# An integrated approach to non-verbal performance in the Hybrid Political Interview

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

During the National Policy Institute's (NPI) 2016 annual conference, Director Richard Spencer gave a speech in praise of the election victory of President Donald Trump. Spencer concluded his address proclaiming, "Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail Victory!" after which several audience members were recorded performing Nazi salutes. Three days after the conference speech, Spencer was an invited guest on the *NewsOne Now* programme where he participated in a 32-min televised interview with black journalist, host and managing editor of the programme Roland Martin. Using the Martin/Spencer interview as a case study, this article draws from Ekman's (2004) taxonomy of non-verbal behavior to examine the contribution of non-verbal performance to the Hybrid Political Interview (HPI) (Hutchby, 2011, 2017). While the linguistic properties of the HPI have been detailed, the attention given to the non-verbal performance of the participants has been underwhelming even though most HPIs are televised events. Our analysis focuses upon three specific action-opposition sequences in which Martin and Spencer cycle back-and-forth between interview and argument conventions. Within these sequences we demonstrate how non-verbal performance provides an additional layer of analysis and understanding as part of an integrated approach alongside the linguistic features of the HPI.

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## 1. Introduction

During the National Policy Institute's (NPI) 2016 annual conference, Director Richard Spencer, the founder of the Alt-Right movement, gave a speech in praise of the election victory of President Donald Trump. Spencer concluded his address proclaiming, "Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail Victory!" after which several audience members were recorded performing Nazi salutes. In the week following, Spencer was a guest on the *NewsOne Now* programme where he participated in a 32-min televised interview with black journalist, host and managing editor of the programme Roland Martin (Author of Speak, Brother! A Black Man's View of America). While the linguistic features of the Hybrid Political Interview (HPI) have been mapped by Hutchby (2011, 2017), the attention given to non-verbal performance has been underwhelming reflecting "how little empirical research on the subject has been published" (Babad, 1999: 340) (see also Babad and Peer, 2009). We see this as significant considering that most HPIs are televised events intended for a second-frame audience (i.e. the audience external to the scene, or the viewing public) combined with research showing that visual performance is more memorable to an audience than information presented as speech (Graber, 1990; Waldman and Devitt, 1998).

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Generally, non-verbal and verbal interactions have been studied separately as independent rather than interrelated phenomena (Jones and LeBaron, 2002). However, criticism of this trend is long-standing in that it promotes a partial view of communication and social interaction. Kendon (1972: 443), for instance, argues how "it makes no sense to speak of 'verbal communication' and 'non-verbal communication'. There is only communication", while Mead (1975) was critical of research into non-verbal behavior for its neglect of linguistic phenomena (see also Knapp, 1978). Moreover, and although concerned with iconic gestures, calls for an integrated approach can be drawn from McNeill (1985) who contends that spoken sentences and related gestures must be considered together in order for a comprehensive representation of the speaker's intention to be realized (see also Biocca, 1991; Beattie and Shovelton, 1999; Hecker and Stewart, 1988). Framing the Martin/Spencer interview as a case-study example, this article examines the contribution of non-verbal performance within the context of the HPI and calls for an integrated approach to the study of social interaction within televised political interviews.

## 2. The Hybrid Political Interview

The HPI derives from the adversarial genre of interview blending the traditional news interview and the radio talk show (Hutchby, 2011). It serves the dual function of providing news information, while packaging the news product in an entertaining manner (see Thussu, 2009; Bell and van Leeuwen, 1994). This brand of news information-entertainment is almost always inclusive of confrontation (Lauerbach, 2004; Newell and Stutman, 1989; Schegloff, 1988), a trend traceable to the emergence of cable network channels situated around the personality of the host whose worldview − and those of the broadcasting channel − is able to be disseminated via their self-named programmes. Examples include the O'Reilly Factor (1996−2017), Hannity (2009-present), Tucker Carlson Tonight (2016-present), Anderson Cooper 360 (2003-present) and Piers Morgan Live (2011−2014). Interaction between the host and guest within such contexts is marked by exchanges frequently drawn on "the relational level, with allegation inviting counter-allegation, and interruption inviting counter-interruption" (van Rees, 2007: 1459). Luginbühl (2007) further highlights the prevalence of staged confrontations where guests are discredited by the host in order to create exciting controversies. The HPI facilitates the host's departure away from journalistic ideals such as neutrality (see Clayman, 1992; Finlayson, 2001; Fowler, 1991) and permits them a more expansive role inclusive of the promotion of selected sociopolitical and ideological agendas.

Within the HPI the question-answer-next question format (Greatbatch, 1988) and/or the question-answer-formulation format (Heritage, 1985) are often adhered to. Expanding Montogomery's (2007) documentation of the accountability interview, the HPI does not uphold this sequential format for the duration of the interview. Instead, the HPI enters into the action-opposition sequence (Hutchby, 1996) whereby opposition to spoken action is seen as the next form of action requiring further opposition. In practice, the interviewer and interviewee begin to cycle back-and-forth between interview and argument conventions, action-opposition sequences that also see the interviewer adopt a more assertoric style of questioning and engage in higher levels of aggression (Hutchby, 2017). These interactional features of the HPI can be seen as giving rise to a non-verbal performance which also departs from the traditional news interview through the facilitation of belligerent body language, animated gesticulation and a range of embodied emotional expressions.

In terms of linguistic features, the HPI is characterized by the frequent deployment of skeptical rejoinders or instances in which the interviewer uses "next-turn rejoinders to indicate skepticism, sarcasm or disagreement with the interviewee (IE), even though no explicit counter-position may be stated" (Hutchby, 2011: 352). As a declarative form of referencing objection, skeptical rejoinders are often avoided within the news interview despite being commonplace in regular conversation. The use of (polar) contrastives within the HPI represents a more explicit move toward outright argumentation and can be witnessed through overt disagreements, often interruptive, marked by yes/no or it is/it isn't answers. Contrasts may be used not only to indicate interviewer disagreement with a particular opinion but can also serve to regulate the direction of interviewee discourse. The HPI is also characterized by the use of insults and personalization markers deployed in the assignment of personal responsibility, belief attribution, motive and position-taking. Hutchby (2017) more recently illustrates how HPIs are characterized by instances of leading questions and repetition in those cases where an interviewee is either evasive or not providing an answer deemed satisfactory to the interviewer. HPIs are also inclusive of demeanor differentiations whereby interviewees orientate toward the aggressive actions of the interviewer, often drawing attention to their unreasonable behavior. Finally, non-resolution has also been identified as a feature of the HPI with many such interactions ending without resolution being reached.

## 3. Non-verbal performance

In their foundational work on non-verbal performance, Ekman and Friesen (1969: 63) proposed a taxonomy of body and facial movements comprising five categories (Emblems, Illustrators, Adaptors, Regulators and Affective Displays). Crucial in terms of the current study, the authors describe how non-verbal behavior does not represent a "unified phenomenon with but one type of usage, one origin and one form of coding", meaning that all such taxonomies can be seen as partial and incomplete. This cautionary position is shared by Krauss et al. (1991) who argue that there is a large degree of unreliability and imprecision inherent in the relationship between speech and gesture meaning that observer inference and the allocation of meaning and intent has a significant role. More recently, Ekman and Friesen's (1969) taxonomy has been updated with slight modifications made to the category labels. Adaptors have been renamed as Manipulators and Affective Displays have been renamed as Emotional Expressions (Ekman, 2004).