

HOW GESTURES CONTRIBUTE TO THE MEANINGS OF IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS AND PHRASAL VERBS IN TV BROADCAST INTERVIEWS

A multimodal analysis

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Abstract – This study aims at shedding light on the representation of some peculiar indicators of spokenness (i.e. idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs) across TV interviews featuring different interviewees: politicians, business people and personalities from showbiz. More precisely, the purpose of this work is to observe how, to what extent, and with which function these traits, which are more typical of oral and informal language, permeate TV interviews pertaining to different specialized knowledge domains. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the usage and the meaning-making of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs in TV interviews, some multimodal aspects will be considered throughout the analysis. Drawing from the findings, it was noticed that these complex indicators of spoken style are abundant in the language of both interviewers and interviewees across all three domains, where they seem to work as lubricants that help smooth interaction and thus engage the audience. Furthermore, gestures with arms and hands appeared to occur together with idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs quite consistently, often pointing to their figurative meanings.

Keywords: TV interviews; idiomatic expressions; phrasal verbs; multimodality; gestures.

1. Introduction: The interview on television

This paper investigates variation in the usage of two frequent markers of orality in English i.e. idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs (Biber *et al.* 1999), across TV broadcast interviews concerning different knowledge and professional domains, namely politics, business and economics, and showbiz. The analysis combines quantitative and qualitative methods and also takes advantage of a multimodal approach to account for both the multisemiotic nature of communication through the TV format and the stratified meaning that characterizes idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs.

In today's society, all kinds of TV-mediated interactions have

undoubtedly established themselves as cultural realities for larger and larger audiences. Indeed, their societal impact can be, and often is, on a much larger scale than everyday casual interactions, touching the lives of an ever-growing number of people. Within the broad scenario of broadcast interactions, and screen-mediated communications in general, interviews aired on television are probably one of the most widely used, best-developed and long-lasting formats for disseminating information, which already existed before the invention of television (Ekström 2001). Their great success can be ascribed, according to Clayman and Heritage (2002, p. 29), to the mutual interest between those who are interviewed (normally public figures) and journalists/anchors: “journalists need access to public figures for their livelihood, while public figures need journalists to gain access to what Margaret Thatcher once called ‘the oxygen of publicity’”. Such a symbiosis leads to the stipulation of an ‘implicit contract’, where journalists grant public figures access to their TV show in exchange for news-making content that will attract the viewers at home.

What mainly characterizes TV interviews is that the final target of the exchange is the ‘overhearing audience’ (Heritage 1985), i.e. a non-active participant in the conversation and an ideal outsider from the discourse community represented in the interview. In other words, it is especially for their consumption that the interview is conceived and prepared. As Montgomery (2007, p. 260) states, “interviewers and interviewees know that what they say will be appraised not just by their immediate interlocutor but by who-knows-how-many beyond.” This triangular communicative frame (among the interviewer, the interviewee, and the home audience) inevitably shapes the way in which knowledge is constructed during the interview (Furkó, Abuczki 2014). In fact, the *raison d’être* of the TV interview is an underlying asymmetry of knowledge where the speaker who asks questions (i.e. the interviewer) claims a ‘lack of knowledge’ in the name of a third party (i.e. the viewers at home). Simultaneously, it is taken for granted that the direct recipient (i.e. the interviewee) is informed about the topic of the question. The asymmetry of the situation is also reinforced by the differential rights and responsibilities to ask questions of the participants and, thus, it is closely linked to the “situation-specific institutional identities of the interviewer and the interviewee” (Lauerbach 2006, p. 197). To sum up, the rigid question-driven format of the interaction during the interview and the prescribed roles of the participants lead to the creation of an asymmetrical, rather constrained, and unique dialogic event.

Despite the highly repetitive and codified format, when it comes to the range of topics that they may touch on, TV interviews are a highly versatile genre. Most often they are aired within a TV news programme (news interviews) or within thematic TV shows, which are programmes revolving around a certain knowledge domain, such as a political arena, a business talk show, etc. Indeed, interviews can either be a more or less marginal part of the show (e.g. an

interview with a doctor in a medical docu-series) or they can be its most important element (e.g. *Hard Talk*, a BBC programme dedicated to in-depth one-to-one interviews). Regardless of the nature of the TV show, on the basis of the specialized and professional community that the interviewee is representing, we can distinguish between different typologies of interviews such as business interviews, political interviews, celebrity interviews, sports interviews.

From the point of view of language use, it is pivotal to always keep in mind that broadcast interviews are generally products that cater to large audiences and have to meet special requirements regarding timing, structure, accessibility (i.e. through popularization strategies) and, last but not least, linguistic register. Especially in the matter of register, some studies focusing on the language of TV political interviews (Fairclough 1998; Bruti 2016, among others) have defined these interactions as stylistically hybrid, mixing elements typical of different registers (e.g. formal, institutional, informal, colloquial) and discourses (e.g. planned, unplanned, spoken and written). More generally, the process through which language undergoes an adjustment for the benefit of the home audience leans toward the so-called ‘conversationalization of discourse.’ (cf. Fairclough 1998, 2000). This means that the style becomes increasingly colloquial, while involving emotional and more subjective linguistic strategies that help to build rapport among interlocutors (direct or indirect ones) (cf. Fairclough 1998, 2000). Such a trend actually reflects the growing demand for rapport with the interlocutors by the viewers, especially in our era characterized by the advent of online interactions, where everyone at home has the chance to talk ‘directly’ to public figures (Sindoni 2013). As a consequence, TV interviews are becoming more engaging and intriguing, representing a form of ‘infotainment’ (Brants, Neijens 1998, p. 315): they inform the audience about something (such as a specific topic) while they also entertain.

