Miscommunication in the institutional context of the broadcast news interview

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the pattern and relative success of linguistic interaction in the Broadcast News Interview (BNI). BNI is modelled as a genre of institutional communication. The psychological and functional characteristics of the BNI were examined from the viewpoint of how communicative conventions that normally regulate interview performance may, at times, impede effective communication. The BNI is intended to transfer information from an expert witness to an interested, though relatively uninformed audience. The interviewer is supposed to act as both conduit and catalyst. Pragmatic properties of the interlocutors' speech as they orient themselves towards the context of the conversation was analysed in order to reveal the manner in which prior assumptions or beliefs may lead to faulty inferences. The notion of miscommunication is used to describe and explain the faults associated with processes of representing the illocutionary force of an utterance, rather than deficiencies in pronunciation or auditory sensation and perception. Opting for a qualitative analysis, an attempt was made to ground explanations in relevant theoretical models of interpersonal communication and communication failure. Results indicate that the conventions that distinguish the BNI from more mundane types of interaction impede successful communication. The study highlights that participants who wish to attain their communicative goal must be more aware of the functional procedures of the BNI and anticipate impediments to successful communication.

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CONTENTS

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The term 'miscommunication' has been used in a variety of ways. The differences in definition often relate to whether the miscommunication has a physical property as its origin, for example, mishearing or mispronouncing; or a psychological property as its origin, for example, a faulty inference or prior assumption (Tzanne, 1999). The outcome of the error may also be a defining feature of a miscommunication, for example, a miscommunication may lead to communication breakdown; participant realisation, active error resolution; or may go completely unnoticed by both speaker and hearer. Often, in the case of the final example, many researchers doubt that miscommunication has occurred at all. Certainly for the purposes of understanding how and why miscommunications arise, these situations are difficult to determine. After all, in order to analyses an instance of miscommunication you first need to be able to observe the miscommunication.

People misunderstand each other's words, silences, gestures, or attitudes all the time. The fact that some participants in a conversation realise the communicative problem straight away, while others may remain unaware of it for a long time, and sometimes never know that it ever occurred suggests that misunderstandings do not develop in the same way, but that they can follow different courses of development, and have different outcomes, effects and consequences each time (Tzanne, 1999). These consequences may be trivial or more serious. For example, the Columbia space shuttle disaster may have been caused by miscommunication between engineers. As one group suggested, "Let's wait until the analysis is complete to see whether we need photos," another group interpreted this to mean, "There will be no photos" (Associated Press, 2003).

Communication and miscommunication in mundane conversation has been explored from a variety of theoretical perspectives, with many principles of communication being developed to explain the reasons why speakers may fail to communicate their intended message or why hearers may fail to accurately comprehend the intentionality of a speaker's utterance. Although these explorations often attempt to account for the occurrence of miscommunication through a description of the distinguishing features of the interlocutors, such as gender or race, miscommunication may also be explained as a result of an interaction between the people involved in the

communication and the situational perspectives that are relevant to language production and comprehension. Therefore, an accurate understanding of the context of the communication as well as the participants must play a part in explaining miscommunication.

The effort expanded may be justified by the severity of some instances of miscommunication. The consequences of miscommunication may be especially dire in institutional forms of communication. In the context of the courtroom, an inability to communicate effectively may result in a harsher penalty. In the context of the doctor's examination room an inability to communicate effectively may result in a failed diagnosis. In the context of the BNI, an inability to communicate effectively may result in a failure to perform persuasive, ingratiating, justificatory, or convincing behaviour and so maintain a more positive public image. In many instances this relates to the success or failure of an individual's career.

The question that I will be examining is whether the difference between the origin, progress, and resolution of miscommunication relate, and to what extent, to the context of the BNI interaction. Many who are interviewed on a regular basis are familiar with how TV interviews proceed and may even have undertaken training to help facilitate successful interviews and the projection of a positive public identity. People who are experienced at being interviewed, such as politicians or company representatives, may adopt strategies that enable them to understand and adapt to the context of the interaction and in turn communicate effectively. However, others who are not experienced with the context, such as ordinary people who happen to experience extraordinary events, may experience problems that relate to the effectiveness of the way they communicate, which in turn may lead to miscommunication.

PREFACE

This thesis will begin with a short account of the specific aims of the research and the rationale and assumptions of the theoretic perspective from which the research problem will be addressed. Following this, the core of the introduction will provide background information and examples of previous research on the psychology of comprehension, a description of the various theories of communication, and prior research specifically concerning miscommunication between meaningfully distinct individuals and from the position of interlocutors interacting in a specific context. A brief description will then be provided of three key communicative concepts: context, inferences, and schemata, and how they relate to successful communication and communication research. Following this, a broad outline will be presented regarding the characteristics of institutional discourse and the features that define and distinguish institutional discourse from more mundane, informal forms of communication. Once the general framework of institutional discourse has been provided, a more specific description of the characteristics that define the broadcast news interview and distinguish it from informal communication and other forms of institutional talk will be offered. These will include: turn-taking procedures; institutional roles and their associated rights, privileges, obligations, and commitments; and the features of the institution that work toward the accomplishment of the specific goal for which the institution was created.

The BNI was chosen as the form of institutional discourse for an analysis of miscommunication in context because, although it is very rarely or never experienced directly by the majority of people in the general population, most people experience it indirectly very frequently. Because of its distant, unattainable nature, for the majority of people, the forces that influence, structure, and confine behaviour during the BNI may be difficult to understand. Yet the BNI is a substantial source of information regarding the most influential people in the community and the reasons behind decisions that may dramatically affect the lives of members of the community. For an individual taking part in a BNI with a controversial message to introduce, acceptance or rejection may depend on how well that idea is communicated and justified. An individual's public identity may also depend on how well the individual presents him or herself during the BNI. Success or failure, acceptance or rejection, will depend on an individual's ability to adapt to the

conventions and procedures that organise and regulate behaviour during the BNI. A further feature influencing my decision to examine institutional miscommunication in the context of the BNI was the ease of observation. In the case of the BNI, unobtrusive observation is especially easy as recording devices and participant awareness of external observation are intrinsic features of the context.

