

## HYBRID DISCOURSE AND THE EMERGENCE OF CONTEXT IN BBC'S QUESTION TIME

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### Abstract

This paper explores how hybrid discourse, instantiated in talk and interaction, can be shaped not only by a situational context (TV panel show) and cultural context (TV's increasing democratisation of laity), but also by human volition in pursuit of recognizable and allowable goals. It does this by examining the emergence of context in light of a non-mainstream hybrid and reflexive activity. Specifically, it examines a non-normative interview format that has arisen in contemporary broadcasting through the analysis of three transcribed segments which were taken from two key episodes of the BBC's flagship political program: *Question Time*. Using a range of analytical concepts from symbolic interactionism, pragmatics, and conversational analysis, such as frames and footings, activity types, discourse types, and turn-taking, the analysis shows how institutional (political) and non-institutional (normative) practices can come together in the pursuit of individual goals and contemporary media's goal for increasingly partisan journalism and confrontation. Overall, the paper highlights the importance of a multidimensional approach to context, whereby meaning both emerges from and is constitutive of the forms and functions of an activity's discourse, whilst further highlighting the role of hybridity in contemporary discourse.

### Keywords

activity types, confrontation, context, hybrid political discourse, reflexivity

### 1 Introduction

In October 2009, the BBC came under heavy fire for its decision to invite a controversial party leader on to its weekly flagship political program, *Question Time*. The man in question was Nick Griffin, who was the leader of the British National Party (BNP), and controversy arose due his (and his party's) far right views and neo-fascist mandates. The BBC justified their invitation on the basis that the BNP was no longer a minority party, and on October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009, Nick Griffin appeared live on *Question Time* at BBC Television Centre in London.

Many believe that this episode explicitly established the show's (implicit) fascination with controversy, reflecting a growing trend in Western media for less nuance and impartiality and more polarised debates leading to conflict. Moreover, 2009 was a key year for the show as it consistently made headlines and became the BBC's most watched show, with Nick Griffin's appearance giving the show its highest-ever ratings in its 40-year history as eight million people tuned in –

50 per cent of the UK audience share that night (Martinson 2019). In the same year there were a number of other pivotal moments for the show, not least ‘the cathartic humiliation’ of politicians in Grimsby, where they “came face to face with the many-headed monster of public outrage” (Adams 2009). It was during this period that *Question Time* (henceforth QT) effectively established itself in the UK as “arguably the most challenging arena for a professional politician” (Penlington 2009). Such a move both signalled and mirrored a clear societal shift toward greater incivility (McKeown & Ladegaard 2020).

Shows such as QT, where traditional roles and interactional orders can be challenged, subverted, or re-established, make particularly rich sites for investigating the forms and functions of innovation, deviation, and conformity in discourse. Specifically, studying the interactions of those involved in such shows can illuminate the hybridity of the activity and discourse, and how its context is both constitutive of, and emergent from, the show’s underlying constraints, forms of talk used, and its goals and those of its participants. The hybridity of such a show can be seen as “something that questions conventional understanding and the accepted order” (Chadwick 2013: 8), and as a hybrid that negates reductionist confluences such as ‘old and new’ or ‘citizen and journalist’.

Of note in this respect is Hutchby’s (2017) view of political interviews in contemporary broadcast media. Hutchby believes that this communicative event needs to be seen in a more variegated way: as an interview that does not necessarily involve a politician, “but one which involves any matter of political concern” (ibid.: 103). Hutchby outlines four types of political interviews in terms of how they approach questions and answers, opinions and arguments, advocacy, agency, and neutrality. Of particular relevance is the hybrid political interview (HPI). This format retains some of the structure of a conventional political interview (CPI) – namely, *question–answer–next question* (no third-turn acknowledgement of interviewee’s answer), and *question–answer–formulation* (third-turn challenges or rewording of interviewee’s answer) – yet participants have more leniency to use forms associated with adversarial political interviews (API), such as framing questions or answers as accusations or insults, or showing incredulity at others’ contributions. Moreover, Hutchby (2017) posits that the “norms of journalistic neutralism that are central to the CPI and, to some extent, the API can be more or less dispensed with in the HPI” (ibid.: 105). Furthermore, the non-verbal performance of interactants in HPIs often takes the form of “belligerent body language, animated gesticulation and a range of embodied emotional expressions” (Rivers & Ross 2018: 60). These turn-taking structures and interactional features accord with the contextual constraints/affordances of QT, whose (implicit) goal is to court controversy by bringing politicians to

account through citizen interviewers (audience members) and polarized guests to enact “confrontainment” (Hutchby 2017).

Therefore, in conceptualizing QT as form of HPI, this study answers Hutchby’s (2017) call “to incorporate non-mainstream hybrid and reflexive forms in which challenges to the normative interview format and the premises of journalistic neutrality are being mounted in contemporary broadcasting” (ibid.: 103). However, as Hutchby’s view is based primarily on conversation analysis, the role of context in his paper is somewhat underdeveloped (as it is in Rivers & Ross 2018). Therefore, the current paper will take a more encompassing view of context as dynamic and co-constructed in light of QT being operationalised as an Activity Type (Levinson 1992), as well as focusing on the hybridity of the discourse contained within it.

