What does ‘emergency’ mean?

Corrections in Romanian and Italian political interviews

Raluca-Mihaela Levonian
University of Bucharest (Romania) and University of Calabria (Italy)

This article analyzes political interviews, focusing on the corrections made by the interviewees in their answers, from a comparative perspective. The data included both Romanian and Italian language interviews, published in print and online media. Two criteria for the classification of corrections have been identified, one regarding the target of the correction and one regarding the form in which the correction is made. The results show that content-oriented corrections are the most frequent type in both corpora, while mitigated corrections appeared more often in the Italian corpus than in the Romanian one. The politicians interviewed use corrections in order to reject the interviewer’s stance and to demonstrate a better understanding or knowledge of the topic discussed.

Keywords: political interviews, political communication, correction, confrontation, Romanian, Italian, media

1. Introduction: Politics and the media, face-to-face

Media studies represent a research domain which has evolved and extended significantly during the last half of the century, in correspondence to the increasing significance played by the media communication in the contemporary society. Media research has revealed two opposing views about the role of journalism in society (Reese 2011, 11). The conception about the negative role of the media is based on the idea that the media contribute to the preservation of the power structures and differences existing in the society, as only the voices of the authorities tend to be represented in the media. This leads to an imbalance between the representation of the ‘already privileged’ and that of the ‘already unprivileged’ (Fowler 1991, 22). Such a view lies at the basis of early critical discourse studies, while recent research investigates the bias tendency in the media and its effects (e.g. D’Alessio and Allen...
The contrasting perspective is a pluralist one, asserting that power is not concentrated by a singular social group but distributed more evenly between social actors and groups (Reese 2011, 11). According to this view, the media represent distinct institutions from the structures of public authority. The difference between the two understandings of the role of the media is also discussed by Richardson, who distinguishes between (proper) journalism and propaganda, pointing out that only the latter disseminates the views of the powerful (Richardson 2007, 7). The media thus appear as an institution with an essential role in the achievement and maintenance of democracy, because of their aims to ‘monitor government and those in power’, to challenge their perspective and to control the activities of the structures of authority in order to prevent social abuses or injustice (Robinson 2011, 152).

One of the media genres in which the journalists acting on behalf of the audience – citizens confront the public figures is represented by the political interview or the ‘accountability interview’ (e.g. Montgomery 2008). It has often been shown that the power relationship established between the interactants throughout an interview derives from their institutionalized roles, as interviewer (henceforth, IR) and interviewee (henceforth IE). This has been seen as a mainly unilateral relation, organized according to an ideal model in which the conversational roles are clearly stated from the beginning and reflect the institutional roles held by the interlocutors. The journalist has the right to ask questions and the public person interviewed is expected to provide the required answer. Moreover, studies on media discourse reveal an evolution in the interviewing style adopted by the journalists. In order to avoid the impression of bias, but also to maintain the audience’s interest, journalists tend to adopt a direct or even an incisive manner of questioning the interviewees. For instance, Jucker observes that IRs tend to engage in debates with the IEs, by confronting them with opposing views (Jucker 1986, 9). Montgomery (2011, 38–40) shows how the style of British broadcast interviews shifted from deference to adversarialness during the last fifty years.

To presume that only the journalists may exert pressure on the public figures interviewed would be, however, oversimplifying. Politicians hold a power position in society as well, and they often attempt to transfer such a resource into the media arena. More precisely, during their interactions with the journalists, they ground their status as IEs on their public authority or role in the social context. Hence, they display a knowledge which the journalists do not have and a different, deeper insight into the causes and effects of the social and political events.

As recent research shows, it would be wrong to view the IEs role in political interviews as a merely passive one. Previous studies have examined the varied means applied by the interviewed speakers in order to shift the discursive power balance in their favour. Such means range from the refusal to answer to vague or
elusive responses to criticism of the IR’s turn, of the IR’s behaviour or of the media, in general (Dickerson 2001, 207). The ‘challenging moves’ (Dickerson 2001) employed by the IEs indicate that their role as ‘passive answerers’ is challenged and negotiated during the interaction. Such a view is consonant with Ekström’s findings, that show how accountability does not merely result from the pre-defined role of the interviewee, but it “is also constructed and negotiated in the interaction” (Ekström 2009, 683).

This paper examines a special case of challenging moves, that of the corrections made by the interviewees in their answers. The first aim of the research is to assess whether the IEs correct the IRs assertions, and, if so, in which form. The second aim is a comparative one, grounded in the conception of the ‘media styles’ (e.g. Hallin and Mancini 2004; Gnisci et al. 2013). Through the comparison of an Italian and a Romanian corpus, this research aims to identify whether there are similarities and/or differences between the interviews conducted and published in the two countries.