The method section will present a description of the interlocutors who participated in the examples of BNI discourse, and a description of the methods employed in the analysis and identification of the intent of each turn at talk. On the assumption that all talk attempts to perform a certain speech act, discourse analytical and pragmatics techniques were used to determine speaker meaning and speaker intent during the instances of miscommunication analysed. The general principle of discourse, "that we can understand the contributions of others only in terms of what we would mean by producing them" (Tannen, 1994, p. 169), was also employed in order to develop possible explanations for a speaker's utterances and subsequent listener interpretations of these utterances. Miscommunication was identified as a discrepancy between the force of an utterance and the subsequent behaviour of the addressee as identified by the force of the response. In order to conserve space, the theory and operation of discourse analytic techniques are not detailed in this thesis. It is assumed that a reader has sufficient background knowledge of the theory behind these analytical tools to allow an understanding of the origin and rationale behind any findings.

The analysis will provide an illustration of and justification for all judgements made regarding speaker meaning and hearer comprehension in the examples of miscommunication during BNI discourse. Each instance of miscommunication will be presented, followed by a detailed account of the force behind each utterance and any possible explanations for misinterpretation of the force of the utterance. Descriptions of the interviewer and interviewee(s) as far as they relate to the outcome of the analysis will be provided at the beginning of each example. In order to substantiate the findings of this research, the decisions made during the analysis regarding the force of each turn at talk were grounded in a range of prior research findings and established principles of communicative behaviour.

The discussion section will consist of concluding remarks in order to summarise the results of the analysis and describe how these findings may correspond with or

contradict previous research. Following the discussion section a further section will be presented in order to describe the implications of the findings of this research, how they may relate to communication during other forms of institutional discourse, and why they matter as far as how observers interact with BNIs and the people that participate in them. The next section will provide an account of the possible flaws in the research method, features of the BNI participants that may cause the results to be unreliable or inappropriate as far as generalising the results to other instances of BNI discourse. The limitations section will follow a natural progression through to a description of ideas regarding possible changes in methodology that could be applied so that these problems might be addressed in future research, and a elucidation of any areas of interest that may have been made manifest by the results of this research.

INTRODUCTION

Research history

"If we acknowledge that speaking occurs (a) under real-time processing constraints and (b) within the lexical and syntactic confines of a particular linguistic code, we must doubt that there are such entities as pure, unsullied, and perfect semantic representations" (Coupland, Wienmann, & Giles, 1991, p. 5). From a variety of foundational perspectives and theories of communication, the nature of communication and the origins of miscommunication have been explored by a number of researchers with this scepticism regarding the purity of communication in mind.

Two of the main vantage points from which to examine the imperfections of conversation are (a) through characteristics of the interlocutors and (b) through characteristics of the situation, otherwise known as context. For example, many studies that use characteristics of the participants as a base for analysis have been concerned with the creation of misunderstandings as they relate to cross-cultural mis/communication (For example, Crago, Eriks-Brophy, Pesco, & McAlpine, 1997; Li, 1999; Jenkins, 2000). As well as focussing on communication between people from different ethnic backgrounds, but also in terms of communication between people from different sub-cultural backgrounds within the same society. The cultural difference perspective has even been applied to people from different age groups, and gender (For example, Mulac, Erlandson, Farrar, Hallett, Molloy, & Prescott, 1998; Tannen, 1994). These approaches take the theory that "any devices can be successful when interlocutors share expectations about their meaning and use, and any devices can cause trouble when such expectations are not shared" (Tannen, 1984, p. 40). The shared understanding of meaning and use in this case refers to an understanding of communicative custom as a function of the cultural background of the individual participants.

From an alternative perspective, however, researchers have questioned whether one's stable personal identity is the only identity an interlocutor can be found to assume in an encounter, and thus whether this identity is always relevant to the interpretation of the interlocutor's goals in all kinds of encounters in which he or she may take part (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Schiffrin, 1994; Thomas, 1995). With this proposition in mind,

theories of communication that utilize characteristics of the environment in which the conversation occurred have been proposed to help explain the occurrence of miscommunication. The context of interaction is now viewed as a major factor influencing communication. In particular, institutional talk, or conversation that takes place within a more strictly defined and controlled environment such as the broadcast news interview, the courtroom, or the doctor's office, has been the focus of attention.

Pragmatic theories

A variety of theories of communication have been enacted to help explain the fundamental rationale behind communication and instances of communication failure. These include Austin's Speech Act theory (Austin, 1962), which describes utterance meaning in terms of pragmatics, or the purpose of the speech act on three progressive levels; *locutionary force*: the actual meaning of the words; *illocutionary force*: the meaning of the words in the context of the situation; and *perlocutionary force*: the effect of the words on the listener's behaviour. Searle's conditions for speech acts (Searle, 1969) attempts to refine Austin's Speech Act Theory by providing preparatory, sincerity, and essential conditions which are required for the proper performance of a variety of speech acts. For example, the rules for the act of promising with the *propositional act:* Speaker (S) predicates a future act (A) of speaker (S), requires the *preparatory condition:* S believes that doing A is in hearer's (H's) bests interest and that S can do A, the *sincerity condition:* S intends to do A, and the *essential condition:* S undertakes an obligation to do A. In order for the act of promising to be properly carried out, these rules must have been obtained.

Goffman's theory of situated roles (Goffman, 1974), which describes communication in terms of the identity of the communicators and the concepts that may be relevant to each person in their particular role, has also been of benefit in the examination of miscommunication. A person's communicative behaviour often reflects that person's communicative goal, and the communicative goal is often directly related to the role that an interlocutor is in at the time of speech (or comprehension). This theory is especially important in the case of institutional talk, as a primary definition of institutional speech is that interlocutors are provided with specific roles prior to commencement of the conversation, for example, doctor- patient and

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interviewer-interviewee (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

Grice's theory of Conversational Maxims (Grice, 1975), which describes four maxims of utterance design, which, if observed, are advantageous to successful communication, may also be used to help explain miscommunication.

Grice's Conversational Maxims (1975):

Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required, but not more so, for the current purpose of the exchange.

Maxim of Quality: Do not say anything you believe to be false or for which you lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relation: Say only what is relevant for the current purposes of the conversation.

Maxim of Manner: Be brief, but avoid ambiguity and obscurity of expression.

The failure of participants to comply with a maxim as far as it is relevant to the context of the conversation, and the degree to which the circumstance influences the importance of each maxim in the context of the conversation may inhibit successful communication. These conversational maxims are not meant to describe the way things actually happen in the real word but as outlining the ideal conditions of effective meaning production and communication (Cosenza, 2001). In natural discourse these maxims may often be intentionally flouted in order to create certain effects, such as sarcasm or irony. Although flouted in daily life, these maxims are still valuable interpretive tools, as the listener must determine what illocutionary purpose an obvious violation of the maxim serves.

