# OPPOSITIONAL DISCOURSE
# IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION
## A Contrastive Analysis between Face-to-Face
## and Video-Mediated Interviews in English

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**Abstract** – This paper explores Oppositional Discourse (OD) with special attention to video-mediated communication in English. I will first qualify the various dimensions of OD as well as its linguistic triggers. Then, I will carry out an exploratory study to test if and to what extent the digital transformation has contributed to possible changes in OD strategies; to do so, a subset of the *InterDiplo Covid-19 Corpus*, developed at the University of Verona, Italy, will be analyzed. The Corpus covers face-to-face and video-mediated interviews carried out in English between journalists and diplomats/politicians/science experts from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, and is specifically tagged to concentrate on the question-answer interface between interviewer and interviewee. The subcorpus taken into consideration for the present study covers two equal sets of face-to-face and video-mediated interviews to compare non-linguistic and linguistic aspects. The data yielded by this pilot analysis point to differences in the actualization of OD between the two subsets, thus suggesting that the video-mediated environment does play a role in the way interviews unfold.

**Keywords**: broadcast interviews; journalism; language of diplomats; Oppositional Discourse; video-mediated communication

> *For language is the armoury of the human mind;*
> *and at once contains the trophies of its past,*
> *and the weapons of its future conquests.*
> (S.T. Coleridge "Biographia Literaria", 1817, Chapter XVI)

> *For language is framed to convey not the object alone*
> *but likewise the character, mood and intentions*
> *of the person who is representing it.*
> (S.T. Coleridge "Biographia Literaria", 1817, Chapter XXII).

## 1. Introduction

The second half of the 20th century has witnessed the thriving of theoretical studies on conflict, with reference to its triggering (Wright *et al.* 1998), management (Smith 1997; Zartman 1995), and resolution (Carnevale, Pruitt

1992; Raiffa 1985) particularly in the working and international environments. Such theoretical research has been paralleled on the applied level by an increasing number of training courses on the management of conflict in economic, legal and political settings, drawing particularly on sociology and psychology (Lewicki 1975; Lewicki *et al.* 1992) and with a clear focus on behavioural and ethnographic perspectives.

The key role of language in conflicting situations has been partly neglected until relatively recently; indeed, it is over the last 30 years that communication as "the essence of all forms of conflict" (Pearce, Littlejohn 1997, p. x) has garnered increasing attention and scholars have moved from the study of opposition 'in discourse' to Oppositional Discourse (OD). Research has been published on aggressive communication in adults/children disputes in the street, at school, and at home (Grimshaw 1990), in healthcare and sports environments (Rancer, Avtgis 2014), in the legal and political arena (Bull, Simon-Venderberger 2019), in mass violence (Dedaic, Nelson 2003) and from the intercultural perspective (Cohen 2001; Chiluwa 2021a, 2021b; Footitt, Kelly 2012). Handbooks (Culpeper *et al.* 2017; Evans *et al.* 2019; Kelly *et al.* 2019) and journals (*JLAC – Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 2013 -) have been published along with book series (*PSLW – Palgrave Studies in Languages at War* 2012 -) tackling foreign languages, translation, interpreting and regional language policies in war contexts. OD has now become such a prominent concern that international associations focussing on communication have developed their own 'Peace and Conflict' divisions (e.g. the *American National Communication Association* and the *International Communication Association*), sharing theoretical and applied studies on the topic.

The blooming of research on OD has partly coincided with the digital transformation that has taken the scene at global level particularly over the last 30 years and has permeated all paths and avenues of our social and personal lives. Internet may have played a role in bringing conflict increasingly within earshot and eyesight of each and every one of us, due to the growing accessibility of information from the general public at a global level, with mass communication consequently becoming a pervasive asset of digital media platforms and devices (Hafner 2021, p. 281). Hence, the online environment has turned into the soundbox of global events and cultural phenomena as well as of personal, interpersonal, inter-/intragroup and international conflicts, wars and violence. It is no surprise, then, as pointed out by Chiluwa (2021b, p. 1) that "interest in the broad subject of conflict studies by linguists and language scholars has increased over the years with the growing incidence of conflicts, wars and political violence around the world".

OD has become so frequent online that since 2016 the EU has adopted

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a specific Code of Conduct to prevent and counter the spread of illegal hate speech online; the code was agreed by the most prominent online platforms and social media companies, including Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter (now X) and YouTube in 2016; between 2018 and 2022 Instagram, Snapchat, Dailymotion, Jeuxvideo.com, TikTok, Rakuten Viber and Twitch agreed to it as well. The European Council has also published a manual to combat hate speech online (Keen, Georgescu 2016), while the UN has issued the *United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech* (UN 2019), acknowledging that "over the past 75 years, hate speech has been a precursor to atrocity crimes, including genocide, from Rwanda to Bosnia to Cambodia."