2. Data and method

The data used for the analysis encompass two corpora, a Romanian-language corpus of 15 interviews and an Italian corpus of 17 interviews. Online access to all the texts was free at the time of the data-gathering. The interviews have been taken for newspapers published both print and online (e.g. La Repubblica, Corriere della Sera, Adevărul, România liberă), for online newspapers (e.g. gandul.info) and for press agencies (Mediafax, Agerpres) in Romania and in Italy. Only texts which respected the interview format, i.e. the dialogue structure with alternative IR-IE turns, were selected, while reports, syntheses of politicians’ declarations or articles including politicians’ quotes were left aside. The sources and the names of the interviewed politicians are listed in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Sources for the Romanian corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Politician</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 January</td>
<td>Mediafax</td>
<td>Unidentified</td>
<td>Călin Popescu Tăriceanu (Tăriceanu_1)</td>
<td>PNL (the National Liberal Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 January</td>
<td>România liberă</td>
<td>Sabina Fati</td>
<td>Ludovic Orban (Orban_3)</td>
<td>PNL (the National Liberal Party)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 03 June 2013 | Adevărul | Romulus Georgescu | Călin Popescu Tăriceanu (Tăriceanu_2) | PNL (the National Liberal Party) |
Table 1. (continued)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
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<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Politician</th>
<th>Party</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>03 August 2015</td>
<td>Evenimentul zilei</td>
<td>Dan Andronic</td>
<td>Ludovic Orban (Orban_4)</td>
<td>PNL (the National Liberal Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 November 2014</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ziare.com">www.ziare.com</a></td>
<td>Ioana Ene Dogioiu</td>
<td>Ioan Oltean (Oltean_5)</td>
<td>PNL/ PDL (the National Liberal Party/ the Democrat Liberal Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 February 2013</td>
<td>Adevărul</td>
<td>Lucian Negrea</td>
<td>Mihail Neamțu (Neamțu_6)</td>
<td>Noua Republică (The New Republic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02 June 2015</td>
<td>România liberă</td>
<td>Sabina Fati</td>
<td>Monica Macovei (Macovei_7)</td>
<td>M10 / PDL (M10 / the Democrat Liberal Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 October 2014</td>
<td><a href="http://www.agerpres.ro">www.agerpres.ro</a></td>
<td>Daniel Florea (Editor:</td>
<td>Monica Macovei (Macovei_8)</td>
<td>M10/PDL (M10 / the Democrat Liberal Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Georgiana Tănăsescu)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08 December 2014</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gandul.info">www.gandul.info</a></td>
<td>Anca Simina</td>
<td>Tatiana Niculescu-Bran (Bran_9)</td>
<td>Spokesperson for the President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 July 2013</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gandul.info">www.gandul.info</a></td>
<td>Andreea Ofițeru</td>
<td>Mihnea Costoiu (Costoiu_10)</td>
<td>Minister for Education – PSD (The Social Democrat Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 September 2014</td>
<td>Evenimentul zilei</td>
<td>Andreea Udrea</td>
<td>Emil Boc (Boc_11)</td>
<td>PNL/ PDL (the National Liberal Party/ the Democrat Liberal Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 May 2011</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gandul.info">www.gandul.info</a></td>
<td>Claudiu Pândaru</td>
<td>Elena Udrea (Udrea_12)</td>
<td>PDL/ Mișcarea Populară (the Democrat Liberal Party / The Popular Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 June 2015</td>
<td><a href="http://www.agerpres.ro">www.agerpres.ro</a></td>
<td>Cătălina Matei (Editor:</td>
<td>Alina Gorghiu (Gorghiu_13)</td>
<td>PNL (the National Liberal Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Florin Marin)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03 December 2014</td>
<td>Evenimentul zilei</td>
<td>Dan Andronic</td>
<td>Victor Ponta (Ponta_14)</td>
<td>Prime Minister – PSD (The Social Democrat Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 May 2015</td>
<td><a href="http://www.agerpres.ro">www.agerpres.ro</a></td>
<td>Doroteea Purcărea (Editor:</td>
<td>Victor Ponta (Ponta_15)</td>
<td>Prime Minister – PSD (The Social Democrat Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Claudia Stănescu)</td>
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Table 2. Sources for the Italian corpus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Politician</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04 April 2013</td>
<td>Il Sole 24 ore</td>
<td>Donatella Stasio</td>
<td>Laura Boldrini</td>
<td>President of the Deputy Chamber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 January 2014</td>
<td>Corriere della Sera</td>
<td>Aldo Cazzullo</td>
<td>Laura Boldrini</td>
<td>President of the Deputy Chamber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 July 2013</td>
<td>La Stampa</td>
<td>Giacomo Galeazzi</td>
<td>Laura Boldrini</td>
<td>President of the Deputy Chamber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 February 2014</td>
<td>Oggi</td>
<td>Giuseppe Fumagalli</td>
<td>Emma Bonino</td>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06 June 2013</td>
<td>Tempi</td>
<td>Luigi Amicone, Rodolfo Casadei</td>
<td>Emma Bonino</td>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 May 2013</td>
<td>Corriere della Sera</td>
<td>Paolo Valentino</td>
<td>Emma Bonino</td>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 August 2015</td>
<td>L’Huffington Post</td>
<td>Andrea Caruganti</td>
<td>Matteo Salvini</td>
<td>Lega Nord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01 July 2015</td>
<td>Il Sole 24 ore</td>
<td>Fabrizio Forquet</td>
<td>Matteo Salvini</td>
<td>Lega Nord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05 August 2015</td>
<td>La Repubblica</td>
<td>Michela Bompani</td>
<td>Francesco Miceli</td>
<td>Assessor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 July 2015</td>
<td>La Repubblica</td>
<td>Giovanna Vitale</td>
<td>Stefano Esposito</td>
<td>Assessor/ Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 July 2015</td>
<td>La Repubblica</td>
<td>Ilaria Carra</td>
<td>Carlotta Sami</td>
<td>UNHCR spokesperson</td>
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<td>25 July 2015</td>
<td>La Repubblica</td>
<td>Liana Milella</td>
<td>Donatella Ferranti</td>
<td>Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 July 2015</td>
<td>La Repubblica</td>
<td>Giovanna Casadio</td>
<td>Gianni Cuperlo</td>
<td>Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 July 2015</td>
<td>La Repubblica</td>
<td>Alessia Gallione</td>
<td>Francesca Balzani</td>
<td>Assessor/ Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 February 2015</td>
<td>Corriere della Sera</td>
<td>Gian Antonio Stella</td>
<td>Mario Monti</td>
<td>Independent / Scelta civica (The Civic Choice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 January 2014</td>
<td>Corriere della Sera</td>
<td>Aldo Cazzullo</td>
<td>Matteo Renzi</td>
<td>Prime Minister / Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04 March 2015</td>
<td>Espresso – La Repubblica</td>
<td>Marco Damilano</td>
<td>Matteo Renzi</td>
<td>Prime Minister / Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first reason for the selection of the interviews required that they contain at least one correction made by the IE. A further reason regarded the social background. The interviews selected have been taken in connection to important topics or events, which were on the public agenda at that moment. Such topics were, for example, the immigration issue and the marò case in Italy, the parliamentary or presidential elections in Romania, or the debate of important laws in the Parliament for both countries. In such socio-political contexts, the interviewed politicians needed to present and defend their stance and to contradict the opposing standpoints.

