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Political interview and audiovisual bias. The case for Los desayunos de TVE (2018)

La entrevista política ante el sesgo audiovisual. El caso de Los desayunos de TVE (2018)

Abstract

This study discusses possible bias in making television interviews with Spanish political leaders. The audiovisual narrative process and scene-setting, the responsibility of the production team, are seen as playing a decisive role in the neutrality of interviews. The study analyses the audiovisual manner by which the Spanish public television corporation, TVE, treated the main Spanish political leaders Pedro Sánchez, Pablo Iglesias, Albert Rivera and Mariano Rajoy on its programme Los desayunos de TVE, as well as their closest collaborators, Adriana Lastra, Pablo Echenique, Fernando de Páramo and Fernando Martínez-Maíllo, in 2018. In the interviews analysed, audiovisual narratives were identified; these were guided by the programme's directors, who are able to influence the impartiality of the interview. The homogeneity of the audiovisual coverage on each political leader is discussed, in respect of all the locations and scene-settings being similar. The results show that the different political leaders did not receive the same conditions or narrative coverage in the audiovisual direction. Consequently, they did not face the same implicit threats in the interview questions analysed.

Resumen

En esta investigación se discute el posible sesgo en el desarrollo de las entrevistas televisivas a líderes políticos españoles. Se considera que el proceso narrativo audiovisual y la puesta en escena, responsabilidad del equipo de realización, puede tener un papel decisivo en la neutralidad de las entrevistas. Se analiza el tratamiento audiovisual realizado a cada uno de los líderes políticos, Pedro Sánchez, Pablo Iglesias, Albert Rivera y Mariano Rajoy en el programa Los desayunos de TVE, y a sus colaboradores más cercanos, Adriana Lastra, Pablo Echenique, Fernando de Páramo y Fernando Martínez-Maíllo, en 2018. Durante las entrevistas analizadas se han descubierto narrativas audiovisuales dirigidas desde el equipo de realización del programa capaces de condicionar la imparcialidad de la entrevista. Se discute si el tratamiento audiovisual otorgado a cada uno de los líderes políticos es homogéneo, siendo las localizaciones y escenografías similares. Los resultados evidencian que los distintos líderes políticos no han tenido las mismas condiciones o tratamiento narrativo en la realización audiovisual, por lo que no se han enfrentado a las mismas amenazas implícitas en las preguntas que componen las entrevistas analizadas.

Keywords

Audiovisual communication, political communication, TV production, audiovisual narrative

Palabras clave

Comunicación audiovisual; comunicación política; realización televisiva; narrativa audiovisual

1. Introduction

Televised political interviews can still reach and influence much bigger audiences than any other form of public speaking, and they continue to be one of the most widely used forms of political communication in the world (Elliott & Bull, 1996; Ekström, 2001). Television broadcasts of interviews provide politicians with the perfect platform to speak directly to a mass audience. They serve as opportunities to present their leadership skills, competence, and integrity, and to promote and explain their ideas, but also to attack and challenge their political opponents (Feldman et al., 2015). Since the early days of television, political leaders and their advisers have recognised the power of the medium, displaying an increasing concern with their on-screen image (Mickelson, 1976). The political leaders who are best able to present themselves on television, projecting self-confidence and delivering well-structured speeches, are perceived by audiences as being more capable of winning elections (Atkinson, Enos & Hill, 2009; Banducci, Karp, Thrasher & Rallings, 2008; Berggren, Jordahl & Poutvaara, 2010; King & Leigh 2009; Lawson, Lenz, Myers & Baker, 2010), and can also achieve better and more regular audiovisual coverage to win over voters (Graber, 1996, 2001; Iyengar, Peters & Kinder, 1982; Mendelberg, 2001; Lenz & Lawson, 2011).

There is a long tradition of academic research on interviews (Bell & Van Leeuwen, 1994; Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Montgomery, 2008; Hutchby, 2006; Tolson, 2006; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991; Heritage, 1985), which are viewed as a negotiation between interviewer and interviewee, in the roles of host and guest, for the benefit of the listening audience. Some studies focus on what is known as conversation analysis, where the nature of the analysis requires greater detail, although the interaction process is not entirely clarified (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Sacks, 1992; Sacks, Schlegloff & Jefferson, 1974).

In general, the political interview format has in itself become a mode of representation of political leaders, and has been the subject of a considerable number of multidisciplinary studies, including the fields of psychology, linguistics, politics, and communications (Heritage, Clayman & Zimmerman, 1988; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991; McQuail, 1992; Nimmo & Combs, 1985). More specifically, in televised political interviews, social psychology has been applied to language and communication, resulting in various ways of assessing the performance of journalists when they interview politicians (Gnisci et al., 2013).