The role of context in an explanation of conversation has also been encouraged by a number of authors. Following a review of the strategic use of words and sentences, Guerin (2003) asserts that in categorising speech according to whether speakers are trying to get the listener to do something, get the listener to say something, keep the listener's attention, or have the listener like them more, a description of the context needs to provide the analytical foundation. More specifically in terms of institutional communication, Sbis (2002) has claimed that even objective context can be negotiated, constructed, and changed, insofar as goals may be negotiated or shifted (even non-verbally) and conventional or institutional states of affairs such as attributions of

rights, obligations, entitlements, and commitments depend on the agreement of the relevant social participants.

Psychological processes

A variety of cognitive theories relating to the production and interpretation of language may help in providing an accurate account of communication and communication failure. These theories relate to such processes as the production of inferences, the effect of prior assumptions, interpretation as a function of interpersonal perspective, and the result of situational context on moderating utterance interpretation and production.

For example, Graumann & Sommer (1988) found that a reader's perspective influences both text comprehension and text production. From this finding it may be possible to gain awareness of the social character of cognition and language. In an instance of communication, an interpretation of speaker meaning will therefore require an understanding of the possible orientation of each participant. Successful communication may also require either mutual perspective or an appreciation for a fellow interlocutors perspective. In instances of communication between people from acutely different backgrounds, where perspectives may vary, fluent discourse may be more difficult to achieve. Interlocutors may encounter a larger number of misunderstandings or, with the realisation of disparate orientations; participants may be burdened by the need to consider alternative interpretations of language based on alternative perspectives. It may be that taking another's perspective in the interpretation or production of an utterance may be a natural part of communication. Hilton (1995) argues that the processes of inference, reasoning, and understanding are systematically shaped by interpersonal assumptions about the source of the utterance. Because a person's perspective usually depends on their category membership, an interlocutor's lack of appreciation for another's perspective may be the result of a misjudgement regarding the category membership of a fellow interlocutor.

The effect of context of the psychological processes of inferences in comprehension or message production may relate to the existence of schemas. For example, Alba, Alexander, Hasher, & Caniglia (1981) found that the presence of a context-inducing title prior to message input increased comprehension and recall in text. Likewise, Tanenhaus, Spivey-Knowlton, Eberhard, & Sedivy (1995) found that visual

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context influenced spoken word recognition and mediated syntactic processing even during the earliest moments of language processing. These finding regarding the effect of situational context on utterance interpretation and production point to the impact of schemata on the regulation of communication. As words, people, environments, etc. activate certain schematic plans, communicators may align their interpretative devices to these plans in order to produce interpretations that conform to the schema and are therefore more likely to conform to the intended force of the message.

Support for the effect of context on interpretation of language is provided by Barsalou (1982) who found that each concept contains both context independent properties (activated no matter what the context), and context dependent properties (activated only in certain contexts). The existence of these properties implies that people may produce alternate interpretations of the same speech depending on the context in which the speech occurs. Barsalou puts forth the idea that the impact of context on the accessibility of properties that may relate to certain interpretations should be considered in accounts of language.

An account of communication must also utilize an understanding of the efforts speakers and hearers go to in order to accurately produce and interpret conversation. Good message production relies on the right amount of disambiguation being applied to an utterance without excessive information and the violation of Grice's maxim of quantity. However, such productions may still be inadvertently biased; as Keysar & Henly (2002) suggest, when speakers monitor their own utterances, they do not act as unbiased observers, instead, they underestimate the ambiguity of their utterances and overestimate the extent to which their disambiguating cues make their intentions transparent. Likewise, the interpretation of ambiguous utterances relies on prior knowledge of the context, that is, prior knowledge of the topic, the speaker, as well as interpretive possibilities in the form of routine proceedings provided by the schemata. However, such interpretations of ambiguous statements may still be faulty, as Keysar, Barr, Balin, & Brauner (2000) suggests, addressees tend to rely on information from their own perspective to resolve ambiguity in conversation, which may be biased according to the specific individual.

Miscommunication research

A number of researchers, including Tzanne (1999), have argued that the occurrence of

misunderstandings in communication can only be accounted for satisfactorily when examined in relation to the dynamics of social interaction. According to Tzanne, miscommunication should be analysed in terms of a process of meaning making and negotiating during the course of an encounter. Conversation develops during an interaction by constructing its own interpretive context turn by turn. This successive structure of discourse means that if frames or roles shift during the course of an encounter the interlocutors' tendency to interpret discourse on the bases of directly preceding discourse may lead to a misunderstanding when the interlocutors fail to realise an intended shift of a co-participants' role or a change in the direction of the activity. Tzanne (1999) also demonstrated in her study of miscommunication during informal discourse, that an instance of miscommunication might result in different combinations of reparative turns at talk. Each turn is constrained by turns taken previously, and at the same time, plays a role in the development of the context on whose basis other turns will be taken.

Miscommunication has been explored in relation to the differences between interlocutors from distinct ethnic backgrounds; between people who differ in meaningful ways within the same ethnic background; and between interlocutors engaged in a variety of institutional talk, where behaviour is constrained or altered by the context of the communication. The findings of studies that examine characteristics of the participants show similarities with studies that examine miscommunication in institutional discourse. In general, these findings relate to the discrepancy in the norms of interpretation and the mutual understanding of the structure of communicative exchange.

Between interlocutors from distinct cultural backgrounds miscommunication may be caused by a difference in the mode of language acquisition during upbringing, which will lead to the development of different interpretive norms. These differences relate to an individual's idea of appropriate participation and the structure of speech exchange during a conversation. For example, Crago, *et al.* (1997), in their study of intercultural communication in classrooms, found that many instances of miscommunication are a function of cultural differences regarding language use. When the communicative competence required for successful participation in the classroom is in disagreement with the norms of interaction that where developed through previous home and educational experiences, miscommunication between teachers and students of distinct ethnic background can occur. Studies have explained these differences in interactional

practices during intercultural communication as reflections of particular societies' cultural values surrounding communication and socialisation (Crago *et al.* 1997).