While the selection process took into account only political interviews, no differences were made in regard to the politicians interviewed. The corpora for both countries include interviews with politicians holding public offices, but there are also cases of interviews with candidates running in the elections, especially for the Romanian corpus. However, although the campaign interview represents an important subgenre of the news interview (Clayman and Romaniuk 2011), this differentiation was not considered relevant for the scope of the present research.

The framework applied was that of the Conversation Analysis, which is frequently employed in the study of interviews as media interactions. Clayman and Heritage (2002, 19) draw attention to the fact that ‘unlike formally quantitative approaches, CA does place much greater emphasis on the close analysis of individual cases […]’. Also, the employment of the CA methodology allows the researcher to focus on ‘the turn-response pair rather than the IE response in isolation’ (Dickerson 2001, 207).

3. Interviews and confrontations

Research on media interviews has usually focused on the radio and television broadcast interactions. Print interviews tend to be left aside, as they represent only the transcript of a conversation, which is usually more or less edited. Still, for the aims of the current research, print interviews have proved to be a useful set of data, as the IE’s corrections of the IR’s turns are easier to follow and IE’s self-corrections, which occur naturally in real conversations, are modified or cancelled through the editing process.

The understanding of the media interview as a verbal interaction organized in sequences of questions and answers has been challenged by Jucker (1986, 7), who advances a definition of radio interviews based on four basic elements (the medium, the participants, the topic coherence and the form of the interaction) which can be followed in the print media interviews as well. First, although the interview is edited and published in a written form, the text is the result of a conversation
usually carried on during a face-to-face encounter or by telephone, between a journalist — interviewer and an interviewee who is a public figure. At the same time, a current tendency regards the online publication of the video interview, accompanied by the transcript. This was the case, for example, of the interview with one of the leaders of the Romanian Liberal Party, Călin Popescu Târiceanu, interviewed by a reporter for the news agency Mediafax.

In the case of print interviews, the participants maintain their institutional roles, acting on behalf of the institutions or organizations they represent. The issue of topic coherence is more complex, here, than in radio interviews. The number of topics discussed and the length of the interview vary in the two corpora, ranging from brief interviews that cover only one topic of actuality to long texts, which discuss a variety of topics, sometimes not only political, but also personal. Certain similarities to broadcast interviews can be observed in regard to the interaction form as well; for instance, print interviews maintain the convention that the speakers address each other directly (Jucker 1986, 13).

In radio and television interviews, the IR’s role also covers the opening of the interaction, with the presentation of the IE, and the closing. In the print media, the interview forms an article because of its news value. The text of the interview respects the common news story structure (Bednarek and Caple 2012, 96–97). The frame is given by the headline of the article, usually indicating the IE’s name and including a quote of his/her speech, thus highlighting the idea considered by the journalists as the most representative for the IE’s discourse. The headline is usually followed by an introductory or lead paragraph, presenting the politician interviewed, even in the case when he/she is a famous public figure, and synthesizing the main ideas of the interview. The lead may also include a presentation of the topic(s) discussed, thus prefacing the IR’s questions and drawing attention to the news value of the interview. The text of the interviews is presented in form of turns, often as a single article if the interview is brief. Especially in the case of long interview, the shifts of topic are signalled through special headlines which delimit the section discussing the new topic from the rest of the text.

The feature usually considered to be specific for interviews is the organization of the verbal exchange in pairs of questions and answers. However, the term ‘question’ appears to be too restrictive and not to cover the cases when the IR’s intervention is made in form of a statement. Jucker points out that all IR’s interventions are meant to elicit information from the interlocutor, thus they should be considered questions even when explicit linguistic cues are absent (Jucker 1986, 99–100). More recently, Montgomery (2011, 43–44) identifies a tendency for British interviewers to formulate their turns as declaratives, tending to occur after an answer of the IE as a clarification. The alternative to the ‘classical’ question-and-answer pair is, thus, the pair formed by assertion and counter-assertion (Montgomery 2011,
45). Although declarative interventions of the IR can be made with the aim of reducing the pressure on the IE (Montgomery 2011, 44), they do not always trigger the IE’s compliance. As the findings in both corpora have revealed, IEs may recur to corrections no matter whether the prior turn was formulated as a question or as a declarative. In this paper, the terms ‘turn’ and ‘initiation’ (e.g. O’Keeffe 2006, 5) will be employed in order to refer to the IR’s interventions and to cover the cases when these interventions are made in the form of a statement.

Acknowledging that corrections of the interlocutor’s turn may be initiated by each of the two participants at the interview, the current paper focuses on corrections made by the IE, viewing them as a form of disagreement or disalignment (Martin and White 2005; Dascălu-Jinga 2006). The act of correcting the prior turn encompasses a few stages: (1) the labelling of a term, statement or idea as wrong and, consequently, the refusal to accept it; (2) the advancement of a different term, statement, idea; (3) the introduction of arguments in order to motivate the change introduced. As in real-life conversations, the first and the third stage may be lacking in interviews or they may not be explicit. The substitution of the ‘wrong’ element with another one, considered by the speaker to be ‘correct’, forms the core of the process of correction.

