

# Do important questions demand respectful replies?

## Analyzing televised political interviews in Japan

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This paper examines the attributes of questions asked during televised political interviews in Japan. It details the type, style, and mode of questions posed during broadcast programs to national- and local-level politicians, and nonpoliticians, including experts in different areas. Based on data gathered during 2012–2013 from three interview programs, the paper provides criteria for identifying questions and distinguishing them from other expressions, differentiates the diverse types of questions, and proposes new criteria to analyze interviewers' questions. Furthermore, the paper replicates and modifies the "*Theory of Equivocation*" to examine how Japanese interviewees cope with the communicative problems posed to them during televised political interviews and the effects of these questions on the interviewees' replies.

**Keywords:** Political interviews, Television, Media discourse, Theory of Equivocation, Political issues, Japan

### 1. Introduction

Televised political interviews aim to test public officials and subject-matter experts on policy issues and questions of concern to the general public. These interviews enable the interviewers – journalists, social critics, or scholars and researchers from different fields – to ask questions and challenge answers. Through questioning, interviewers may disagree with, argue, criticize, or otherwise confront interviewees. Often, however, these interviews take the form of rule-governed speech situations that rely on specified rituals (Baym, 2007), highlighting image, emotion, and style rather than reflecting rational debate (Deluca & Peebles, 2002). Although interviewers continue to search for answers that delve deeper, television

can provide a perfect climate for politicians seeking to avoid answering tough questions and trying to speak to the “overhearing audience” (Heritage, 1985) at home. Politicians utilize various techniques to hedge and equivocate in response to questions fired at them in order to communicate their planned party messages and designed policies (Bull et al., 1996; Feldman, Kinoshita, & Bull, 2015).

This paper focuses on the attributes of questions asked during televised political interviews in a particular political culture, that of Japan. It endeavors to detail the type, style, and mode of questions posed during broadcast programs to national-level politicians (members of the Diet, Japan’s bicameral legislature), local-level politicians, and nonpoliticians, including experts in different areas. Based on data collected during 14 months from three interview programs, the paper first provides criteria for identifying questions and distinguishing them from other expressions. Next, it replicates previous research methods to differentiate the diverse types of questions, and proposes new criteria to analyze interviewers’ questions. Finally, the paper examines the effects of these questions on the interviewees’ replies. Detailing broadcast political interviews in Japan is of special relevance because of the linguistic and communicative mode used in this country. These include nonlogic, taciturnity, ambivalence, situational logic, emotionality, subjectivity, and particularity characteristics; the use of cautious and indirect speech or “the art of the abdomen” (*haragei*) to sense others’ mood before venturing an opinion in order to achieve a consensus of opinion and harmony and to avoid disagreement; and the hierarchy-oriented language, depending on the relationship between the partners engaged in a conversation, in this case interviewers and interviewees (Feldman, 2004). All these cultural communications tendencies may affect the interaction between the individuals participating in the interview and the nature of their verbal behavior, in turn determining not only the frame and content of televised interviews but also the nature and scope of the information disseminated to the public.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 The Interviews

The study detailed here is based on 194 live interviews (145 with politicians, 49 with nonpoliticians) broadcast over a period of 14 months (May 2012 – June 2013) on three nationally-broadcast television programs: *Puraimu Nyūsu*<sup>1</sup> (Prime

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1. In Japanese vowels can either be short or long; a diacritical mark, e.g. ō, ū, ē, or ā over the vowel indicates that it is a long vowel.

News; 147 interviews), *Shin Hōdō 2001* (New Broadcast 2001; 25 interviews), and *Gekiron Kurosufaya* (*Gekiron* Crossfire; 22 interviews). Questions were mainly posed by prominent journalists, who also functioned as moderators of the wider discussion. Scholars or experts in areas such as public policy or economics (referred to as *komenteitā* or “commentators”) often participated in the interviews and contributed their own questions. Interviews were not scripted, but interviewees had a general idea of what they were going to be asked.

The sample of 194 interviews consisted of 133 interviews with national politicians from all the political parties represented in the Diet.<sup>2</sup> For comparison purposes, there were 12 interviews with local politicians (e.g., governors of Tōkyō and Ōsaka), and 49 with nonpoliticians (e.g., subject-matter experts and retired politicians). Interviews took place either in small groups or one-on-one, with preference for selecting the latter wherever possible, in order to focus primarily on question-response sequences between interviewer and interviewee. Only questions asked by the moderators or “commentators” were included in this study.

The mean duration of the interviews was 24 minutes, 36 seconds, with a mean of 26.2 questions per interview. In total, 5,084 questions were analyzed based on the criteria detailed below.

## 2.2 Procedure

Interviews from the three programs were recorded using a DVD recorder. A verbatim transcript was made of each selected interview. Two coding sheets were devised for analyzing the structure and verbal content of the interviews: one for the interviewees’ responses (see Feldman et al., 2015), and the second for interviewers’ questions. The latter coding sheet is at the heart of the discussion in this paper, which begins first with the identification of questions posed during the interviews.

## 2.3 Detailing questions and their configuration

### (1) *Identifying questions*

The first major task of the study was to identify questions and distinguish them from other utterances. “*Questions*” were regarded as utterances made by interviewers in

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2. The sample consisted of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), 61 members; the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), 38; Japan Restoration Party, 7; the *Kōmei* Party, 6; Your Party, 6; People’s Life Party, 3; Japanese Communist Party, 3; the Social Democratic Party, 2; the People’s New Party, 1; the New Renaissance Party, 1; the Sunrise Party of Japan, 1; Tax Cuts Japan, Anti-TPP, Nuclear Phaseout Realization Party, 1; New Party Daichi – True Democrats, 1; Green Wind, 1; and one unaffiliated politician. On the selection of these interviews see Feldman et al., 2015.

order to elicit information or opinions from interviewees. Questions may or may not utilize interrogative syntax. Consider the following example from an interview between journalist Tahara Sōichirō<sup>3</sup> and Prime Minister Abe Shinzō, as the discussion focuses on relocating the U.S. Marine Corps' Air Station to the Henoko district, Okinawa Island. Prime Minister Abe is asked about a formal request by the central government for an offshore land-fill project necessary to implement the Henoko relocation plan (questions are *italicized*):

Tahara: In general, a popular topic [among] the public, or should I say in the mass media, is whether the [official] request to reclaim land off the coast of Henoko will be made before or after the election for the Upper House [planned for July]. *What are your thoughts in this regard?*

Abe: Either way, this is a collective security issue, so probably the people of Futenma want it to be resolved as soon as possible. So, I'm not going to think about the Upper House' election. This is not to say that it's going to be done before it; it's something that I should decide on without considering it [the election].

Tahara: *To do it as quickly as possible.*

Abe: Yes, in spite of this, what is also important is that there has been a loss of trust [on the part of the citizens of Okinawa Prefecture]. So to rebuild this trust, I think we must sweat  
(*Gekiron Kurosumafaya*, March 9, 2013).

In this sequence, the first question takes an interrogative form and ends with rising intonation. In the second question, Tahara requests to clarify that he understood correctly Abe's contention that the issue of relocating the US Marine Corps' Air Station should be resolved, as the local residents hope, *as soon as possible*. Even though there was no interrogative syntax in the remark, Abe took it as a question and replied accordingly. This is an example of a declarative question that is not even accompanied by rising intonation, although its function is clearly to elicit a response.