Miscommunication between cultures may be comparable to miscommunication in institutional context as successful communication in institutional contexts is also a function of the prior knowledge or experience regarding the communicative norms associated with each institution. For example, in both the BNI and intercultural communication one of the areas of discourse where miscommunication may appear is the case of silence. According to Scheu-Lottgen & Hernandez-Campoy (1998), cultures differ with respect to what and when silence is considered as non-communication. Similarly, the conventions associated with the occurrence and use of silence during the BNI is particular to that specific institution and relate to the particular goal of the BNI (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

Scheu-Lottgen & Hernandez-Campoy (1998) also state that miscommunication in cross-cultural contact will emerge when two or more participants fail to agree on the initial system of hierarchy or misuse the linguistic markers of politeness in the negotiation of face. Miscommunication may be caused when participants from distinct cultural backgrounds differ in their expectations about aspects of the conversation such as pacing, intonation pausing, or timing, or, as a result of distinct cultural norms, when a listener fails to indicate that he or she is following the message. For example, feedback gestures by the listener, such as *ah-ha*, nods etc., may be used in order to show interest and allow continuation of the turn by the speaker, and particles such as *err* by the speaker may be used to guarantee the continuation of a turn in the turn-taking process (Scheu-Lottgen & Hernandez-Campoy (1998).

The notion that differences in interpretive norms are associated with differences in culture as a result of distinct styles of language acquisition has also been applied to miscommunication between men and women (Tannen, 1994). For example, Mulac *et al.* (1998) found that men and women of similar age and education interpret the use of backchannels such as *"ah-ha"* and *"yeah"* differently. Mulac *et al.* attribute this result to the theory that the difference in sociolinguistic cultures in which men and women grow up establishes a hard boundary between men and women linguistically. Similar studies of miscommunication between subcultures reveal issues regarding a discrepancy in the prior knowledge, opinions, beliefs, or perspectives, between interlocutors, or a bias in the

interpretive style related to the perceived difference between the interlocutors. For example, Coleman & DePaulo (1991) found that the attitudes and stereotypes which able-bodied people hold regarding the disabled lead to misjudgements being made about the appropriateness of language.

Analyses of intercultural miscommunication are also performed within the context of specific, controlled, and defined institutional situations. This context is assumed to influence the participants' behaviour as they orient their interpretive strategies towards the explicit rules and implicit customs of the institution. More closely associated with the effect of institutional context, miscommunication in such instances was found to relate to the power differences between participants, the style and form of discourse, and the discrepancy in prior knowledge and experience of the interlocutors. For example, Cass, Lowell, Christie, Snelling, Flack, Marrnganyin, & Brown (2002) found that the asymmetrical power relation between Aborigine patients and a health provider meant that the issues of who has control of the time, place, participants, purpose, topic structure, and language were out of the hands of the patients. Cass *et al.* also found problems concerning the lack of relationship between patient and provider, the impersonal and relatively offensive question - answer routine that is a part of the institution, and a shared understanding regarding the behaviour expected during the institutional occasion and the topic of discussion. As a shared understanding of many of these concepts does not exist, effective communication is seldom achieved. Interpretation in medical contexts may depend on the listener's frame of reference, either from a medical frame or life-world frame (Mishler, 1984). As will be discussed, these question-answer or turn taking routines are a defining aspect of institutional discourse, these issues may therefore, be especially significant to an analysis of miscommunication in the context of the BNI.

Context

Three levels of context

There are three basic levels of context which are recognised in all major works that attempt to specify context. These are: cultural, situational, and textual, listed from most fundamental to most specific. The contextual feature of the culture and the situation

initially exists extraneous to the text itself; however, upon the expression of an utterance the cultural and situational aspect of the context interact with the utterance in order to aid comprehension (Wilson, 1994). First of all, the most fundamental level of context, that of culture may be described as a large and complex knowledge system spread between the various members of a particular culture. In a given interaction the context of culture is utilized by participants by means of the knowledge system which the various participants bring to bear on the situation. The pertinent knowledge regarding the meaning of an utterance is triggered by aspects of the context of situation upon reception of an utterance. During an interaction, rather than operating as an isolated individual, a listener or speaker operates instead as a social agent, located in a network of social relations, in specific places in a social structure (Kress, 1985).

Fairclough (1989) argues that the 'context of culture', allows for the making and interpreting of meaning. He describes the linguistic process as essentially active. Before a listener can arrive at an interpretation he or she must go through an active process of matching features of the utterance with representations stored in the long-term memory as schematic instructions. These representations may be describes as prototypes for a extremely diverse collection of things, people, and situations. For a particular situation these representations suggest to the interpreter the expected sequence of events in a particular situation type (Fairclough, 1989).

Context as opposed to personal characteristics as an interpretive strategy

Reasoning and judgement may, to a certain extent, depend on the level of an individual's personal capacity with regard to primary mental processes such as attention and memory. However, an emphasis on these personal characteristics may lead to the neglect of other higher-level environmental or situation specific characteristics on regulating processes of reasoning and judgement during language production and interpretation (Hilton, 1995).

The problem with explanations of conversational behaviour based entirely on personal variables such as memory capacity and attention factors, is that; by attributing justification for a pattern of behaviour to a participant's personal characteristics rather than the way that participant's behaviour may be influenced or constrained by the contextual characteristic of the situation, the analyst will expose the explanation of conversational behaviour to the fundamental attribution error (Hilton, 1995). A detailed

description of the social context of an interaction may be necessary to reduce the likelihood of succumbing to this error in the interpretation of communicative behaviour. For any conversation, the most accurate method of analysis may be to gather as much of the features of the context and the participants as possible and begin analysis by looking at what is done with the words (Guerin, 2003). Such a description may aid in determining how a participant comprehends an utterance and in turn explain the logic behind otherwise seemingly illogical inferences that are draw during the course of an encounter.

Definition

Because context is such an abstract concept, a definitive and agreeable definition and description of the term as it stands alone is difficult. Furthermore, constructing a description of a particular context from an observed interaction for the purpose of analysis is equally difficult. Essentially, the context of an interaction functions to activate and draw a participant's attention to applicable knowledge and skills and to provide the participant with an appropriate situated scheme for whatever the activity may be (Blimes, 1991). Context must therefore, in some sense be "available" to participants in these activities, then and there as utterances are being constructed and interpreted (Blimes, 1991).