## **2 Theoretical underpinning: Context and contextualisation**

### **2.1 Context-dependency**

The term context comes from the Latin ‘contextus’, and means connection or coherence. It relates to all the dimensions of a situation that are required to gain an understanding of talk/text. Broadly speaking, people intuitively assign contextual ‘sense’ and contextual ‘reference’ to words to gain understanding (Thomas 1995); assigning sense involves selecting the most appropriate meaning for a word/utterance, whereas assigning reference involves linking a word/utterance to its referent/indexical.

In this relational view of context, the interpretation of talk/text encompasses three dimensions (Auer 2009): (a) Indexed features, such as concrete/abstract elements; (b) indexical–deictic language; and (c) relationship between (a) and (b). However, problems arise with this relational view of context when considering the interpretation of talk/text that falls outside (a) and (b). For instance, as Fillmore et al. (1988) demonstrate, background knowledge can constrain syntactic relations such as “I wouldn’t X, let alone Y”, where the relationship between ‘X’ and ‘Y’ exists because of shared contextual knowledge. Moreover, culturally-shared knowledge can shape constraints at the lexical level, particularly vis-à-vis membership categorisation. For example, when referring to an incumbent of the category ‘family’ (husband, wife, etc.), categorisations may be markedly different in cultures where more than one wife is allowed; similarly, category-bound activities may also invoke associative inferences, such as equating male hairstylists with homosexuality (Schegloff 2007). Ultimately, the interpretation of talk/text cannot always be resolved via sense and reference alone: sometimes further information is needed, which often involves drawing

upon an inferential source from outside the focal event (e.g. Grice's Maxims (1975)).

## 2.2 Typology of context

Therefore, in order to conceptualise a wider concept of context that incorporates both relational and peripheral indices, some scholars delineate aspects of interpretation in terms of referential frames. Goodwin and Duranti (1992), for example, see context as emerging along four dimensions in a figure-ground relationship:

- Setting, which involves the physical and social framework within which encounters occur, e.g. physical movement can affect deixis; role-relationships can affect terms of address.
- Behavioural environment, which includes gesture, attentional resources, etc. which can be used interactively to modify an event's frame, signify coherence, and so on.
- Language as context, such as pronominal address and reference as powerful markers of relational frames (Coupland & Coupland 2000).
- Extra-situational context, such as shared background knowledge, whether general, cultural, or member derived can contribute to the emergence of context.

Furthermore, in Goodwin and Duranti's (1992) view of context, focal events act as figures, perceived by those involved as "well outlined, sharply defined, and well-articulated, [while contexts appear as the background, interpreted as] far more amorphous, problematic, and less stable" (ibid.: 12-13). Additionally, focal events can become detached from their point of origin and, when this happens, indexicals may detach from their original indexes. In such circumstances, participants then co-construct a new context in order to (re)interpret their newly modified interaction, i.e. focal events and indexicals are reunited in situ as participants contextualise, recontextualise, and decontextualise encounters. Thus, context is seen as process and product, local and global, micro and macro, making the figure-ground relationship more suited to usage-based paradigms of language (e.g. socio-pragmatics) where context is seen to emerge in, and through, interaction.

## 2.3 Interaction as a contextual resource

However, as Auer (2009) posits, demarcating contextual frames of reference may be somewhat of a heuristic endeavour, because almost anything "can become a 'context' for a linguistic 'focal event'" (ibid.: 95). Therefore, perhaps it is better to concentrate on how something becomes context, as context itself

has fuzzy boundaries. It is to this issue that I now turn: how can context be seen (in analytical terms) to emerge from interaction?

Within a conversational analytic (CA) approach, talk is seen as “the medium through which ... sociological and psychological characteristics manifest themselves” (Heritage 2009: 303). More specifically, CA sees context as emerging from the sequential patterning of talk, where social order is construed by temporal concatenations that arise as interactants orient toward mutual intelligibility and locally constituted goals/identities (Sacks et al. 1974). However, a fine-grained analysis of sequential structure alone can shift the focus away from indexicality and reflexivity, and onto the actor as “a mere exponent of sequential activities” (Atkinson 1988: 450), i.e. CA focuses on local inferencing, which by itself can eschew wider issues of unseen, implicit behaviour that may emerge in future interaction. Therefore, to operationalise a dynamic and dialogic view of context it appears necessary to draw upon additional analytical concepts.

When considering global inferencing (e.g. role organisation) it is useful to consider the work of Goffman (1974), in particular the notions of ‘frames’ and ‘footings’. Footings are “the alignment[s] we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance” (Goffman 1981: 128). By examining changes in these alignments an analyst can gain insights into how interactants define and redefine an interaction, i.e. how they frame an event both socially and relationally.