Amid this growing interest in online OD, little attention has so far been dedicated to the possible differences between video-mediated and face-to-face polarized speech; more specifically, to my knowledge, no study has analyzed the impact of video platforms on the actualization of question/answer interface in conflicting dialogues. To bridge this gap, the present paper will attempt a preliminary study to check whether face-to-face and video-mediated interviews exhibit differences ascribable to the environment where they take place. To do so, in the following sections I will first delve into the different ways in which language impinges on conflicting situations, paying special attention to the increasing role of digital platforms. Then, I will analyze a corpus of interviews carried out in English between journalists and diplomats/international experts from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, concentrating on the question-answer interface between interviewer and interviewee, and I will finally compare them on the basis of the video-mediated/face-to-face environment in which they take place.[1]

## 2. Opposition(al) Discourse

The unwinding of discourse in conflicting situations is generally subsumed under the labels 'Opposition(al) Discourse', 'Conflict Talk', 'Polarized Speech', and 'Adversarial Talk', and is prototypically viewed within the spoken medium, although it may actualize in writing as well.[2] For the purpose of the present paper, I will refer to Oppositional Discourse (OD) as

[1] This article is the result of the research project "Digital Humanities applied to Foreign Languages and Literatures", funded by the Italian Ministry of University and Research within the framework of the Departments of Excellence 2018-2022.

[2] Most notably, political and religious propaganda magazines are a typical example of dichotomous/aggressive language (Patterson 2022), but academic writing may also exhibit (covert) forms of criticism that can be traced back to OD, although scientists favour hedging strategies to safeguard the free flow of information (Salager-Meyer 2000, p. 24).

to the naturally occurring use of language to induce change or doubt in an opposing party via single or multiple speech acts (e.g. questions, assertions, threats, promises). Huspek (2006, p. 1) remarks that OD

> presupposes active opposition between agents, conducted by discursive means, and waged within a public setting. (…) With oppositional discourse we are presented with dominant and subordinate groups, to be sure, but they are in public opposition that consists of openly asserted propositions, questions, counters, and other forms of discursive confrontation and presentation.

While endorsing Huspek's remarks on "active opposition" through "discoursive confrontation", the reference to "dominant" and "subordinate" groups may be debatable, since roles may be inverted within the flow of the same stretch of speech; moreover, particular norms apply and issues of accountability arise depending on the environment (e.g. the workplace). Similarly, the notion of "public setting" would require further contextualization to avoid unnecessary restrictions, considering the variety of contexts in which OD can take place: interpersonal, inter-/intragroup and international. To provide a clearer view of OD, Section 2.1 will illustrate the main dimensions of actualization of discourse, bearing in mind confrontational aspects.

## 2.1. Dimensions of (Oppositional) Discourse

In the actualization of discourse and, consequently, of OD, a number of co-existing variables intervene that can be subsumed under the overarching categories of 'setting', 'channel', 'domain' and 'genre'. Bearing in mind that in actual life there are more overlapping similarities than clear-cut distinctions, we can broadly characterize the setting according to the following dyads:

- Physical/Virtual: by physical we mean, for example, houses, institutional buildings, TV studios, and streets, as opposed to the virtual environment, which may be video-mediated or not; yet a caveat is needed with reference to the Metaverse, where the life settings that are traditionally considered 'physical' are paralleled online in such a way that it would be too simplistic to qualify them merely as 'virtual';
- Private/Public: individuals interacting among themselves without a significant audience or in a public arena, at local, national or international level;
- Family/Workplace;
- Audience/Lack of Audience, whereby numbers and identity of the audience may be known or unknown, thus adding a further variable to OD;
- Mediated/Unmediated, the mediator being a third party who is expected to

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be neutral in relation to the cause of the conflict.

The channel may be either verbal or non-verbal, whereby non-verbal may refer to clothing, gestures, body posture, facial expression and – more generally – display of physical presence. Yet, in spoken contexts, discourse is hardly ever exclusively either verbal or non-verbal, since it unfolds via co-occurring and co-dependent channels that make it inherently multivocal.

Discourse can occur in a variety of domains, from journalism to politics, from business to law, from medicine to biotechnology, and from education to advertising, to name the most typical ones. In turn, each domain is organized into sub-domains which can hardly be disentangled as separate hemispheres but should be viewed as a set of interconnected units and sub-units. So, for example, the political section of a news outlet cannot be separated either from the language of politics or from the broad field of journalism, not to mention the user-generated content of unmediated journalism which is given voice in the vlog/blog discussions hosted by mainstream media.