The slant towards colloquialism that tends to characterize TV interviews described above is the focus of this paper. More precisely, the present research investigates how and to what extent some recurrent indicators of spoken, involved, and informal style permeate specialized TV interviews representing different discourse domains. The linguistic phenomena of interest in the study are phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions, as two separate, but similar, instances of formulaic language that are very frequent in the English language (Biber *et al.* 1999). The specialized domains that frame the interviews analysed here are basically three: political science, business and economics, and showbiz. It is important to highlight that not only do these three discourse domains represent different areas of knowledge and expertise, but they also testify to different linguistic registers. In fact, political discourse would typically call for a formal and politer language whereas in the business and economics world, technicality, straightforwardness, and informality are foregrounded (cf. Crawford Camiciottoli 2007). Showbiz, instead, is the least specialized and

constrained knowledge domain among the three, in which informality and casualness are freely admitted. Given the fact that the TV interview is inherently a multimodal and multisemiotic text, in which meaning is created through the intersection of visual elements, verbal language, gestures, and other semiotic cues, the ensuing analysis also takes a multimodal approach which aims to show if and how the stratified meaning of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs is reflected in communicative modes other than the verbal. Therefore, the research questions addressed in this paper are: how and to what extent are idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs used in political, business and showbiz interviews? How is their meaning reflected in co-occurring semiotic stimuli other than the verbal?

2. Idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs: A brief overview

Idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs are natural linguistic phenomena in English accompanying native-like linguistic competence. As Searle (1979, p. 50) advocates, speaking idiomatically is so pervasive in the English language that speakers seem to follow an implicit rule: “speak idiomatically unless there is some special reason not to”. Some scholars have also attempted to provide the numbers for this phenomenon. Jackendoff (1995), for example, claims that there are as many fixed expressions as there are words in English. Gardner and Davies (2007, p. 347), referring to phrasal verbs, in particular, maintain that “learners will encounter, on average, one phrasal verb in every 150 words of English”.

The idea of studying idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs together stems from their intrinsically related and sometimes comparable phrasal nature. As Sinclair (1991) first put it, what sets both linguistic phenomena apart from ‘plain language’ is that they both abide by what he calls ‘the idiom principle’, according to which texts are composed for about 80% of multi-word expressions that constitute single choices in the mental lexicon. Hence, idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs are some possible outcomes of these single choices, being phrasal semantic units in which meaning cannot be limited to the single lexeme (Sinclair 1996).

More precisely, the point Sinclair (1996, 2008) wants to make is that the meaning and the function of each component of a phrasal unit is not, or not simply, a property of the single word itself, but of the whole phrase. His proposal is to store expressions in which a single semantic and pragmatic choice involves more than one word, like idiomatic expressions, proverbs, clichés and phrasal verbs, in the lexicon together with lexical compounds. Indeed, in all these expressions the constituting elements seem to have lost their semantic identity in favour of a non-compositional meaning.

The concept of ‘single choices’ (i.e. of holist expressions) would become, over a decade later following valuable advances in the field of psycholinguistics (cf. Cooper 1998, Wood 2010, Wray 2002, among others), one of the pivotal points giving evidence to the existence of a high level of formulaicity in language production, especially, but not only, in spoken interactions.

Within the category of formulaic expressions, which encompasses proverbs, conversational routines, collocations, etc., the main peculiarity of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs is that they tend to entail figuration, conventionality and, to some extent, flexibility (Liu 2003, Nunberg *et al.* 1994). As for figuration, it is undeniable that the meaning of idiomatic expressions and of the majority of phrasal verbs is not totally compositional. In other words, a phrasal verb is not the exact sum of the meanings of the single words of which it is composed. The fact that idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs are highly conventionalized is another critical point that distinguishes them from literal plain language. It is thanks to this feature that their meaning or use is somewhat unpredictable unless the expression is lexicalized as a whole in the speaker’s lexicon. Finally, concerning flexibility, we can observe that both of the linguistic phenomena under study tend not to change their canonical forms, although studies have demonstrated that they may undergo some alterations and still maintain their figurative meanings (Nunberg *et al.* 1994).

Building on the discussion above, in this research the label ‘idiomatic expressions’ is broadly used to indicate some institutionalized and mostly fixed expressions “whose overall meaning does not correspond to the combined meanings of its components” (Philip 2007, p. 1). Thus, they differ from free combinations of words because, in that particular context, they work as fixed non-compositional strings that acquire a figurative meaning. In the same vein, the definition of phrasal verbs used in the present study characterises them as “combinations between a lexical verb and a morphologically invariable particle which functions as a single syntactic unit” (Quirk *et al.* 1985): they are two- or three-word sequences made from a verb that colligates with adverbial or prepositional particles and that also semantically collocates (Baicchi, Rosca 2016). More specifically, this work draws upon Celce-Murcia and Farsen-Freeman (1999), who identify three main kinds of phrasal verbs, i.e. literal, idiomatic and aspectual phrasal verbs. The study carried out here looks at the idiomatic ones,¹ which could also be described as a specific subcategory within idiomatic expressions for their semantically opaque meaning and their rather fixed nature, given the fact that if the particle is removed, their meaning radically changes.

Therefore, the choice of studying phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions in TV interviews stems from the fact that these dialogic interactions are well

¹ The general expression ‘phrasal verbs’ will be used throughout the paper, even though it only refers to the idiomatic ones.

known as rather extemporaneous, generally presenting more marked similarities with spoken English. For this reason, they are a privileged site for the occurrence of phraseological and more colloquial expressions (Milizia 2013).