Some questions, usually asked at the beginning of an interview, were merely "small talk" to make interviewees "comfortable" upfront. These included "softball" questions, i.e., non-challenging questions that function as greetings before the actual interview begins and often invite interviewees to brag about themselves or their work. The following exchange between Shimada Ayaka and Nakada Hiroshi, Acting Chairperson of the Japan Restoration Party (or JRP)'s Policy Research Council, is an example:

Shimada: Um, Mr. Nakada, this morning you asked questions in the [Diet] House of Representatives' Budget Committee, didn't you?

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3. Personal names are given in the Japanese order, i.e. family name first.

Nakada: Yes, after a long time of not asking (*Puraimu Nyūsu*, February 8, 2013).

We considered these types of questions to be greetings and therefore excluded them from analysis.

In all, the total number of identified and analyzed questions was 5,084, distributed across the television programs as follows: *Puraimu Nyūsu* 3,868 (76.1%); *Shin Hōdō 2001* 957 (18.8%); *Gekiron Kurosufaya* 259 (5.1%). The high proportion drawn from the first program reflects the fact that it is broadcast five days a week for almost two hours per day.

A detailed description of the nature and pattern of the questions follows.

## (2) *Classifying questions based on syntactic expression*

In line with Jucker's (1986: Ch. 5) approach, this research classifies interview questions into two large groups according to their syntactic expression. The first consists of *prefaced questions* and the second of *non-prefaced questions*.

### (i) *Prefaced questions*

In most cases, these are prefaced by a main clause in which the main prepositional content of the question appears in indirect form in a subordinate clause (in *non-prefaced questions* there is no such preceding main clause). This group includes questions such as "What do you think?" "What do you feel?" "Are you saying ...?" and, "Can I ask you ...?"

Consider the following example to illustrate this category of questions:

Suda Tetsuo (interviewing Katayama Satsuki of the Liberal Democratic Party, or LDP): Ms. Katayama, *let me ask you a question*. Um, regarding parents and children, [concerning] a child or siblings, in light of the fact that social insurance benefit payouts are rapidly increasing, and as has [just] been indicated, there are parents who can't fulfill their duty to support [their children], *what do you think* in this regard about [the possibility of] obligating [the children's] relatives to support the children? (*Shin Hōdō 2001*, June 3, 2012).

### (ii) *Non-prefaced questions*

The second group consists of *non-prefaced questions*, which may be further subdivided according to whether or not they take interrogative syntax: (a) Interrogative syntax appears in three basic question forms: (1) *yes/no questions*; (2) interrogative-word questions, or the *WH-questions*, i.e. questions that start with *what, why, who, when, where, or how*; and (3) disjunctive or alternative questions; (b) Non-interrogative syntax questions include declaratives, imperatives, or *moodless questions* (i.e., those that lack a finite verb).

(a) *Interrogative questions*

The first category of interrogative questions is *yes/no questions*, or questions that “seek a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response in relation to the validity of (normally) an entire predication” (Quirk et al., 1972: 52, cited in Jucker, 1986: 109). Responding with “Yes,” “No,” or any other clearly affirmative or negative reply (using words or expressions such as “certainly,” “of course,” “not at all”) is seen as constituting a reply. Interrogative questions also include *WH-questions*. The third category of interrogative questions is *disjunctive* or *alternative questions* that pose the interviewees with a choice between two or more alternatives. If the interviewee chooses one of the alternatives, then this can be seen as constituting a reply. It is also possible to present an additional alternative, which can be regarded as a reply. If the interviewee does not choose between the alternatives offered by the interviewer, nor offers another alternative, then response is regarded as a non-reply. Consider the following example:

Tahara (interviewing Ōsaka City’s mayor and JRP Representative Hashimoto Tōru): [As we just discussed] a while ago [about] the amendment of the constitution, specifically, *would you change Article 9 [or] wouldn’t you change it?* (*Gekiron Kurosufaya*, April 6, 2013).

(b) *Non-interrogative syntax questions*

This category includes *declaratives*, *imperatives*, or questions *lacking a finite verb* (i.e., *moodless questions*). They are identical in form to declarative statements in writing, but are generally spoken with a final rising, questioning intonation (Quirk et al., 1985). Some declarative questions may not even be accompanied by rising intonation, but the expression still clearly functions to elicit information. Consider the following excerpt from an interview with Defense Minister Morimoto Satoshi as the discussion focused on the Japanese constitution:

Tahara: It [the constitution] doesn’t talk [specifically] about the right to self-defense. Article 9, in any case, stipulates that [Japan] should not conduct war, and will not use any force. In the second column [of this article], it stipulates that, in order to achieve what is written in the previous paragraph, [Japan] will not have land, sea, or air forces, but somehow it left open a little hole, *I think it’s a kind of devious constitution*.

Morimoto: Well, un, this is [one] theory to read [the constitution] in this way, but basically because [Japan is] a sovereign state, it has, naturally, as a sovereign nation, the right to exercise self-defense. [We have] the idea that it has just the right to exercise it  
(*Gekiron Kurosufaya*, July 21, 2012).

As this example illustrates, even though the interviewer (Tahara) does not explicitly invite the interviewee to respond to his declarative remark, and the remark is not even accompanied by a rising intonation, the interviewee (Morimoto) perceives the utterance as a request for his thoughts about the interviewer's way of looking at the constitution and offers a response. This is an example of not only a *moodless indirect question* that invites a response but also of a question that is grammatically incomplete, as detailed below.

### (3) *Distinguishing the syntactic structure of questions*

In addition to identifying and classifying questions based on syntactic expressions, this study also replicated Jucker's (1986:126 ff) research method in examining cohesive ties that exist between questions and the answers preceding them. During interviews, interviewers assess the responses given by interviewees to determine whether they have answered the question or hedged it. If interviewers consider the response to be an answer, they can either expand on the same topic or shift to a new topic, called "*topic extension*" and "*topical shift*" respectively. An interviewer who views the response as a non-answer can follow up with a "*reformulation*" or a "*challenge*."

#### (i) *Topic extension*

"Topic extension" refers to a situation in which an interviewer raises a minor implication of a prior statement in order to encourage an interviewee to reconfirm and/or expand on prior remarks. Consider the following example from an interview with Yamada Masahiko, former Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries:

Sorimachi: ...Since the LDP [won control of Japan from 1955], the prime minister has changed annually, and in the three years under the Democratic Party of Japan (or DPJ) administration, there have been already three prime ministers, so [now] that it is the fourth year, perhaps a fourth prime minister [may assume office] and the like. Obviously, I think, there will be criticisms [if this happens]; what do you think about this?

Yamada: Indeed such criticism will surface, but at this moment we have to make a radical reform of the DPJ, this is what has to be done.

Sorimachi: Where did it [the functioning of the DPJ] go wrong? Did the problem lie with [former prime minister] Hatoyama Yukio's administration?

Yamada: During the Hatoyama administration, we had government-led politics rather than bureaucrat-initiated politics. We did as much as was needed.

Yagi: Earlier you mentioned a transformation of the party. What type [of reform] will it be?

(*Puraimu Nyūsu*, September 5, 2012).

*(ii) Topical shift*

When shifting the topic, the interviewer doesn't relate back to the preceding answer but rather brings up a new aspect of the general topic under discussion. Consider the following example from an interview with Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko as the topic of discussion shifted from energy and nuclear power to the conflict between Japan and China over disputed islands:

Suda: Now, Mr. Prime Minister, regarding energy measurements. This [issue] is also attracting attention. Hmm, it is understood that your administration has launched a policy of [using] zero nuclear power plants by 2040. Meanwhile, er, you have resumed construction of nuclear power plants in Ōma [in Aomori Prefecture] and in Shimane [Prefecture]. This, as has been said [here], is a contradiction. Well, would you consider clarifying this [contradiction] in the nuclear power plant [policy] for the 2030s in the [DPJ's] manifest?

