the interviewee, threat to negative and positive face is minimized; for the interviewer, such indirect forms serve as prompts which provoke the interviewee into "say[ing] more."

As well as querying hearer's belief state, speakers can also politely request information by representing their own mental states as in *I was wondering I have been asking myself* whereby they realize both the roles of speaker and hearer, while assigning the hearer to a new role akin to listener:

- (17) I was wondering what you think of Calvin Klein's designs as compared to what other designers are putting on the runway these days?

Searle would analyse this indirect request in terms of invocation of the essential condition; that is, it counts as an attempt to get the hearer to perform an action. But, in this example the action is only being hinted at. The interviewer could ask directly *Are Calvin Klein's designs better or worse than what other designers are putting on the runway these days?* Such a request for information would require that the interviewee, Grace Mirabella, provide an answer in the form of an evaluation of Calvin Klein. Such a request would be both negative and positive face threatening since the interviewee would be required to make a potentially controversial judgment; that is, such a request presumes that Mirabella has the ability to make this judgment and further requires she must make it known to others and specifically the interviewer, Pamela Wallin.

Of course, Wallin could also have asked *Do you think Calvin Klein's designs are x as compared...?* This request would also be polite. Why then does she choose an even more mitigating form, which is highly indirect and technically does not make a request of the interviewee at all, except inferentially? Although Grace Mirabella is a fashion writer who makes a living analysing designers' work, she is being drawn in by Wallin to make a controversial assessment of Calvin Klein. To prompt or encourage her interviewee Mirabella to make that assessment, Wallin virtually removes all threat to negative face. Mirabella is made aware of a need on the speaker's part, but there is no linguistic coercion for her to answer, since technically she is not being asked a question. This is not the same as if Wallin had said *I want/need to know what you think of Calvin Klein* which would invoke the sincerity condition and be highly face-threatening for Mirabella. Wallin's need for the information can only be arrived at by conversational implicature (relevance) which permits Mirabella the freedom to respond or not to respond, since the implicature can be taken up or not taken up according to Mirabella's wishes.

Indirect requests for information which minimize threat to the negative face of the interviewee in my data are "politeness" forms, but politeness is not the main goal or issue. Interviewers choose certain of the indirect requests for information to reduce threat to the interviewee to ensure that the interview will proceed smoothly or continue. In the example above where the interviewer Barbara Frum literally asks to ask of Margaret Thatcher, she does so at a point where the interview is breaking down and where to continue she needs the cooperation of Thatcher. Thus she minimizes her imposition upon Thatcher, who consents to be further interviewed. The questions which follow, however, are highly confrontational: "Do you ever allow yourself self-doubt?" "Do you like being called Iron Lady?". These requests for information are quite obviously threatening to positive face. Strategically, then, Frum uses an indirect request redressing the hearer's negative face, only to set up further requests which have no such redress.

When Pamela Wallin asks her interviewee Michael Harris in (15), "But do you think this is a justice denied, this is a Donald Marshall case after all this time?", she strategically avoids any embarrassment to Harris should he not be able to answer her question; however, she also makes a request which is positively conducive and carries the implicature that Harris does think that "this is a justice denied, this is a Donald Marshall case after all this time." Moreover, this

conventional indirect request for information carries another implicature, that the interviewee will "say more." By virtue of the Maxim of Relevance, Wallin expects her interviewee not only to agree with the presupposition conveyed by her request but to expand or elaborate on his reasons for doing so.

Wallin's highly indirect request for information in (17), "I was wondering what you think of Calvin Klein's designs as compared to what other designers are putting on the runway these days?" invoking the essential condition, also functions as a prompt for more talk. By redressing Mirabella's face so extensively that she does not technically request information of her, but of herself, Wallin in fact is prompting Mirabella to evaluate Calvin Klein's designs. The more controversial or problematic a request for information may be for an interviewee, the more delicately or more indirectly a question can be put. Redressing negative face by going so far as to not technically threaten it, as Wallin does when she wonders what Mirabella thinks rather than asking her directly, has the strategic purpose of encouraging the interviewee to open up and talk about a subject which otherwise might not be taken up at all.

