

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 089 388

CS 500 654

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TITLE The Interview: Special Form of the Dyad.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Milwaukee, April 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.75 HC-\$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Communication (Thought Transfer); *Information Seeking; *Information Sources; Information Utilization; *Interviews; *Oral Communication; Persuasive Discourse; *Question Answer Interviews
IDENTIFIERS *Dyadic Communication

ABSTRACT

The interview is a special form of dyadic (unequal two-party) communication. It can be defined as a two-way vocal interaction system which is time-bound and in which the interviewer serves as a delimiter of the topics considered. Further, the interviewer seeks information from the interviewee, who functions as an information source in order to accomplish a specific, preselected, limited end. The structure of an interview is dyadic and "information seeking" and is composed of dialogue and action modes. Also, in an interview, feedback occurs in real time and is essential for use by the interviewer in controlling the interview. (A brief definition of the following types of interviews is included: journalistic, research, examination, interrogation, counseling, information giving, appraisal, psychoanalytic, persuasion, Socratic dialogue, advocacy, action/results, selection, recruitment, screening, placement, and termination.) (CH)

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THE INTERVIEW: SPECIAL FORM OF THE DYAD

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Presented at
CENTRAL STATES SPEECH ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
April 6, 1974

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1.0. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the interview as a special form of the dyad. The first portion discusses the interview as a structured dyadic communication system. The second portion discusses some of the functions performed by the interview.

1.1. The Interview. Interviews are not ends in themselves, but means to some external purpose. These external purposes are usually described in terms of the categorical functions which they serve. These categorical functions are referred to as "types of interviews." Thus, we have a type of interview called the "Investigative Interview" in which the interviewer is attempting to gather information in order to describe a situation. Within the broad categorical type "Investigative Interview" there are more specific functional types of interviews such as the "Journalistic Interview" in which the interviewer is attempting to gather information in order to piece together and report a story, or the "Research Interview" in which the interviewer may be attempting to gather information in order to test a hypothesis or determine public attitudes toward a controversial issue.

1.2. Structured. The structure of the interview is that of an information gathering activity conducted for a specific purpose (described by the type of interview). The special quality of this form is the singular mode of activity necessary to define the situation. Activities such as information giving, acceptance seeking, acceptance giving, recognition seeking, recognition giving, or some combination of these may be present in an interview situation, but they are not essential to the situation.

1.3. Dyadic. In the interview dyad there are two parties, not necessarily two people. For example, a salesperson (party one) in a "Persuasion-Action Interview" may be interviewing a couple (party two) about their housing needs;

or, in an "Investigative-Interrogative Interview," a team of police personnel (party one) may be interviewing a suspect and his/her lawyer (party two) about a crime. Since there are only two parties in an interview, actions such as arbitration, mediation, or coalition formation are not possible.

Perhaps the most singular characteristic of the interview dyad, however, is the unequal distribution of power. The two parties do not (and probably should not) share the responsibility for accomplishing the purpose of the interview. This responsibility rests with the interviewer (although the role of interviewer may shift from one part to the other within an interview), who has the power to direct the course of the interview. Thus, the dyad is a one-up, one-down situation.

1.4. Communication. Two characteristics of communication within the interview deserve mention: (1) dialogue and (2) action mode.

1.4.1. Dialogue. While dyadic communication situations are possible in which one party is a sender and the other a receiver (one way communication), or in which both parties are senders (one way dialogue), this is not the case in the interview. The interview is characterized by dialogue (two way communication) in which both parties serve as senders of messages and both parties serve as receivers. The interview dialogue demands an inherent empathy (at least superficially) in that the interviewer seeks information in terms of the interviewee's experience and the interviewee responds in terms of the interviewer's questions.

1.4.2. Action Mode. The interview is conducted in the oral-aural mode. The parties interact mainly by speaking and listening. Action modes such as gestural-tactile (handshakes), gestural-visual (appearance), or written-visual (documents) may be present, but are not essential to the interview situation.

Thus, the telephone may be an interview medium, but not the letter or sound proof partition.

1.5. System. The interview is a time bound feedback and control system, regulated both by the external purpose and the internal interaction.

1.5.1. Time Bound. The interview usually begins with the definite understanding that there is a time limit. Because the interview is not open-ended in the same sense as conversations or negotiations, the information gathering activity must be compressed to fit the time available.