Corrections are therefore a way of connecting to the prior turn by signalling the IE’s attention to the question or to the perspective expressed by the journalist. They may also mark a distance from the standard pre-defined roles of IR and IE, with the latter one rejecting the former’s attempts to exert pressure or to obtain a specific kind of answer. By correcting the IR, the interviewed person struggles to impose a specific viewpoint in discourse. Corrections thus represent a discreet form of undermining the journalists’ authority, suggesting that they may not have correct and/or complete information on an issue, that their position may be biased. In contrast, the politicians attempt to highlight their discursive authority mainly based on knowledge of political, economic or social issues. At the same time, corrections enhance the IE’s authority as an interlocutor, indicating that he/she does not accept the perspective voiced and the language used by the media representative.

4. Types of corrections

Two possible classifications emerged from the analyzed corpora, based on two different criteria. One classification regarded the target of the correction made by the IE. The other criterion for classification regarded the form in which the correction was made. Both classifications will be discussed below. They do not aim to cover the entire range of forms and situations in which corrections can be made.
in interviews as well as in ordinary conversations. Rather, the two classifications refer to the corrections which were most frequent in the two corpora examined.

4.1 Classification according to the target of the correction

4.1.1 Context-related corrections

A first category of corrections identified included context-related corrections. In both corpora, these were usually cases when the IE refused to answer the IR’s question, prompting a justification which regarded the context of the interaction. Such corrections shift the target of the IE’s criticism from the interlocutor to the context. The element most often brought into discussion was the time chosen for the interview: the IEs sustained that the IRs have not chosen the proper moment to raise a particular issue.

(1) “IR: Bun, dar se ridică întrebarea. Un partid mic cum este Noua Republică, de unde are fonduri să susțină o nouă campanie?
IE: Eu zic că este prematur să vorbim de logistică. Haideți să așteptăm să anunțe premierul organizarea alegerilor și apoi discutăm.” (Neamțu_6)

“IR: All right, but a question arises. A small party like The New Republic, from which source does it receive the funding for a new campaign?
IE: I say it is too early to talk about logistics. Let’s wait for the prime-minister’s announcement regarding the organization of the elections and we talk afterwards.”

In Example (1), the refusal to give a precise answer to a difficult question is disguised as a correction regarding the appropriateness of the question. The correction, which is a mild threat to the IR’s face, is mitigated by the hortatory formula “Let’s wait”. Corrections referring to the appropriate moment to answer the question also include a promise, as it happens here. The Romanian politician formulates his turn as an apparently delayed answer, claiming that he would be ready to discuss the topic in the future. Such promises are difficult to challenge, as the IEs assert their willingness to answer, but also difficult to verify, for both journalists and the public.

4.1.2 Content-related corrections

The second category of corrections is represented by content-related corrections. These interventions are the most problematic for both interlocutors, because they deal openly with the truth value of the prior statement or question. They vary according to the instance to whom the statement or the idea rejected is attributed.
4.1.2.1 Corrections of IR’s statements. A first subcategory consists in corrections of the IR’s statements or ideas. In such case, this indicates a confrontation between the interlocutors, because, by correcting the IR’s opinion, the politician highlights his expert knowledge on the topic discussed. Such a stance was taken by the Romanian Minister for Education during an interview for an online journal, in response to the journalist’s dealing with difficult topics regarding the Ministry’s rules for the evaluation of Romanian universities. In the following excerpt, the journalist made a statement about the problems faced by the Ministry of Education in the past. The response gave by the Minister appears as a counter-assertion (Montgomery 2011):

(2) “IR: În urmă cu cinci ani studenţii de la programele de la programele desfiinţate tot prin nomenclator au dat ministerul în judecată.

IE: Situaţia nu are nimic în comun cu cea de atunci. Sunt situaţii complet diferite. Acum sunt universităţi care n-au îndeplinit condiţiile de calitate, care n-au mai venit la o evaluare de 10 ani de zile”. (Costoiu_10)

“IR: Five years ago, the students enrolled in the study programmes which were cancelled by the decree have sued the Ministry [of Education].

IE: The current situation has nothing to do with that one. These are completely different situations. There are now universities which fail to meet the quality standard, which have not asked to be evaluated for 10 years.”

The journalist’s statement is interpreted by the Minister as an accusation against the institution he represents and strongly rejected. The rejection is manifest in the Minister’s insistence on the difference between the case mentioned by the IR and the current case. In the quoted excerpt, Minister Costoiu highlights these differences in a first statement, which is paraphrased in a second one (The current situation has nothing to do with that one. These are completely different situations). Further, he continues to sustain his stance by giving technical explanations (There are now universities which fail to meet the quality standard). This exchange indicates the differences between the apparent, superficial form and topics of the interview and the underground structure, which concerns the construction of power relations. In this interview about the ministerial policies regarding the universities, the journalist repeatedly signals a situation which she describes as critical, for the universities and for the students. More or less explicitly, the journalist attributes the blame to the Ministry of Education and, consequently, to Mihaela Costoiu, although he was not a Minister five years before. In a similar manner, the IE attempts repeatedly to shift the blame, indicating the academic institutions as the one responsible, and thus absolving the Ministry of any guilt.

In Example (2), the correction is made in a complex manner, through a reformulation and an explanation aiming to shift the blame to a third party, namely the
universities failing to fulfill the evaluation criteria. In other cases, the politicians choose to correct the IR’s intervention without providing ‘technical’ reasons. In the following excerpt, the IE does not aim to construct his authority as an expert, but keeps the discussion at the level of small-talk. After the correction, he makes a direct criticism against the IR, which is mitigated – to a certain extent – by the double generalization: one regarding all journalists and one regarding exaggerations as being a permanent characteristic of their style:

(3) “IR: Assessore Esposito, ha fatto pace con Marino? 
IE: Non abbiamo mica litigato, voi giornalisti esagerate sempre”. (Esposito_10)
“IR: Assessor Esposito, have you made peace with Marino? 
IE: We haven’t even argued, you journalists always exaggerate.”