The interpersonal meaning or roles between the interviewer and interviewee are completely altered by such indirect requests. The interviewer momentarily suspends his/her right to request and rather than obliging the interviewee to respond, assigns the interviewee the more equal role of co-conversationalist who can respond at will, or meet the needs of the interviewer at will. The conventions of general conversation are brought into the context of situation of the interview and there is the momentary illusion that conversation exists between equals. But this is only an illusion, since the interviewer's real motive is to get the interviewee to respond to highly face threatening requests. These indirect forms all function as prompts to encourage the interviewee to "say more" in the interview. The concern of the interviewer is not really politeness but the interview itself and the strategic getting of information and talk.

3. Provocation in indirect requests for information

Not all indirect requests for information are mitigating or negative face redressing. Interviewers also employ conventional indirect requests for information which invoke the sincerity condition. In such indirect requests the speaker's wishes or needs are foregrounded. Such indirect requests have the effect not of diminishing the power of the interviewer but of enhancing it:

- (18) I want to hear your view about Nato and and what in fact the members of Nato are not doing

or

- (19) I wanna talk about health care because that's one of the things you've had to tackle

By invoking the sincerity condition to effect an indirect request for information, the interviewer signals as well as signifies his or her role as interviewer in the discourse. Such indirect requests serve as markers of both the interviewer's function and power, specifically the power to choose and direct topic. Whereas in normal

conversation topic is negotiated between co-conversationalists, topic in interviews is largely controlled by the interviewer. This fact of the discourse is overtly signalled by the interviewer's use of indirect requests which invoke the sincerity condition.

In (18), the interviewer could easily have chosen to say *What do you think about Nato and what in fact the members of Nato are not doing*. Such a direct request requires that the interviewee provide his "view" of Nato as is the case in (18), but the constraints of his answer are very different. In (18), the interviewer foregrounds interpersonal meaning between herself and the interviewee, Andreas Pompandeou. Part of the explicit meaning of the utterance is the speaker's right to make the request as well as the hearer's obligation to answer. "I" realizes thematic information in the utterance, whereas "your view about Nato" realizes new information and by definition contrasts "your view" with that of others which is old information. The interviewer, by linguistically realizing her right to request, constrains the hearer not simply to "say more" but to say something which is new and thus salient for the interview and the audience listening. Though asking to ask and by asking to ask, the interviewer reinforces his/her power and obliges the interviewee to provide the desired information. Within the discourse, the threat to negative face which such indirect requests produce is not seen as inappropriate, but rather as appropriate and acceptable since normative roles between the interviewer and interviewee are reinforced.

4. Assertions as provocation in interviews

In the interview, as in exposition, new information is at a premium. More than anything else, new information constitutes desired goods. As indicated above, interviewers can invoke the sincerity condition for requests for information to constrain interviewees to provide such information, but their repertoire, their competence, would be extremely limited if this were the only means available to them. The conventional indirect requests that I have examined above function either as prompts or provocations. Provocation, however, is ironically less marked in the asymmetrical interpersonal relations between the interviewer and the interviewee. This can be achieved by asking theoretically "tough questions," but what exactly is the mechanism for asking such questions? Tough questions, the art of provocation in interviews, are realized as much through indirect requests for information as through direct requests. Such indirect requests are not formed conventionally through the invocation of felicity conditions, but through assertions of what Labov and Fanshell refer to as A-, B-, and D-events. Strategic assertion of such events, as indirect requests for information, constitute more than even direct requests the interviewer's linguistic means of provoking new and salient information from interviewees and thus serving the interests of the interview. Rather than querying the hearer/interviewee's state of belief or opinion as in conventional indirect requests for information ascertaining the existence of information (*Do you think, know, believe*), the speaker/interviewer can assert his/her own. The hearer's response, although still technically an "answer," is more accurately termed *response* since above all what is required is a response to the assertion which is made by the speaker.