1.5.2. Feedback. Unlike other forms of dyadic communication such as correspondence, feedback in the interview occurs in real time. The feedback in an interview (for example, the response to a question) may affect the question asked (redefinition), questions not yet asked, and information sought; in addition to contributing to the information already gathered by the interviewer.

1.5.3. Control. Feedback is the mechanism by which the interviewer determines the actions necessary to maintain control of the interview. Since the interviewer is attempting to achieve a given purpose, the information gathered in the interview must contribute to that purpose. The Investigative-Research interviewer exploring public attitudes toward the Presidency does not attempt to gather information about the family problems of the interviewee, while the Counselling-Information Giving interviewer attempting to determine the interviewee's qualification for veterans' benefits does not attempt to gather information about the interviewee's opinions of the President. In the interview, the interviewer attempts to limit discussion to those topics which contribute to the purpose of the interview.

1.6. Summary. From this discussion several special characteristics of the interview are apparent, including: (a) the interview is an instrumental form of communication--i.e. part of a larger process; (b) the interview is structured in the interrogatory mode, as an information gathering activity; (c) the interview dyad is composed of two unequal parties, only one of whom must be responsible for gathering information; (d) the interview situation requires both parties to speak and both parties to listen; (e) interaction takes place in compressed time; (f) feedback takes place in real time; and (g) control is exercised by the interviewer through the act of seeking information.

2.0. Interview Functions. In section 1.1. we noted that interviews are referred to by the purpose which they serve. The interview as a structure of communication is recognizable in the act of information gathering. But, any discussion of the special characteristics of the interviews, requires mention of the special types of interviews. This section is a discussion of the interview as an instrument in the performance of four principle categorical functions: (1) Investigation, (2) Counselling, (3) Persuasion, and (4) Selection.

2.1. Investigation. Investigative interviews are those in which the interviewer is attempting to gather information in order to describe a situation. Examples of investigative interviews include journalistic interviews, research interviews, examinations, and interrogations.

2.1.1. Journalistic Interviews. The purpose of a journalistic interview is to gather information in order to compile and report an incident. Frequently the text of the interview (or a portion of it) is reported, but more often the

interviewer contacts a number of persons (economists, for example) and gathers their impressions or analyses of a situation (the prospect of future unemployment, maybe). This information is organized into the journalist's story.

2.1.2. Research Interviews. The purpose of a research interview is to gather information in order to understand a situation. The researcher begins with an a priori explanation of certain behavior and attempts to test it (as in the Hawthorne Studies at Western Electric). Examples of research interviews in which the interviewer is searching for explanations include the debriefing interview where the interviewer is trying to discover reactions to an experiment and the attitude survey where the researcher is attempting to determine interviewees' feelings toward some concept.

2.1.3. Examination Interviews. The purpose of an examination interview is to gather information in order to determine the level of the interviewee's knowledge of a subject. A striking example of this type of interview is the oral comprehensive examination which most Masters and Doctoral candidates participate in.

2.1.4. Interrogation Interviews. The purpose of an interrogation interview is to gather information in order to assign responsibility for certain actions. The most obvious examples of this type of interview are the police and courtroom interrogations, but the mother asking her children, "Who put the peanut-butter in the washing machine," is also conducting an interrogation.

2.2. Counselling. Counselling interviews are those in which the interviewer is attempting to gather information in order to help the interviewee. Examples of counselling interviews include information giving interviews, appraisals, and psychoanalytic interviews.

2.2.1. **Information^cGiving Interviews.** The purpose of an information giving interview is to gather information in order to determine what additional information or advice the interviewee needs to be given. Examples of this type of interview include the guidance interview in which an advisor is attempting to help a student decide which courses to take, and the professional interview in which a lawyer or accountant (or what ever) is trying to determine the interviewee's aims in order to recommend courses of action.

2.2.2. **Appraisal Interviews.** The purpose of an appraisal interview is to gather information in order to evaluate the interviewee. The philosophy behind the appraisal interview is that, if the interviewee knows where he/she stands, it will be possible to take action to improve the situation. The most striking example of the appraisal interview is the semi-annual or annual appraisal of most employees of American industrial firms. The interviewer attempts to discover areas of potential improvement and point these out to the interviewee.