Similarly, Gumperz’ (1982) ‘contextualisation cues’ posit the link between context and talk/text as globally reflexive and flexible. For Gumperz, any form of sign needs to be contextually embedded in order to fulfil its meaning potential. Thus contextualisation cues function by drawing upon or indexing interpretive schemas via the use of verbal/non-verbal cues. These can include linguistic style, gesture, proxemics, and intonation. Such cues can be used to assist interactants’ framing of an event by increasing the inferential force of their utterance (Auer & Di Luzio 1992).

### 3 BBC’s *Question Time* as an activity type

#### 3.1 Activity types

Within sociolinguistics, one of the most widely adopted approaches to studying speech events is Hymes’ (1972) SPEAKING mnemonic, which provides a checklist of features (Situation, Participants, etc.) that can be used to analyse highly-ritualised, often formally-proscribed events. However, it takes a decidedly cultural and socially-constituted view of context, making it incompatible with an integrated, encompassing view of context.

One viewpoint that shares many of Hymes' conceptualisations, but views meaning as interactively managed, is Levinson's (1992) 'activity types'. As an analytical concept, it drew little attention when first published in 1979. However, following its reprint in 1992, and a theoretical shift in thinking that saw context reconceptualised as dynamic and co-constructed (see above discussion), a number of scholars adopted the approach for use in studies of talk-in-interaction (e.g. Sarangi 2000, Culpeper et al. 2008).

Levinson (1992) defines an activity type (AT) as a "fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with constraints on participants, setting, and so on, but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions" (ibid.: 69). An AT, then, is a categorisation of a situation based upon the perspective of prototype theory, which posits that concepts should not be defined by necessary or sufficient features, but rather by reference to typical instances, (e.g. a robin is a more prototypical bird than an ostrich). In line with this thinking, Levinson gives a number of illustrations, including that of a prototypical lesson: the teacher controls turn allocation and topic; when a student wishes to contribute, they raise their hand; the expectation being that if the student is selected then they can, and will, provide a relevant answer. Thus, an AT is an analytical perspective on how semiosis is inherently entangled within social activities. Essentially, specific activities constrain contributions (e.g. turn-taking) whilst possessing their own inferential schemata (how contributions are interpreted). As Culpeper et al. (2008) state "particular conversational contributions ... stand in particular pragmatic relationships to each other and have become a relatively conventionalised whole" (ibid.: 299).

These concepts are somewhat compatible with Mey's (2001) view of 'situated pragmatic acts', yet in Mey's view there is perhaps more room for human volition as these acts "both rely on, and actively create, the situation in which they are realized" (ibid.: 219). Pragmatic acts (or *practs*) are composed of smaller semogenic acts such as speech acts and 'extra-linguistic acts', such as body positioning, intonation, laughter and other contextualization cues. When clustered together, *practs*, and the context they are situated in, can realise *pragmemes*<sup>1</sup>, such as 'accommodating' or mourning the dead at funerals (Parvaresh & Capone 2017), 'selling' at the marketplace (Capone 2018), 'insult' (Allan 2016), and so on. In terms of political interviews, and HPIs in particular, certain discursive routines that give agency and intentionality to participants could also be conceptualized as *pragmemes*. Hutchby (2017), for example, whilst not working from a pragmatic perspective, talks of 'tribuneship', where "the IR [interviewer] often takes up a stance on his or her own behalf as spokesperson

for, or representative of, segments of a population which are brought into play rhetorically in order to pursue an argument" (ibid.: 115).

Overall, it seems reasonable to situate *Question Time* as an AT, where the acts contained therein both construe and realize a mediated form of public debate (i.e. a HPI). This is a form that is highly regulated and designed for an immediate audience (TV studio), as well as a deictically and temporally disconnected one (TV viewers). Specifically, the program's core activity is to promote public debate via the manipulation of symbolic locales (Thompson 1995), audience members (ordinary citizens), and panel elitists (from politics, media, etc.), where the host (moderator) is a combination of mediator and interviewer who controls turn-allocation, manages topics, and mediates in times of dispute. The coming together of these locales, activities, and clearly defined roles can be seen as constituting an AT – a fuzzy yet recognizable situation – where hybrid discourse can emerge from and construe context in terms of semogenic acts, practs, and human volition, as shall be seen in the following sections.

### 3.2 Activity types and context

ATs assume the viewpoint "that language use is primarily indexical, and that meaning is dependent on its context of production" (Sarangi 2000: 3). Essentially, ATs draw upon context (derived mainly from the structural properties of an event) as a source for semiotic mediation. Thus, an AT provides a locus of occurrence – a 'background' – to which focal events orient to and, thus, through interactants' presuppositions becomes contextualised. This view of context, however, appears to bias ATs in favour of concepts such as goals, purpose, etc. where the accompanying social relations are seemingly overlooked or taken as given. This view of context is clearly exogenous. Therefore, in order to support "the relationship between 'focal event' and context as a reflective, dialectic one" (Auer 2009: 95), it is necessary to incorporate the endogenous nature of context generated through talk/text, i.e. how talk/text modifies and reflects not only shifts in meaning (field), but also shifts in beliefs/relationships (tenor). It is to this issue that I now turn.