Labov and Fanshell define A-Events as events or information known only to

the speaker, whereas B-Events are those known only to the hearer. D-Events are disputable between the speakers. A-, B-, and -D Events can all be asserted by an interviewer rather than making a direct request for information or a conventional indirect request based on a felicity condition. These assertions allow interviewers to introduce controversial and often personally delicate topics into the discourse without formally appearing to ask tough questions at all and as such they are not dissimilar to prompts of the *I wonder, I ask myself* type; however, because positive face rather than negative face concerns are raised by these indirect forms, they are provocative rather than prompting. Standard for such indirect requests for information is a move that can best be termed a "set-up," usually realized by an assertion or series of assertions, the request itself, and then possibly a follow-up, which is most often realized as a reiteration or reformulation of the request.

- (20) Would you you be offended if I told you my feeling as I read the story? And ah this is really awkward because the man who wrote the book never makes judgements. But I thought in some way that a human being has in some way to be a bastard to survive. That saints maybe don't make it.

This request for information is taken from an interview between the Canadian interviewer Barbara Frum and one of the survivors of a plane crash in the Andes who were forced to resort to cannibalism. Frum's first move is to set up her indirect request for information by initially querying her interviewee's feelings. This first move is a conventional indirect request for information except that the felicity conditions which pertain concern the hearer's positive face ("Would you be offended") rather than negative face (*Would you mind*). Such an indirect form would seem to have politeness as a principal concern. Frum is, in fact, asking to ask and she is certainly being polite. She follows this conventional indirect request for information with an evaluative assertion which again indicates her unwillingness to attack the interviewee's positive face. She contrasts herself with another journalist who does not make judgements and indicates her own awkwardness and so reluctance to do so. Twice, then, she redresses her interviewee's positive face. However, such politeness is entirely strategic because what follows, the principal move as an indirect request for information, although technically an assertion of a D-Event, carries a B-Event implicature which seriously threatens the positive face of the interviewee: "But I thought that a human being has in some way to be a bastard to survive." Labov and Fanshell argue that assertions of D-Events have the function of gaining agreement or disagreement by the hearer. The purpose of this indirect request for information is not to gain agreement or disagreement, but to provoke a response from the interviewee.

Prior to this request, Frum has several times explored with two of the survivors whether the experience has changed them in any way ("Now that you're back do you think you're the same person you were before this happened?" "Are your insides changed?"), but has received minimal or low-key response which hardly evokes the ordeal which these men went through. Her assertion of a D-Event which carries such a strong B-Event implicature, that by surviving their ordeal in the Andes the two men are bastards, serves as a highly provocative means of getting the new and salient information Frum wants for her interview. Her provocation works

because it threatens or challenges the positive face of her two interviewees, who respond by literally asking Frum, "Do you really think we're bastards?" Technically, Frum has not asserted or asked this at all, but what she has asserted carries such a strong B-Event implicature that her interviewees are forced to examine the significance of their survival not only for themselves but for every human being. Frum's purpose is not initially to redress the positive face of her interviewees only then to threaten it, but to provoke them into response, and indeed to provoke them into thought and analysis and so get a good interview. Frum's linguistic behaviour goes well beyond that of a game between herself and her interviewees. Through such very complex indirect requests for information, Frum elevates the interview into a truly investigative discourse concerned with understanding the truth.

Although Frum's indirect request for information above is formed by means of an assertion of a D-Event, its real provocative power comes from its B-Event implicature. Assertions of B-Events are analysed by Labov and Fanshell as "requests for confirmation." Such assertions can function in this way, but when so are usually marked by an high rising terminal intonation contour. One of the four interviewers I examined, a Jewish American male, is strongly predisposed to realizing requests for information as declarative in form with an interrogative contour:

- (21) His life is a success?
- (22) And it was instant? You knew him, you like him, when you first met him?