Finally, with reference to genre, of the traditional four broad categories that we may encounter in discourse in terms of its aims – descriptive, narrative, expository, and argumentative, which can in turn cover many more subtypes, like (factual) report, explanation, analytical/hortatory exposition, and direction – OD in particular can be actualized in a discussion (be it formal or informal), a negotiation (recorded/unrecorded), a meeting (scheduled/unscheduled) or an interview.

## *2.2. Linguistic triggers of opposition*

Scholars have identified a set of linguistic features that notably spark opposition in conversational discourse. In the present overview, I will subsume all of them under the overarching label of 'linguistic triggers' of OD, without diversifying between lexical, grammatical or pragmatic ones. Indeed, in a number of cases, a syntactic trigger may function as a semantic trigger as well; this is the case, for example, of *and* in such contexts as "I find this difficult, and then again easy" (Jeffries 2014, p. 44), in so far as it co-occurs and co-works with the contrastive lexemes *difficult/easy*, "thus signalling an ongoing metalinguistic activity in the speaker's mind" (Aijmer 2013, p. 4). The most common linguistic triggers are:

- Negation, covering both explicit (*no*, *not*) and implicit negative triggers (e.g. *instead*, *in place of*);
- Coordinating conjunctions, most notably *but*, *(n)or* and *yet*;
- Contrastive/concessive conjunctions like *while*, *despite*, *although*;
- Comparatives: *less… than*, *more… than*;

- Juxtaposition of personal pronouns: *I/we* vs. *you/they*;
- Modal markers of commitment, such as *I think*, *I suppose*, *possibly*, *may*, *actually*, *certainly* and *obviously*;
- Syntactic frames of binarized opposition (*either X or Y)* or of replacive opposition (*X rather than Y*).

In turn, lexicon may trigger OD when it is 'polarized', that is when it expresses adversarial stance, creating binary opposition through naming choices, like *legal* vs. *illegal*, *genuine* vs. *non-genuine* and *right* vs. *wrong*. Applied to separate group categories – like natives vs. strangers – this practice leads to group divisions, with one of the two dismissed as undeserving. So, for example, referring to *migrants/boat people* rather than to *refugees* leads to the understanding that the people are denied a label that denotes their legal status (Goodman *et al*. 2017).

Some terms may be more 'loaded' than others with conflictual strength; by way of example, *aggression/attack* is more 'loaded' than *strike/military action/operation*; the same goes for *the killing of civilians* vs. *collateral damage*, *the inadvertent killing of soldiers by allies* vs. *friendly fire*, and finally *torture* vs. *enhanced interrogation techniques*. Indeed, lexical items may possess more than one meaning or have a hidden connotation, which may actually change over time and depend on circumstances. Hence "it is necessary to examine the meaning of a word or expression in the context of the conflict, where it may be loaded with different associations and meanings depending on whom you ask" (IPI 2013, p. 4).

Overall, a caveat is necessary when dealing with the linguistic triggers mentioned above. None of them, not even the virtually unmistakable particle *no*, is inherently oppositional, none of them is exclusively responsible for the activation of OD; indeed, the significance of the outcome of OD depends on the interplay between content, context, and interlocutors who, with their communicative actions and reactions, may at times need some inferencing effort (Jeffries 2014) – and this is actually part of the game, since language may camouflage more than it reveals.

Hence, the discourse strategies exploited by interlocutors also play a role in the actualization of OD. Some of these techniques are clearly identifiable; this is the case, for example, of 'evasion', where the interlocutor refuses to speculate (*let me stop you*), and of 'hesitation', where pauses, repairs, and restarts, as well as the words *well*, *but*, *I mean…* in turn-taking, signal lack of willingness to agree. Other techniques may convey more than one pragmatic effect, like 'subjectivization', whereby first-person pronouns are followed by verbs of cognition/upgraders/lexical expressions (*I think*, *in my experience*, *to our knowledge…*), that may either show the locutor's personal opinion and direct involvement or, in contrast, question what the addressee has just uttered. Similarly, the rhetorical strategy of

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'indetermination', which relies for example on *if*-clauses and approximators to convey uncertainty, points to OD when patterns of second type conditional are exploited like *if what you say were right, we would…*, thus indicating unreal situations. In turn, with embedded 'presuppositions', utterances are organized in such a way as to include words or phrases that presuppose and give for granted the speaker's assumptions. This practice is frequently actualized by means of negative-interrogative questions and verbal patterns like the following:

- *(why) do/did/don't/didn't you + realize, acknowledge, remember, forget, regret, know*;
- *are/aren't/were/weren't you + aware, sorry, proud, glad, sad of ….*

Finally, all of the above largely co-occur with paralinguistic devices (such as pitch, intensity and duration) which together determine the prosody of speech and are of paramount importance in conveying the intensity of conflictual intention in turn-taking.