For an utterance to be accepted as a relevant part of a conversation, a speaker must choose lexical and syntactic forms that accurately represent the intended propositional content of the utterance as well as match the specific contextual demands of the situation (Roth, 1998). This means that the participants in a conversation perpetuate the contextual aspects of the conversation as each utterance displays an understanding of the meaning and direction of any proceeding utterances and how they relate to the contextual character of the situation (Wilson, 1991). Unless there is good reason to assume otherwise, this context renewing character of conversation specifies that the context already established by the preceding utterances should remain the prevalent scheme of utterance interpretation and production (Wilson, 1991). Because of the context conforming nature of conversation, any analysis of an instance of miscommunication must utilize a detailed description of the context of the interaction as an essential analytical resource in order to arrive at an accurate explanation for the miscommunication. However, an explanation of miscommunication may require more than merely a detailed

description of the observed situation.

Context aids interpretation

An accurate rendering of the context of a conversation is an important prerequisite to a thorough interpretation of speaker meaning. An understanding of the situational context can help with understanding speaker intentions and, in turn, the interpretation or misinterpretation of those intentions (Thomas, 1995). The first level of speaker meaning obtained prior to an appreciation of context is that of *abstract meaning*; abstract meaning is concerned with what a word, phrase, sentence, etc. will mean when considered before the situation surrounding the utterance is understood. The abstract meaning of an utterance is also known as its *locutionary force*, that is, the actual words uttered (Austin, 1962).

Once abstract meaning has been realised we move on to *contextual meaning*; that is, the meaning of the word, or utterance in the particular situation in which it is used, also known as the utterance's *illocutionary force* (Austin, 1962). This level of speaker meaning has greater communicative explanatory power in terms of understanding how communicators construct their utterances and interpret their co-communicator's utterance (Thomas, 1995).

Finally, the third abstraction of speaker meaning is the utterance's practical accomplishment, or the actions that the utterance produced in the listener. This level of speaker meaning is known as the *perlocutionary force* (Austin, 1962). For example, the utterance "Were you born in a tent?" has the locutionary force of a question regarding the location of the addressee's birth. However, when spoken to a person who had recently exited or entered a room without closing the door the utterance has a different meaning, that is, the illocutionary force of a command to close the door. The perlocutionary force may be the action of the addressee closing the door, or, if misinterpreted, the addressee informing the speaker of his place of birth, "No I was born in a garage".

To start of with, knowledge of context can help with constructing an understanding of an interaction on the most basic level, for example, *deictic expressions*. These are expressions such as the reference deictic 'this' and 'that' and the place deictic, 'here' 'there' which derive part of their meaning from their context of utterance but do not mean very much in isolation. It is only when the listener knows where the speaker is

standing or what the speaker is indicating that they become truly meaningful (Thomas, 1995).

As well as deictic expressions, the activation of particular properties of each concept may depend on certain contextual features. Context-independent properties are those properties of a concept that are activated by the word for the concept on all occasions independent of context. Context-dependent properties are rarely if ever activated by the word for a concept and are only activated by the relevant context in which the word appears (Barsalou, 1982). A detailed understanding of the context of a conversation may help to shed light on why certain concepts are activated by certain words mentioned during the course of a conversation.

<u>Applying relevant context:</u>

In order to compose an accurate rendering of an instance of miscommunication, the analysis of the conversation in which the miscommunication occurred must be made not just in relation to the obvious or assumed contextual features of the conversation, but rather to those contextual features that are meaningful to the participants involved in the conversation (Schegloff, 1992). One difficulty with this method is that different individuals may use different features of the context in order to interpret the same utterance. Even if communicators do use the same contextual features, the relative amount of significance given to each feature may also vary between participants and, consequently, lead to varying interpretations of the same utterance (Coupland *et al*, 1991).

A description of the context will take an understanding of miscommunication further if the total conversation preceding the miscommunication is taken into account. Participants exhibit a strong tendency to interpret an utterance by relying on discourse elements that were produced directly before the trouble-source-turn as relevant interpretive context. By concentrating exclusively on the structure of the trouble-source-turn, an analyst may fail to realise the effect prior talk and emergent contextual features may have on the occurrence of miscommunication (Tzanne, 1999).

Related to the concept of context, understanding communication also involves understanding the social role that a participant in an interaction may utilize in the construction and interpretation of communication. In institutional discourse, such as the

BNI, the roles enacted by the participants are closely correlated with each participant's communicative behaviour. Goffman's theory of fames and roles (1974) may be employed in order to understand how the behaviour of a participant in a conversation may relate to the participant's negotiation and performance of certain roles in the situation, and how the same participant may continually change roles throughout the course of the same encounter. Goffman's theory also attributes the construction and interpretation of utterances to the perceived relevance of the contextual features of the situation rather than simply the components of the context.

Speakers must design their utterances so that they target a specific listener in a specific role. The same is true of listeners, as they must interpret an utterance as a product of a specific speaker in a specific role (Wilson, 1991). Therefore, participants in a conversation construct their utterances in part through their orientations to their relevant biographies and identities, their fellow interlocutor's relevant biographies and identities, as well as to their conception of the character and focus of the present situation and its connections to prior and prospective future occasions. Context, therefore, shapes the character of an interaction and interaction, in turn, shapes the character of the context. This information is especially pertinent to an understanding of the forces that conspire to impede successful communication, as situational characteristics such as social roles and the physical surroundings in which a conversation takes place impact on a participant's comprehension as relevant and effectual variables (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

Inferences

An Important consideration in an examination of communication and its failings is the manner in which interlocutors govern their inference making processes. How do listeners get from literal meaning of an utterance to an understanding of its indirect meaning? Inferences made during the course of a conversation directly relate to the successful outcome of that conversation. These inferences that an interlocutor makes are based on prior knowledge as well as the content of the utterance. Therefore, for each participant to produce the same inference on exposure to a certain stimulus prior knowledge must be mutual and each participant must hold or be familiar with the same prior beliefs (Bach &

Harnish, 1979). Because inferences are often based on a general philosophy or world knowledge, they may vary between different classes or cultures (Ochs, 1991). Inferences are also based on the motivation or goal of the interpreter. In this case communication may be more likely to be successful in situations where both participants share an understanding of the purpose of the conversation and the goals, motives, and intentions of their fellow participants (Mortensen, 1997).