3. Data and methods of analysis

The dataset under analysis is part of the materials used for “The ESP Video Clip Corpus”, a multimodal corpus currently being compiled by a group of scholars at the University of Pisa for an inter-university project.² The corpus encompasses 216 video clips (and their corresponding transcripts) spanning across various knowledge domains and textual genres. This study revolves around TV interviews, one of the six textual genres represented in the corpus, featuring interviewees with different backgrounds and roles, who were interviewed to discuss topics related to their specific knowledge domain and area of expertise. More precisely, the interviewees involved in this study come from the world of *i*) political science, *ii*) business and economics, and *iii*) showbusiness (showbiz). The following table (1) details the dataset by supplying specific information for each item, e.g. the knowledge domain represented by each interview (first column), the name of the person being interviewed and his/her expertise/occupation (second column), the date on which the interview aired (third column), its length (fourth column), and finally the TV show in which the interview appeared (fifth column).

Domain	Interview title	Date	Length	Source
Political science	Interview with Hillary Clinton (Politician)	13-10-17	20:13 minutes	Channel 4 News
Political science	Interview with Donald Trump (USA President)	25-01-17	20:17 minutes	ABC News Tonight
Political science	Interview with Bernie Sanders (Politician)	13-10-15	24:00 minutes	Meet the Press
Business and economics	Interview with Meg Whitman (HP CEO)	03-11-15	21:33 minutes	Charlie Rose
Business and economics	Interview with Nick Woodman (GoPro CEO)	06-09-14	18:40 minutes	Charlie Rose
Business and economics	Interview with Ursula Burns (XEROX CEO)	01-02-17	23:31 minutes	Charlie Rose
Showbiz	Interview with Tom Hanks (Actor)	22-01-14	22:31 minutes	David Letterman Show
Showbiz	Interview with Sofia Coppola (filmmaker)	05-08-17	20:07 minutes	Charlie Rose
Showbiz	Interview with Sheryl Crow (Singer)	09-09-17	20:01 minutes	Charlie Rose

Table 1
Dataset used for the present study.

² This research has been financed by the Italian Ministry for the University (PRIN 2015 no. 2015TJ8ZAS).

All the selected interviews were aired on American television programmes of various kinds, and they all feature American interviewees. In accordance with the principles of data harmonization and balance (Freddi 2013) for building a specialized dataset, the full interviews (video and transcripts) were selected amongst those used for the creation of “The ESP Video Clip Corpus” on the basis of their topic (three interviews per discourse domain), their length (between eighteen and twenty-four minutes of conversation) and, since the analysis is synchronic, the date on which they were broadcast (from 2014 to 2017). Altogether, 64:30 minutes of political interviews, 63:40 minutes of business interviews and 62:30 minutes of showbiz interviews were gathered, orthographically transcribed and then analysed.

The methodological apparatus used for the present research attempts to combine quantitative and qualitative considerations and is especially catered towards the multimodal nature of the corpus. Given the complexity of an analytical approach which takes into account different levels of communication (e.g. verbal and nonverbal), I referred to Bednarek and Caple’s (2017) topology for situating research to decide how to conduct this study.

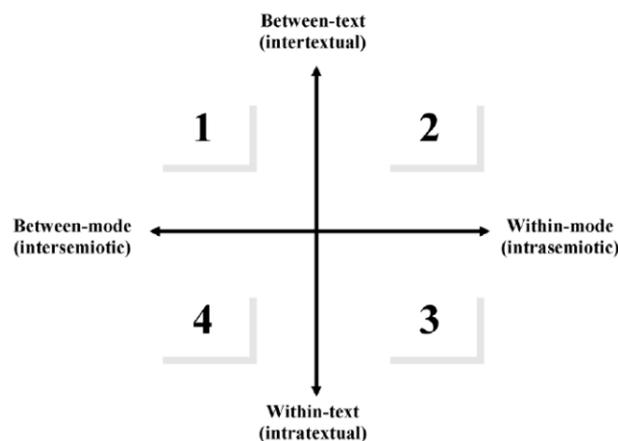


Figure 1
Topology for situating research (Bednarek, Caple 2017).

With reference to the figure above, the analysis was structured into three main phases. The first phase was to detect and transcribe all instances of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs in the interviews presented above, together with their time frame of occurrence. The starting point for disambiguation was the definition of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs explained in section (2). Phase one could be situated in Zone 1 of the topology, since it entailed the mono-modal (intrasemiotic) analysis of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs within each text (and not across texts, as is usually done in corpus-based studies). Preliminary quantitative counts of the frequency of idiomatic

expressions and phrasal verbs³ through a manual check⁴ of the transcripts allowed me to explore variations across different discourse domains. The second phase consisted in combining the reading of the transcripts with the observation of the corresponding videos so as to detect whether, how and to what extent the non-compositional meaning of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs is also recalled by co-occurring nonverbal semiotic resources (cf. Wildfeuer 2013 for an overview of nonverbal items on screen). Since gestures were found to be the semiotic element whose relationship with the meaning of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs was more manifestly evident and recurrent, the second phase of the analysis primarily focused on their description and investigation. As far as their classification and analysis are concerned, I used the taxonomies for gestures put forward by McNeill (1992, 2005) and Kendon (2004). Going back to the topology, in this phase of the research a shift from Zone 1 to Zone 4 can be detected, since the analysis becomes intersemiotic, involving more than just one mode of communication. Thus, still in Zone 4 of the topology, the third phase entailed establishing to what extent and how gestures accompany idioms and phrasal verbs across interviews featuring specialized discourses. For this purpose, a selection of examples taken from different interviews in the dataset under analysis were transcribed multimodally, following a model of transcription already used in Vignozzi (2016), which was adapted from Wildfeuer (2013) and Bruti (2015). The results of this multimodally-informed comparative analysis made it possible to posit some hypotheses about the potential motivation behind the trends detected.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. *Quantitative analysis of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs*

The first step in the analysis consisted in qualitatively going through the transcript of each interview in the corpus in order to single out all instances of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs contained in the delivery of the interactants. Table (2) summarizes the results of this preliminary quantitative

³ As for the identification of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs, I relied upon the criteria described in detail in Section 2.