## 2.3. Focus on Online OD

When it comes to the online environment, social media have been addressed by scholars from different perspectives as the setting that most breeds extreme speech; flaming, trolling, and slurs (Anderson, Lepore 2013; Berghel, Berleant 2018; Hardaker 2017), particularly when applied to minorities (Polak, Trottier 2020), embody and shape stereotypes of the targeted group and contribute to deepening divisions, as well as spreading, reinforcing, and re-contextualizing populist discourses.

Aggressive discourse has been largely identified in microblogging sites like Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and LinkedIn, as well as the Chinese Weibo. A recent analysis of posts on Weibo carried out by Ho (2021) has showcased ample use of metaphors to express the users' anger, distrust, and hatred towards those who left their houses during lockdown. Escapees were even dehumanized through animal metaphors to highlight their irresponsibility and call for their punishment.

The language of online gaming has also been put under the lens as a form of digital conflict; Graham (2019) in particular has studied a corpus of interactions on an online platform that broadcasts streamers as they play video games and simultaneously interact with their viewers. Messages of obscenity and swearing, as well as aggressive commands have been noticed to be ritualized to create community; indeed, while playing the game, streamers use aggressive language as a strategic tactic, to agitate the opponent and thus gain a competitive advantage and win.

Corpora have been compiled to detect and fight online hate speech; this is the case of the *Italian Twitter Corpus of Hate Speech against Immigrants*

(Sanguinetti *et al.* 2018) and of the *Dataset of Counter Narratives to Fight Online Hate Speech*, covering 5000 hate speech/counter narrative pairs, each annotated with the corresponding hate target (D'Errico *et al.* 2015; Fanton *et al.* 2021).

Since the outburst of the Covid-19 Pandemic, cloud platforms for video and audio communication services like Zoom, Google Meet and Microsoft Teams, where two or more interlocutors talk and discuss in a video-mediated setting, have flourished and fully substituted, at least temporarily, face-to-face interactions. Indeed, during lockdowns, world communication has largely passed through these channels, including OD, which appears to have increased even more, abetted by the unprecedented situational constraints (Hsu, Tsai 2022; Pascual-Ferrá *et al.* 2021; Ye *et al.* 2021).

In his study published immediately before the outbreak of Covid-19, Graham (2019, p. 311) has posited that overall "digitally mediated interactions are not as different from f-t-f interactions as was once thought". When it comes to video-mediated OD, however, to my knowledge, no study appears to have been carried out so far to check if and to what extent the use of video platforms may affect the unfolding of dialogical discourse in conflicting situations. More precisely, does the 'mediation' of the screen make any difference in online interactions where confrontation is enacted? Is the language of interviews, particularly with reference to question/answer turn-taking, somehow affected by the mediation of the video? To address this issue, I have carried out an exploratory pilot study of video-mediated and face-to-face interviews recorded during the first year of the Covid-19 Pandemic, as illustrated in Section 3.

## 3. A pilot study

The *InterDiplo Corpus* has been developed at the University of Verona, Italy, to capture how the English language is used in broadcast interviews and discussions involving professional journalists and international/public figures, and how far the discursive strategies of interlocutors may be prompted by the respective lingua-cultural backgrounds, particularly when diplomats, politicians and science experts are interviewed. At the time of writing this paper (2022) the *Interdiplo Covid-19* section has been completed. This portion covers 80 interviews on the spread and the political/social/economic consequences of Covid-19; the interviews were recorded between February 2020 and February 2021, at a time when the whole world was virtually in complete lock-down and conversational dialogue could be carried out almost exclusively online via cloud platforms for video and audio communication. The interviews are grouped into four equal chunks of 20 recordings each, depending on the English-language

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nativeness or non-nativeness[3] of the participants, so that we could have an equal number of both native and non-native speakers of English interviewing and being interviewed, as follows:
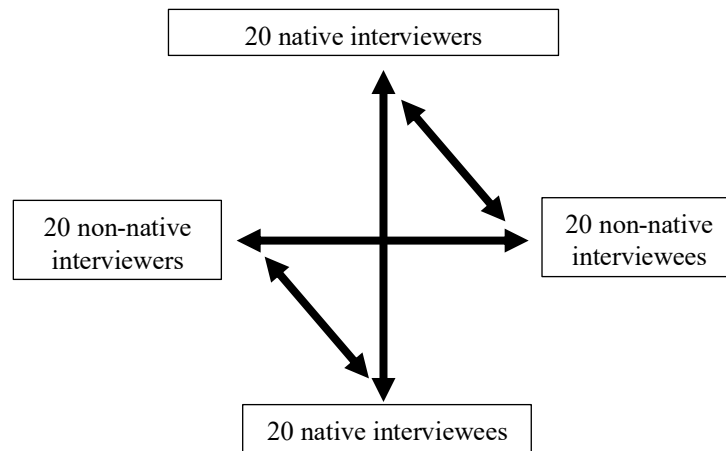


Figure 1
Structure of the InterDiplo Covid-19 Corpus.