Inferences may be quick, sub-conscious processes used to connect a pair of propositions expressed by a pair of clauses with no repeated phrases, or alternatively, may be highly elaborative, such as when they are used to construct a detailed expansion of theories, intentions, consequences, and implications from the limited information given (Hodgetts & Habermann, 1997). Such inferences may not be required for a minimal, acceptable understanding, especially an understanding of an utterance produced in a thoroughly comprehensive conversational context. However, in vague or indeterminate situations elaborative inferences may contribute to coherence. The inference a speaker may expect to be made with the expression of a particular utterance may be systematically different form the inference made by the hearer. In general, speakers perceive their own utterances as more transparent than they actually are (Keysar & Henly, 2002).

When a participant's reaction does not specifically match the illocutionary force of the prior utterance, it may be the result of a discrepancy in the knowledge or prior beliefs on which the inference making processes were based (Fussell & Krauss, 1992). Therefore, an appreciation of the way inference-making processes govern comprehension may be necessary in an analysis of communication. Because inferences can be a function of both linguistic and non-linguistic contextual elements as well as prior knowledge and beliefs (Hodgetts & Habermann, 1997), this appreciation must take specific account of the contextual characteristic of the occasion.

Attributional inferences

Attribution processes refer to the ways in which we draw inferences concerning the causes of behaviour (Clark, 1985). In the case of the BNI, both participants and witnesses use attribution processes to infer the reason a particular individual chose to express thoughts or beliefs in a particular manner or why a particular individual reacted with

anger, resentment, or offence to certain statements or questions. Attribution processes may be described as dispositional, that is, causes of behaviour that are internal to the actor; or situational, causes of behaviour that are external to the actor. For example, if a garbage collector failed to collect a certain bag of garbage an observer might infer that the garbage collector was careless (dispositional) or that the bag was not in an obvious enough position (situational).

Three types of information that are important for determining the causes of actions: Distinctiveness, whether the action occurs when the entity is present versus absent; consistency, the degree to which the action occurs over time and in different situations; and consensus, the degree to which the action is performed towards the entity by others. Differences in the levels of these three characteristics may help an interpreter to judge if the cause of the action was dispositional or situational. For example, if an action has high distinctiveness, high consistency, and high consensus, the interpreter may be more likely to blame the situation for the occurrence of the action. If the action has lo distinctiveness, high consistency, and low consensus, an interpreter may be more likely to blame dispositional factors for the occurrence of the action. Individuals use multiple explanations, both dispositional and situational in explaining behaviour (Clark, 1985).

Schemata

Closely tied to processes of inference production is the notion of schemata. Associated with every activity- including the BNI- is a set of inferential schemata. These schemata are tied to the structural properties of the situation and determine what will count as allowable contributions to the conversation (Levinson, 1992). Schemata are the knowledge structures permanently stored and activated at the occurrence of each concept. Schemata can be defined as a representation of the critical properties of a category, which automatically generate a plan or expectation that is used to selectively organise input, and thereby guide comprehension (Singer, 1990). Once activated by the recognition of certain words, behaviours, or environmental signals, the schema will begin to generate expectations, and focus attention on particular aspects of the occasion (Sperber & Wilson, 1986). When interlocutors have situational expectations, they may be more likely to make

more situational inferences than inferences concerning the disposition of fellow interlocutors as, in this case, making situational inferences is less effortful than making dispositional inferences (Lee & Hallahan, 2001).

Schemata may facilitate fluent or efficient communication in a variety of ways. People may use knowledge structures such as schemata to judge the boundaries of a person's category-related knowledge, in deciding what actions are warranted for a particular occasion, or in the task of drawing inferences regarding the conduct of fellow participants (Markus & Zajonc, 1985). However, schemata may also induce miscommunication as a result of an imbalance or discrepancy in what is mutually known or believed (Fussell & Krauss, 1992). Miscommunication may occur when members of different social groups with differing knowledge schemata concentrate their interpretations on different cues in the text (Graumann & Sommer, 1988).

Miscommunication may also be the product of an interlocutor's desire to minimise workload in processing, which often leads to a reliance on schematic interpretation strategies and the most probable (although perhaps unwarranted) inference outcomes (Hodgetts & Habermann, 1997). An appreciation of the role of schemata in institutional interaction is therefore vital for an understanding of miscommunication.

Institutional Communication

Every instance of communication takes place within a tangible context, the character of which is a function of the variables: when, where, why, who, and how of the conversation. In mundane conversation discourse participants have more freedom to negotiate the context and interpretive norms of their conversation (Connor-Linton, 1999). However, while the performance of everyday "mundane" conversation may occur under unpredictable, volatile, or otherwise indeterminate conditions, other instances of conversation may have a more-or-less pre-defined context. For example: the courtroom, the doctor's office, or, in this case, the BNI. Collectively, these forms of conversation are known as institutional talk.

Comparisons with informal discourse

Findings of conversation analytical research suggests that there are systematic and identifiable means by which participants in a conversation identify a particular conversation as an instance of institutional communication as opposed to an informal, more natural instance of communication (Atkinson, 1982). The most important of these may be for an interlocutor to locate, compare, and contrast the ways in which an institutional form of conversation may noticeably diverge from the intuitive model of everyday communication.

Institutional talk normally involves the participants in specific goal orientated roles, which correspond to their institutionally relevant identities. For example: doctor – patient; judge – lawyer – defendant; interviewer – interviewee; and so on (Drew & Heritage, 1992). The institutional role that each participant occupies places special constraints on what actions the participant may perform. In most institutional settings these constraints revolve around pre-arranged turn-taking conventions, designed to streamline the conversation so that it is more conducive to the achievement of the institutional goal (Drew & Heritage, 1992). These turn-taking conventions, which are often controlled by legal constraints established to regulate efficiency and fairness in accordance with the function of the institution, affect the structure and management of institutional talk in a variety of ways (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

Because of the comparatively prearranged nature of institutional talk, the variables that may define the context of a conversation that takes place in an institutional setting may at first appear obvious. However, like all communication, the performance of institutional talk, such as the BNI, requires realisation in the actual conduct of the participants, and not merely predefined institutional settings and declared objectives or pre-set participant roles (Schegloff, 1992). More specifically, the participants must still create context. A functional description of the context must therefore use aspects of the conversation that are relevant and motivational to the participants at the moment in the conversation that is currently under investigation. However, this may be easier said than done.

Although institutional talk may be more strictly defined and controlled than mundane conversation, the relative significance of the different conversational topics and the various professional or personal roles occupied by the participants may still vary

among each participant. That is, a participant involved in an institutional form of communication may inhabit a variety of social identities, whether they be specifically institutional (temporary), such as; doctor, lawyer, interviewer, etc. or more personal (stable), such as; father, husband, male, New Zealander, etc. The specific role enacted by a participant may not always be deducible from the category of institution in progress and will often relate to the relevance of that specific social identity or topic category at the moment of speech (Schegloff, 1991).