It may be presumed that, in this case as well, the Italian politician feels threatened by the question, because of the presupposition that he had been involved in an open conflict. The assumed informal tone of the IR’s question may also signal a hint of irony, to which the IE responds with a criticism. His answer avoids the topic proposed by the journalist, by suggesting that the perspective is wrong and the topic is unworthy of discussion. Through this correction, the politician constructs his authority at the discursive level, by implying a distinction between himself as being committed to the truth and the journalists, who allegedly exaggerate.

4.1.2.2 Corrections of a third party’s statements. A second type of content-related corrections, the correction of a third party’s assertion, is usually triggered by the IR’s mention of a statement attributed to another politician, which contradicts the IEs’ views or actions. The IEs tend not only to point out the flaws in the quoted statement, but also to use the occasion to criticize the third party quoted. The act of bringing into discussion such problematic statements or ideas appears to be a strategic move of the journalists, which encourages the IEs to give a polemical answer and excludes the IRs from being the targets of the blame. For the politicians interviewed, the answer to such questions or statements represent their attempts to delegitimate their political opponents while avoiding an open confrontation with the journalist.

(4) “IR: Alfano mette il veto sulle nozze gay. 
IE: Ognuno di noi, quando a scuola il professore lo interrogava e non aveva studiato, aveva il suo argomento a piacere. Il mio era la seconda guerra mondiale. Quello di Alfano sono le nozze gay: se si trova in difficoltà su qualcosa lancia un’agenzia su questo tema e “mette in guardia” da questa sinistra pericolosa. Io non parlo di matrimonio gay. Parlo di unioni civili. Siamo l’unico Paese dell’Occidente a non avere una legge che le riconosca. La faremo.” (Renzi_16)
“IR: Alfano says no to the gay marriage.
IE: Each of us, when the teacher asked us and we hadn’t studied, had a favourite topic. Mine was the Second World War. Alfano’s topic is the gay marriage: if he has a problem about something he directs a speech about this issue and “warns” against “this dangerous left-wing”. I am not talking about gay marriage. I am talking about civil unions. We are the only Western state without a law to acknowledge them. We will make it.”

In this exchange, the Italian President of the Council of Ministers, Matteo Renzi, underrates not only Angelino Alfano’s stance on the topic of civil unions, but his entire discourse as a politician. This effect is achieved because Renzi introduces here an unexpected frame, that of the school and the pupils’ activities in the classroom. His answer to the IR’s assertion comprises two parts. In the first one, Renzi ironically criticizes the other politician, by comparing his own behaviour during school years with Alfano’s current behaviour. In this manner, Renzi manages to lessen the other politician’s importance and to place himself in a better light. This differentiation is also visible in the use of the verb tenses. When speaking about himself, Renzi uses the past tense, implying that he has surpassed this developmental stage. Instead, he uses the present tense for Alfano, suggesting that he considers the politician’s behaviour as (still) childish. The second part of the IE’s turn includes the real correction, which regards the signified as well as the signifier. The correction is not only linked to the terms in use (gay marriage, civil unions), because the two syntagmas are not synonyms. In fact, the expression “civil union” may function as a hyperonim, encompassing both same-sex and heterosexual unions; moreover, the concept of union is not a synonym to marriage, from a legal point of view. The correction of the syntagma used by the IR is associated here with the IE’s attempt to correct an opinion that depreciates same-sex couples and partnerships.

4.1.3 Form-related corrections
The third category includes form-related corrections, which are directed only at the formal level of the IR’s utterance, namely at the linguistic formulation of the IR’s prior turn. In the corpora, no corrections regarding the grammatical structure of the IR’s turns were identified. The most common corrections referred to the lexical choices made by the interlocutor and to the attempts to hedge or to mitigate a term used by the IR.

4.1.3.1 Term-related corrections. Term-related corrections are employed by the IEs when a specific term or formula appears to them as offensive or face-threatening. In this case, the IEs often replace it with a term considered to be more convenient.
Term-related corrections reveal the ideologic potential of the linguistic resources for conveying power relationships, because the selection of the lexical units is never gratuitous or completely neutral (e.g. Clayman and Heritage 2002), as both journalists and politicians are well aware of. Instead, every word may convey a specific judgment on the topic discussed, functioning as a means of evaluation. Such a case is represented in the example below, where the journalist addressed a question to the Romanian Minister of Education in an apparently joking form:

(5) “IR: 10 universităţi intră în lichidare sau sunt monitorizate permanent, alte 183 de specializări de la fără frecvenţă şi învăţămînt la distanţă intră în lichidare. Aţi pornit „jihadul” impotriva universităţilor?
IE: Nu e niciun jihad. Este vorba de o metodologie care se aprobă anual de către Ministerul Educaţiei, nu e nimic nou. Această metodologie este pe site-ul ministerului de două luni de zile. Este în consultări cu universităţile de multă vreme şi în acest moment cele 183 de specializări despre care se vorbeşte, marea lor majoritate, covârşitoarea lor majoritate, este acceptată de universităţi prin adrese scrise.” (Costoiu_10)

“IR: 10 universities are going to be closed down or are placed under constant monitoring, other 183 specializations from distance learning and part-time are going to be closed. Have you declared the ‘jihad’ against the universities?
IE: There is no jihad. This is a methodology which is approved every year by the Ministry of Education, there is nothing new about it. This methodology was posted on the Ministry’s webpage two months ago. It has been debated with the universities for a long time and right now the 183 specializations that we are talking about, the most of them, the overwhelming majority, have been accepted by the universities by means of written documents”

The journalist begins her turn in an apparent neutral manner, as she advances factual data about the measures taken by the Ministry. However, the apparent neutrality is undermined precisely by the numbers given as information. By presenting these data in a marked position, at the beginning of the two clauses, the IR attracts attention to them, suggesting that the ministerial rules are directed against the universities. This impression is further sustained by the question addressed to Mihnea Costoiu, which forms the conclusion to the situation presented previously as ‘critical’. The journalist’s conclusion implies that the Minister is involved in a personal war against the universities. The term ‘jihad’ apparently maintains the conversation on a friendly ground, by creating humour or releasing the tension which has built up previously. At a deeper level, however, the term carries negative connotations especially in the contemporary social context, because it
activates the script of ‘terrorism’ and, consequently, delegitimizes the Minister of Education. In this manner, the Minister is no longer presented as the politician acting on behalf of a governmental institution and implementing legal measures, but as an ‘outlaw’ himself.