Noda: ...(reply)

Yoshida: That means it is likely you are going to achieve zero [nuclear power] perhaps in 2040 or 2050?

Noda: ...(reply)

Suda: Mr. Prime Minister, in the end is the goal really zero?

Noda: It should be zero if we are to have an independent society. This is the goal. ... based on firmly established safety standards, judgment should be made by the new [Nuclear] Regulatory Commission. This is how things are.

Suda: Recently, six surveillance vessels sent by the Chinese government simultaneously entered the Territorial waters around the *Senkaku Islands*. Mr. Noda, do you have any ideas about how to strengthen effective control [around the Islands], for example by creating a harbor, and whether there are various other proposals [in this regard]. What is your view? (*Shin Hôdô* 2001, September 16, 2012)

*(iii) Reformulation*

An interviewer "reformulates" when he or she accurately restates an interviewee's declared position, with the implication that the preceding answer was not adequate and needs clarification or expansion. Consider the following extract from an interview with Kakizawa Mito from the Your Party, in which Hirai Fumio, the interviewer, tried to recap Kakizawa's reply to Suda's question to confirm his understanding of the situation:

Suda: I will now ask Kakizawa from Your Party, is it possible [for your party] to merge with the JRP? This [topic] has also become a focus of the news.



Kakizawa: I very much looked forward to having this issue decided before appearing on this program, but, well, it is up to [their] policies; policies are important.

Hirai: [It sounds like] depending on [JRP] policies a merger is possible.

Kakizawa: Depending on [their] policies (*Shin Hōdō 2001*, November 25, 2012).

Hirai's question also illustrates another case of a *moodless question* not accompanied by rising intonation that is also grammatically incomplete, as discussed below.

#### (iv) *Challenges*

Interviewers sometimes directly challenge an answer by making explicit the possible implications or presumptions of the answer, with the goal of testing some aspect of the interviewee's intentions, actions, or attitudes. Consider the following example from an interview with Kasai Akira of the Japan Communist Party:

Sorimachi: Mr. Kasai, in order to eliminate [Japan's] military functions [as you suggest] we would need to abolish all of the American military bases in Japan. So, for example, how would we handle national security? Do we have to protect our own country by ourselves?

Kasai: This should be done by cultivating diplomatic power.

Sorimachi: Do you [mean to say we] can protect Japan without maintaining military power? (*Puraimu Nyūsu*, November 22, 2012).

#### (4) *Examining the pragmatic means of weight reduction*

This study further followed Jucker (1986:126ff) in examining two ways in which interviewers could challenge an interviewee's point of view without appearing to violate the required perception of neutrality: *quotation of critics* and *questions accompanied by accounts*. In the former case, interviewers based their questions on actual or hypothetical critiques by an interviewee's opponents (political or other), or cited other actual or potential challengers. Drawing on the words of others allows interviewers to openly disagree without appearing to do so personally (e.g., Holt & Clift, 2007). As an illustration, consider the following extract from an interview with Oshima Tadamori of the LDP, wherein the interviewer (Tahara) bases his view on newspaper reports:

Tahara: You just talked about political realignment and about Mr. Ibuki [Bunmei, a former LDP Secretary-General], and most newspapers now welcome this political realignment. That is, many newspapers have written that [Prime Minister] Abe will leave the LDP and team up with the JRP. Are you in favor of such a move?

Oshima: First, I don't think [Prime Minister] Abe will go that far and so on, and will do this.

Tahara: Wasn't it reported in the newspapers [that he plans to do so]?

Oshima: Even though it was reported in the newspapers I don't think it [will] happen. (Gekiron Kurosufaya, August 25, 2012)

In the case of *questions accompanied by accounts*, the interviewers provide their logic or opinions as the basis for challenging questions. The following extract from an interview with LDP President Tanigaki Sadakazu is an example:

Tahara: So today I would like to say, and I will say it clearly, because every citizen of this country can express criticism toward the DPJ, we have already had enough of this [criticism]. Because the LDP [as a party in the opposition] always criticizes the DPJ in the Diet [as well as elsewhere], I feel we have had enough of this. Now, what I would like to hear [from you] is what [the LDP] is going to do [in regard to these areas of criticism] if the LDP regains [political] power (Gekiron Kurosufaya, May 19, 2012).

##### (5) *Identifying grammatically complete and incomplete questions*

Additionally, the study differentiated between grammatically complete questions and questions that are incomplete. Questions categorized as grammatically complete follow the syntactic Japanese rule that a question particle *ka* must be attached to the end of the sentence accompanied by rising intonation. Grammatically incomplete questions, considered less formal, less direct, and friendlier utterances, lack the Japanese particle *ka* but project turn-yielding despite their incomplete structure. An example of a grammatically incomplete question was found in an interview with Igarashi Fumihiko of the DPJ:

Yagi: So did [the legislation] depend on the attitude of Mr. Koshiishi [Azuma, the DPJ Secretary-General]? What do you think Mr. Igarashi?

Igarashi: The prime minister has said that he will risk his political career to do that [early passage of bills needed to raise the consumption tax], so the employees [the political party's staff] had to follow [his instructions], even though it was not a big task. This is how I view it.

Sorimachi: So Mr. Koshiishi may have been [serving] a braking [function]; there are various ways to view [this issue]. Unexpectedly it may seem as if [Prime Minister] Noda entrusted Mr. Koshiishi with carrying out his real intentions.

Igarashi: I think it can also be seen that way.

Sorimachi: In that sense, Mr. Koshiishi didn't go against the prime minister but actually sympathizes with the prime minister [and is working in partnership

with him] by playing a deterring role [is that so?]. These things will eventually become more known.

Igarashi: He is an experienced [politician], we do not know anything (Puraimu Nyūsu, June 7, 2012).

Although the interviewer's last two questions lacked the particle *ka* and were thus grammatically incomplete, they still yielded replies from the interviewee.

(6) *Identifying questions that seek personal opinions versus prevalent views within a group*

Last, the study distinguished further between questions that explicitly sought from interviewees (1) personal, private information such as their own opinions, thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, as opposed to questions that sought (2) information, ideas, or views of a group that the interviewee belonged to, e.g., political parties and government ministries. In other words, the study differentiated between questions posed to interviewees according to the *required perspective* – personal perspective or that of a social or political group. The general assumption was that politicians would be asked to share the viewpoints of their groups, while nonpoliticians would be asked for their private, personal views; but this was not always the case. Consider for example a question by Sorimachi to Izumida Hirohiko, Niigata Prefecture's Governor, where he is clearly invited to offer his own, private take on an issue:

Sorimachi: *Where* should they [nuclear power experts] be brought from? Do you have any idea? I would like to hear [your opinion]

(Puraimu Nyūsu, May 8, 2012).

In contrast, in the following example, the interviewer seeks information from the interviewee, Matsuno Yori-hisa, in his capacity as a leader who knows the ins and outs of his political group, the JRP:

Sorimachi: Well, regarding the JRP's decision-making processes, its mechanisms are not so clear to me, so I would like to ask about this. There is a Diet members' delegation, right? In Ōsaka I think you have the Ōsaka Prefectural government committee's delegation. In this regard, to coordinate activities in electoral districts [with other political parties], or when selecting candidates and the like for the JRP as a whole, do the local and national-level delegations discuss the options as equals?