Each interview has been saved, transcribed, converted into in XML and tagged for metadata, parts of speech and paralinguistic features (e.g. pauses, repairs, restarts, hesitations), as well as for discursive aspects such as question and answer types.[4] In particular, questions have been categorized as 'open' (leaving the interviewees free to express themselves), 'closed' (expecting a 'yes/no' answer), 'choice' (offering two options), and 'requests' (direct/indirect interrogatives and imperatives, as in *I wonder if you could talk about…, can you tell us, talk us through…*"). Following the same criterion, answers provided in reply to the different types of questions have been classified as 'open', 'closed', and 'choice'.[5]

For the scope of the present study on OD, I selected 20 interviews of an average length of 15-20 minutes each, subdivided into two subsets of an equal number of video-mediated and face-to face interviews, so as to allow comparison between the two subsets, for a total of ~40,000 tokens. Table 1 shows the subcorpus under scrutiny and provides an indication of the setting (video-mediated/face-to-face) of the interviews, the media outlet of each journalist, as well as the nationality, gender and job of each interactant.

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[3] For the concept of Nativeness/Non-nativeness in English of the speakers, we have relied on their nationality.

[4] A detailed description of the different phases of the InterDiplo Corpus compilation, with specific reference to the choice of data and annotation criteria, can be found in Cavalieri *et al.* (2022).

[5] The corpus has been tagged in such a way as to clearly match each question with its related answer.

| SETTING | MEDIA OUTLET | INTERVIEWER | | INTERVIEWEE | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | NATIONALITY | GENDER | NATIONALITY | GENDER | INTERVIEWEE'S JOB/ROLE |
| FACE-TO-FACE | 1. CBS | USA | F | China | M | Diplomat - Ambassador to the US |
| | 2. BBC | UK | M | Italy | M | Diplomat - Ambassador to the UK |
| | 3. CBNC | Singapore | M + M | Singapore + India (2 interviewers) | M | Politician - Minister of Foreign Affairs |
| | 4. CHANNEL NEWS ASIA | Thailand | F | Thailand | M | Politician - Minister of Public Health |
| | 5. RTHK | UK | M | Hungary | M | Politician - Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade |
| | 6. CGTN | China | F | USA | F | Epidemiologist |
| | 7. CGTN | China | F | China | F | Virologist and immunologist |
| | 8. BBC | UK | F | UK | M | Politician - Prime Minister |
| | 9. ITV | UK | F + M (2 interviewers) | UK | M | Politician - Prime Minister |
| | 10. FOX NEWS | USA | M | USA | M | Politician - former President |
| VIDEO-MEDIATED | 11. GZERO | USA | M | China | M | Diplomat - Ambassador to US |
| | 12. BBC | UK | M | China | M | Diplomat - Ambassador to UK |
| | 13. EURONEWS | UK | F | Spain | M | Politician – EU Foreign Policy Chief |
| | 14. BBC | UK | M | UK | M | Science expert - WHO Special Envoy for COVID-19 |
| | 15. BBC | UK | M | Sweden | M | Epidemiologist |
| | 16. BBC | UK | M | France | F | Economist |
| | 17. BBC | UK | M | Holland | M | Writer/historian |
| | 18. BBC | UK | M | India | M | Politician - General Secretary of the ruling party |
| | 19. DW | UK | M | UK | M | Politician |
| | 20. DW | UK | M | China | M | Diplomat - Government Advisor |

Table 1
InterDiplo Covid-19 subcorpus.

It is no intention of this pilot study to draw conclusions on possible relations between nationality and gender of the interlocutors on the one hand and

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incidence of OD on the other, since more data are necessary to reach convincing results. Yet considering that, when compiling the whole InterDiplo Covid-19 Corpus, an attempt was made to trace all interviews available online on the topic during the time under scrutiny, a couple of preliminary observations can be offered. In the first place, this subset – selected on account of its incidence of OD traits compared to the rest of the corpus – may point to a higher exploitation of OD features in native speakers of English among journalists. Secondly, male speakers overwhelmingly exceed female speakers both among interviewers and among interviewees, with females accounting for 35% of interviewing journalists and only 15% of the interviewees; this gap partly mirrors the data recorded in the whole Covid-19 Corpus, where female speakers amount to 44% of the interviewing journalists and 16% of the interviewees. Indeed, overall, it has been difficult to trace broadcast interviews with female science experts and politicians at the international level, not to mention diplomats, which reflects the extant professional gap between men and women in certain professions.