As an explanatory framework, perhaps the biggest advantage of an AT is that it has fuzzy boundaries. Specifically, ATs can incorporate a multitude of communicative concepts, from facework to contextualisation cues (Sarangi 2000). It is this amorphous constitution, whereby an AT is both adaptive and flexible, which allows it to serve as a contextual 'bridge', spanning gaps between societal macro-structures covered by perspectives such as Hymes' SPEAKING grid, situated micro-structures of CA, and situated macro-acts like pragmemes.

Hence, six communicative features are frequently mentioned when describing ATs (Thomas 1995):

- Participants' goals: these may be similar, dissimilar, or change during an interaction (e.g. seeking/giving/avoiding answers of interviewers/interviewees).
- Allowable contributions: interviews, for example, have well-defined roles and turn-taking procedures (Clayman & Heritage 2002).
- Commitment to Gricean maxims: politicians, for instance, frequently avoid difficult/damaging questions via equivocation strategies (Bull 2003).
- Commitment to interpersonal maxims: for example, different ATs, cultures, etc. orientate to politeness principles in diverse ways.
- Turn taking and topic maintenance: many ATs have strict turn-taking rules, where a topic is controlled by one party (Drew & Heritage 1992).
- Use of pragmatic strategies, such as forms of address (sir, mate, etc.) can increase/decrease social distance/formality.

By operationalising an AT in light of the above features, and drawing upon the theoretical constructs outlined previously, an analysis can potentially encompass all four dimensions of Goodwin and Duranti's (1992) view of context, bringing into play the exogenous nature of context generated through talk. The following analysis attempts to do this.

#### **4 Method**

Data was BBC *Question Time* (QT) footage first broadcast in 2009, and following the recommendations of Sacks et al. (1974) footage was taken from two settings (episodes). The first episode took place in Grimsby, England, and aired on 14/05/2009. This episode was one hour long and focused on the controversy surrounding politicians' excessive expense claims. In addition to the moderator (M), panellists included three politicians, a journalist, and a CEO. The second episode took place at BBC Television Centre, London, and aired on 22/10/2009. It was also one hour long. It covered five topics: the BNP's use of Winston Churchill's image; the BNP's views on Islam; immigration policies; journalistic ethics, and would this episode end up benefiting the BNP.

In terms of the shows' participation frameworks, contributions from individual audience members (ordinary citizens) were initiated by the moderator (M), who addressed audience members via their gender and/or colour of their clothes. Introductions/greetings were completely absent. Politicians refrained from asking questions and primarily gave responses or rebuttals. When participants deviated from constraints, M typically intervened.



Across the two episodes, audience members asked questions 18 times and made statements eleven times. I randomly selected one question–answer segment from the Grimsby episode (segment 1 = 1:41 min) and one from the BNP episode (segment 2 = 2:00 min). I also selected one instance of M engaged in an action-opposition segment from the BNP episode (segment 3 = 36 sec) to illustrate an instance of tribuneship. In total, 4:17 min was transcribed using Jefferson's (2004) transcript notation. To study verbal and non-verbal behaviour, the micro-analytic procedure consisted of repeatedly watching the recorded data at a reduced playback speed (0.5) whilst referring to the transcripts.

## 5 Discussion and analysis

Within an AT, it is relatively straightforward to see how meaning can be inferred from context in terms of utterance types. However, it is less clear how this works for larger chunks or genres (in the traditional sense) like conversation or narrative. Blum-Kulka (2005), for example, argues that meaning cannot always be derived solely from an AT's inferential schemata, as some other kind of prototypical discourse (what she deems a 'generic resource') is often found running in the background. Consequently, she sees many instances of meaning as dependent upon a hybridisation of AT and a 'generic resource', where these generic resources occur with such regularity that they should be termed 'discourse genres' – this is very similar to Sarangi's (2000) concept of 'discourse types' (DTs).

DTs are forms of talk that act as focal events within the contextual background of an AT. In Sarangi's (2000) view, "activity type is a means of characterising settings, [and] discourse type is a way of characterising the forms of talk" (ibid.: 2). However, as opposed to Blum-Kulka (2005), Sarangi (2000) believes that discourse types are "not imported into activity types willy nilly" (ibid.: 23); rather the hybridity of ATs and DTs remain under the overall contextual umbrella of the activity in question. Therefore, although the function of a DT may change as it crosses activities, this change typically reflects the nature of the event it is imported into. Essentially, discursive events are malleable and are, therefore, often situationally (re)constructed and (re)contextualised to meet the needs of those involved.