Legitimate governments recognise that a nation needs mechanisms to guarantee democratic processes. One of these mechanisms is the media (Gnisci et al., 2013), which can influence public opinion and guide the voting preferences of its viewers (Hopmann, Van Aelst & Legnante, 2012). The interview has been described as "the fundamental act of contemporary journalism" (Schudson, 1994: 565).

Although interviews can offer opportunities for greater democratic control, they are not immune to purposeful and ideological manipulation (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007). In practice, the televised political interview exhibits systematic differences in purposeful, ideological approaches in favour of certain political parties or spaces in line with the political and economic orientation of the broadcaster in question (Gnisci, 2008; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007). Yet despite the significance of such claims for systems of public democratic freedoms, only a few studies have focused on the possibility of interviewer bias (Huls & Varwijk, 2011; Strömbäck & Shehata, 2007; Gnisci et al., 2013).

Televised political interviews act as a link between politicians and the public (Ekström, 2001). In theory, political interviews should be used to obtain objective information from leaders (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), giving politicians the opportunity to present their skills and abilities to deal with different issues in a question-and-answer format (Hagerty, 2010). Spectators, meanwhile, are active evaluators of the performance of politicians in terms of the quality of their answers, and their fitness, cooperative attitude, authenticity, leadership, and personality (Liebes, 2001). According to Clayman & Heritage, "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'" (2002: 28).

Of course, interviewers may also ask questions and challenge politicians to clarify and explain their positions and points of view on a wide range of topics. In doing so, they are obviously considering the consumers of their programs (i.e. the audience) and their interests (Feldman et al., 2015). In many cases, the questions asked by the interviewer have a coercive nature, which by the force of their logic cannot be answered with a simple affirmation or denial (Bull, 1994), thus leaving the politician in a kind of unmanageable disorientation. This gives media corporations the power to harm the image of politicians or alienate a sector of the electorate (Feldman et al., 2017).

The political leaders interviewed, meanwhile, often strive to control the direction of the interview. They may abandon the established ritual of questions and answers, shift the focus of the subject chosen, ignore the questions asked of them, or repeat statements unrelated to the interviewer's questions (Feldman et al., 2016; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). There is a clear tension in the journalistic profession today, due above all to the potential presence of equivocation in the presentation of a political leader to mass audiences

(Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Hutchby, 2006). Such equivocation does not occur without a situational precedent; in other words, although it is individuals who equivocate, such answers must always be understood in the situational context in which they occur—a concept known as the "situational theory of communicative conflict" or STCC (Bavelas et al., 1990). Equivocation and its adaptation to Q&A scenarios will be explored later in this article.

The political interview is one of various contexts that can give rise to political incivility, particularly during election campaigns. It is an asymmetrical, interactive situation in which an interviewer asks questions on relevant topics and the politician tries to offer answers (Clayman, 2001; Clayman & Heritage, 2002). Unlike press conferences or debates, where politicians or their media advisers distribute the turns in such a way that an interviewer can only ask one or (very rarely) two questions, the televised interview allows the interviewer to pose a much longer and more coherent series of questions (Huls & Varwijk, 2011). Although this might seem a small difference, its consequences are wide-sweeping. The interviewer has the opportunity to act on the consistency of previous answers and explore a variety of possible ways to obtain more revealing replies (Greatbatch, 1988). When politicians cannot offer a consistent answer, interviewers can hold them to account and try to elicit a more satisfactory answer (Pomerantz, 1984). Despite the profusion of evasive tactics and political incivility, providing a relevant answer to a question is still the expected norm in political communication (Clayman, 2001).

There is no consensus in the academic literature regarding the concept of political incivility (Stryker, Conway & Danielson, 2016), a multidisciplinary object of study in the fields of communications, psychology, political science, sociology and law. One approach defines political incivility as the violation of the basic principles and rules of civil discourse, i.e. the free and respectful exchange of different ideas between opponents, different people, or different groups or cultures (Coe, Kenski & Rains, 2014), and as such it is a violation against the collective dimension of democracy (Papacharissi, 2004).

2. Bias and threats in televised interviews

The increasingly confrontational nature of political interviews today should be viewed as a sign or a result of a cultural evolution that began with the emergence of electronic mass media (Emmertsen, 2007). This has led to a questioning of the neutrality of interviewers (Tannen, 1998), who are expected to demonstrate independence from political and financial pressure groups (Gnisci et al., 2013). Due to the financial pressures and competition afflicting the audiovisual industry, interviewers have become tougher on their interviewees (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Clayman, 2001; Lengauer, Esser & Berganza, 2012; McNair, 2000), turning interviews into complex spaces of conflict (Clayman & Heritage, 2002).