To detect possible differences between the video-mediated interviews and the face-to-face ones, the data have been scrutinized with reference both to verbal and to non-verbal behaviour, thus including display of physical presence, gestures and facial expressions, as illustrated in Section 3.1.

## 3.1. Non-verbal behaviour

In video-mediated interviews a neat difference has been observed between journalists speaking from their studio and those interacting from a different environment, presumably their homes; specifically, when in their studio, they are portrayed half length, with their hands and part of the desk clearly visible; this allows noticing that their gestures frequently accompany their questions as an integral part of their dialogical turn; in contrast, when speaking from a different location, they appear almost exclusively with close-ups on face and shoulders, making it almost impossible to monitor the movements of their hands.

The same goes for interviewees, who are never portrayed half bust and their hands are hardly ever visible. Moreover, even when they counter-react to challenging questions, they appear to convey few facial expressions; indeed, they sometimes even turn their faces away from the camera. This shared attitude of interviewers and particularly of interviewees of not disclosing their body reactions leaves the 'burden' of conveying OD almost exclusively to verbal language.

In contrast, in face-to-face interviews, portraying all interactants in the broadcast studio, hand gestures and facial mimic appear to be evident and the eyes are most frequently turned to the interlocutors; thus non-verbal behaviour accompanies and complements the verbal interaction.

This first finding would lead us to suggest that in professional interviews involving OD, when carried out in a video-mediated setting, verbal language is almost exclusively responsible for expressing opposition, while eye-, face-, and hand-movements are somehow screened by the video, making the whole interaction somewhat apparently more impersonal or neutral from the non-verbal point of view.

## 3.2. Verbal behaviour: questions and answers

Tables 2.1 to 2.4 provide the raw numbers (including the percentages of the totals) of the questions and answers recorded in each interview of the subcorpus with reference to their typology ('open', 'closed', 'requests' and 'choice').

| QUESTIONS | OPEN | CLOSED | REQUEST | CHOICE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text 1 | 4 | 12 | 0 | 5 | 21 |
| Text 2 | 4 | 11 | 2 | 0 | 17 |
| Text 3 | 11 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 29 |
| Text 4 | 8 | 14 | 1 | 0 | 23 |
| Text 5 | 9 | 8 | 0 | 1 | 18 |
| Text 6 | 9 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 18 |
| Text 7 | 6 | 14 | 0 | 0 | 20 |
| Text 8 | 12 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 24 |
| Text 9 | 4 | 37 | 0 | 0 | 41 |
| Text 10 | 5 | 32 | 0 | 0 | 37 |
| TOTAL | 72 (29%) | 167 (67.3%) | 3 (1.2%) | 6 (2.4%) | 248 (100%) |

Table 2.1
Video-mediated interviews: Questions (raw numbers and % in totals).

| ANSWERS | OPEN | CLOSED | CHOICE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text 1 | 13 | 2 | 0 | 15 |
| Text 2 | 8 | 6 | 0 | 14 |
| Text 3 | 21 | 3 | 0 | 24 |
| Text 4 | 14 | 3 | 0 | 17 |
| Text 5 | 8 | 5 | 0 | 13 |
| Text 6 | 11 | 3 | 0 | 14 |
| Text 7 | 5 | 10 | 0 | 15 |
| Text 8 | 15 | 4 | 0 | 19 |
| Text 9 | 22 | 3 | 0 | 25 |
| Text 10 | 16 | 10 | 0 | 26 |
| TOTAL | 133 (73%) | 49 (26.9%) | 0 (0%) | 182 (100%) |

Table 2.2
Video-mediated interviews: Answers (raw numbers and % in totals).

| QUESTIONS | OPEN | CLOSED | REQUEST | CHOICE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text 11 | 7 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 13 |
| Text 12 | 12 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| Text 13 | 11 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 31 |
| Text 14 | 12 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 18 |

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| Text 15 | 17 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 30 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text 16 | 14 | 22 | 0 | 1 | 37 |
| Text 17 | 17 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 18 |
| Text 18 | 5 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 17 |
| Text 19 | 11 | 30 | 0 | 0 | 41 |
| Text 20 | 26 | 77 | 0 | 0 | 103 |
| TOTAL | 132 (40.1%) | 196 (59.6%) | 0 (0%) | 1 (0.3%) | 329 (100%) |

Table 2.3
Face-to-face interviews: Questions (raw numbers and % in totals).

| ANSWERS | OPEN | CLOSED | CHOICE | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text 11 | 9 | 3 | 0 | 12 |
| Text 12 | 17 | 3 | 0 | 20 |
| Text 13 | 15 | 5 | 0 | 20 |
| Text 14 | 15 | 4 | 0 | 19 |
| Text 15 | 14 | 7 | 0 | 21 |
| Text 16 | 13 | 6 | 0 | 19 |
| Text 17 | 9 | 2 | 0 | 11 |
| Text 18 | 10 | 3 | 0 | 13 |
| Text 19 | 15 | 12 | 0 | 27 |
| Text 20 | 55 | 23 | 0 | 78 |
| TOTAL | 172 (71.7%) | 68 (28.3%) | 0 (0%) | 240 (100%) |

Table 2.4
Face-to-face interviews: Answers (raw numbers and % in totals).