(Puraimu Nyūsu, October, 30, 2012).

(7) *Subject of enquiry/response*

In addition to the above six forms of classifications, the coding sheet included two questions to identify those key topics at the center of the interview and the

issues at stake in each question-response: The first question was, “What is the main content of the *question* about?” The second question was, “What is the main content of the *response* about?” Each of these two questions were sub-divided (and coded) in respect to six criteria which are detailed below, all mutually exclusive, on the content of the questions and answers (e.g., Feldman, Kinoshita, & Bull, 2016). Notably, there was not even one case in which the subjects of enquiry and response differed in terms of these criteria:

- (1) *Knowledge* of a certain topic or a fact or lack of it (mainly requesting responses to WH-questions – what, where, who, why, when, and how).
- (2) *Human affairs/ significant others* (i.e., others’ performance at work, impressions on their activities, evaluation of their ability, characteristics, personality, attitudes, and thoughts, and human relationship).
- (3) *Political and social institutions* (e.g., impressions, opinion, and judgments on the activities, attitudes, views, thoughts and ideas within political parties, party factions, and the media).
- (4) *Political process* (i.e., involving procedures of decision-making and course of action in the government, the bureaucracy, and between political parties).
- (5) *Political commitment* (promises regarding courses of action, pledges, and public obligation).
- (6) *Issues* (opinions, stances, and views on policy issues, on social, economic, political and other problems and topics on the public agenda).

If category “(6) *Issues*” was selected, the research coders had to answer an open-ended question: “What is the issue (problem, or topic) at the core of the question/response sequences?” The raters identified the issues at the focus of the discussion between the interviewers and the interviewees and listed them one by one. It was later clustered in related categories as detailed below.

#### 2.4 Examining Responses

To analyze interviewees’ responses the study used the “*Equivocation Theory*” (Bavelas et al., 1990). The theory regards equivocation as a form of indirect communication, ambiguous, contradictory, and tangential, which may also be incongruent, obscure, or even evasive (Bavelas et al., 1990, p. 28), and underlines the four dimensions of *sender*, *receiver*, *content*, and *context*. However, whereas in the Bavelas et al. procedure raters are asked to mark on a straight line the degree of equivocation for each dimension, in this study each dimension was assessed on a 6-point Likert-type scale. “Neutral” was not included in these six possible

responses, in order to force the rater to make a selection on the relative degree of equivocation. The following modifications were made:

1. *Sender*. Assessed by the question: "To what extent is the response the speaker's own opinion (intention)? To what extent is the response the speaker's own ideas?" The response scale ranged from (1) "It is obviously his or her personal opinion/ideas, not someone else's," to (6) "It is obviously someone else's opinion/ideas."
2. *Receiver*. Assessed by the question "To what extent is the message addressed to the other person in the situation?" Because the original Bavelas et al. (1990) scales were devised for the analysis of dyadic conversations, the intended receiver is always clear. However, when the scale is extended to broadcast news interviews, the issue of multiple receivers arises. Thus, when an interviewee responds to a question, it is not always clear whether the intended receiver is the interviewer, another interviewee, the general public, a particular segment of the public, or another political entity, the latter three of whom can be referred to as the "overhearing audience" (Heritage, 1985). To address this issue the coding sheet included the following question: "To what extent is the message addressed to the person(s) who asked the question?" i.e. the interviewer (either the moderator or the commentators). Possible recipients were assessed on a six-point scale, ranging from (1) "Obviously addressed to the moderators or the commentators" to (6) "Addressed to other people."
3. *Content*. Assessed by the question "How clear is the message in terms of what is being said?" The six options aimed to evaluate the various degrees of equivocation ranged from (1) "Straightforward, easy to understand, only one interpretation is possible," to (6) "Totally vague, impossible to understand, no meaning at all."
4. *Context*. The question used to assess this dimension was, "To what extent is this a direct answer to the question?" (Bavelas et al., 1990). The six options ranged from (1) "This is a direct answer to the question asked," through (6) "Totally unrelated to the question."

## 2.5 Coding

Each question identified in this study was coded and examined in light of the various categories explained above. Coding related to the first six types of questions was conducted initially by a well-trained undergraduate student. Any problems that arose during coding were resolved immediately through discussion with the main author. An inter-coder reliability study of a sample of 300 questions was conducted with another undergraduate. His analysis was performed independently of the

main coder and resulted in a high level of agreement: the sample showed a Cohen's (1960) kappa of 0.87 for *interview questions based on syntactic expression*; 0.85 for the *syntactic structure of the questions*; 0.97 for *quotation of critics/questions accompanied by accounts*; 0.97 for *grammatically complete/incomplete questions*; 0.96 for questions that seek *individual opinion versus views as the representative of a group*; 0.72 for the *subject of enquiry/response*; and 0.79 for the 19 issues (see below). The Pearson's correlation coefficients were 0.72 (for the *sender* dimension), 0.73 (*receiver*), 0.85 (*content*), and 0.82 (*context*), all significant at the  $p < .001$  level.

### 3. Results

The frequency of each category of interview questions in relation to two distinct groups of interviewees – politicians (distinguished further between national and local level politicians) and nonpoliticians – is shown in Table 1.

It should be noted that four of the question types (prefaced, *Yes-No*, *WH*, and disjunctive/alternative) take interrogative syntax, whereas the *moodless* type (*declarative* and *indirect*) does not. As such the results show clearly that an overwhelming majority (99%) of the 5,084 questions asked of all interviewees employed interrogative syntax. The most frequently employed interrogative formats were *prefaced questions* (58%), followed by *Yes/No* interrogatives (32%), *Wh*-interrogatives (5%), and Disjunctive/alternative interrogatives (about 4%). Only 1% of the questions were non-interrogative, and the most frequent form of these was the *declarative* type.

The table also reveals that these proportions did not vary much across interviewee types (i.e., Diet members, local level politicians, and nonpoliticians), nor based on coalition or opposition affiliation. Prefaced questions accounted for between 57% and 58.4% and non-prefaced questions accounted for between 41.6% to 43% of all questions across groups. This demonstrates uniformity in the *style of questions* posed to interviewees, which did not significantly vary in accordance with their status in the administration or their professional background and expertise.

Table 2 shows that close to 73% of the questions were *topic extension* and about 9% were *topical shift*. In other words, interviewers found 82% of the interviewees' replies to be satisfactory. Only 18.5% of the questions were classified as either asking for more clarification (*reformulation*, 13.5%) or confronting an interviewee regarding the answer to a previous question (*challenge*, 5%).