Until the 1960s, interviewers on the BBC in the United Kingdom had been widely recognised for their neutrality, until the end of the network's monopoly brought with it more aggressive interviewing techniques (Day, 1961; Scannell, 1996). The politeness expected until then was abandoned, thereby undermining the effectiveness of turn-taking as the only method for ensuring neutrality—although such turn-taking does not prevent conflict or bias in interviewers (Clayman & Whalen, 1989),

Since the 1980s, there has been a substantial change in the structure of televised political interviews, as they have become a political propaganda tool or strategy based especially on the ability to avoid answering certain questions through what is known as "agenda shifting" (Greatbatch, 1986) and "equivocation" (Bull & Mayer, 1993). The first strategy refers to the creation of opportunities to change the topic or to redirect it in a more advantageous direction. Although not without its risks, such as inviting criticism from interested members of the public, interviewers "have displayed a willingness to resist, sanction and thus draw attention to […] such manoeuvres" (Greatbatch, 1986:442). Clayman (1993) refers to this as a habitual technique to attempt to change the direction of the interview and evade certain topics, leaving certain questions unanswered. Currently, this process is addressed with the establishment of a speaking order or a run sheet requirement. Emmertsen (2007) suggests that interviews in a political debate can only be understood adequately as interactions organised by a conversational turn-taking system. There are other techniques, such as "equivocation", which is related to the popular perception that politicians frequently fail to answer questions in political interviews, either by answering a different question or by making political assertions of their own, because a direct answer would have negative consequences and leave the politician with no means of escape (Bavelas, et al., 1988, 1990).

Changes in the modes of presenting political leaders, new spaces for debate and fierce competition have led to an imbalance between interviewers and politicians, increasing the need for the latter to defend themselves. Interviewers may be interested in maintaining control of the topic, thereby pressuring politicians to choose between undesirable options where all potential answers could damage the politician's image and alienate the electorate. In this way, interviewers acquire the authority to focus the audience and are

able to construct increasingly challenging questions (Bavelas et al., 1990). Other studies suggest that interviewers make use of certain challenges to polarise the positions of interviewees, leading to situations of conflict (Emmertsen, 2007). Several studies have demonstrated that the journalistic interview, especially in the political context, aims for an atmosphere of confrontation (Clayman et al. 2006; Garcés, 2010). On the other hand, Garcés (2010) argues that the journalist's impoliteness increases when the interviewee's opinions are less in keeping with public opinion.

Political interviews and news reports are two of the journalistic formats that can display the highest degree of bias to a general audience(Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Ekström & Kroon-Lundell, 2011). Both have the capacity to persuade spectators who are generally less interested in politics (Baum & Jamison, 2006), yet the public is given the impression that the politicians are being observed directly (McNair, 2000).

Partisan bias and threats against the interviewee are present in various cultures (Gnisci et al., 2013). Even in a context as different from Western cultures as Japan, a study revealed that interviewers' questions affected the interviewees' answers, which in turn altered the journalists' subsequent questions (Feldman & Kinoshita, 2019). In particular, the way that interviewers manage the threat is not reflected in the content of the questions but in the way the questions are asked (Feldman & Kinoshita, 2019).

In some cases, the belligerence of the interviewers takes centre-stage in the debate (Hagerty, 2010). Journalists are viewed as celebrities representing "tribunes of the people" (Higgins, 2010), thereby garnering audiences of millions (Gnisci et al., 2013). Some presenters of this type come to be seen as "watchdogs of democracy" (Dimitrova & Strömbäck, 2012; Gnisci et al., 2011; Waver & Wilnatt, 2012), although these are exceptional cases (Baum & Groeling, 2008). In reality, the most widely accepted model is the polarised pluralist, especially in Mediterranean countries (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), where there is generally less press freedom and a higher level of interference (Hallin & Mancini, 2012).

Various techniques have been established to assess objectivity and impartiality in interviews (McQuail, 1992; McCombs & Mauro, 1988) based on relevant linguistic indicators that have proven to be effective predictors of audience attention. Elliott & Bull (1996) constructed a more advanced methodology to assess the level of difficulty of the questions asked in interviews through the facial expressions of the individual interviewed. Facial control has since been used as a complement to other traditional approaches, such as the analysis of the importance given to word choice and other elements. It has been demonstrated that the interviewee's facial control can be a very useful tool for neutralising threatening aspects of questions (Elliott & Bull, 1996) or to accentuate more positive issues. Essentially, "face to face" is the continuous effort of individuals to maintain a positive impression.

Studies of the typologies of facial expressions adopted began in the middle of the twentieth century (Goffman, 1955, 1959), based on the sociological perspective of "symbolic interactionism" (Mead, 1934), whereby a person's positive social value is determined by the consequences of their public exposure. According to Goffman (1959), facial expressions are negotiated socially during the interaction of an interview by adopting defensive strategies in an effort to preserve their original appearance. In other words, interviewees tend to avoid acts that are potentially threatening to them, and facial expression serves as a kind of remedial tool. In an act of interaction, participants try to control not only their own facial expressions, but also the expressions of others, turning an inappropriate act by one member of the group into a source of shame for the others (Goffman,1959).