The IE is forced to correct the term, which he does at the beginning of his response statement. First, the Minister rejects the term used by the IR, then he advances the scientific term methodology, which brings forward a different perspective, that the universities are evaluated according to a common scientific standard. Mihnea Costoiu attempts here to correct the entire stance taken by the journalist, by insisting not only on the term methodology, but also by giving explanations about the entire process of academic evaluation. Moreover, he also attempts here to correct the journalist’s implicit suggestion about the ‘unfair’ closing of the many academic programmes of specialization, by pointing out how the universities in case have been informed about the procedure.

4.1.3.2 Corrections of grading. Another sub-category of form-related corrections are employed in the cases when the IE introduces a grading correction. The IE may attempt to correct the evaluation proposed by the IR through the introduction of a different intensifier, upgrading or downgrading it (Pomerantz 1984, 65–68).

In the following extract, the Liberal politician Ludovic Orban shows his disagreement with the journalist’s proposal about a political alliance with another centre-right wing politician. The disagreement is manifest in form of a longer turn, in which Orban does not explicitly deny the idea of a future partnership, but criticizes the other politician.

(6) “IR: O colaborare cu Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu ar putea fi mai simplă?
IE: Ce reprezintă Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu astăzi? A fost premierul de criză al lui Traian Băsescu, a fost șeful Serviciului de Informații Externe și nu are calitățile necesare unui lider politic.
IR. Totuși, potrivit sondajelor, se bucură de o simpatie destul de mare.
IE: Nu mai e chiar așa de mare.” (Orban_3)

“IR: Could a partnership with Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu be easier?
IE: What does Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu represent today? He was Traian Băsescu’s prime-minister for the crisis, he was the head of the Foreign Information Service and he doesn’t have the necessary qualities to be a political leader.
IR. Still, according to the surveys, he enjoys a rather high degree of sympathy.
IE: It’s not so high now.”
The exchange shows how the IE rejects the partnership suggested by the journalist by denying the importance of the other politician, Ludovic Orban attempts to enhance the image of his party, as being selective and not accepting compromises. Here, he answers indirectly at the IR’s question, implying that his party does not consider the formation lead by the politician Ungureanu as a partner for future alliances; however, the alliance is not discussed in terms of parties involved, but of persons. Orban’s statement reveals the conception that a party leader has to be a strong and charismatic personality in order to maintain a stable group of supporters. The journalist does not accept the IE’s negative response and contradicts him, by mentioning an objective criterion, the surveys of voters’ preferences. Her statement is already modalized (a rather high degree of sympathy) and vague enough, but the IE further attenuates the quantification (not so high) and introduces a temporal reference (now). In fact, the politician’s argumentation is entirely constructed around the time issue: he considers Mihai Răzvan Ungureanu as a politician who lost his credibility at the current moment.

4.2. Classification according to the form of the correction

A second criterion of classification that emerged from the interviews analyzed regarded the manner in which the interviewees chose to introduce the correction in their turn. The introduction of the correction indicated the IE’s concern for avoiding the threat of the IR’s ‘face’. In both corpora, corrections were introduced either in a direct (unmitigated) or in an indirect (mitigated) manner. The degree of mitigation is not influenced by the position of the correction within the IE’s turn, although a pattern tended to emerge: unmitigated corrections were placed at the beginning of the response, while mitigated corrections appear in the centre or at the end of the response.

4.2.1 Unmitigated (direct) corrections

Unmitigated (direct) corrections can be realized in different ways. Speakers may choose to answer using the terms they consider to be correct and not insist on the ‘mistake’ in the IR’s turn, i.e. not providing any other justification for the difference in their responses from the prior turn. Another possible realization is to introduce the correction and then explain it. Such a case is visible in Example (7), when the Minister Emma Bonino first provided the ‘correct’ answer, then repeated the correction and provided further explanation.
“IR: Minister, can you bring the marò Massimiliano Latorre and Salvatore Girone back home?

IE: We are doing our best. Not I, we. There is no room for individual actions. This issue regards all the institutions […]”

The question was asked in the opening of the interview and it might have been interpreted by the IE as placing too high emphasis on her role as a Minister for Foreign Affairs and isolating her from the rest of the team. The formulation of the question is very direct and proposes a rather reductive frame for the conflict between the Italian state and the Indian one regarding the two Italian Marines under trial in India. As the journalist presents it, the issues of international laws and politics are glossed over and the solution of the case seems to depend on the Italian Minister only. Her reply brings into discussion the wider political context, presenting the problem as an institutional, not a personal one. The correction of the personal pronoun, from singular to plural, implies, here, a re-definition of the social actors involved in the situation. Emma Bonino’s answer here reveals the typical pattern for direct corrections, which is “not X, but Y” or “I say Y instead of X”.

4.2.2 Mitigated (indirect) corrections

In contrast, mitigated (indirect) corrections do not enhance the adversarial character of the interview, but begin by highlighting an (apparent) area of agreement between the IR and the IE. In this case, the IE first echoes a part of the IR’s claim or question, and afterwards presents his/her personal viewpoint, usually in the form of a clause introduced by “but”. This strategy allows the IE to display more accurate knowledge on the topic than the IR, while still preserving the IR’s “face”.