The first utterance, which is a direct request to Margaret Thatcher about Michail Gorbachev, requests Thatcher to give her opinion of Gorbachev's career. In the second utterance, Larry King, the interviewer, asks Thatcher about her feelings for Ronald Reagan, while in the third, "You knew him, you like him, when you first met him?", by asserting a B-Event known only to Thatcher, requests confirmation of his proposition. In effect, King is saying, 'have I got it right, you liked Ronald Reagan instantly when you first met him?'. However, in the request for information which immediately precedes this in the interview, King also asserts a B-Event, but this does not have the force of a request for confirmation:

- (23) But you can have the same opinions and the same goals, but that doesn't mean you have to like someone. And the two of you had genuine affection.

The first utterance is an assertion which serves to set up the the indirect request for information which follows. There is no interrogative contour accompanying this utterance and so King is not simply asking Thatcher to confirm what he has said. Instead, King asserts a B-Event about which only Thatcher should have information. He does not want Thatcher to say 'yes, we had genuine affection,' rather he wants to provoke Thatcher to talk about her feelings for Reagan. Even when positive as (23) is, indirect requests for information as assertions of B-Events are highly positive face-threatening because the speaker asserts knowledge which only the hearer should have. There is a sense in which such assertions also threaten negative face since although there is no imposition upon the hearer, there is nonetheless a form

of violation of the hearer's boundaries or sense of internal self. When such assertions are negative as above, they function much like challenges and so provoke response as a form of defense. However, when positive, their function would seem to be to provoke revelation, since they provide a means by which the hearer/interviewee can reveal aspects of him/herself which enhance the social self. In this sense, they reinforce positive face and allow the interviewee to boast.

Interviewers can also assert A-Events as a means of making indirect requests for information. By asserting his or her own beliefs, feelings or even dilemmas, a speaker can provoke a response of solidarity ('I'm with you') or problem-solving ('I recognize your problem and can/will help you'):

- (24) You look in the mirror and you think 'that's not me' but this person who is supposed to be a professional is telling you that you look great and you buy it and it hangs in your closet.

In the first request, the interviewer, Pamela Wallin, presents to Grace Mirabella a problem which is faced by many female consumers, having bought an item which is really not suitable for them. Wallin employs a *you* of solidarity, and so represents her own A-Event as one experienced by women in general. Through this A-Event Wallin represents to Mirabella a common experience as a problem, thus provoking from Mirabella a solution:

- (25) Hangs in the closet. I guess that's not easy. I know it's not easy. You have to really keep sort of watching around you and being very aware of yourself. And and not doing things that will make you uncomfortable. I think being uncomfortable is maybe the key word. Regardless of what anybody says to you. And maybe you do look very nice in it but you're not comfortable. So go with your gut.

Mirabella initially chimes in with her interviewer by repeating the interviewer's last remarks, "Hangs in the closet." She then evaluates, "I guess that's not easy. I know it's not easy." Her first comment, "I guess that's not easy," represents an assertive evaluation which marks distance between herself and the "you" of Wallin's assertion. Her second comment, "I know it's not easy," marks Mirabella's transition from evaluating an A-Event to that of an A-B Event, since she asserts her own experience of the same proposition, "Hangs in the closet." Wallin's experience becomes Mirabella's experience and so provokes from Mirabella the need for a solution. Response as solution follows immediately from Mirabella's own embrace of the A-B Event: "You have to really keep sort of watching around you and being very aware of yourself...." Of course, Wallin could have asked *What does one do when one has bought an item and it never gets worn* or *How do you deal with salespersons who talk you into buying things you don't want*, but she does not. Instead, she provokes a response of solidarity from Mirabella and thus a much more heart-felt and salient solution than a direct request could afford. Mirabella's language is idiomatic and impassioned, "so go with your gut," rather than being authoritative and neutral. All the provocations formed by assertions act to involve the interviewee emotionally as well as intellectually in the discourse and so enhance what we could call the "so-what" factor in interviewing. In this way the interview becomes a

meaningful exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee, rather than simply a game played between them.

