

The Structure of Greetings and Farewells/Thankings in MSNBC Political News Interviews

Karen Duchaj
Northeastern Illinois University
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625
k-duchaj@neiu.edu

Jeanine Ntahirageza
Northeastern Illinois University
5500 N. St. Louis Ave.
Chicago, IL 60625
j-ntahirageza@neiu.edu

Abstract

The television news interview is a genre of dialogue that differs from ordinary conversation in recognized ways. One of the stated differences (Clayman and Heritage, 2002) is in the structure of openings and closings. Until recently, most serious evening interviews have appeared to lack overt greetings, such as *Good evening!* and *Nice to see you!*, opting instead to begin the first question immediately upon introducing the interviewee. According to these previous accounts of openings, greetings have a slightly more likely presence in morning programs, as seen below in Clayman and Heritage (2002: 67):

(1) US NBC *Today Show*: 27 Jan 1998

1 M. Lauer: Mrs. Clinton, good morning.

2 H. Clinton: Good morning, Matt.

Regarding closings, Clayman and Heritage (2002: 74-75) observed in their data that “although thankings are normally acknowledged in ordinary conversation, in the news interview context a response appears to be more or less optional.” In other words, *reciprocal* thankings or, in many cases, any final response from the interviewee, were missing in evening news broadcasts (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). This was particularly within interviews with fellow journalists, which Kroon Lundell (2010) calls ‘intraprofessional broadcast talk’ and Montgomery

(2007) refers to as a ‘live two-way’.

Our study examines a set of evening news/political commentary programs on the U.S. network MSNBC, a 24-hour news/politics channel, including one program that has recently moved to another network but continues in the same format. In these programs, we argue, not only are overt greetings and farewells/reciprocal thankings present, they follow an identifiable pattern, similar to other dialogues such as transactions. Below are current examples of a greeting (2) and a closing sequence (3):

(2) MSNBC/*Current Countdown*: 22 July 2011

1 K. Olbermann: Good evening, Craig.

2 C. Crawford: Hello there!

(3) MSNBC/*Current Countdown*: 27 July 2011

1 K. Olbermann: It’s always a pleasure.

2 Thanks for your time.

3 K. Ellison: Always a pleasure, Keith.

4 Take care now.

5 K. Olbermann: You, too.

The two-way component of the opening and closing dialogue is crucial enough to the interlocutors that time constraints on these programs rarely interfere with it, including waiting

for the interviewee's final reply of a closing sequence over a satellite delay or prompting the interviewee if the response is missing, as shown in (4) below:

(4) MSNBC *The Last Word*: 26 July 2011

1 L. O'Donnell: Thank you for joining me
2 here tonight, Melissa.
3 [pause] Thank you,
4 Melissa.

Finally, we further argue that the interviewer's professional relationship with the interviewee affects the type, though not the presence, of greeting/farewell given and returned, with a closer relationship shown above in (2), with a fellow journalist. In (5), we see a respected guest who is less familiar, and in (6) a fellow journalist who returns a more casual response than he was greeted with.

(5) MSNBC/Current *Countdown*: 25 July 2011

1 K. Olbermann: Thank you for some of
your time tonight, sir.
2 M. Weitzman: Thank you for inviting
me.

(6) MSNBC *The Last Word*: 26 July 2011

1 L. O'Donnell: Howard, thank you for
joining me here tonight.
2 H. Fineman: Hi, Lawrence.

References

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