Table 1. Types of questions posed to the different groups of interviewees

	Politicians							
	Diet Members				Non-Politicians			
	Coalition Members	Opposition Members	Total	Local Level	Total	Non-Politicians	Total	
<b>1. Prefaced Questions</b>	Count	1146	797	1943	236	2179	762	2941
	% within question	39.0%	27.1%	66.1%	8.0%	74.1%	25.9%	100%
	% within interviewees	58.0%	58.4%	58.1%	58.1%	58.1%	57.0%	57.8%
<b>2. Non-Prefaced Questions (Total)</b>	Count	831	568	1399	170	1569	574	2143
	% within question	38.8%	26.5%	65.3%	7.9%	73.2%	26.8%	100%
	% within interviewees	42.0%	41.6%	41.9%	41.9%	41.9%	43.0%	42.2%
<b>(1) Yes /No</b>	Count	633	444	1077	112	1189	457	1646
	% within question	38.5%	27.0%	65.4%	6.8%	72.2%	27.8%	100%
	% within interviewees	32.0%	32.5%	32.2%	27.6%	31.7%	34.2%	32.4%
<b>(2) 5WH</b>	Count	98	63	161	41	202	62	264
	% within question	37.1%	23.9%	61.0%	15.5%	76.5%	23.5%	100%
	% within interviewees	5.0%	4.6%	4.8%	10.1%	5.4%	4.6%	5.2%
<b>(3) Disjunctive/ Alternative Questions</b>	Count	89	34	123	14	137	46	183
	% within question	48.6%	18.6%	67.2%	7.7%	74.9%	25.1%	100%
	% within interviewees	4.5%	2.5%	3.7%	3.4%	3.7%	3.4%	3.6%
<b>(4) Moodless Questions</b>	Count	11	27	38	3	41	9	50
	% within question	22.0%	54.0%	76.0%	6.0%	82.0%	18.0%	100%
	% within interviewees	0.6%	2.0%	1.1%	0.7%	1.1%	0.7%	1.0%

Table 1. (continued)

	Politicians				Total
	Diet Members		Local Level		
	Coalition Members	Opposition Members	Total	Total	
Count	1977	1365	3342	406	3748
% within question	38.9%	26.8%	65.7%	8.0%	73.7%
% within interviewees	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>Total</b>					
					1336
					26.3%
					100%
					100%





The proportion of satisfactory responses (i.e., *topical shift* and *topic extension* combined) was almost identical for politicians and nonpoliticians (81.5% and 81.4% respectively) indicating that interviewers treated members of both groups similarly, regardless of their political or professional skills and experience. However, interviewers had different strategies for dealing with unsatisfactory responses from politicians and nonpoliticians. The larger proportion of *reformulations* following nonpoliticians' answers was attributed to interviewers' desire to simplify the jargon and technical terms experts used in their replies so that they would be better understood by the audience. The relatively high proportion of challenges to answers given by politicians demonstrated interviewers' efforts to invite politicians to defend or justify their actions or attitudes. A comparison between politicians on the national and local levels reveals almost the same inclination on the part of interviewers regarding *topic extension* and *challenge*. Yet, in contrast with local level politicians, when posing questions to Diet members interviewers tended to use relatively more *reformulations* (10.8% and 12.7% respectively) and fewer *topical shift* (11.6% and 8.9% respectively), especially when interviewing coalition parties' members.

Table 3 presents several features regarding the content of information required from interviewees. First, it reveals that interviewers relied less on quoting third parties (in only 5.9% cases), usually news media, and more on their own perceptions of events (94.1%) as the basis for questioning politicians and nonpoliticians alike. Second, the table indicates that televised interviews contained more questions that were grammatically incomplete (without the particle *ka*) with a slightly higher percentage of incomplete questions (51.6%) directed at politicians in general. Third, it shows, as perhaps could be expected, that politicians were asked more often (in 96.6% of the questions posed to them) to reveal thoughts and opinions of groups with which they were affiliated (e.g., a political party, a party faction), while subject-matter experts nonpoliticians were asked more (56.7%) about their personal views and experiences. Thus, whereas the questions posed to politicians and nonpoliticians were almost identical in regard to *stance* and *grammar*, there was a clear divergence regarding the *required perspective*, i.e. whether interviewers requested a personal perspective versus that of a social or political group.

Last, Table 4 focuses on *subjects of enquiries and responses*. The data were initially divided into issues (2,753 of the 5,084 questions, 54.2%), and non-issues (2,331, 45.8%) as detailed in the methodology section. The table reveals that majority of the questions posed to members of both groups of politicians and nonpoliticians were about issues. However, nonpoliticians were asked relatively more questions about issues (60.5% of their questions) than politicians (51.9%). Interviewers were more interested in hearing experts' professional views on selected issues on the political, economic and social agenda, and politicians' thoughts on

Table 3. The content of the required information from the different groups of interviewees

	Politicians						Total
	Diet Members			Local Level			
	Coalition Members	Opposition Members	Total			Total	
<i>Quotation of Critics</i>	Count	127	67	194	33	227	300
	% within questions	42.3%	22.3%	64.7%	11.0%	75.7%	100%
	% within interviewees	6.4%	4.9%	5.8%	8.1%	6.1%	5.9%
<i>Account</i>	Count	1850	1298	3148	373	3521	4784
	% within questions	38.7%	27.1%	65.8%	7.8%	73.6%	100%
	% within interviewees	93.6%	95.1%	94.2%	91.9%	93.9%	94.1%
<i>Grammatically Completed</i>	Count	1027	579	1606	201	1807	2462
	% within questions	41.7%	23.5%	65.2%	8.2%	73.4%	100%
	% within interviewees	51.9%	42.4%	48.1%	49.5%	48.2%	48.4%
<i>Grammatically Uncompleted</i>	Count	950	786	1736	205	1941	2622
	% within questions	36.2%	30.0%	66.2%	7.8%	74.0%	100%
	% within interviewees	48.1%	57.6%	51.9%	50.5%	51.8%	51.6%
<i>Personal views, ideas, or opinion</i>	Count	16	22	38	88	126	884
	% within questions	1.8%	2.5%	4.3%	10.0%	14.3%	100%
	% within interviewees	0.8%	1.6%	1.1%	21.7%	3.4%	17.4%
<i>Affiliated Group's views ideas or opinion</i>	Count	1961	1343	3304	318	3622	4200
	% within questions	46.7%	32.0%	78.7%	7.6%	86.2%	100%
	% within interviewees	99.2%	98.4%	98.9%	78.3%	96.6%	82.6%



Table 4. Subjects of enquiries posed to the different groups of interviewees

	Politicians				Total	Non-Politicians		Total
	Diet Members		Local Level			Total	Total	
	Coalition Members	Opposition Members	Opposition Members	Total				
<b>Non-Issues</b>	Count	753	859	1612	191	1803	528	2331
	% within questions	32.3%	36.9%	69.2%	8.2%	77.3%	22.7%	100%
	% within interviewees	38.1%	62.9%	48.2%	47.0%	48.1%	39.5%	45.8%
<b>Issues</b>	Count	1224	506	1730	215	1945	808	2753
	% within questions	44.5%	18.4%	62.8%	7.8%	70.7%	29.3%	100%
	% within interviewees	61.9%	37.1%	51.8%	53.0%	51.9%	60.5%	54.2%
<b>Total</b>	Count	1977	1365	3342	406	3748	1336	5084
	% within questions	38.9%	26.8%	65.7%	8.0%	73.7%	26.3%	100%
	% within interviewees	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Issues:

1. Government Bureaucracy (e.g., functioning of officials in the different governments ministries) (684 questions); 2. Foreign Policy & Diplomacy (e.g., relations with the USA, China, and Korea) (456); 3. Economy (286); 4. Energy & Nuclear Power (261); 5. National Security (e.g., USA bases in Okinawa Islands, disputed islands with South Korea and China, tension with North Korea) (193); 6. Earthquake- and Tsunami-Affected Fukushima's (and other areas) Reconstruction Efforts (165); 7. Campaign Strategies (e.g., nomination of candidates, electorates' mobilization) (124); 8. TPP (Trans-Pacific Partnership) (97); 9. Constitution (e.g., revision, interpretation) (88); 10. Intra-Party Politics (e.g., strategy within a political party) (70); 11. Local Autonomy (65); 12. Diet Affairs Management (65); 13. Consumption Tax & Financial Affairs (61); 14. Cabinet and Government Performance (e.g., appointment of ministers, functioning of the cabinet) (52); 15. Interparty Cooperation (e.g., building grand coalition) (26); 16. Parties' Policy Beliefs & Preferences (e.g., objective of political parties) (21); 17. Public Opinion (opinion polls, support for political parties or issues) (16); 18. Diet's Dissolution (13); (19) *Yasukuni Shrine* (10).