⁴ The choice of carrying out a manual check of the transcripts derived from the fact that the linguistic phenomena under analysis in this work are essentially pragmatic in nature. Therefore, an automatic investigation would not have been as accurate, especially in the recognition of idiomatic meanings for which there is a clear form-function mismatch (Aijmer, Rühlemann 2014). Such an attentive analysis was also possible because the multimodal subcorpus used for this study was rather contained in size.

investigation. In the first column on the left, the discourse domains around which each interview revolves are listed, and their titles are displayed in the second column. The third and the fourth column, instead, show the frequency of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs in each interview. Finally, the last column on the right illustrates the total count of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs occurring in each discourse domain, displaying also their occurrence calculated per minute.

Domain	Interview title	Idiomatic expressions	Phrasal verbs	Total counts and frequency per minute	
Political science	Interview with Hillary Clinton (Politician)	14	22	99 idiomatic expressions + phrasal verbs (1.53 x minute)	
Political science	Interview with Donald Trump (USA President)	11	22	32 idiomatic expressions	67 phrasal verbs
Political science	Interview with Bernie Sanders (Politician)	7	23		
Business and economics	Interview with Meg Whitman (HP CEO)	18	13	88 idiomatic expressions + phrasal verbs (0.64 x minute)	
Business and economics	Interview with Nick Woodman (GoPro CEO)	8	9	41 idiomatic expressions	47 phrasal verbs
Business and economics	Interview with Ursula Burns (XEROX CEO)	15	25		
Showbiz	Interview with Tom Hanks (Actor)	7	21	72 idiomatic expressions + phrasal verbs (0.41 x minute)	
Showbiz	Interview with Sofia Coppola (filmmaker)	12	11	26 idiomatic expressions	46 phrasal verbs
Showbiz	Interview with Sheryl Crow (Singer)	7	14		
TOTAL COUNTS		99	140	239 (1.25 x minute)	

Table 2
Frequencies of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs.

On a surface level, it can be noticed that all interviews in the corpus contain both idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs in quite a consistent way. Looking at variations among discourse domains, we can appreciate that interviews with politicians feature the highest concentration of these linguistic phenomena with 99 occurrences, corresponding to 1.53 items per minute. Interviews about business and economics contain 88 occurrences of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs with a total count of 0.64 instances per minute. Finally, interviews involving showbiz personalities include 72 occurrences, which correspond to 0.41 idiomatic expressions or phrasal verbs per minute. Across all domains, 1.25 idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs together (239 instances in total) per minute were uttered. This first result is rather low if it is

compared with what Erman and Warren (2000) and Liu (2003) found in spontaneous and non-specialized conversation, where Liu (2003) counted around 4 idiomatic expressions per minute.

Examining the data in more detail, phrasal verbs (e.g. ‘figure it out’) were more numerous than idiomatic expressions (e.g. ‘bird in hand’) (140 phrasal verbs and 99 idiomatic expressions). This finding is in line with Biber *et al.*’s (1999) large-scale description of spoken English, according to which phrasal verbs are far more recurrent than idiomatic expressions. Political science interviews contain, by far, the majority of phrasal verbs (67 instances), which, in business and showbiz interviews, are more or less the same in number (47 times in the former and 46 times in the latter). As for idiomatic expressions, the highest concentration is found in business and economics interviews, which contain 41 examples. Political science interviews follow with 32 occurrences and showbiz interviews with 26. Table (3) shows a snapshot of some phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions found in each domain.

Domain	Sample of Idiomatic expressions	Sample of Phrasal verbs
Political science	Have second thoughts; walk a different line; get their hands dirty; put blood and treasure; perfect storm; back on track; a home run; like a war zone; shine a bright spotlight.	Eked out; swirling around; send [the press secretary] out; getting [sucked] into; paying down; flips out; warned against; flooded with; shut down; run against.
Business and economics	Pull your socks up; been there done that; have a rhinoceros skin; drink your own Kool-Aid; get into the weeds; bird in hand; hit the road; thrown out on your ear; drive the bus into a road or into a ditch; keeping the power plant going.	Lean in to; lever up; take out; come up with; inch along; lean forward; run under; hammer [something] out; manage across; started out.
Showbiz	A rock and a hard place; a ‘B’ movie; throw down the gauntlet; find your way to him; being hot heads; in the dark; at the height of his game; money changes hand; off their game; hit the road.	Filling in; tracked down; cracks [me] up; taking over; cut off; hung out; miss out; broken up; come together; took off.

Table 3

A sample of some idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs for each domain.

Therefore, as Table (2) shows, the domain in which there are more idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs is political science, where phrasal verbs are roughly twice as frequent as idiomatic expressions. Given the fact that such linguistic phenomena, as underlined in section (2), are considered typical features of colloquialism and informality, this trend may appear relatively unexpected. Indeed, politics is considered a rather formal and institutional domain, where speakers talk to large audiences and tend to monitor their speech and use an adequately serious tone, akin to a more written-like style (van Dijk 1997). In business interviews, we can observe that idiomatic expressions (e.g. ‘change of pace’, ‘get the ball rolling’, etc.) are more numerous than in political interviews and that they are almost as frequent as phrasal verbs. This tendency is in line with the nature of business communication, which is neither particularly formal nor informal, but is a hybrid mixture of technicality and informality (Crawford Camiciottoli 2007). To conclude, showbiz interviews contain the lowest concentration of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs, even though they are manifestly less specialized than political and business interviews, and their more relaxed and light-hearted register should, in theory, have favoured the occurrence of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs. In fact, these linguistic phenomena are also recognized as rhetorical tools that embellish language, making it more colourful, creative and intriguing (Wood 2010).