Years later (Brown & Levinson, 1978), a model of politeness was constructed on the foundation of Goffman's studies. This model made a dichotomous distinction between positive face (the need to be appreciated and approved of) and negative face (being threatened). These two types of face often come into conflict. A study by Jucker (1986) drawing on Brown & Levinson's (1978) politeness theory concluded that maintaining positive facial expressions in interviews is crucial to ensure political survival and influence voters. In all cases, the leader's image is constantly exposed during the interview, and the credibility of his or her answers will depend to a large extent on facial control.

Jucker's (1986) study of 13 types of face capable of posing threats (Bull et al. 1996) offers a psychosocial model that aims to explain how and why interviewers try to threaten politicians with different expressions, and why politicians resort to errors, self-contradictions, inconsistencies, subject switches, or misunderstandings in self-defence (Bavelas et al., 1988), which essentially amount to evasion strategies. Nimmo & Combs (1985) made a distinction between four journalistic styles of television news: popular/sensationalist, elitist/factual, ignorant/didactic, and pluralist (the last two styles treating the audience as extremely diverse). On the other hand, Elliott & Bull (1996) suggest that the potential threats implicit in the questions asked are exposed in detail in the subtle interaction between the style displayed by the interviewer and the answers offered by the interviewee.

There is an extensive body of research on interviews, their discourse and content, their potential biases, and the use of politeness, detailed in publications by the authors listed in the introduction. Recent advances in computer technology have allowed for more complex studies; for example, the use of the software programme *Discursis* for qualitative discourse analysis. This technique is designed to provide a representation of the text that allows the analyst to obtain a quick overview of the whole text and to decode the dynamics of turn-taking in the interview (who speaks, when, and for how long), the text's conceptual content over time, and its conceptual coherence (Angus et al., 2016, 2013).

Research to date has considered the actors in televised interviews in dichotomous terms (interviewer vs. interviewee), with a non-participatory audience. This study introduces a new actor capable of guiding the direction of the interview, hindering or helping the interviewee's position, and analyses whether this new actor could have direct consequences for the presence of equivocation.

Direct audiovisual interviews with political leaders are shaped by numerous intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The intrinsic factors are those associated with journalistic discourse as informed by the context of the moment or with specific editorial intentions, while the extrinsic factors are those determined by the mise-en-scene, editing, and the predetermined audiovisual composition, i.e. audiovisual rhetoric. In televised political interviews, the principles of politeness, neutrality, and cooperation can be undercut by deliberate action to control the audiovisual discourse, and by the elements associated with production, i.e., the extrinsic factors.

The aim of this study is to explore how audiovisual media, the narratives employed and the formal arrangement of the individuals involved can condition the spectator's viewing experience and thus the perception spectators have of the leader, considering more than just the duration of the exchanges and other staging factors, as variables to be agreed on by the press services, the politicians concerned, and the television networks. While coercion in verbal terms can be expressed in the grammatical construction of a sentence, different intonations at the end of the sentence, or particular combinations of both (Cruttenden, 1986), audiovisual coercion is conditioned by the audiovisual elements used in the construction of the interview. While in the field of linguistics, coercive questions are considered declarative, in audiovisual narration they are products of a particular narrative structure related to the mode of representation. Previous studies point to the importance of the impartiality of presenters and studio directors or producers to ensure free and fair elections (Gnisci, 2008), but the scope of potential biases and how they are constructed has not been analysed.

Drawing on previous studies of bias indicators considering the neutrality or toughness of the interviewers based on facial expression (Bull, 1994, 2000; Bull & Elliott, 1998; Bull et al., 1996; Bull & Mayer, 1993; Elliott & Bull, 1996) and on the model of equivocation and evasion/conflict (Lewin, 1938; Bavelas et al., 1988; Bull, 2002; Hamilton & Mineo, 1998), this study will examine televised interviews from an original perspective based on narrative observation and the use of image units through a process of audiovisual content analysis, with the aim of discovering the function of that third actor, the audiovisual production team and its processes of neutrality or bias. While traditionally, the political interview takes place between two interlocutors (first context), designed for an external audience that in some cases is not present (second context) (Fetzer & Weizman, 2006), here we consider the presence of a third context (extrinsic factor), the team responsible for sound and image.