Non-issues:

1. *Knowledge of familiarity with a certain topic/fact or lack of it* (537, 10.6%); (2) *Human affairs* (382, 7.5%); (3) *Political and Social institutions* (742, 14.6%); (4) *Political process* (547, 10.8%); (5) *Political commitment* (123, 2.4%).

These topics are mutually exclusive.

and assessments of non-issue themes, e.g., evaluation of the performance of other politicians and officials, their reasoning on the working of the administration and other political institutions. A closer look reveals that coalition parties' members were presented more than politicians from the opposition camp with questions related to political issues (61.9% and 38.1% respectively). Opposition parties' members, in turn, were asked more than their colleagues from the coalition camp on non-issues themes including their election promises and the evaluation of the performance of the administration (62.9% and 37.1% respectively). There were no significant differences in the proportion of question (issues and non-issues) posed to politicians from the local and national levels.

Finally, the analysis focused on the effects of the questions on the interviewers' responses, revealing that the style, structure, and nature of questions significantly affect the way interviewees respond to questions. Tables 5 through 7 detail separately the way Diet members, local level politicians, and nonpoliticians handled the questions posed to them.

First and foremost it should be noted that significantly different patterns of response were found across the different televised programs, for both national and local level politicians. In *Shin Hôdô 2001* the *content* dimension obtained a significant negative coefficient, indicating that members of both political groups tended to reply in an easy to understand fashion to questions, but for the *context* dimension the coefficient has a positive significance, implying that those politicians didn't reply to the questions themselves. In contrast, in *Gekiron Kurosufaya*, the *content* dimension of these politicians' replies to questions has a significant positive coefficient, indicating that their replies were not clear; the *context* dimension, with a negative coefficient, denotes however they provided direct answer to the questions. In addition, when replying to questions they were asked on *Shin Hôdô 2001*, national level politicians (Table 5) addressed interviewers (significant negative coefficient on the *receiver* dimension) whereas the same members tended to address other people and institutions rather than the interviewers when replying to questions in *Gekiron Kurosufaya* (the *receiver* dimension obtained a significant positive coefficient). Nonpoliticians, for their part (Table 7), tended during interview sessions on *Gekiron Kurosufaya* to address interviewers (*receiver*) and to present their replies in an easy to follow manner (*content*), but neither presented their own views (*sender*) nor provided direct replies to questions (*context*).

Second, the variable of *LDP administration* (in this study refers to the period since the December 17, 2012 election, after which the LDP regained control over

Table 5. Explanatory model for variables that affect no-reply of Diet members along the four dimensions (*Tobit Model*)

	Sender			Receiver			Content			Context		
	Robust			Robust			Robust			Robust		
	Coefficient	St. Err.		Coefficient	St. Err.		Coefficient	St. Err.		Coefficient	St. Err.	
Gender (Female)	-0.202	0.252		-0.393***	0.150		0.031	0.220		-0.029	0.258	
Age	-0.011*	0.006		-0.016***	0.003		-0.009*	0.005		0.000	0.006	
TV Program [ <i>Shin Hôdô</i> ]	0.122	0.159		-0.236***	0.089		-1.182***	0.146		0.390***	0.144	
TV Program [ <i>Gekiron</i> ]	0.145	0.361		0.791***	0.198		1.862***	0.334		-0.666**	0.337	
LDP- Administration	0.442***	0.118		0.246**	0.067		0.042	0.103		-0.113	0.115	
Government Party	-0.397***	0.119		-0.005	0.069		0.321***	0.108		0.499***	0.116	
Knowledge/Facts	0.693***	0.212		-0.614***	0.125		-1.005***	0.198		-1.495***	0.227	
Topic Extension	-1.155***	0.165		-0.580***	0.099		-1.024***	0.141		0.335*	0.179	
Topic Challenge	-0.981***	0.269		-0.492***	0.150		-0.812***	0.230		1.202***	0.260	
Reformulation	-1.418****	0.227		-0.784***	0.136		-1.466***	0.199		-0.298	0.241	
Quotation of Others	0.331	0.207		0.519***	0.111		0.253	0.189		0.068	0.205	
Grammatically Completed	0.217*	0.111		0.085	0.063		0.075	0.096		0.357***	0.107	
Yes/No Questions	-0.542***	0.124		-0.611***	0.072		-0.890***	0.110		-0.648**	0.116	

Table 5. (continued)

	Sender			Receiver			Content			Context		
	Robust			Robust			Robust			Robust		
	Coefficient	St. Err.		Coefficient	St. Err.		Coefficient	St. Err.		Coefficient	St. Err.	
WH-Questions	-0.349	0.270		-0.534 <sup>***</sup>	0.149		-0.315	0.216		-0.161	0.239	
Moodless Questions	0.859 <sup>*</sup>	0.471		-0.486	0.324		-0.504	0.516		-0.381	0.422	
Alternative Questions	-0.300	0.288		-0.247	0.160		0.188	0.275		2.855 <sup>***</sup>	0.429	
Constitution	0.977 <sup>***</sup>	0.302		0.540 <sup>***</sup>	0.183		0.602 <sup>**</sup>	0.282		0.612 <sup>*</sup>	0.346	
Foreign Policy	1.011 <sup>***</sup>	0.178		0.374 <sup>***</sup>	0.104		0.022	0.157		0.144	0.181	
Intra-Party Politics	0.091	0.190		0.026	0.116		-0.193	0.175		0.484 <sup>***</sup>	0.187	
Energy & Nuclear Power	0.379 <sup>*</sup>	0.230		0.901 <sup>***</sup>	0.107		0.688 <sup>***</sup>	0.197		0.354 <sup>*</sup>	0.208	
Economy	0.960 <sup>***</sup>	0.242		0.713 <sup>***</sup>	0.127		0.243	0.216		0.416 <sup>*</sup>	0.231	
Reconstruction Efforts	0.270	0.269		0.388 <sup>**</sup>	0.143		-0.239	0.223		0.092	0.275	
Diet Management	-0.225	0.219		0.347 <sup>***</sup>	0.122		0.389 <sup>***</sup>	0.187		0.702 <sup>***</sup>	0.199	
Political Parties' Policy	-0.252	0.448		0.162	0.287		0.234	0.400		0.746 <sup>*</sup>	0.406	
Consumption Tax	0.717 <sup>*</sup>	0.382		0.890 <sup>***</sup>	0.206		0.865 <sup>**</sup>	0.354		0.696 <sup>*</sup>	0.407	



Table 5. (continued)

	Sender		Receiver		Content		Context	
	Robust Coefficient	St. Err.	Robust Coefficient	St. Err.	Robust Coefficient	St. Err.	Robust Coefficient	St. Err.
Public Opinion	0.731*	0.395	0.424	0.281	0.965**	0.416	1.078***	0.403
Government Performance	0.400	0.476	0.848***	0.255	1.364***	0.384	0.677	0.434
Intercept	2.791***	0.398	4.107***	0.231	2.909***	0.343	0.993**	0.395
Sigma	2.750	0.048	1.686	0.025	2.382	0.043	2.698	0.054
F (27, 3315)		7.89***		16.7***		13.66***		10.12***
Log likelihood		-5164.91		-5677.53		-4862.38		-5465.78
Pseudo R2		0.0176		0.0358		0.0375		0.0325
N (questions)		3342		3342		3342		3342

Significance levels:

\*\*\*  $p < .01$ \*\*  $p < .05$ \*  $p < .10$ Note. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients (*betas*) and standard errors (*St. Err.*).