4.2. Multimodal analysis

After determining to what extent idiomatic phrases and phrasal verbs occur across the corpus, I added a multimodal perspective to the analysis (the concept of multimodality used here is broadly inspired from O’Halloran 2010 and Wildfeuer 2013). To put it simply, the analysis thus far centred on dialogues only, i.e. one semiotic system within the aural modality, was complemented with the evaluation of the corresponding visual.

The reasons for and the advantages of carrying out a multimodally-informed analysis are manifold. First and foremost, we cannot disregard the fact that TV interviews are essentially thought of and disseminated as audiovisual texts, which are characterized by an intricate semiotic fabric (Baños *et al.* 2013). Differently from a written text, they utilize various ‘sign systems’ such as language, visual communication, body language, kinesics, etc. by exploiting different modalities (e.g. visual and aural) (O’Halloran 2010). Moreover, given the stratification of idiomatic meaning-making that describes both linguistic phenomena under analysis, a multimodal approach that takes into account different semiotic codes may show, for example, if and how elements from the visual match and co-occur with their complex figurative meaning. Therefore, all idiomatic phrases and phrasal verbs were carefully looked at in their semiotic integrity (i.e. by watching the videos corresponding

to the transcripts) in order to observe which nonverbal elements were more manifestly intertwined with their meanings in the interaction.

Such a preliminary inductive exploration of the “modal ensemble that creates meaning” (Kress 2010, p. 59) revealed that body movements (i.e. gestures), were the nonverbal cue that most frequently recalled the non-compositional meaning of both the linguistic phenomena at stake. In particular, it was noticed that arm and hand gestures co-occurred with phrasal verbs and idiomatic phrases in such a consistent and meaningful way so as to inspire me to carry out a more detailed analysis casting light on the role and functions of gestures in sequences involving idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs.

4.3. Hand and arm gestures

Gesturing is a vast field of study that embraces different communicative events, lying behind the idea that “speech and movement appear together as manifestations of the same process of utterance” (Kendon 1980, p. 208). Giving a complete description of the phenomenon would be far beyond the scope of this research, for which the notion of gestures was narrowed down to the “motion [of arms and/or hands] that embodies a meaning relatable to the accompanying speech” (Kendon 2004, p. 36). As such, the definition of gesture used here does not include movements that do not accompany speech, nor does it include pantomimes (gestures with the obligatory absence of speech) or emblematic gestures (optional presence of speech), such as the ‘ok’ sign in North America, or signed language in general.

The taxonomy to classify the types of gestures in my dataset was adapted from McNeill (1992), whose classification distinguishes between four types:

- Deictic gestures are pointing motions to identify, in space or time, an entity under discussion.
- Iconic gestures represent a concrete idea. An example given by McNeill is a speaker who, while retelling a scene from a Sylvester and Tweety Bird cartoon in which Tweety Bird stuffs a bowling ball down a drain pipe on top of Sylvester, stuffs one hand with fingers together to form a fist inside a ring created by the other hand.
- Metaphoric gestures, instead, represent an abstract idea. In general, they resemble something concrete in order to represent something abstract (e.g. pantomiming a spherical shape to represent the idea of wholeness).
- Beats are gestures typically executed as rapid hand flicks, which have no semantic content of their own and are thought to play a role in the conception of the discourse organisation. In fact, they generally occur during the introduction of a new character or to highlight important points in discourse.

Moving on to the functions of gestures, I mainly followed Kendon (2004) who, from a more pragmatic point of view, describes how gestures can give precision to the meaning of utterances. He identifies modal gestures, which express degrees of certainty; performative gestures, whose primary function is to perform a speech act (an example could be dismissing something with a wave of the hand); and parsing, which specifically marks different units within an utterance. Weinberg *et al.* (2013) add three more functions to this repertoire: indexical (when used to indicate a referent), representational (when they represent an object or idea) and, finally, social (i.e. gestures that stress the importance of the message or attempt to involve the audience to a major extent).

4.3.1. Idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs and gestures

For a broader understanding of the role of gestures in the meaning-making, an assessment of whether and to what extent idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs coexist in time and with tight synchrony with hand or arm gestures was undertaken. First, idiomatic expressions alone were taken into account. The investigation revealed that among the 99 idiomatic expressions identified in the dataset, 62 (62.2%) occur together with gestures.⁵ An example is Hillary Clinton, who says ‘have second thoughts’, meaning a change of opinion, while moving her arms and hands from left to right.

The following figure (2) offers a more detailed breakdown divided per specialized discourse domain. The first bars for each domain illustrate the occurrences of idiomatic expressions, the second ones specify the number of times idiomatic expressions co-occur with gestures.

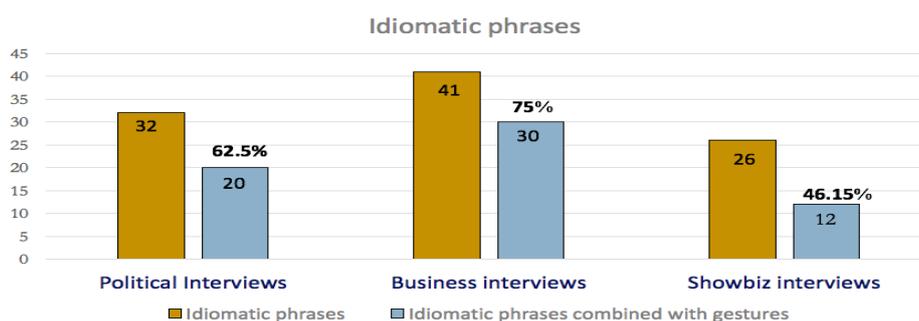


Figure 2
Idiomatic expressions and gestures.