The objective of this study is to discover whether certain rhetorical devices used in the construction of audiovisual narratives could produce certain "meaning effects" (Morales, 2011; Saperas, 2009) capable of guiding the reception and interpretation of the content of the discourse. To this end, we posed the following research questions (RQ$_1$ and RQ$_2$):

RQ$_1$. Have different political leaders, both progressive and conservative, faced the same degree of intensity or toughness in the questions asked during the televised interviews analysed?

RQ$_2$. Is there any evidence of a significant correlation between the intensity of the questions asked and the shots taken of different leaders that might suggest a biased formulation in the production of the televised interviews?

3. Methodology

Eight interviews have been analysed in this study, with the leaders of the four political parties that have the largest representation in the lower house of Spanish parliament (the Congress of Deputies), and with their four closest advisers. All the interviews were broadcast on the Spanish public television network TVE on its morning news programme *Los desayunos de TVE,* presented and hosted during the period of study by the journalist Sergio Martín, produced by Jesús Manrique, and directed by Olegario Marcos. *Los desayunos de*

TVE is a benchmark program that has been broadcast on TVE's *La 1* channel since 8 January 1994, every morning from Monday to Friday, with an approximate duration of one hour and thirty-five minutes. All of Spain's most important political figures have been invited to appear on the programme, including successive prime ministers and their cabinet ministers. The program, which has had more than 1,000 broadcasts, is a talk show with a political focus, with journalists discussing current political, economic and social affairs live in the studio. This discussion is followed by an interview conducted by the program presenter, accompanied by journalists, with a figure of political importance (or of importance in the social, cultural, economic, artistic, sporting, or media sphere). The approach taken by the team responsible for the program in relation to the questions and topics chosen has been censured by the TVE News Board. [1] At the beginning of 2018, the Board's quarterly report listing all alleged cases of manipulation of information identified in the last three months of 2017 included nearly 50 complaints recorded in the period; in addition, the Board issued a monograph focusing on possible cases of manipulation of information related to the Catalan independence movement. Sources at TVE pointed out that with the journalist Sergio Martín at the helm, the news program "has produced an excess of partial content and a lack of pluralism" (El Mundo, 9 April 2019). The issue even sparked debate in the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions about allegations of "manipulation and harassment," in which the Committee Chair, Cecilia Wikstrom expressed her concern about the complaint filed by TVE journalists (El País, 16 May 2018). Since 3 September 2018, the program has been hosted and presented by the journalist Xabier Fortes, who has also been the subject of accusations related to his alleged political bias. The same internal sources at TVE are currently claiming that with Fortes on *Los desayunos de TVE*, the profile of the program's guests has changed, claiming that "the editorial line on *Los desayunos de TVE* has veered sharply to the left and there are more voices supporting [Catalan] separatist positions, which has not gone down well with the audience" (*El* Mundo, 9 April 2019). On 18 May 2020, *Los desayunos de TVE* presented by Xabier Fortes moved to the network Canal 24 horas. Its timeslot would be filled by *Las mañanas de la 1*, presented by TVE's current weather reporter, Mónica López.

For this study, we decided to complement our analysis of interviews with the leaders of the main political parties by analysing an interview with a person considered to be a close adviser of each party leader. This two-part analysis for each party would ensure that the audiovisual approach taken with each leader is not the result of personal partiality or individual interference, while at the same time allowing us to draw some conclusions about the strategies used in the audiovisual coverage of each party. Televised interviews represent one of the few opportunities that political leaders have to confront one another on public television under the same conditions of audiovisual production, timing, staging, composition, and target audience.

The interviews analysed for this study were with Pedro Sánchez, leader of the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE), [2] on 16/05/2018 (28 min.); PSOE Deputy Leader Adriana Lastra [3] on 24/04/2018 (27 min.); Unidas Podemos (UP) party leader Pablo Iglesias [4] on 10/04/2018 (29 min.); Unidas Podemos Organization Secretary Pablo Echenique [5] on 26/03/2018 (25 min.); Albert Rivera [6], leader of the party Ciudadanos (C's), on 3/04/2018 (24 min.); Fernando de Páramo [7], communication secretary for Ciudadanos, on 07/05/2018 (23 min.); Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy [8] on 30/01/2018 (48 min.); and Fernando Martínez-Maíllo [9], general coordinator of the ruling party, Partido Popular (PP), on 08/05/2018 (24 min.).