The multiple regression analysis measures the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor); if the VIF is less than 5, it confirms that the multicollinearity has not occurred. Robust standard error was used here to accommodate non-uniform dispersion (heteroscedasticity).

A positive significant result indicates an increased likelihood of NOT answering the question.

Table 6. Explanatory model for variables that affect no-reply of local politicians along the four dimensions (*Tobit Model*)

	Sender			Receiver			Content			Context		
	Robust			Robust			Robust			Robust		
	Coefficient	St. Err.	St. Err.	Coefficient	St. Err.	St. Err.	Coefficient	St. Err.	St. Err.	Coefficient	St. Err.	St. Err.
Gender (Female)	0.735	0.649	0.894*	0.476	0.476	0.476	1.147	0.768	0.768	0.701	0.733	0.733
Age	0.037**	0.017	-0.009	0.011	0.011	0.011	-0.006	0.017	0.017	0.030*	0.017	0.017
TV Program [ <i>Skim Hódó</i> ]	-1.026	0.745	-0.185	0.500	0.500	0.500	-2.036**	0.818	0.818	2.471***	0.730	0.730
TV Program [ <i>Gekiron</i> ]	4.241**	1.849	0.161	1.556	1.556	1.556	4.932**	1.976	1.976	-7.162***	2.264	2.264
LDP-Administration	1.596***	0.565	0.685*	0.375	0.375	0.375	-0.472	0.615	0.615	-1.170**	0.580	0.580
Knowledge/Facts	0.498	0.638	-0.204	0.451	0.451	0.451	-0.949	0.713	0.713	-2.390***	0.761	0.761
Topic Extension	-0.768	0.479	-0.872***	0.305	0.305	0.305	-1.693***	0.528	0.528	0.417	0.529	0.529
Topic Challenge	0.084	0.740	-0.424	0.529	0.529	0.529	-1.747**	0.822	0.822	-2.052**	0.834	0.834
Reformulation	-0.179	0.620	-1.365***	0.435	0.435	0.435	-2.062***	0.729	0.729	0.028	0.753	0.753
Quotation of Others	-0.281	0.595	0.703**	0.352	0.352	0.352	0.277	0.522	0.522	1.418**	0.570	0.570
Grammatically Completed	0.506	0.334	0.391*	0.228	0.228	0.228	0.561	0.353	0.353	-0.363	0.350	0.350
Representatives' Opinion	0.464	0.499	-1.488***	0.279	0.279	0.279	-0.812*	0.442	0.442	-0.706*	0.423	0.423
Yes/No Questions	-0.568	0.392	-0.654***	0.250	0.250	0.250	-1.055***	0.404	0.404	-0.377	0.373	0.373
WH-Questions	-0.411	0.609	-1.252***	0.416	0.416	0.416	-1.330**	0.612	0.612	0.398	0.532	0.532
Moodless Questions	-0.004	1.426	0.372	0.365	0.365	0.365	2.310***	0.736	0.736	1.071	1.023	1.023
Alternative Questions	-0.131	0.764	-0.406	0.564	0.564	0.564	-0.111	0.989	0.989	3.598***	1.295	1.295
Constitution	-0.436	0.959	1.203***	0.451	0.451	0.451	-0.121	0.878	0.878	-0.203	0.830	0.830
Foreign Policy	0.927*	0.501	0.552	0.365	0.365	0.365	-0.205	0.530	0.530	-1.100**	0.539	0.539

Table 6. (continued)

	Sender		Receiver		Content		Context	
	Robust		Robust		Robust		Robust	
	Coefficient	St. Err.	Coefficient	St. Err.	Coefficient	St. Err.	Coefficient	St. Err.
Intra-Party Politics	1.934**	0.917	-0.056	0.597	0.304	1.022	1.418*	0.837
Energy & Nuclear Power	0.935	0.664	0.838**	0.392	-0.415	0.565	1.182*	0.655
Reconstruction Efforts	0.649	0.585	0.935**	0.386	1.137*	0.642	1.111*	0.646
Intercept	-2.671**	1.345	4.181***	0.808	3.924***	1.306	0.091	1.252
Sigma	2.687	0.138	1.961	0.084	2.768	0.158	2.828	0.172
F (21, 385)		4.27***		6.39***		4.70***		3.16***
Log likelihood		-526.33		-670.39		-560.06		-638.76
Pseudo R2		0.0596		0.0583		0.0677		0.0553
N (questions)		406		406		406		406

Significance levels:

\*\*\*  $p < .01$ \*\*  $p < .05$ \*  $p < .10$ Note. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients (*beta*'s) and standard errors (*St. Err.*).

The multiple regression analysis measures the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor), if the VIF is less than 5, it confirms that the multicollinearity has not occurred. Robust standard error was used here to accommodate non-uniform dispersion (heteroscedasticity).

A positive significant result indicates an increased likelihood of NOT answering the question.

Table 7. Explanatory model for variables that affect no-reply of nonpoliticians along the four dimensions (*Tobit Model*)

	Sender			Receiver			Content			Context		
	Robust			Robust			Robust			Robust		
	Coefficient	St. Err.	St. Err.	Coefficient	St. Err.	St. Err.	Coefficient	St. Err.	St. Err.	Coefficient	St. Err.	St. Err.
Gender (Female)	0.649*	0.368		-0.438**	0.198		0.110	0.311		0.060	0.359	
Age	0.009	0.012		-0.024**	0.007		0.005	0.009		0.015	0.010	
TV Program [Gekiron]	0.736***	0.254		-0.611***	0.153		-0.379*	0.228		0.914***	0.221	
LDP-Administration	0.466*	0.254		0.041	0.148		-0.074	0.214		-0.455**	0.230	
Knowledge/Facts	0.621**	0.301		-1.104***	0.186		-1.004***	0.253		-1.908***	0.312	
Topic Extension	-1.227***	0.312		-0.972**	0.173		-1.218**	0.271		-0.053	0.332	
Topic Challenge	-1.931***	0.738		-1.294***	0.427		-0.776	0.600		1.032*	0.610	
Reformulation	-1.654***	0.390		-1.114**	0.226		-1.199***	0.327		-1.063***	0.404	
Quotation of Others	-0.327	0.401		0.732***	0.204		-0.673**	0.298		0.221	0.334	
Representatives' Opinion	0.633***	0.236		0.247*	0.133		0.279	0.192		-0.073	0.215	
Yes/No Questions	-0.173	0.217		-0.494**	0.128		-1.050***	0.185		-0.467**	0.194	
Alternative Questions	-1.047	0.656		-0.255	0.339		0.826	0.516		2.441***	0.764	
National Security	0.875**	0.446		0.469	0.286		0.474	0.397		0.914**	0.439	
Constitution	1.197**	0.578		0.901***	0.333		-0.813	0.600		-0.774	0.546	
Foreign Policy	1.335***	0.291		0.598***	0.169		0.420*	0.236		0.248	0.272	
Intra-Party Politics	-0.575	0.582		0.091	0.330		0.776*	0.409		0.913**	0.421	
Energy & Nuclear Power	0.862**	0.412		-0.012	0.236		-0.017	0.318		0.214	0.360	
Economy	0.620*	0.345		0.187	0.194		-0.261	0.292		0.455	0.300	