A further complicating feature is that each of these categories of institutional communication, the tasks and obligations associated with the different categories of institutional role, and the methods used to perform those tasks, are highly variable (Wilson, 1991). They may vary according to the culture in which they occur; they may vary over time; and they may also be intentionally altered, not just by those involved in the performance of the conversation but also by those involved in the management of the institution (Wilson, 1991). The context of an institutional interaction reflects these variations. In contrast the fundamental mechanisms of communication, the tools member of society use to construct their interaction, while sensitive to context (their specific enactment relates to the context of the interaction in which they occur) are also free of context and so are not products of the interaction in which they occur. They are not socially constructed in the same sense that context is socially constructed. Rather, these devices are universally available mechanisms used by communicative participants in the construction of the social context of their conversation (Wilson, 1991).

For an interaction to be considered institutional, the communicative behaviour of the participants themselves must be meaningfully oriented to the characteristics of the situation that differentiate and distinguish it from other more mundane forms of conversation. This means that in order to justify attributing any conversational inferences drawn during the course of the interaction to the contextual characteristics of the interaction, these contextual characteristics must be shown to be relevant to the participants' utterance production and comprehension schemes (Schegloff, 1991). In essence, the institutional context must be shown to somehow regulate the conversational behaviour of the participants involved.

The degree to which conversational participants regulate their behaviour in order to conform to a particular institutional framework will depend on the restrictive

potential of the institution. A variety of systematic differences between institutional and mundane conversation tend to appear as these restrictions take effect (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). These constraints on the availability of conversational options, which arise according to the institutional character of the situation, formally relate to the task at hand and influence institutional conversation in ways that the practices making up the essence of mundane conversation do not (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

Miscommunication in institutional discourse

The inherent features of institutional forms of conversation can have an effect on the success of communication. That is, the problems that originate in an institutional setting often relate to the differences between institutional talk and more mundane, everyday forms of communication. Compared to the phenomenon of everyday conversation, institutional settings such as the law courts, news interviews, doctor-patient interactions and so on, are relatively recent innovations that have undergone a great deal of change as society itself has changed. Meanwhile, the institution of mundane conversation is experienced prior to institutional interaction, both in the life of the individual participant, and in the life of society as a whole (Drew & Heritage, 1992). In mundane communication speakers must begin the negotiation of the context by interpreting other speakers' utterances egocentrically, through the interpretational heuristic of their own construction of the context (Connor-Linton, 1999). In contrast, in institutional settings such as the BNI, speakers are assigned an interpretational heuristic to a greater extent.

Participants in an institutional setting who are less conversant with the context in question may be more susceptible to miscommunication than they would if they were participating in an ordinary conversation. For these participants, the elements of institutional interaction, which are experienced as unfamiliar, disagreeable, or discomforting are experienced as such in relation to an implicitly assumed background knowledge of the workings of ordinary conversation (Atkinson, 1982). Because of the universal availability of these fundamental mechanisms of interaction, and their habitual service as tools in the construction of everyday conversation, we develop throughout our lives an innate understanding of these rules and procedures as we expand our communicative competence. However, an encounter with a more novel institutional form of conversation, where the same fundamental rules do not necessarily apply, may cause

communicative problems. As each institutional setting possesses a meaningfully distinct character compared to ordinary conversation and other forms of institutional talk, a participant's level of communicative competence in a specific institutional setting will depend on the degree of experience the participant has had with the specialised and re-specified interactional functions of the institution in question (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

Turn-taking

Communication in institutional interactions such as BNIs has been shown to exhibit systematically distinctive forms of turn-taking systems which significantly structure many aspects of conduct in these settings (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). Because of their potential to modify the participants' opportunities for action, and also to recalibrate the interpretation of almost every aspect of the activities that they structure, these special turn-taking systems can be very important in studying institutional interaction (Drew & Heritage, 1992).

First, turn-taking processes are fundamental aspects of the organisation of interaction and have a pervasive effect on a wide variety of conversational processes, whether in mundane or institutional contexts (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). The characteristic turn-taking structure of an institutional conversation is enacted repeatedly over the course of the interaction, so that the participants organise and present their turns at talk during the conversation in a manner that is distinct from mundane conversation so as to conform to and realise the institutional character of the situation. The contextual relevance of an institutional setting to the participants' utterance comprehension and production is therefore confirmed in compliance with this turn-taking process (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). Participants in an institutional interaction contribute to the maintenance and perpetuation of the "identifying details" (Garfinkel, Lynch, & Livingston, 1981) of institutional activities as they enact the specialised and re-specified interactional functions of the institution.

The Broadcast News Interview

The fundamental role of the BNI- the purpose for which it was created- is the communication of information from public figures, politicians, government officials, spokespeople, experts, or people of public interest, for the benefit of the viewing audience (Heritage, 1985). The structure of a BNI, the physical setting, procedures, and conventions, are therefore geared towards satisfying this objective. This organised structure is what identifies the news interview as an example of institutional talk.

Role specific conventions

The conventions that constitute the BNI regulate participant behaviour in a variety of ways. For example, within the institution of the BNI there are conventions that dictate the form and function of a speaker's utterance (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). These conventions are associated with the specific institutional role that the speaker occupies within the conversation and are pre-established prior to the commencement of the interview. In general, speakers who act as interviewers, may not properly engage in actions other than asking questions, while speakers who act as interviewees may not properly engage in actions other than answering the interviewer' questions. While the distinction between a question or statement and an answer or evasion may not always be obvious (Clayman, 2001), the main goal behind this organisation is that those who take part as interviewers should refrain from making overt declarative statements or value judgements, while those who take part as interviewees should refrain from initiating actions, such as unsolicited comments on prior talk, opening or closing the interview, or asking questions to which the interviewer or other interviewees would be obliged to respond (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

Other role specific conventions of the BNI related to turn-taking procedures and the question-answer format regulate the expression of disagreement among interviewees. For example, when interviewees wish to make direct comments or express disagreement with a co-interviewee's previous remark, interviewees are normally careful to maintain the interviewer, rather than the co-interviewee, as the direct addressee or their statements (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). This procedure of third-person reference to a co-interviewee is in direct contrast with disagreements in mundane conversation, and is

the principal means by which an interviewee can depart from the typical turn-taking procedures of the BNI, yet still maintain the institutional functionality and character of an interviewee (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

Because interviewee disagreements, in accordance with the institutional conventions of the BNI, are directed towards a third party, these disagreements may be produced in a more blatantly conflicting and less refined manner (Greatbatch, 1992). In mundane conversation such explicit statements of conflict may imply rudeness on the part of the speaker or, understandably, cause offence. However, in the context of the BNI, by virtue of being addressed to a third party, disagreements which are produced as answers to an interviewer's questions are automatically mitigated, in that mediated disagreements are intrinsically weaker than unmitigated ones (Greatbatch, 1992).