The positioning of the cameras was similar for all eight interviewees, who sat in the same chair and were accompanied by the same number of journalists. The camera arrangement and the technical and artistic strategies used were also exactly the same. The program's host occupied his usual spot on the set in all eight interviews, with a more favourable visual framing than the guests had. In all eight interviews with the political leaders, a total of 150 questions covering 59 different topics were asked, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Content of Interviews

Leader	Topics
Pedro Sánchez (PSOE)	Catalan independence movement; Criminal Code amendment; relationship with Catalan Socialist Party (PSC); application of Spanish Constitution Article 155 for government intervention in Catalonia; stance of C's and UP on Catalan independence; Supreme Court Judge Pablo Llanera; voting intention polls; relationship between PSOE and PSC.
Adriana Lastra (PSOE)	Investiture of Catalan government; application of Article 155; yellow ribbons in support of Catalan independence; censure motion by Socialist Party of Madrid (PSM); Valley of the Fallen; the Toledo Pact; decent pensions.
Pablo Iglesias (Unidas Podemos)	PP member Pablo Casado's master's degree; upcoming elections in Madrid; Íñigo Errejón, candidate for the Community of Madrid; possible censorship motion in Madrid government; prosecution of Catalan separatist leader

	Carles Puigdemont; Committees for the Defence of the Republic in Catalonia; latest voting intention polls; UP primaries.
Pablo Echenique (Unidas Podemos)	Arrest of Carles Puigdemont; annual state budget; Basque Nationalist Party (PNV)
Albert Rivera (Ciudadanos)	Delivery of PP budgets with support of C's; job insecurity; Cristina Cifuentes's master's degree; voting intentions
Fernando de Páramo (Ciudadanos)	Elections in Catalonia; Catalan Transition Act; replacement of Cristina Cifuentes as President of the Community of Madrid; support of C's in Madrid Assembly; annual state budgets and pension increases; the end of ETA; prospects of C's in the upcoming elections in Madrid; agreement between PP and PSOE for appointments to the Bank of Spain.
Mariano Rajoy (Partido Popular)	Possible candidates for Catalan parliament; the Supreme Court and Puigdemont; King of Spain and his position on Catalonia; Agreements between C's and PSOE on Catalonia; funding for autonomous region legislation; PP and corruption; political agreement to approve annual state budgets; candidates for upcoming elections; end of the financial crisis in Spain; wage equality between men and women; possible government pacts with the opposition; excessive force by police in Catalonia; political situation in Venezuela.
Fernando Martínez Maíllo (Partido Popular)	Elections in Madrid after resignation of Cristina Cifuentes; possible influence peddling at Rey Juan Carlos University and the academic degrees of Pablo Casado and Cristina Cifuentes; delicate political position of Cristina Cifuentes; C's support for PP in the Community of Madrid; measures brought by PP against Puigdemont; alternative candidate to Puigdemont in Catalonia; rift between PP party members Cospedal and Sáez de Santamaría; Community of Madrid elections; possible pension increases and their budget; future high speed train lines; investment in rural sector.

Source: compiled by authors.

3.1. Variables considered

Table 2 shows the variables used in the study, the first of which refers to questions asked off-screen ($Q_{(n)}O$), a technique that conditions the audiovisual representation and rhetoric, which can result in "negative face" when the question poses a difficulty for the interviewee (Heffelfinger, 2014; Brown & Levinson, 1987). This type of question is asked while the camera is on the guest listening to it. In other words, the presenter is off-screen while the question is posed, as the shot remains on the interviewee to whom the question is addressed. A question of great political importance that is critical of the leader's policies can prove uncomfortable for the interviewee, and a close-up of that leader while the question is asked can produce a clear context of defencelessness in relation to the spectator. The delicate situation of receiving a tough question while being filmed in close-up may provoke certain expressions of worry or disapproval, as suggested in the research on the threatening aspects of questions (Elliot & Bull, 1996; Bavelas et al., 1988; Jucker, 1986). On this point, it has been demonstrated that the interviewee's facial control can be a very useful tool for neutralising threatening aspects of questions (Elliott & Bull, 1996). The constant efforts of the interviewee to maintain a positive impression clashes with these situations provoked by the development of the audiovisual narrative, which will condition the spectator's interpretation of the credibility of the answers.

Similarly, the audience's perception of an answer can be conditioned by the images that accompany it. The nature of these images can vest the statements with veracity (positive face); alternatively, the statements may be considered inconsistent with the images displayed on the screen (negative face) (Brown & Levinson,1987). For example, if the prime minister is asked about the unemployment rate and while he responds images are shown of professionals at work, his answer will be supported and reinforced by images of economic growth (positive face). Conversely, if images of long queues of unemployed and disadvantaged people are shown while he answers the question, the audience may have some doubts about his political narrative. Either way, this is the role played by the third actor or context defined above, with control over the choice of images and the moment when they will be displayed while the political leader is speaking: the team responsible for the production of the televised interview.

Variables (dependent)	Values adopted
Intensity of questions ($Q_n I$)	Likert Scale (1-10)
Questions asked off-screen ($Q_n O$)	Dichotomous (y/n)
N= 150	
Independent variables: political leaders	
Π Scott= 0.7167 (Intercoder Reliability)	

Source: compiled by authors.