In the first place, the data testify to an overall mismatch in numbers between questions and answers; indeed, both in the video-mediated and in the face-to-face interviews, answers are ca. 30% fewer than questions (73.3% online and 72.9% face-to-face), indicating that journalists tend to ask more than one question in the same turn. More interestingly, there appears to be a significant higher number of open questions in face-to-face interviews (40.1%), which leave floor to the interlocutor for an open response, as opposed to video-mediated interviews, where open questions are lower in number (29%). Similarly, choice questions, though extremely limited in both subsets, are almost non-existent in face-to-face interviews (0.3%), while they occur (though not particularly frequently) in video-mediated interviews (2.4%).

Considering that both types of interviews have roughly the same length, these quantitative differences appear not to be attributable to stricter time constraints in either one or the other type. Moreover, in the choice of data, an attempt was made to select similar programme formats, in order to limit the factors that may affect differences in the two types of interviews. Yet further data are needed to verify whether TV channels and programme types may impinge on the results.

Overall, it appears that, in video-mediated interviews, journalists tend to channel their interlocutor to precise answers more than in face-to-face interviews, where questions leave more floor to the interviewees to express

their standpoint without being forced to follow the interviewer's path, as in (1):[6]

(1)     But how do you intend to win them over? given the fact that they are noticing how the government seemingly is clipping the wings of the opposition [txt14_q19]

The data also show that in both subsets closed and choice questions are paralleled by corresponding closed/choice answers only to a minor degree; specifically, I recorded 67.3% closed questions vs. 26.9% closed answers, and in the face-to-face subsets 59.6% closed questions vs. 28.3% closed answers, while choice questions are even down to zero in all their corresponding answers. Indeed, interviewees largely avoid closed questions in favour of open ones, frequently followed by further expansions, as in (2):

(2)     Q: even you have to recognize reality, Donald Trump has declared that he doesn't believe in the credibility of your organization today, Gordon Brown described Trump's move as 'self harm', an act of sabotage, he said many would see it as do you see it in that way?
         A: I really do not want to use any words to do criticize any president of any country that is part of the international system. The way in which the international system works is by consent and by cooperation, when you've got a giant emergency like we have at the moment the most important requirement is that all leaders work together to make sure that the well-being of 7 point 8 billion people is maximized, if one head of state decides that he wants to move away from that global consensus that's not a problem just for the World Health Organization, it's a problem for the world and it's a particularly serious problem if it is the leader of the organization that provides the majority of funding to our system. [txt14_q/a15]

Moreover, checking n-grams containing *not* as a typical oppositional adverb, the most frequent 3-word n-gram turns out to be *I'm not* (27 occurrences) in face-to-face interviews, while in video-mediated ones *I'm not* is superseded by *that's not* (19 vs. 12 occurrences). Such first result would point in the direction of oppositional talk being conveyed in a more impersonal, less subjective way in video-mediated interviews, being somehow 'masked' by third-person subjects (and largely pointing at facts). This dovetails with the considerations made in Section 3.1 on non-verbal behaviour in video-mediated interviews.

     In contrast, in face-to-face interviews there appears to be more personal involvement particularly of the interviewees, who – as pointed out above – are left more free to express their opinions by a higher number of open questions.

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[6] Punctuation in examples is mine.

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Undoubtedly, this aspect would require more in-depth investigation on a broader corpus, taking into account the background of the speakers as well and their professionality; indeed, some of the interviews are with diplomats, who – by profession – tend to avoid personalization and work more as facilitators and mediators leaving themselves aside. In turn, science experts strongly rely on data in their answers and, because of that, they appear to be much more direct and forceful in counterreacting to challenging questions than diplomats, favouring clusters like *that's not true*, *this is/was not*, *absolutely no/not*, as in (3):

(3)    absolutely not, I would like to say it a second time, absolutely not [txt14_q/a5]

With reference to the answers provided by politicians, despite conflict being "congenial" to their language (Bull, Simon-Vendernbergen 2019), in the corpus, when answering questions that may trigger further conflict, politicians take up a conciliatory position and avoid rebutting forcefully to provocative questions:

(4)    Q: people want to know what happened, forty five thousand people died who've tested positive, what do you think the mistakes were?
       A: We mourn every one of the of those who lost their lives and and our thoughts are very much with the with their families.
       Q: do you and you take
       A: and and and do it and I take full responsibility for everything that government did. [txt8q/a4-5]

This tendency appears to be common both in video-mediated and in face-to-face interviewees, confirming that the professional background does impinge on the way answers are given.