⁵ In a few cases, it was not possible to evaluate whether the idiom co-occurred with a gesture or not, because the voice was off-camera.

Overall, the results seem to suggest that in business interviews gestures are associated with idiomatic expressions to a major extent (in 75% of the cases). In political interviews as well, gestures are quite preponderant being employed in 62.5% of cases. Finally, in showbiz interviews, they are used in slightly less than the half of the total cases (46.15%).

The same type of analysis was carried out for phrasal verbs, for which in 81 examples out of 160 (50.6%) gestures are intertwined with verbal language. Figure (3) graphically displays the results for each discourse domain.

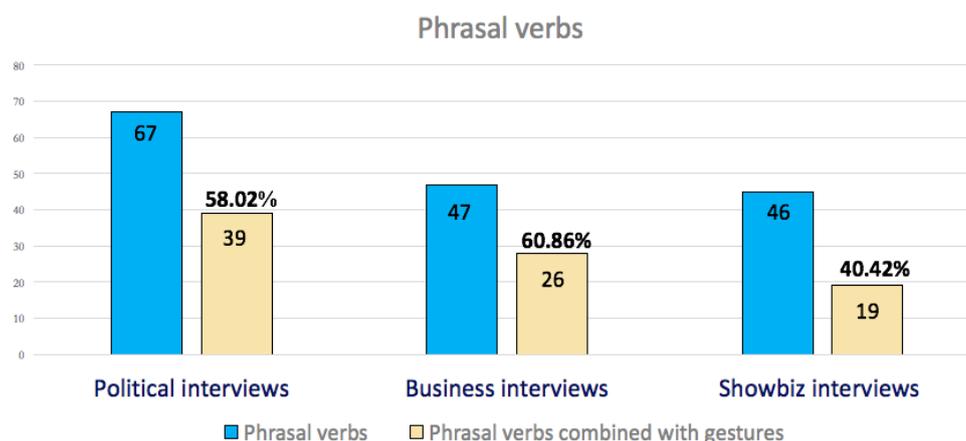


Figure 3
Phrasal verbs and gestures.

Quite interestingly, the results obtained for phrasal verbs show similar trends to those found for idiomatic expressions. In fact, even though these particular verbs are more recurrent in political interviews than in business and economics, the specialized domain with which hand or arm movements are more often associated is again business and economics (60.86%). Moreover, in political interviews gestures appear in 58.02% of cases, and in showbiz interviews, where there is the lowest frequency peak, in just 40.42% of the cases.

4.3.2. Classification of gestures across domains

With the aim of understanding the typology of gestures used in each discourse domain, both idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs were evaluated following the framework introduced above (cf. section 4.3.). The figures that follow (4, 5, 6) illustrate the analysis for gestures co-occurring with idiomatic expressions. Before describing the results, I would like to point out that, as relevant literature on the topic has noted (cf. Crawford Camiciottoli 2015, Bruti 2016, Masi 2016, among others), hand and arm gestures that recur with verbal language sometimes can be quite hard to classify. In my experience, this is especially the case with metaphorical and iconic gestures, which in some cases may overlap.

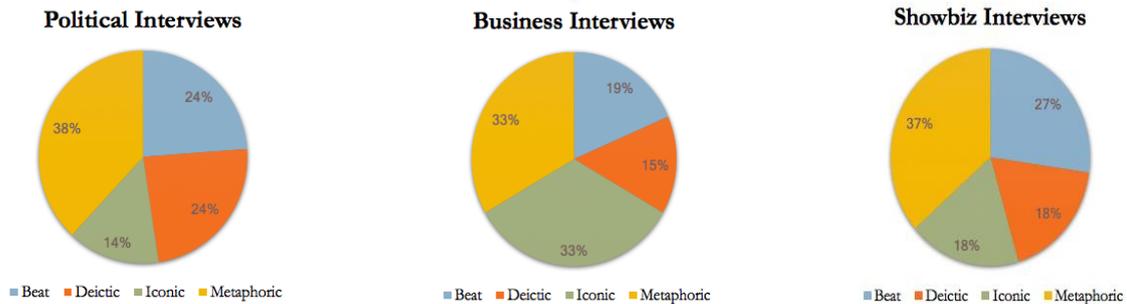


Figure 4

Figure 5

Figure 6

Types of gestures accompanying idiomatic expressions.

What seems to emerge from this analysis is that metaphoric gestures most frequently accompany idiomatic expressions (e.g. the interviewee opening his/her hands and arms while saying ‘it’s bigger picture’) across all the three discourse domains (38% in political interviews, 33% in business interviews and 37% in showbiz interviews). The other type of figurative gestures, i.e. iconic gestures, are also quite recurrent in all interviews, with particular relevance in business interviews (33%), where they are as frequently associated with idiomatic expressions (e.g. the interviewee imitating the act of seizing something while saying ‘bird in hand’) as occurs with the metaphoric gestures. Looking at beats associated with idiomatic expressions, we can see that their frequency is consistent across the three domains, ranging from 19% in business interviews to 27% in showbiz interviews. To conclude, deictic gestures (e.g. the interviewer saying ‘ahead of time’ while pointing in front of him), appear to be slightly foregrounded in political interviews (24%), and in business and showbiz interviews they occur to a similar extent (15% and 18%).