The next variable used in the study, intensity of questions ($Q_{(n)}I$), has been determined on the basis of studies by Feldman & Kinoshita (2019) in the field of linguistic research. Our analysis of the interviewees' answers was based on content and context, two of the dimensions considered in equivocation theory (Bavelas et al., 1990), taking into account the modifications suggested in subsequent studies (Feldman et al., 2016). To assess the interviewers' questions in terms of difficulty or toughness, the coding included ratings based on their semantic content in accordance with the level of threat they represented for the political leader on a 10-point Likert scale, from 1 = no threat at all, to 10 = highly or extremely threatening/resistant. "Non-threatening" questions allowed at least some kind of answer that would not represent a threat for the politician. "Tough" questions were defined as those where any of the possible answers posed some kind of threat with the potential to provoke a confrontation. To avoid potential coding errors due to the subjective nature of the interpretation of a question's intensity, it was necessary to measure intercoder reliability with the aid of two external coders who had not participated in the initial coding, who conducted an independent analysis of 20% (n=30) of the variables analysed previously (Tabachnick, Fidell & Ullman, 2007). The minimum value obtained according to the Scott Pi formula was 0.63, a high value according to the classification proposed by Landis & Koch (1977) for all variables, with a mean value (Neuendorf, 2016; Kinnear & Gray, 2001) in all variables of 0.7167.

4. Results

Research questions RQ_1 and RQ_2 have both been answered following the quantitative analysis (mean and standard deviation) of questions asked off-screen ($Q_{(n)}O$) and the intensity of the topics discussed ($Q_{(n)}I$). A descriptive analysis has been conducted on the variables, with a Chi-square hypothesis test (X^2) and a bivariate analysis using the Pearson correlation coefficient (R_{x-y}). For the statistical analysis, the software SPSS IBM v.21 has been used.

The leaders of the parties on the left were generally subjected to a higher number of questions asked off-screen ($Q_{(n)}O$). The results for this type of audiovisual composition were as follows: Pedro Sánchez (n=9), Pablo Iglesias (n=9), Adriana Lastra (n=8), Pablo Echenique (n=10); Mariano Rajoy (n=5), Fernando Martínez-Maíllo (n=6), Albert Rivera (n=6) and Fernando de Páramo (n=7). In relation to the intensity of the questions, i.e., the toughness displayed (Bull, 1994, 2000; Bull & Elliott, 1998; Bull et al., 1996; Bull & Mayer, 1993; Elliott & Bull, 1996), the total scores for the progressive political parties, PSOE and UP (see Table 3), were M=7.15, DT=1.22 and M=7.60, DT=1.36, respectively. Pedro Sánchez as a political leader had a mean of M=7.19, DT=1.275, while Pablo Iglesias's was M=7.70, DT=1.28. Conversely, the conservative parties, PP and C's, had markedly lower means, with Mariano Rajoy scoring M=5.70, DT=1.298, and Albert Rivera scoring M=5.30, DT=1.73. Overall, Partido Popular (M=5.85, DT=1.283) and Ciudadanos (M=5.60, DT=1.178) obtained markedly lower scores than the parties on the left. Taken together, the results show a mean intensity of M=7.45 for the progressive parties, much higher than the mean for the conservative parties (M=5.55). In response to RQ_1 the results show that conservative and progressive political leaders and parties have not received questions with the same degree of intensity, revealing a clearly biased representation that could lead to polarisation between the two sides of the political spectrum.

Table 3 Intensity of questions for political leaders, $Q_{(n)}I$

Leader	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	DT
Pedro Sánchez	23	6	9	7.19	1.275
Adriana Lastra	16	6	8	7.12	1.167
(PSOE Mean: 7.15).					
Pablo Iglesias	18	6	8	7.70	1,283
Pablo Echenique	16	6	9	7.50	1,456
(UP Mean: 7.60)					
Albert Rivera	20	4	7	5.30	1,732
F. de Páramo	18	5	8	5.90	1,994
(C´S Mean: 5.60)					
Mariano Rajoy	27	4	7	5.70	1.298
F. M. Maillo	12	5	8	6.00	1.537
(PP Mean: 5.85)					
Total	150				

Source: compiled by authors.

In Table 4 the Pearson correlation coefficient (R_{x-y}) has been used to correlate the intensity of the questions ($Q_{(n)}I$) with questions asked off-screen ($Q_{(n)}O$). It is important to bear in mind that the positive or negative value of the absolute result can range between -1 and +1, and in this sense, a relationship of +1 is as strong as -1. In the first case, the relationship is positive, while in the second it is negative. Our analysis has revealed correlations between question intensity and questions asked off-screen in the cases of Pedro Sánchez ($r(150)= 0.621$ $p<.004$), Pablo Iglesias ($r(150)= 0.828$ $p<.001$) and Adriana Lastra ($r(150)= 0.561$ $p<.008$). Mariano Rajoy and Albert Rivera both obtained very low negative correlations, i.e. the question is generally less intense when the shot is of the leader listening to it ($r(150)= -0.405$ $p<.010$) and ($r(150)= -0.480$ $p<.020$, respectively).