Correspondingly, while interviewees may deviate from their role as "answerers" when they wish to disagree with a co-interviewee, they nonetheless sustain a core aspect of their institutionalised identity, and in doing so limit the extent to which their actions undermine both the status of the interaction as a news interview and the role of the interviewer within it (Greatbatch, 1992). By complying with these pre-established conventions, the participants in a BNI – interviewer and interviewee – collaboratively create and perpetuate a definition of their joint circumstances as "an interview" rather than "a discussion" across their various questions and answers – whether hostile or affable (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

Viewer audience involvement

The BNI, while comprised of an interviewer and at least one interviewee as the most obvious participants, has, because of its core function, the viewing audience as a third party and its primary beneficiary. The interviewer must therefore use various strategies in his or her utterance design that help to sustain the viewing audience as the principal addressee. One of the most important strategies used by interviewers in this task is to withhold response tokens such as "continuers" or "acknowledgement tokens" (*"ah huh"*, *"really"*, *"did you?"*) (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991).

In everyday conversation the performance of such response tokens signal the listeners decision to pass on the opportunity to speak, this identifies the listener as the primary addressee of the talk, and, in principle, as having the right to respond to the talk

at those points in virtue of the turn-taking procedures for ordinary conversation (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). However, by withholding such response tokens and declining the role of report recipient, the interviewer rejects the opportunity to identify himself or herself as the primary recipient of the utterance and instead passes this benefit on to the viewing audience. The absence of these response tokens may not appear to be manifestly problematic to successful communication. However, because their occurrence in mundane conversation is often taken for granted, their absence may lead to uncertainty and possible communication problems when inexperienced interviewees are involved.

Participant identity

Because of the largely predefined institutional nature of the BNI, the general topic of conversation, or at least the set of possible topics, is essentially predetermined. While the interviewer directs the course of the conversation, the information and opinions solicited are determined by the particular identity of the interviewee (Roth, 2002). However, each interviewee may occupy a variety of roles and identities in their daily lives, a number of which may be socially relevant and therefore applicable to the conversation. Therefore, although the selection of sources for BNIs is typically thought of as being the result of a recruitment process extraneous to the actual interview, another form of interviewee selection operates within the boundaries of the conversation itself, even after a particular interviewee has been chosen. This secondary selection process occurs as the interviewer constructs questions to target the various aspects of the interviewee's identity (Roth, 2002).

Interviewers select certain aspects of an interviewee's persona for conversation when they describe the interviewee during the interview. By bringing an aspect of the interviewee's identity into prominence during the process of selective description and not attending to others, interviewers establish that specific identity as relevant to the questions that will follow. Interviewers' descriptions of interviewees are a function of the aspects of the described interviewee's persona and the activity context of the interview. Through the design of their turns at talk, interviewers display their understanding of who the interviewee is with regard to the reason he or she is being interviewed, and what the interviewee knows, or should be expected to know based on the interviewee's identity, with regards to what the viewing audience might be interested to

learn from the interviewee (Roth, 2002).

The fact that interviewees are more often than not already aware of the biographical information expressed by the interviewer in their descriptions of the interviewees may appear to indicate that the interviewee descriptions are made for the benefit of the viewing audience, as background information (Roth, 1998). Although it is certainly the case that this biographical data does serve to inform audiences' understandings of the interviewee, these descriptions also have a more important function. Because one way that interviewees respond to such descriptions of themselves is to embrace the descriptions as resources for constructing their responses, the interviewer's descriptions of the interviewees are consequential for news interviews subsequent trajectories. Interviewees therefore orient to how these descriptions facilitate or restrict their possibilities for responding (Roth, 1998). This phenomenon is important in an analysis of speaker meaning as in order to capture the complex and dynamic relationship between the institutional character of the BNI and the participants' conduct, analysis must attend to the participants' orientations of who they are, for one another, on these occasions.

Objectivity

A primary tenet of the BNI is that interviewers are supposed to remain objective in their work. This means, among other things, that they should not allow their personal opinions to enter into the interviewing process and should not overtly affiliate with or disaffiliate from those expressed by interviewees (Clayman, 1992). By confining themselves to asking questions, interviewers avoid the overt expression of opinion; while by confining themselves to responding to the interviewer's questions, interviewees avoid challenging the presuppositions or implications of the questions and therefore promoting a possibly subjective elaboration. Therefore, the question – answer routine, as well as fulfilling the purpose of an information exchange system from interviewee to audience, satisfies the requirement of impartiality which, in most countries, including New Zealand, is a legal requirement that broadcast journalists are obliged to maintain (Greatbatch, 1992). This requirement is laid down in the charters, licenses and broadcasting acts of numerous governments and the various national and international media organisations, e.g. the New Zealand Broadcasting Act, 1989 (Broadcasting Standards Authority, 2001).

The form of turn-type pre-allocation that limits interviewers to asking questions does not mean that interviewers cannot produce statement formatted utterances, such as assertions or assessments, but when they do, they are usually made covertly by being embedded within question turns and are very rarely expressed without mitigating features such as hedges or a shift in footing (Clayman 1992).

Interviewers shift footings during more subjective utterances as a way of placing some degree of distance between themselves and their more overtly opinionated remarks. Evidence that interviewers shift footing during the production of more opinionated remarks as a way of displaying neutrality may be observed in the interviewer's placement and use of such mitigating features. For example, interviewer footing shifts tend to be restricted to relatively controversial opinion statements, footing shifts are renewed during specific controversial words, and interviewers use footing shifts to avoid affiliating with or disaffiliating from the statements they report (Clayman, 1992). An understanding of the strategies that interviewers use in order to remain neutral is important in an analysis of speaker meaning in the BNI as these strategies effect the production of language and how that language should be interpreted.