5. Two interviews with Margaret Thatcher

Two of the interviewers I examine, one female and one male, interviewed Margaret Thatcher. These interviews provide a locus for examining the role and function of indirect requests for information in the interview. One interview was done by Larry King, an American interviewer, who continues to have one of the top-rated interview programs in North America; the other was done by Barbara Frum, a Canadian television interviewer, for the Canadian Broadcasting Company's (CBC) nightly news program. The profiles of these interviewers reveal very different styles of interviewing. Of all speech acts in the respective Thatcher interviews, King employs 45% direct requests and 21% indirect requests, while Frum employs 21% direct requests and 42% indirect requests. The percentiles are almost entirely the reverse of one another. Of all speech acts in all interviews, King employs 40% direct requests and 21% indirect requests, while Frum employs 35% direct requests and 36% indirect requests. King employs indirect requests slightly less than half the time that he employs direct requests, whereas Frum employs direct and indirect requests with approximately the same frequency. However, in her Thatcher interview there is a marked increase in frequency from 36% to 42%. King's interviewing strategy with Thatcher is consistent with his general interviewing style, whereas Frum varies her strategic choices by increasing her use of indirect requests and decreasing her use of direct requests. The question of course is why.

The interviewers begin both interviews by asking Thatcher why she got into politics. However, their approaches are quite different.

King interview

LK: And how much of "all" is told? When they say, "Tell it all," Lady Thatcher, how much have you told?

MT: I've told quite a a lot, because I had to tell it to make it live. I had to say who said what and the kinds of arguments we had between heads of government and heads of state. Things which concern security, of course, are never told.

LK: When, along the route to your own rise, did you say to yourself, "I want to be prime minister-"

MT: Oh, never.

LK: "-I want to lead the country"?

MT: Never.

LK: How did it happen?

MT: I can tell you exactly how it happened. I became an ordinary member of Parliament. I went and saw some of those scenes in Parliament, the debates. You know how noisy they are. I thought, "Thank goodness, I'm on the back benches, an ordinary member and not a minister. I don't think I could take this, some of the cat-calling they have." Then, I became a cabinet minister, and that seemed all right. And then we lost that election, and we had lost

several, and so Keith Joseph and I decided to go right back to the drawing board on principles, followed by policy, followed by detailed decisions. And I had expected, when Ted Heath put up again as leader of the party, that Keith Joseph, as the leader of this particular group, would stand. And he came into my study one day and said, "Margaret, I just can't stand. I don't think I can take that kind of criticism and that kind of pressure." And almost immediately, I said, "Look, Keith, if you won't stand, I will. someone who holds our views has got to stand, so that we have a chance of putting them into action."

LK: So, had he stood that day and said so, you wouldn't have-

MT: I would have been his most loyal lieutenant, and I wouldn't have been prime minister. We still had to go through, of course, a general election.

In this exchange, all but one of Larry King's requests for information are direct. He only indirect request, "So, had he stood that day and said so, you wouldn't have-" asserts a B-Event and would act as a provocation for Thatcher to tell a less self-serving account were King not interrupted by Thatcher. King's first two direct requests are closed questions as well as being positively conducive ("When...did you say to yourself, 'I want to be prime minister-'"), but Thatcher responds first by interrupting King and secondly by cancelling the proposition which his request conveys, that there was a time when Thatcher chose to become prime minister is. Thatcher chooses to deny any agency for herself in this interview. She avoids any representation of herself as making a decision to become prime minister.