Table 4. Correlation between intensity of questions/questions asked off-screen

Leader ($Q_{(n)}I$)	Listening shots ($Q_{(n)}I$)
Pedro Sánchez	0.621**
Adriana Lastra	0.561*
Pablo Iglesias	0.828**
Pablo Echenique	0.576**
Albert Rivera	-0.480
F. de Páramo	0.342*
Mariano Rajoy	-0.405
F. M. Maillo	0.521

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Source: compiled by authors.

In response to Research Question RQ2, the analysis of the data collected makes it clear that Partido Popular and Ciudadanos are the political parties that have been treated best in terms of the audiovisual narration, in view of the patterns identified in the presentation of supporting images inserted at non-threatening moments. On the other hand, the interviews with the leaders of PSOE and UP show evidence of a significant correlation between the modes of representation of the leader and the degree of toughness or intensity of the questions asked by the interviewer.

5. Discussion and conclusions

Various authors define two forms in the construction of meaning around the object of communication. The first form makes use of narrative or denotative editing, establishing the right order of sounds and images to ensure audiovisual continuity (Martín, 1999; Amiel, 2005; Mitry, 2002). The second form of signification involves a more elaborate, connotative editing style designed to elicit expressive and emotional responses from the spectator (Martín, 1999; Balàzs, 1987). In introducing what they call "Complex Structural Theory", Taboada & Mann (2005) classify different types of discourse according to the type of association ("nucleus" or "satellite"), based on how new the information is for the spectator; e.g. variations in semantic

parameters, visual and sound edits, and pauses and transitions in the message (Morales, 2011). Our study has sought to analyse both denotative language and connotative strategies applied in interviews with political leaders.

This exploratory research has been designed with the aim of examining possible bias toward different political leaders during individual televised interviews. The analysis of bias or of audiovisual politeness (Sánchez-Castillo, 2018) has been found to be crucial for better understanding the construction of audiovisual discourse and trying to discover whether the approach taken in televised interviews has favoured or undermined the political narrative of the different leaders vying for control of the Spanish government. The study has identified audiovisual narratives orchestrated by the programme's production team in the interviews observed, pointing to the use of audiovisual strategies that favour the political interests of the ruling party, while presenting the opposition to the audience in a less favourable light.

The way that political leaders are presented in a timeslot with a mass audience and the audiovisual strategy used to accompany their discourse can have a decisive impact on audience perceptions of those leaders. The impact of a compromising question that is difficult to answer can be mitigated if delivered during a shot of the presenter or of positive images in keeping with the message. Conversely, if the question directed at the guest is accompanied by images that convey a negative message or by a close-up of the interviewee, any expression of doubt, discomfort, or incredulity could weaken the answer and therefore be perceived by the spectator as untrue. This technique has been observed in the interviews included in this study.

With the data obtained, notwithstanding the limitations inherent in this type of methodology, we can confirm that the audiovisual approach taken to the political leaders is not homogeneous, although the set and staging are similar. The audiovisual production seems to suggest a particular purpose in its presentation of the individuals and the arrangement of its multi-camera composition. The results of this analysis point to a correlation between the narrative approach and the editorial line of the network. Although the reasons behind this bias fall beyond the scope of this research, further studies of this kind could be especially useful for identifying patterns of analysis that could reveal the efficacy of the narrative approach in terms of electoral outcomes, i.e. to determine the extent to which electoral behaviour can be linked to different forms of representation on television.

The study of different forms of bias arising from audiovisual compositions offers important clues that can help explain the persuasive tactics constructed through hegemonic discourses. According to Mats Ekström, studies of political interviews have failed to take into account "how the material is edited and presented in specific media, genres and narrations" (2001:566). With this in mind, we have identified a need for research on the televised political interview as the audiovisual format with the biggest impact on society. This research could prove useful for the press services of major political parties, political scientists, journalists, and opinion makers in general who recognise the continued importance of generalist television and are looking for a theoretical and empirical framework to identify strategies targeting the ever-present prospect of political manipulation. The methodological limitations observed in this study should be viewed as an incentive to conduct further research on bias in political interviews and to study evidence of its direct effects on audiences and their voting intentions. We believe it would be valuable to continue to explore this issue in future studies in other political contexts, with the objective of analysing the audiovisual approach taken and possibly finding evidence of shifts in orientation or inclination towards the ruling party, regardless of which party that might be.

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