Within QT, a number of DTs weave their way in and out of focus, such as the core activity of interviews, where interviewer and interviewee frequently shift between different frames. However, whilst audience members are allocated the activity role of interviewer, they frequently draw upon varying social roles (e.g. distressed wife in Extract 1; proud patriot in Extract 2) to construct discourses of personal narrative, emotional release, and promote in-group identities via 'us

versus them’ polarisations. Consequently, the emerging discursive event is a hybrid one, composed primarily of institutional (political/ media) discourse and non-institutional (public/lay) discourse. Consider Extract 1, which is from the Grimsby episode (14<sup>th</sup> May 2009):

**Extract 1****Controversy surrounding politicians’ expense claims [Segment 1: 0:00 – 0:22]**

- 01 M: ok the the woman in pink there on the right (.) lets er [DON’T]=  
02 A1: [yes:]  
03 M: =sit down you don’t need to get up to speak °sit down°  
04 A1: ·uh I’m just very angry thats all mister dimbledee (.) MISSES BECKETT are you  
05 going to pay back the seventy two thousand POUNDS you’ve taken after you’re meely  
06 mouthed answer trying to EXPLAIN yourself (.) and<sup>1</sup> mister Campbell (.) how tha hell↑<sup>2</sup>  
do you get through eight hundred pounds a monf on food↑

Note: M: Moderator, A1: Audience member (in pink)

Here we see the woman in pink (A1) orienting to the AT by not only assuming the role of interviewer, but also by adding a level of formality, and distancing herself from those on the panel. This is evidenced by the use of Received Pronunciation and formalised address terms: “mister dimbledee”<sup>2</sup> (line 04), “MISSES BECKETT” (04), and “mister Campbell” (06). However, starting at line 05 she switches styles as she gets increasingly angry and resorts to emotionally laden lexis whilst relaxing her enunciation: “meely mouthed” (05), “how tha hell” (06), and “monf”; i.e. her linguistic features signal a change in activity via the re-appropriation of lexical choices and a shift in tenor. Thus, examining A1’s contribution in terms of contextualisation cues not only reveals an unconscious social restructuring – she moves between the frames of institutionalised talk and non-institutional ‘laity’– but also indicates a subtle change in activity from interview to dispute.

Moreover, as Levinson (1992) suggests, utterances derive their force “by virtue of the expectations governing the activity” (ibid.: 74). Consequently, A1 (and later on A2) use emotionally charged rhetoric and personal opinion to draw activity-specific inferences; i.e. they bring politicians to account by flouting the expectations of a prototypical interview, whilst remaining within the constraints of “asking questions” (Clayman & Heritage 2002). Such findings accord with the observation by Hutchby (2017) that in HPIs “we find increasing levels of “emotionally heightened behaviours, such as raised voices and belligerent body language” (ibid.: 106).

In Extract 2 below (a continuation of Extract 1), we see clear evidence of this AT’s turn-taking constraints in lines 07-10 when MC self-selects and is quickly

repudiated by M, despite being explicitly addressed by A1 at the end of the last extract, i.e. departures from the institutional norm (M selecting next speaker) “systematically attract overt sanctions” (Drew & Heritage 1992: 27):

**Extract 2**

**Controversy surrounding politicians' expense claims [Segment 1: 0:22 – 0:51]**

- 07 MC: not [eight] hundred pounds a month↓ =  
 08 M: [(inaudible)]  
 09 MC: =-hhh [th]  
 10 M: [uh] no (.) hold on margaret beckett first I think and you can (.) margaret beckett  
 11 MB: no I'm not (clears throat) because ·hhh as I as [I pointed out a moment ago]  
 12 AUD: [(jeers and boos)]  
 13 Man: THATS RUBBISH=  
 14 MB: =well (.3) one of the difficulties with this issue (.) is that (.) er er (.) I completely  
 15 understand that people can't understand why [mps make the claims]=  
 16 AUD: [(soft jeers and heckles)]  
 17 MB: =that [they do] <and there are two reasons for that> (.)  
 18 Man: [NONSENSE]  
 19 MB: one of them is [because (.) its]  
 20 Man: [>YOUR BETTER THAN US<]

Note: MC: Ming Campbell (politician), M: Moderator, MB: Margaret Beckett (politician), AUD: Studio Audience, Man: Man in studio audience

However, despite her aggressive opening in line 11 (“no I’m not”), MB appears somewhat nervous, evidenced by the awkwardness with which she clears her throat and the repeated reformulation of her answer (14-19). Furthermore, by employing the categorisation devices of “people” and “mps” (15), she creates her own polarisation of group identities, reflecting her views of the institutional-lay identities that constitute this AT. Furthermore, her use of membership categorisation is also a pragmatic strategy with which to deflect blame onto MPs in general. Her justifications, however, are clearly seen by the audience as the dis-preferred response as they repeatedly heckle her (12, 13, 16, 18, and 20). Consequently, as opposed to normal conversation or interviews where interruptions are rare, her turn is repeatedly interrupted and she is forced to initiate successive self-repairs until allowed an uninterrupted turn, starting at line 21 in Extract 3:

**Extract 3**

**Controversy surrounding politicians' expense claims [Segment 1: 0:51 – 1:41]**

- 21 MB: one them is because it's not appreciated that mps <do have extra> costs that people  
22 even in comparable jobs do not have and the second reason is because no one is allowed  
23 to explain (.) now you called my explanation meely mouthed (.) its quite simple and  
24 straight forward (.) if you live in a grace and favour residence you have three sets of  
25 housing costs one of which you pay out of your own salary like anybody else does  
26 that's the position that's the position I was in and that's why no if I:m found (.) <when  
27 theres↓ this independent inquiry> if theres some question ·hhh about something that  
28 I've paid (.) then of course I will deal >with it in the way anyone else would< but (.5)  
I: hope (.) I don't think (.) they will make (.) that (.5) judgement
- 29 M: ok the man here in the in the second row in the front you sir in the white jacket yes and  
30 then I'll go up there to the woman in pink yes

Note: M: Moderator, MB: Margaret Beckett (politician)

In Extract 3, we witness MB seamlessly transitioning from a previously awkward situation into a more conventionalised political routine (lines 21-28), within which she flouts the maxims of quantity, manner, and possibly relevance in order to apposition blame. Fundamentally, she provides a heavily mitigated hypothetical scenario, where she distances herself from previous actions by effectively referring to herself as “you” three times in lines 23 and 24 (in these instances, “you” is clearly non-second person). Overall, through MB's interactions, we get a glimpse into how she defines and then redefines this AT. Specifically, she initially frames her answer in light of a prototypical news interview, where she would be expected to address the topic and move on, yet through the audience's aggressive accounting practices, she is forced to renegotiate her position, and thus redefines the situation as one where she needs to give account of her actions.

Because QT is set up to promote this kind of public contestation, and thrives on the confrontational nature of adversarial questioning (Cottle 2002), it is perhaps unsurprising to see audience members performing bald-faced attacks. However, at the start of Extract 4, which is the first segment from the BNP episode, A2 uses a more traditional question framing device (04) – a preliminary to a preliminary – to project his upcoming turn:

**Extract 4**

**Can the recent success of the BNP be explained by the misguided immigration policy of the government?** [Segment 2: 0:00 – 0:10]

- 01 M: you in the middle there with the white shirt there (1.5) er no you've spoken already  
 02 A2: no no [I] haven't  
 03 M: [no] you haven't alright speak up then  
 04 A2: qua this is a question to erm dick griff oh I beg your pardon nick [ka↑ um  
 05 AUD: ((laughter and applause))  
 06 M: now (2) now come along respect [>the statesman and let's get on<
- Note: M: Moderator, A2: Audience member (white shirt), AUD: Studio Audience

Within this traditional framing device, A2 embeds the first of several attacks he unleashes on NG. This initial one (line 04) comes in the form of a play on words, as he mispronounces Nick Griffin's name and calls him "dick" – a tactic that clearly resonates with the audience as they begin laughing and applauding (05). The audiences' reaction also demonstrates shared background knowledge concerning both the conventionalised insult (dick) and NG's questionable character. Following this insult, M interrupts to restore order (line 06), illustrating such contributions are frowned upon. However, A2 is then allowed to continue his confrontational rhetoric (Extract 5), highlighting the shows preference for argumentative debate:

**Extract 5**

**Can the recent success of the BNP be explained by the misguided immigration policy of the government?** [Segment 2: 0:10 – 0:56]

- 07 A2: [you're committed to erm reversing and yer you're  
 08 committed to stemming the flow (.) and reversing the flow of immigration ·hhh (.) into  
 09 the U K so that we revert back to a white britain (1.3) where do you want me to go this  
 10 is my country I love this country [I'm part of this country (.4)  
 11 AUD: [x—xx-xxx—xx-x-xxxxxxxxx  
 12 A2: do you know what (3) I was born here I was educated here (.) You'd be surprised how  
 13 many people will have a whip round (.) to buy you a ticket (.) and your supporters [to  
 GO (5) to go (3)]  
 14 AUD: [xxxxxXXXXXXXXXXXXxxx]  
 15 A2: to go to the south pole it's a colourless landscape it'll suit you fine↓  
 16 AUD: *(laughter and applause)*  
 |------(4)-----|
- Note: A2: Audience member (white shirt), AUD: Studio Audience

In lines 07-10, A2 attempts to bring NG to account by assuming a negative view of him. He does this via the "you say X but what about Y" argumentative

structure (Hutchby 2006), whilst also embedding a well-constructed preface recounting NG's previous views on immigration. In 12-13, A2 then builds justification for his attack on NG based on the assertion of national pride, evidenced by his repetitious use of country and his explicit claims towards being a proud patriot. During this turn he also repeatedly points a finger at Nick Griffin in a belligerent manner. Again, his actions gain audience approval with cheers and laughter that last for approximately eight seconds (line 14). Finally, he finishes his turn not with a question, but with a sarcastic remark (in 15), which is essentially a conversational implicature implying that NG is racist (the South Pole being an entirely white landscape). Again, this is followed with cheers and laughter by the audience (four seconds).

In this extract, it is somewhat questionable as to whether A2 is in fact adopting the role of interviewer (as A1 initially did), or whether he is merely interested in taking a confrontational stance. Overall, though, this short series of events illustrate how the setting (talk produced for an audience), use of language, and extra-situational context (shared background knowledge) is used to construct an image and assessment of NG's character.