King follows Thatcher's denial of agency, "Never," with an open question, "How did it happen?" which has no conducive force positive or negative and so permits Thatcher to render an account quite unconstrained by any other view but her own. Thatcher presents herself as someone to whom things happen, a patient rather than an agent. Initially happy to be a back bencher not having to go into the fray, her first move up the ladder is accounted for simply as an event in time: "And then, I became a junior minister." The *and* employed by Thatcher is simply an *and* of sequence. Magically, for no apparent causal reason, Thatcher "became a junior minister." Grammatically, all that Thatcher marks is a change of state, but no explicit cause, reason or motive is given for this change. We don't know why she becomes a junior minister, any more than we know why she becomes a backbencher.

Thatcher continues this rendering of herself as a patient until she represents agency as thrust upon her by the refusal of her colleague Keith Joseph to run for the head of the Conservative Party. Thatcher reports Keith's speech to her, "Margaret, I just can't stand. I don't think I can take that kind of criticism and that kind of pressure." According to Thatcher, Keith presents himself as inadequate to the task. Thatcher then reports her own speech, "And almost immediately, I said, 'Look, Keith, if you won't stand, I will. Someone who holds our views has got to stand, so that we have a chance of putting them into action.'" In this narrative clause, Thatcher reveals not motive, not cause, but result. The *and* she employs is an *and* of result, "And almost immediately, I said." Grammatically, Keith's speech realizes action, while Thatcher's speech realizes the result of that action, the two being linked by an *and* of result. Thatcher comes to the role as a result of a failure of nerve on Joseph Keith's part. Thatcher's agency then is a limited one, since it is represented by her as being reactive rather than proactive.

Larry King does attempt to provoke another version of this story from Thatcher through his assertion of her B-Event as an indirect request for information. His request, "So, had he stood that day and said so, you wouldn't have-" is negatively conducive, that is, King represents Thatcher's experience back to her as a means of provoking from her a different response, new information, from that which she has provided. He challenges her through this assertion of a B-Event, but in the process of so doing is interrupted by Thatcher who goes on to complete her very self-serving representation. Thatcher, therefore, has been able to use her interview with King to represent herself not as an ambitious hard-nosed politician who as a minister was known as "Thatcher the Snatcher," and as Prime Minister as "The Iron Lady," but as a noble and brave woman who had the courage of her convictions to enter the fray when others would not. There is only one attempt by King to counter this convenient representation which Thatcher provides, and which amounts to little more than public relations.

Barbara Frum's interview with Thatcher contrasts markedly with that of King's.

Frum interview

BF: Mrs. Thatcher, until you came to power most politicians in the Western world thought they had to crowd the centre of the road, you staked out that hard bold ground on the right, and the electorate in Britain has bought it utterly. How do you account for that?

MT: Because we had clear goals and clear ways of getting there. I think people much prefer that. They like to know what we want to do, why we want to do it, how we are going to do it. That's what we set out to do.

BF: How far are you going to take them because in everything that you've said there's a sense of crusade, as though you want to change the way Britons think even act and ah live and frankly since coming to Canada there's a sense too that you want to stiffen all of our backbones, Canadians included.

MR: Oh, I am just speaking of my experience and from things that I have seen go wrong on the international stage because people have tried somehow to go round the rules and the laws aren't suspended just because politicians would like them to be or like to get round them. Ah in Britain I think we had something which we'd not had in Canada which explains several social socialist governments. The essence of Socialism is that you surrender quite a bit of power over your own life to the state - well we all do that to some extent but of course it went much further. Ah you pay very high taxes and they wish to uh take um even higher taxes because they think that politicians can spend money better than the people can spend it. The more you take away the less there is for private industry and that's where the creation of wealth comes. So you have to establish very clear limits on the role of government and really you know politicians I think should sometimes just be a little bit more modest about their abilities than they are. We can't run everything and we shouldn't try.