In the following extract, the politician Ioan Oltean counteracted in this manner the question referring to the Liberal Party having lost a considerable share of the electorate before the presidential elections.

“IR: Pe alegătorii lui Călin Popescu Tăriceanu nu i-ăti pierdut deja când domnia sa a devenit prima opțiune de premier a lui Victor Ponta?

IE: La prima vedere lucrurile pot sta așa. Dar alegătorii lui Călin Popescu Tăriceanu nu sunt comuniști, ci oameni de dreapta, ai libertății, ai economiei de piață, ai democrației, ai statului de drept și ai Europei unite. Nu unii care vor comunism cu față umană, întoarcerea spre est, spre Rusia. Există doar un grup restrâns condus de interesul propriu, câțiva parlamentari, câțiva primari.”
“IR: Haven’t you already lost Călin Popescu Tăriceanu’s voters when Victor Ponta chose him as his first option for the prime-minister office?
IE: Things may look like this, at first sight. But Călin Popescu Tăriceanu’s voters are no communists, but people of the right-wing, people sustaining the freedom, the market economy, the democracy, the state of right and the united Europe. Not some [individuals] who want communism in a human form, to return to the East, to Russia. There is only one small group, driven by their own interests, some Members of Parliament, some mayors.”

The formulation of the question suggested that the journalist already expected an agreement on the topic, in form of an affirmative answer. At the same time, an explicit agreement of the politician would have placed his party in an unfavourable light. Oltean chooses to begin his answer with a formal agreement, which nevertheless draws attention to the error in IR’s claim (at first sight). From the beginning, the politician thus suggests that the claim made by the IR indicates that her knowledge of this specific political issue is incomplete. Instead of giving a precise ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, Ioan Oltean introduces a marked evaluation of political actors and of their supporters, constructing an in- and an out-group. In this case, the mitigated correction is combined with a grading correction. The journalist’s question referred to the entire group formed by supporters of the former leader Tăriceanu, implying that this was a considerable loss for the party. The IE corrects this view, downgrading the dimension of the electors’ group.

5. Distribution of corrections across the two corpora

A further step in the analysis consisted in the comparison of the correction types and their distribution for each corpus gathered. The results are presented in Table 3.

The results show that content-oriented corrections tend to be the most frequent ones for both corpora. The rejection of a ‘wrong’ idea and the advancement of the ‘right’ one appear to represent a main concern for the IEs during political interviews. Contrary to the expectations, the term-related corrections have occurred less frequently in the corpus and especially in the cases when the term employed by the IR was particularly problematic, as in Example (5). Another possible explanation for this difference is that term-related corrections often appear in association with the correction of an idea previously expressed. The first criterion of classification did not show notable differences in the two corpora. The only significant difference was observed in connection to the second criterion: mitigated
corrections appeared more often in the Italian than in the Romanian corpus. Such a result needs to be linked to the general style of the Italian interviews, as the Italian journalists tended to conduct the interviews in a more relaxed, even informal tone than the Romanian interviewers. Moreover, some Italian interviews included various topics, tackling even the personal life of the interviewee, which was not the case in the Romanian corpus. The Romanian interviews indicated a more marked differentiation of the institutionalized roles of IR and IE, while the Italian interactions gave the impression that the interview was understood as a collaborative construction or a conversation with politicians seen not only as public figures or representatives of institutions, but also as private persons.

### 6. The role of corrections in the interaction

The analysis of the corpora showed that the corrections made by the IE may fulfill various functions in the interaction. Although corrections are ‘challenging moves’ (Dickerson 2001), they transcend the distinction between answers and non-answers, being used in both cases. In a few cases analyzed, the correction was used in order to avoid the answer to the IR’s question, as for example in Example (1) or (3). In other interviews, corrections were employed with the aim of delaying the precise answer, as it happened in Example (4), when the speaker made a digression, highlighting the fault in another politician’s discourse, in order to introduce the real correction afterwards. Most often, corrections served for the IE to introduce or reinforce a different perspective on the topic discussed or even a shift of topic.

The role of corrections should not be considered as limited at the linguistic level, as they may contribute to the construction of the IE’s identity in discourse. The interviews examined indicate that the discursive construction of the

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politicians’ identity encompasses some constant features (for example, some politicians appear to be more relaxed than others or more incisive, no matter who the IR is) but, at the same time, it may vary according to the manner in which the interview proceeds. Although corrections are not necessarily a sign of an adversarial interview, corrections of the IR’s statements, in particular, tend to appear during confrontational exchanges.

This was the case of the interview taken to the Romanian politician Ludovic Orban by Dan Andronic in August 2015. Most of the journalist’s interventions, in this interview, were made in form of declaratives, and the journalist attempted to show his understanding of the IE’s statements by beginning two of his turns with the formula ‘I understand’ (‘Am înțeles’). During the interview, a variety of issues was discussed, and the IR’s attitude varied: from ‘critical’ questions, masking possible accusations towards the IE, to statements showing agreement on other topics.

(9) “IR: Ați vorbit, la un moment dat, de măsurile dezastruoase ale guvernelor Băsescu, deci automat le-ați branduit folosindu-vă de mandatele fostului președinte, dar totuși dvs. v-ați aliat cu cei care au făcut parte din acelă guverne.
IE: Nu ne-am aliat, am fusionat.
IR: E același lucru. Am spus că v-ați aliat.
IE: Nu e alianță. Dacă era alianță, se putea rupe.
IR. Am înțeles, deci v-ați căsătorit, nu v-ați logodit.
IE: La ora actuală, suntem PNL. Toți foștii membri ai PDL sunt membri ai PNL.” (Orban_4)

“IR: You talked, at a certain moment, about the disastrous measures taken by the Băsescu governments, so automatically you labelled them using the ex-President’s mandates, but still you allied with those who were members in those governments.
IE: We did not ally, we fusioned.
IR: It’s the same thing. I said that you allied.
IE: It is not an alliance. If it were an alliance, it could be broken.
IR. I understand, so you got married, not engaged.
IE: At the present moment, we are PNL. All the former members of PDL are PNL members.”