The remaining figures below (7, 8, 9) show the types of gestures that are performed in combination with phrasal verbs.

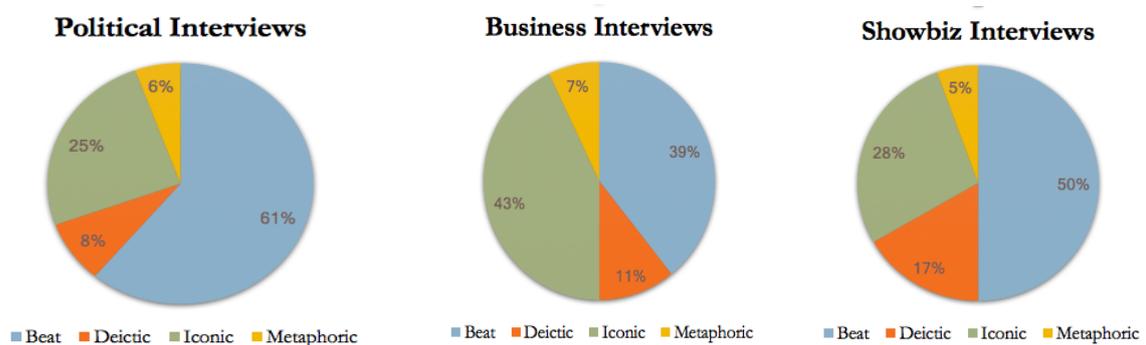


Figure 7

Figure 8

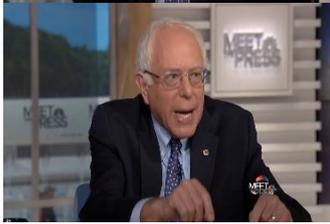
Figure 9

Types of gestures accompanying phrasal verbs.

As can be noticed, beats are the most frequent kind of gestures co-occurring with phrasal verbs. In political interviews in particular, they account for more than half of the total of gestures. As to iconic gestures, they are most frequently employed with phrasal verbs in business interviews (43%), then in showbiz and political interviews to almost the same extent (28% of cases in the former and 25% in the latter). Quite surprisingly, metaphoric gestures, which were the most frequent type with idiomatic expressions, are not very frequently used with phrasal verbs. Finally, deictic gestures are quite stable across the three domains, although, on average, they were employed with a higher frequency with idiomatic expressions.

4.4. Multimodal transcription of selected examples

The subsequent tables illustrate the multimodal transcriptions of a selection of examples showing how co-occurring gestures may contribute to the meaning-making of idiomatic expressions (table 4) and phrasal verbs (table 5). As previously noted, the transcription follows the same framework employed in Vignozzi (2016). The first column on the left gives the title of the interview and the discourse domain. The second column displays the shots that correspond to the uttered expression, which are described in the third column. The fourth is devoted to gestures and is the richest part of the transcription. The last column consists of the transcription of the verbal language making up the idiomatic expression or the phrasal verb.

Interview title and domain	a) Shot	b) Shot description	c) Gestures	d) Spoken language
(1) Interview with Senator Bernie Sanders - Political science		Medium shots of Bernie Sanders	Hands and arms gesture, closed hand, index fingers pointing, moving from up to down. Arms moving with the hand	Bernie Sanders: We are on a race to the bottom
			Gesture function: Representational/metaphoric	
(2) Interview with Nick Woodman (GoPro CEO) - Business and economics		Medium shots of Nick Woodman	Hand gesture, closed hand touching the temple and then suddenly	Nick Woodman: The light bulb went off

			opening up	
			<p>Gesture function: Representational / iconic</p>	
(3) Interview with Sofia Coppola (Filmmaker) - Showbiz		Medium shot of Sofia Coppola	Hand and arm gesture, open hand, palm down. The hand and the arm suddenly move up	Sofia Coppola: In this kind of over the top situation
			<p>Gesture function: Metaphoric/representational</p>	

Table 4

Multimodal transcriptions of a selection of excerpts involving idiomatic expressions.

In example (1) in table (4) we may notice that the idiomatic expression used by Senator Bernie Sanders during an interview for the Sunday morning talk show ‘Meet the Press’ is “a race to the bottom”. This expression is tied to the socio-economic environment and indicates a state of competition where companies (or states or nations) attempt to undercut the competition’s prices by sacrificing standards, safety, regulations, wages and so on. As happens most of the time in TV interviews, the image is conveyed through medium shots, which frame the whole subject from the knees (or waist) up, and thus they allow the viewers to detect gestures and movements. The analysis of gestures reveals that the senator, while using the idiomatic expression, suddenly moves his hand and arms from up to down until he reaches the table. This gesture metaphorically recalls the idiomatic meaning of the expression, being the representation of something that falls, just like the economic situation, according to the interviewee. The second example represents the field of business and economics and (2) is taken from an interview with GoPro (an American technology company) CEO, Nick Woodman, aired on Charlie Rose, at the time one of the biggest interview talk shows in the USA. The idiomatic expression used by the interviewee is “the light bulb went off”, which is an informal American idiomatic expression meaning “to have a sudden realization or recognition”. Regarding gestures, we can appreciate in the two medium shots that the speaker lifts his hand to his head and opens it up so as to symbolize something that bursts. Therefore, the gesture, again, unveils the idiomatic meaning of the expression, which implies that something “turned on”. The last example in table (3) comes from the same talk

show as example (2), and features an interview with the showbiz personality Sofia Coppola, a renowned filmmaker. While talking about one of her last movies, she defines the situation resorting to the idiomatic expression “over the top”. The sense of such an expression is rather hyperbolic, meaning ‘beyond normal’, ‘excessive’. In evaluating the gesture that co-occurs with the verbal message, it can be seen that the auteur raises her open hand and arm, metaphorically representing the idea of something that is well above the standard.