NG meanwhile shows alignment to the AT by not interrupting and waiting until prompted by M in line 17 (Extract 6 below):

#### Extract 6

**Can the recent success of the BNP be explained by the misguided immigration policy of the government?** [Segment 2: 0:56 – 1:42]

- 17 M: you want to answer him  
 18 NG: yes thank you (.) um yah our immigration policy (.) is I think supported by (2) eighty-four  
 19 percent of british people at present who according to a very recent opinion poll (.) ar said  
 20 they are worried about immigration [it it should stop]  
 21 BG: [which opinion] poll nick which which is it=  
 22 NG: =I:: honestly °don't remember°=  
 23 M: =let let no=  
 24 BG: =well there ya go:::=  
 25 NG: =but er it was in the papers only the other day (inaudible) and this included two thirds  
 26 of members of settled ethnic minorities in this country also saying immigration is out of  
 27 control it's time to shut the door because I look (.) what our policy is=  
 28 M: = what he said was what what where do you want me to go this was his question  
 29 NG: I'm very happy for you to stay here (.) what we what we said is that we believe that:  
 30 it's time to shut the door because this country is overcrowded (.) that: criminals bogus  
 31 asylum seekers and people who aren't loyal to this country should be deported and  
 32 everyone else can stay: =

Note: M: Moderator, NG: Nick Griffin (BNP Leader), BG: Bonnie Greer (writer, historian and playwright)

However, despite NG's alignment to the AT, when he begins his turn in line 18, he launches into a carefully formulated 'justification of policy' routine, which is a common equivocation strategy (Bull 2003). He interlaces this strategy with self-referential "our" and "we", and vague mitigating statements such as "I think" and "a very recent opinion poll". In essence, he is shifting footing and assuming the role of animator only (Goffman 1981). This effectively attributes opinions to others (e.g. his political party) and distances him from A2's allegations. However, his tactics clearly do not sit well with other panellists as he is interrupted and challenged for further details in line 21, i.e. an instance of cross-examination (a specific DT) is appropriated into this AT as a strategic move by BG to imply that he is lying. Furthermore, turns (21) and (24) by BG display another asymmetrical function of the show: non-political panel members "doing" *tribuneship* (Hutchby 2017). Specifically, BG assumes the role of spokesperson on behalf of the audience, wherein her actions directly counter NG's claims and then discredit them with a condescending remark.

Perhaps what is most telling in this extract, though, is NG's behaviour: he tightly sticks to the AT's turn-taking rules and avoids direct confrontation, waiting for transitional relevance places (TRPs) in lines 22 and 25 (and 29 later on) before answering. Whilst his behaviour reflects conformance to the constraints at hand, it may also be due to the presence of a studio audience, who have already signalled their disapproval of him. Fundamentally, as Drew and Heritage (1992) state "the presence of an audience whose members may assess the moral character of the focal participants ... helps to limit the extent to which the latter depart from formal turn-taking procedures" (ibid.: 27). However, although NG tightly sticks to the AT's constraints, his answer in lines 25-27 does not directly address A2's question. Hence, in line 28, we see evidence of the show's asymmetrical preference for questions to be answered when M reiterates A2's original question.

Further evidence of the show's asymmetrical stance can be seen in Extract 7 below. In this instance, we see M implicitly redefining the situation in lines 38 and 40, thus highlighting that interruptions or contributions by panellists are less important than those from the audience.

**Extract 7**

**Can the recent success of the BNP be explained by the misguided immigration policy of the government? [Segment 2: 1:34 – 2:00]**

- 33 NG: I'm very happy for you to stay here (.) what we what we said is that we believe that:  
 34 it's time to shut the door because this country is overcrowded (.) that: criminals bogus  
 35 asylum seekers and people who aren't loyal to this country should be deported and  
 everyone else can stay:=  
 36 BW: =theres no [such °thing as a bogus°  
 37 NG: [there isn't an issue=  
 38 M: =[alright  
 39 BW: =[theres no such thing as a bogus asylum seeker (.) you are [an asylum seeker  
 40 M: [ok >°oh wait a minute alright° you sir in  
 41 the front sir yes yes=  
 42 BW: =you are an asylum seeker (.) that's a legal term

Note: NG: Nick Griffin (BNP leader), BW: Baroness Warsi (politician), M: Moderator,

In the above extract we also see another small instance of tribuneship in lines 36, 39 and 40 when BW challenges NG's assertion that there are "bogus asylum seekers". And whilst M makes an attempt to control the floor (38 and 40), it is somewhat relaxed and BG is allowed to finish (42).