This is one of the rare situations when the IE’s correction is rejected by the IR. At stake here is the term used in order to designate the relationship between the two major right-wing parties. At the beginning, the IE does not provide a justification for the use of the term “fusion”. He explains the fusion of the two political parties only after the IR repeatedly rejects his correction. The confrontation here is linked to the construction of both interlocutors’ identities. While the politician claims to
know the evolution of his own party better than the interviewer, the journalist also claims to understand the current events in the political sphere. In this case, the interview seems to shift from the traditional structure, with the IR eliciting information from the IE, to a different structure, where the IR claims the position of a dialogue partner – commentator and interpreter of the political events.

Corrections of the ideas or statements expressed by third parties may be employed in confrontational, neutral or collaborative interviews. They tend to appear in almost each interview examined, as the political discourse ultimately is based on the construction of and distinction between in- and out-groups. For example, the importance of correcting a third-party’s opinions is visible in an interview with the Italian politician Laura Boldrini, taken by Giacomo Galeazzi for *La Stampa*, in July 2013. The main topic discussed in the interview is the situation of the refugees arriving to Italy. Throughout the discussion, other subsidiary topics emerge: the difficulties faced by the refugees on their journey to Europe, the Italian law on citizenship, Pope Francesco’s visit in Lampedusa and his attitude towards the people in need. During the interview, the answers given by Boldrini reveal her attempt to correct the common view that refugees were dangerous and did not need or deserve help. The corrections which emerge in her answers are not addressed directly to the journalist, but regard a third party which is never precisely nominated as a social actor. The confrontation here appears to unfold between the politician and the collective mindset or the conservative attitude of the citizens and authorities. As the extract below shows, the correction is not made precisely in adversarial terms, as the politicians repeats the inclusive pronoun *we*, which may encompass politicians, the citizens, and even the media.

(10) “IR: Intanto però sono ripresi gli sbarchi. Vede una nuova emergenza?

“IR: Meanwhile, the landings have begun again. Do you consider this a new emergency?
IE: No. Our perspective needs to be enlarged. We have to move away from the emergency dimension. In our country, landings on the sea shore have taken place during the last 15 years, they are structural, situations that are recurrent. The emergency is in Jordania, where hundreds of
thousands of refugees are gathered, not the few of them who make it to Italy. The emergency are the governments because of which they flee because they have no human rights. It is false to talk about emergency – landings in our country. […] We are not the only country which accepts migrants. There is a victimism which is not motivated by the numbers. They are not illegal [migrants], they are refugees. And Italy is not the most exposed point, for sure."

The IR formulates here a ‘prefaced question’ (Clayman and Heritage 2002, 104–105), whose first part serves to support the term ‘emergency’ employed in the second part. The perspective proposed by the IR can be interpreted both as representing the journalist’s opinion or the common opinion. The latter interpretation is taken up by the politician, who constructs the first part of their answer as an attempt to correct the term used by the journalist. The lexical correction, here, implies a correction of the viewpoint advanced, which is shifted from the Italian hosts to the foreign refugees. Boldrini substitutes the image of Italy in crisis with a different understanding of the concept of ‘emergency’, describing the situation of other countries where human rights are not respected.

7. Concluding remarks

This analysis has shown that corrections are a frequent phenomenon in political interviews, which may represent the IE’s refusal to answer or the IE’s attempt to shift the discussed topic. Corrections are employed by the IEs as a manner to take distance from the stance expressed or suggested in the IR’s prior turns. At the same time, corrections contribute to the discursive construction of the IE’s identity, who in this manner appears to be more informed than the IR or to have a better understanding of the events or issues discussed.

Two criteria of classification have been identified in the analysis, one regarding the target of the correction and another one, regarding the form of the correction. While the two corpora presented a high degree of similarity in the case of the first type of corrections, a difference emerged in regard to the form chosen for the correction. The Italian politicians tended to mitigate the corrections introduced more than the Romanian ones and thus to contribute to the unfolding of the interview as a collaborative construction. On the contrary, the Romanian politicians tended to distinguish their stance from the journalist’s stance in a more marked way. A tendency towards confrontation was therefore more visible in the Romanian corpus. This trait may be attributed to the journalists’ effort to present
themselves as independent, in contrast to the role played by the media during the totalitarian regime in Romania.

The findings of this study are not exhaustive, as they are based on two small samples of interviews in the two languages, taken in the last five years. The analysis needs to be extended to a longer period of time and to a larger sample of publications; still, similarities and differences in the journalistic styles adopted in the two countries and in the conception of the institutional roles of journalists and politicians are already visible.

References


Author’s address

Raluca-Mihaela Levonian
Centre for Romanian Studies / Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Letters
University of Bucharest
5–7 Edgar Quinet St., Sector 1
010017, Bucharest
Romania

raluca.levonian@litere.unibuc.ro

Biographical notes

Raluca-Mihaela Levonian is currently Lecturer for Romanian language at the University of Calabria (Italy), where she has also worked as Adjunct Professor (2011–2016). In 2009, she completed her PhD at the University of Bucharest with a thesis on literary pragmatics. Between 2014 and 2015 she conducted a postdoctoral research project on the analysis of Romanian and Italian political discourse, funded by the University of Bucharest. Her research interests include pragmatics, discourse analysis and foreign language teaching.