BF: Mrs. Thatcher, though, you're going for attitudes. You're trying to change the way people think about their role in life. It's almost sometimes as though you think by your own resolve you can inspire people to be different. You're

- you're still inside if I can suggest that very bright green grocer's daughter
- MT: Well
- BF: who made herself a chemist, who made herself a tax lawyer, made herself Prime Minister, anybody can.
- MT: I don't really quite recognize what you are saying. I believe certain things very strongly. I believe that we will gain towards a way of life in which people were constantly looking to the state to solve their problems and to do things for them. You know when the state does everything for you it will soon take everything from you. You'll then have no basis for personal freedom, political freedom, nor economic freedom. I saw it go much too far and I think it would have gone even further had I not won that 1979 election - too far ever to pull it back. I said in my speech today the state must never substitute for personal responsibility, nor private initiative.
- BF: But there's a message.
- MT: There is a message.
- BF: But you said
- MT: There's a message, yes indeed
- BF: You hate softness, you hate slackness don't you?

Theme or topic in Barbara Frum's discourse is "you," that is, Thatcher herself. All of Frum's requests for information focus careful attention on Thatcher's attitudes and behaviours. Indeed, she characterizes Thatcher's political activity as a "crusade," and by extension Thatcher as someone who wants to change how other people think and believe. In grammatical terms, Thatcher is portrayed over and over again as an active agent of change. Frum's first request for information is direct, neutral in terms of conduciveness, and queries an explanation for Thatcher's success as a politician taking up the right on the political spectrum, "How do you account for that?" As in the King interview, Thatcher chooses to evade any personal responsibility or agency to explain the embrace of the right by the British electorate: "Because we had clear goals and clear ways of getting there. I think people much prefer that." The *we* of solidarity which Thatcher employs cancels the focus Frum has placed on Thatcher herself. Also, grammatically, "we had clear goals" realizes not agency nor patiency but simply attribution, "clear goals" being attributed to "we." Equally, "people much prefer that" realizes behaviour or experience. Thatcher's constructions avoid action on anyone's part. Thatcher does not answer Frum's question. Moreover, she deflects thematic attention away from herself as an agent having any affect on other people's attitudes and behaviours.

Frum's response is simply to return thematic focus back upon Thatcher, "How far are **you** [m.e.] going to take them because in everything that **you've** [m.e.] said there's a sense of crusade, as though **you** [m.e.] want to change the way Britain's think even and act and ah live?" In this speech act, Frum employs another direct request for information which nonetheless implicates that Thatcher herself has gone too far and is without awareness of the extent of her own actions. This is followed by the first of Frum's indirect requests for information, "and frankly since coming to Canada there's a sense too that you want to stiffen all of our backbones, Canadians included." The *and* employed by Frum is an *and* of evaluation which gives focus to the entire clause which realizes new information in the overall utterance. In this indirect request for information Frum asserts a B-Event, "that you

want to stiffen all of our backbones, Canadian's included," to provoke Thatcher first into a recognition of her own extremism, second into recognition of her agency or responsibility, and third and most salient for the discourse into responding to this agentive characterization, which has the force of a challenge.

Thatcher responds by again not taking up the question: "Oh, I am just speaking of my experience and from things I have seen go wrong on the international stage because people have tried somehow to go round the rules and the laws aren't suspended just because politicians would like them to be or like to get round them." Thatcher, in fact, violates the Maxim of Relevance, but not for purposes of an implicature, but simply to deflect attention away from herself as thematic subject and onto "people" who have "tried somehow to go round the rules." There is no sense in which Thatcher functions as a cooperative interlocutor. She does not simply resist Frum's question; she ignores it entirely, and in so doing she challenges Frum's authority as interviewer, and indeed turns the discourse on its head.