2.2.3. **Psychoanalytic Interviews.** The purpose of a psychoanalytic interview is to gather information in order to help the interviewee to overcome personal problems. Although the popular model of the psychoanalytic interview (the bearded psychiatrist-interviewer listening to the neurotic client-interviewee laying on a couch) is potent, it is misleading. This type of interview is better visualized as a client-centered session in which the interviewer asks questions in order to help the interviewee confront him/herself.

2.3. **Persuasion.** Persuasive interviews are those in which the interviewer is gathering information in order to get the interviewee to believe or behave in some way. Examples of persuasive interviews include Socratic dialogues, advocacy interviews, and action results interviews.

2.3.1. Socratic Dialogue Interviews. The purpose of a Socratic dialogue interview is to gather information about the interviewee's opinions or beliefs so that the interviewer can subtly challenge them. The interviewer works to change the interviewee's positions by (1) pointing out logical inconsistencies and (2) presenting ambiguous situations for the application of the opinions. The most obvious examples of this type of interview are the dialogues from which the name comes, although this is sometimes called the "Yes, but..." interview from its principle technique.

2.3.2. Advocacy Interviews. The purpose of an advocacy interview is to gather information about the interviewee's objections to a position advocated by the interviewer. The most obvious example of the advocacy interview is the marketing followup interview in which the interviewer is attempting to improve a product or campaign by discovering why people did not buy the product or, after buying the product, did not use or continue to use it.

2.3.3. Action Results Interviews. The purpose of an action results interview is to gather information in order to convince the interviewee to take some action desired by the interviewer. The most obvious examples of this type of interview are the sales interview in which the interviewer wishes the interviewee to expend money to purchase some good or service and the political canvassing interview in which the interviewer wishes the interviewee to vote in a particular way.

2.4. Selection. Selection interviews are those in which the interviewer is gathering information in order to make a decision between two or more mutually exclusive alternatives. This type of interview is most visible as a part of the employment process and is sometimes referred to as the employment interview. Examples of selection interviews include recruitment interviews, screening interviews, placement interviews, and termination interviews.

2.4.1. Recruitment Interviews. The purpose of a recruitment interview is to gather information that will be used to increase the number of available alternative choices. This interview has much in common with forms of persuasive interviews. An example of this type of interview is the mass audience interview in which the interviewer (searching for door-to-door salespeople, college students, military personnel, etc.) talks to a number of people at the same time in hopes of finding some who can be considered for available positions.

2.4.2. Screening Interviews. The purpose of a screening interview is the opposite of the recruiting interview -- to gather information in order to decrease the number of available alternative choices. An example of this type of interview is the medical school interview used to screen out applicants to medical school so as to bring the number of choices more closely in line with the number of available positions.

2.4.3. Placement Interviews. The purpose of a placement interview is to gather information from the interviewee in order to determine which of the available alternatives is best suited for him/her. This interview is much like the counselling interviews, but the interviewer has more control of the interviewee. This is the type of interview in which the interviewer is most directly concerned with finding employment for the interviewee.

2.4.4. Termination Interviews. The purpose of a termination interview is to gather information about a decision to reject a given alternative. Examples of this type of interview include the firing interview (similar to the information giving interview) in which the interviewer is terminating the interviewee and the exit interview (like the investigative interviews) in which the interviewer is trying to gather information about the interviewee's reasons for self termination.

2.4.5. **Disclaimer.** The forms of selection interviews may be regarded as special cases of other types of interviews, but their frequency of occurrence and relative importance to both the interviewer and interviewee make them deserving of special attention.

2.5. **Summary.** The interview is conducted for the purpose of gathering information in order to perform some specific purpose. There are many purposes which may be performed by interviews including (a) investigation, (b) counselling, (c) persuasion, and (d) selection.

3.0. **Conclusion.** The interview is a special form of dyadic (unequal two party) communication (two way vocal interaction) system (time bound) in which the interviewer (topic limiter) seeks information (instrumental means) from the interviewee (information source) to accomplish a specific purpose (preselected, limited end). Obviously, any one or more of these characteristics may be used to describe some other form of human behavior. The interview is special not because it possesses unique characteristics, but because it is an unique synergistic combination of characteristics recognizable in day-to-day living.