In table (5) below the same transcription was carried out for a selection of phrasal verbs co-occurring with gestures.

Interview title and domain	a) Shot	b) Shot description	c) Gestures	d) Spoken language
(4) Interview with US President Donald Trump - Political science		Long shot of President Donald Trump and TV anchor David Muir	<p>Hand gesture, closed hand, index finger pointing, moving from right to left. Arm moving with the hand</p> <p>Gesture function: Deictic-indexical</p>	David Muir: So, they are paying us back
(5) Interview with Meg Whitman (HP CEO) - Business and economics		Medium shots of Meg Whitman	<p>Hand gesture, open hands, palms down. The hands interlace and the fingers are towards the palms</p> <p>Gesture function: Iconic-representational</p>	Meg Whitman: Put old technology together
(6) Interview with Sofia Coppola (Filmmaker) - Showbiz		Medium shots of Sofia Coppola	Hand gesture, open hand, palm down and then up down. The hand fluctuates from right	Sofia Coppola: How to fit in

			and left. Imitating a snake	
			Gesture function: Metaphoric- representatio nal	

Table 5
 Multimodal transcriptions of a selection of excerpts involving phrasal verbs.

In example (4) there is one long shot (i.e. framing the whole figures of both interviewer and interviewee) of U.S. president Donald Trump and anchor-person David Muir. The attention here is on the interviewer himself who states that, according to Trump, Mexicans are “paying [us] back” for building the notorious wall. By uttering this phrasal verb, he makes a gesture with his right hand, using his index finger while moving from right to left. Such a deictic gesture has a clear indexical function, inasmuch as it positions and reinforces the transaction from ‘they’ to ‘us’. Example (5) is part of a business interview with Meg Whitman, the CEO of the Silicon Valley colossus Hewlett Packard. In the interview, she uses a series of phrasal verbs, such as “lever up [the balance sheet], “take out [the costs]”, “put [old technology] together”, to mention just a few. The shots show the interviewee’s fingers weaving together she utters the phrasal verb. The iconic nature of the gesture is crystal clear, concretely representing the idea of connection. The last example includes (6), which is another extract from Sofia Coppola’s interview. In the two medium shots, she uses the phrasal verb “fit in” and, at the same time, she moves her arm and hand miming a slithering snake, i.e. something that slips in. Such a representation, again, is metaphorically related to the non-compositional meaning of the phrasal verb, which, in this case, is to try to be accepted within a group.

5. Concluding remarks

Interviews broadcast on television are instruments of knowledge dissemination used to discuss a vast array of topics in a way that is accessible to those who turn on their television at home and tune to the network airing the show. They are, thus, crafted with the aim of encouraging the consumer not to change the channel, and to keep watching and enjoying the interview. The linguistic register used by the interactants is undoubtedly one of the elements that adapts the most to the need to reach a balance between clarity/specialization of information and entertainment that is dictated by both the TV and the dialogic

format. The result is a product that is a hybrid mixture between conversational features, as well as specialized and planned discourse traits.

This research has proposed a pilot study of the pervasiveness of some orality indicators, i.e. idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs, in political, business and showbiz interviews. A first quantitative analysis testing the occurrence of these linguistic phenomena showed that phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions are more recurrent in business and political interviews, i.e. in more deliberately specialized interviews as compared to showbiz interviews (idiomatic expressions were more frequent in business interviews and phrasal verbs in political interviews). This result seems to point to the fact that, the more specialized the knowledge domain, the more language, when it is TV-mediated, is permeated with these involving and engaging expressions, perhaps in an attempt to smooth out the indirect interaction with the home audience and thus to build rapport with them.

Furthermore, using phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions to a greater extent in political and business communication could not only be a stylistic choice making language more colourful and involving, but it could also have a simplifying function by, for example, substituting more complex words (e.g. Greco-Latinate words) or by just explaining very specialized and sophisticated concepts with figurative phrases, confirming the trend highlighted in Laudisio (2015) when studying specialized TV series. Even though more in-depth research would be needed to make precise claims, the overall tendency seems to be that formality and specialization tend to be mixed with colloquialism, so as to succeed in reaching the audience effectively with a more informal, direct and involving style.

Regarding the multimodal analysis of a selection of examples featuring these linguistic phenomena, it emerged that gestures are the nonverbal elements that are most often intertwined with the non-literal meaning of phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions. Speakers in political and business interviews, in particular, employed gestures in synchrony with phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions more often than in showbiz interviews. More interesting is the fact that idiomatic expressions most often co-occur with metaphoric gestures, i.e. representational movements that match and reinforce the idiomatic meaning expressed through the verbal. As for phrasal verbs, they are associated with beats (i.e. discourse organizing gestures that do not directly reflect the non-compositional meaning of the verb) to a greater extent in political interviews and showbiz interviews. In business interviews, instead, iconic gestures (i.e. concrete representations of the meaning of the phrasal verb) are the most recurrent typology.

In a nutshell, this preliminary study seems to confirm Biber and Reppen's (2002) claim that the frequency of idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs is register and domain specific, namely their frequency varies according

to the formality of the situation and to the knowledge domain we are talking about, adding that gesture use also seems to match with that in quite a consistent way. In fact, political and business interviews feature both more idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs and co-occurring gestures than showbiz interviews, where perhaps other strategies, such as the use of humour, substitute the involving and social lubricant function covered by phrasal verbs and idiomatic expressions.

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