Frum responds to this challenge of her own role by employing her second indirect request for information, "Mrs. Thatcher, though, you're going for attitudes. You're trying to change the way people think about their role in life." Here again Frum asserts a B-Event which clearly represents Thatcher as agentive. And further Frum escalates her provocation of Thatcher by representing to Thatcher her own motivational schema which is clearly class-based, "You're still inside if I can suggest that very bright green grocer's daughter who made herself a chemist, who made herself a tax lawyer, made herself Prime Minister, anybody can." In contrast to the very self-serving characterization Thatcher provides of herself in her interview with Larry King, Frum represents Thatcher to herself as self-made, realizing both roles of agent and patient. Thatcher has made herself Prime Minister; the role has not simply been thrust upon her by an accident of circumstance. She is an agent of marked propensity.

Thatcher for the first time is completely unable to deflect or avoid provocation. She must respond. She does so initially by stating, "I don't really quite recognize what you are saying," however, all thematic utterances in this response are realized by "I." For the first time in the interview, Thatcher talks about herself, and as well she explicitly and categorically marks herself as agent, "I [m.e.] saw it go much too far and I [m.e.] think it would have gone even further had I [m.e.] not won that 1979 election." Gone is the *we* of solidarity; Thatcher now explicitly credits herself with stopping the advancement of Socialism in Great Britain and for causing the Conservative Party to win a crucial election.

What Frum achieves through her strategic use of indirect requests for information is far more interesting and salient as information than that in King's interview with Thatcher. As provocations, Frum's indirect requests for information cause Thatcher to reveal something of herself in terms of her own motivations, ambitions, concerns etc. In contrast, Thatcher is made to reveal nothing of herself in her interview with King. Where Thatcher is made to acknowledge her own agency in Frum's interview which relies heavily on indirect requests, she comes to no such precipice of understanding in her exchange with King, who relies much more on direct requests, and often open requests with little conducive force. King's style is convivial whereas Frum's is exploratory and at times confrontational.

Apart from her use of assertions as indirect requests, Frum also reinforces

her own status as interviewer several times in her interview with Thatcher by invoking the sincerity condition: "I I want to ask you so many things. I want to hear what you think about public works but I know we are under time pressures..." "I want to raise a whole other question." Frum's increase in her normal use of indirect requests can be explained by Thatcher's clear skill in avoiding or deflecting tough questions. Frum's use of indirect requests is increased by six percent overall. As I have argued, certain of these requests, invocations of hearer-oriented felicity conditions, function as prompts rather than provocations and so factor in redress to the hearer's negative face as a strategic means of encouraging the hearer's as co-conversationalist to "say more," and of course say more that is interesting. The provocative forms which rely more on use of assertions as indirect requests not only do not redress the hearer's negative face but also have the function of threatening the hearer's positive face even when positive in denotation and so provoking response as new information. This is precisely what happens in Frum's interview with Thatcher and which makes this interview far more interesting and informative than that of King.

Conclusion

Interviewing of the calibre of Frum's and other serious journalists who employ direct and indirect requests strategically goes beyond being simply a game. Frum's provocations cause Thatcher to acknowledge linguistically her own nature and her own motives. Something about Thatcher is revealed in Frum's interview, whereas it is concealed in King's. Such interviews draw back the curtain and allow both the interviewer and the interviewee to gain insight or knowledge in the process of the exchange. The more skilled the interviewer, the more possibility there is not only for drama but also for understanding and for communication. Asking to ask is a significant aspect of an interviewer's competence. Indirect requests for information are not by definition politeness forms, although indirect requests as prompts do incorporate negative face redress. But politeness is not the issue between speakers in interviews since the interview is by definition an asymmetrical exchange where power is to the interviewer and not the interviewee. The issue of negative face redress for the interviewer is encouragement of the interviewee to "say more" and say more that is salient and interesting. To this end the interviewer momentarily modifies the existing interpersonal relations or meaning potential in the exchange. The illusion of equality between speaker and hearer facilitates requests for information which are highly face threatening both in a negative and positive sense. Indirect requests which are speaker-oriented, formed by invoking sincerity conditions or assertions of A-,B-or D-Events, function, even when positive in denotation, to threaten the interviewee's positive face and act as provocations of not simply more information but new information and as such enhance the quality of the interview itself.

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