From a discourse-strategy point of view, all interviewers follow a practice that is widely acknowledged in journalistic interviews (Clayman, Heritage 2002; Piirainen-Marsh 2005), by embedding presuppositions in their questions both online and face-to-face, taking opinions for granted as facts in the introductory part of the question, to control the direction of talk, as in the following:

(5)    I mean obviously there's been a lot of criticism about the fact that the Chinese government initially was not forthcoming about the explosion of these cases (…) Are there any any lessons the Chinese government has learned from the early missteps that were made in responding to the coronavirus? [txt1_q5]
(6)    What do you have to say to China when it comes to its campaign of disinformation and withholding information when it has come to this pandemic? [txt3_q7]
(7)    Why are you so obsessed with immigration? [txt15_q3]

The strategy of giving for granted an opinion and presenting it as a given fact embedded in the question has been recorded in statements as well, since interviewers frequently close their turn with a statement rather than with a question, loading it with presuppositions:

(8)    You have as China a massive problem now. [txt2_s9]
(9)    Thailand has been issuing very inconsistent statements and incomplete instructions regarding quarantine for COVID-19. [txt14_s1]

Overall, from all the categories of interviewees, diplomats appear the ones who are particularly good at unveiling such fallacies and rebutting the ball into the journalist's side of the pitch, as in (10-11):

(10)   Q: But this would be the EU's moment to start playing that role but it seems to be on the back foot. Why is that?
       A: Well it's your opinion. [txt13_q/a25]
(11)   Q: Do you admit that the EU has failed?
       A: I'm sorry to say but you have a vision of the world which is a little bit dramatic. [txt13_q/a31]

Due to space constraints, in the present paper only these preliminary findings could be dealt with, but a separate study is under way on each linguistic trigger identified in Section 2.2, crossing the data with gender and nationality of the participants, as well as with the formats of programmes from the different TV channels.

## 4. Conclusions

This study has yielded information on both similarities and differences between video-mediated and face-to-face OD, with special reference to the genre of broadcast interviews. In terms of similarities, in both subsets of the corpus analyzed, interviewers largely exploit embedded presuppositions as a strategic device, presenting opinions as facts in their questions; the practice, which is typical of media interviews, channels the interlocutor in the direction desired and runs the risk of causing more confrontation. In turn, to avoid falling into the trap laid by their interlocutors, interviewees tend to answer closed questions with open answers, thus treading different reasoning paths from the ones offered by their interviewers. Diplomats, who are trained in the art and science of negotiation, are the ones most likely to reply in this way, transforming potentially violent conflict into non-violent processes.

In terms of differences, the video somehow screens or hinders non-verbal movements, so far as interviewees convey few facial expressions, do not show their hands, and move their eyes away from the camera. Similarly,

in video-mediated interviews, interactants rely on such clusters as *that's not* more than on *I'm not*, thus pointing in the direction of disclaiming responsibility and resorting to facts rather than to subjective stance in their answers. This would suggest that oppositional talk is conveyed in a more impersonal, less subjective way in video-mediated interviews. In turn, in such interactions, interviewers appear to be more 'imposing' on their interlocutors, favouring closed and choice questions rather than open ones, while in face-to face interviews a higher number of open questions has been recorded.

The observations reported in this exploratory study need to be substantiated by further research; indeed, for want of space, little attention could be paid to possible differences between genders, since female speakers, particularly among interviewees, were very limited in number. Moreover, more data are needed to look into possible differences in reactions for the interactants who do not share the same lingua-cultural background, since, as pointed out by Haugh and Chang (2019), the same criticism does not necessarily convey the same 'indexical value' in different people, and consequently it does not occasion the same response. This aspect, along with the need to analyze thoroughly the interrelation between the profession of the interviewees and the type of answers provided, will need to be intersected with a detailed study of the typical pragmatic aspects triggering OD, diversifying between face-to-face and video-mediation, thus also calling into question such theoretical perspectives as multimodal conversational analysis, politeness theory, and critical discourse analysis.

Bearing in mind what still needs to be done, this preliminary analysis already points to OD as an evolving type of discourse with interesting and partly unexpected traits; the more we understand it in its facets, the more we will be able to tackle potentially aggressive language and engage in constructive communication.

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