The real tribune in the show, however, is M (David Dimbleby) as Extract 8 highlights:

**Extract 8**

**The BNP's use of Winston Churchill's image [Segment 3: 0:00 – 0:36]**

- 01 NG: you have to go somewhere to start with where they come from that for instance was the  
 02 process whereby the Labour party and [others]  
 03 M: [so you so you]  
 04 NG: ended up with sinn fein in government (.)  
 05 M: so you were saying these things (.7) uh not because you meant them >but because it  
 06 was a way of winning him over< in other words (.) you wanted to win over a [racist]=  
 07  
 08 NG: [not to win over]  
 09 M: =to your view (.) and you said we start by being moderate=  
 10 NG: = >not to win over him< I'm trying to win over the youngsters he otherwise leads  
 11 astray (.) [but can we reframe this whole question]  
 12 M: [but why should the point is this] WHY should anybody trust (.7) what you  
 13 say (.3) why should anybody think (.) it's any more than a facade  
 14 NG: WHY should anybody trust any politician (.) all of us (.) as simple as that really=  
 15 BG: =I'm not one (.3) not [me  
 16 =°that was nonsense°  
 17 NG: [sorry (.) I apologize

Note: NG = Nick Griffin, M = Moderator, JS = Jack Straw, BG = Bonnie Greer, AUD = Audience



In this final extract, tribuneship is indexed through a number of rhetorical moves: first, M explicitly challenges NG in lines 05-07, and 08 by questioning his motives for making a previous statement to the press. NG then explicitly asks for the questioning to be reframed in 11. M, however, ignores this request and goes on to attack NG's ethical character in 12 and 13 via a form of rhetorical questioning that focuses on the trustworthiness of NG's words (when talking, M is also quite animated as he gesticulates with both hands). NG then attempts to make light of the situation in line 14 with a rhetorical question of his own that aligns himself and his behaviour with "all of us" (politicians). This tactic clearly backfires as not only does BG interject, but M also shows his displeasure by whispering an explicit and subjective evaluation (line 16). The exchange ends with NG apologizing. Overall, this exchange is a clear instance of tribuneship where M comes off as the protagonist. In fact, he explicitly acknowledged this in an interview with *The Guardian* (Adams 2009): "I had everything quoted verbatim and dated. That may have given the impression that I was a protagonist, but it was just what I would always try to do, which is to hold the panellists to what they have said elsewhere".

## 6 Conclusion

As Sarangi (2000) concludes, and the above exploration illustrates, an AT can be a useful concept in accounting for a multi-layered approach to context, both at the situational and interactional level. Specifically, operationalising an AT in terms of analytical perspectives such as turn-taking (Sacks et al. 1974), interactional frames and footings (Goffman 1981), conversational inference (Grice 1975), etc. allows an analyst to explore how context is both a priori of, and emergent from an activity. Furthermore, such a multidimensional approach can be used to gain insights into how participants are able to stay within the constraints of an AT, yet exploit the interactional resources at hand (e.g. DTs) to achieve localised goals. In this light, the study has provided further evidence that "the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said in the situation, as well as what is actually being said" (Mey 2001: 219), and has done so in light of a hybrid discourse where institutional (political) and non-institutional (normative) practices come together in the pursuit of individual interactant's goals and contemporary media's goal for increasingly partisan journalism and confrontationment.

Moreover, the study highlighted how QT appears to feature many of the interactional forms seen in HPIs (Hutchby 2017), and it is because of this hybridity that audience members (citizen interviewers) can engender various social roles (e.g. proud patriot), discourse roles (author, animator, and principal),

and activity roles (interviewer). This fluidity, in turn, allows audience members to deviate from the focal point of merely asking questions and attempt to bring politicians to account by flaunting journalistic neutrality – a phenomenon that is clearly supported by the show’s manipulation of the activity. Consequently, the study has also shed light on how agency and intention can be instantiated in a non-normative interview format through changes in footing. This finding gives credence to the notion that pragmatic acts, instantiated in talk and interaction, can be shaped not only by the situational context (TV panel show) and cultural context (TV’s increasing “democratisation” of laity (Holmes & Jermyn 2004), but also by human volition in pursuit of a recognizable and allowable goal.

Whilst there are a number of limitations in this paper, not least the small dataset, future research into this AT would benefit greatly from a multi-modal approach, as limitations of space made it impractical to cover behavioural environment (e.g. layout of the studio, use of juxtaposed camera shots, etc.). This added layer of analysis would no doubt reveal subtle manipulations on the part of the show’s producers as to how participants (and their interactions) are managed and portrayed.

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In sum, situated semogenic acts can combine to become practs, and practs can combine to become pragmemes. Pragmemes, in turn, can function within ATs to construe and instantiate context. These concepts thus reflect the constituency, instantiation, and layering of language and context in pragmatic terms.
- <sup>2</sup> She actually mispronounces the name as it should be ‘dimplebee’.

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### Transcription conventions

Word	Added stress
WORD	Increased intensity (volume)
°quietly°	Reduced intensity (volume)
<slow>	Markedly slower speech
>quick<	Markedly quicker speech
[	Simultaneous starting talk (overlap or interruption)
=	Latching talk
(.)	Small pause (under a second)
(2)	Long pause (in seconds)
An:d	'Stretching' of previous syllable

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