Table 7. (continued)

	Sender			Receiver			Content			Context		
	Robust			Robust			Robust			Robust		
	Coefficient	St. Err.		Coefficient	St. Err.		Coefficient	St. Err.		Coefficient	St. Err.	
TPP	-0.077	0.525		0.329	0.280		0.252	0.429		1.431***	0.449	
Reconstruction Efforts	2.666***	0.571		0.715***	0.248		-0.104	0.498		0.378	0.555	
Diet Management	-1.584	1.225		-0.398	0.615		0.765	0.821		1.597*	0.854	
Parties' Policy	0.697	0.998		1.140***	0.432		1.031	0.768		1.987*	1.033	
Consumption Tax	0.345	0.600		0.424	0.348		1.069*	0.561		1.942***	0.576	
Public Opinion	-4.332***	1.417		0.062	0.503		-1.309	0.842		0.144	0.857	
Government Performance	-1.146**	0.500		-0.009	0.340		0.507	0.442		-0.367	0.598	
Intercept	-0.219	0.765		4.602***	0.435		1.967***	0.592		0.228	0.689	
Sigma	2.978	0.099		1.917	0.045		2.549	0.077		2.808	0.097	
F (25, 1311)		4.36***			9.69***			5.69***			6.44***	
Log likelihood		-1736.54			-2192.76			-1862.33			-1925.14	
Pseudo R2		0.0319			0.0421			0.0367			0.0449	
N (questions)		1336			1336			1336			1336	

Significance levels:

\*\*\*  $p < .01$ \*\*  $p < .05$ \*  $p < .10$ Note. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients (*beta's*) and standard errors (*St. Err.*).

The multiple regression analysis measures the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor), if the VIF is less than 5, it confirms that the multicollinearity has not occurred. Robust standard error was used here to accommodate non-uniform dispersion (heteroscedasticity).

A positive significant result indicates an increased likelihood of NOT answering the question.

Japan, until the end of the study, June 30, 2013)<sup>4</sup> indicates that during this season politicians on both the national and local levels as well as nonpoliticians did not tend to disclose their opinion when replying to questions (a significant positive coefficient on the *sender* dimension), politicians did not address the interviewers (positive coefficient on the *receiver*), yet local politicians and nonpoliticians provided full replies to the questions they were asked (a significant negative coefficient on the *context* dimension).

Third, regarding the variable of *Government party* (Table 5) that assessed the extent to which members of the ruling coalition parties reply to questions: The significant negative coefficient on the *sender* dimension, and the significant positive coefficients on the *content* and the *context* dimensions reveal that when their political parties controlled political power, ruling party members, either from the DPJ or the LDP, disclosed their own views and opinion but their responses during interviews were neither clear nor a direct replies to the questions.

Forth, Tables 5 through 7 reveal that when members of the three groups were asked questions regarding the non-issue related item *knowledge/facts of events*, they had no trouble at all to provide complete replies (*context* dimension). On this topic Diet members and nonpoliticians demonstrated similar attitudes as both addressed the interviewers (*receiver*), and presented easy to understand replies (*content*) yet didn't disclose their own thoughts and ideas (*sender*).

Fifth, the syntactic structure of the questions affected the responses yielded from both national level politicians and nonpoliticians. Faced with questions that were categorized as *topic extension*, *topic challenge*, and *reformulation*, Diet members (Table 5) tended to disclose their opinion, addressed the interviewers, and provided easy to understand replies. But in the case of the first two (*topic extension* and *topic challenge*) they equivocated regarding the *context* and thus tended not to answer the question. As for nonpoliticians (Table 7), *topic extension* yielded clear replies (*content*), disclosing their opinion and thoughts (*sender*), and addressing the interviewers (*receiver*). When faced with *challenge* type of questions, nonpoliticians tended to equivocate in their replies (*context*), but revealed their thoughts (*sender*) and addressed the interviewers (*receiver*). Nonpoliticians didn't equivocate on any of the dimensions when faced with *reformulation* of questions. They disclosed their thoughts, addressed the interviewers, and their replies were clear

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4. Interviews were broadcast both before and after the general election of 16 December, 2012 for the Lower House of the National Diet. Since September 2009, majority of seats in this House had been held by the DPJ and its coalition partner, the People's New Party. However, the election resulted in a disastrous defeat for the DPJ and an overwhelming victory for the LDP and its partner the *Kōmei* Party; they won a majority in the House, and consequently established a new coalition administration.

and complete. Local politicians (Table 6) demonstrated more complex patterns of response. When faced with *topic extension*, they tended to address the interviewers (*receiver*) and their replies were clear (*content*). When faced with *challenge*, the content of their replies was clear but they didn't answer the questions. Once the interviewer *reformulated* their questions, local politicians provided clear replies (*content*) and tended also to address the interviewers (*receiver*).

Sixth, when the questions included quotation from others, such as the news media, Diet members, local politicians, and nonpoliticians tended to address unanimously other people rather than the interviewers (*receiver*). In addition, local level politicians didn't reply to the questions (*context*), and nonpoliticians didn't provide easy to understand replies (*content*). Diet members who were presented with less formal questions (*Grammatically Incomplete*) tended to both disclose their opinion and thoughts (*sender*) more and to offer clearer responses (*content*), while local politicians under the same circumstances tended to address the interviewers (*receiver*). Asked about their own ideas and opinion (*Representatives' Opinion*), local politicians tended to address others rather than the interviewers (*receiver*), to speak unclearly (*content*), and to avoid replying to the questions directly (*context*). Nonpoliticians, on the other hand, tended to reveal both their personal opinions (*sender*) and to directly address the interviewers (*receiver*).

Confronted with *yes/no* questions, all interviewees tended to address their replies to the interviewers (*receiver*) and to reply in easy to understand terms (*content*). In addition, Diet members and nonpoliticians alike provided full replies (*context*). In contrast, neither politicians nor nonpoliticians replied to the *alternative questions* they were asked (*context*).

Finally, regarding political and social issues, Diet members tended to equivocate on all the four dimensions when asked about such issues as the constitution, energy & nuclear power, and the increase in consumption tax. They equivocated to a less degree when asked about the economy, the economic policies of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō (*sender, receiver, and context*), Diet management (*receiver, content and context*), public opinion (*sender, content and context*), foreign policy (*sender and receiver*), and government performance (*receiver and content*). Local politicians equivocated notably on reconstruction efforts (*received, content and context*), on energy & nuclear power (*receiver and context*), and intra-party politics (*sender and context*). Nonpoliticians tended to equivocate when asked on foreign policy (*sender, receiver, and content*), national security (*sender and context*), the constitution (*sender and receiver*), reconstruction efforts (*sender and receiver*), intra party politics (*content and context*), parties' policy (*receiver and context*), and consumption tax (*content and context*).

#### 4. Discussion

Perhaps the most significant result of this study is that interviewers in Japan approached both politicians and nonpoliticians alike in a calm and friendly manner rather than probing in a confrontational or argumentative way. Nevertheless, interviewees still showed difficulties responding to questions, tending to equivocate instead of providing full and clear responses.

To begin with, the fact that the majority of questions (approximately 58%) posed to both politicians and nonpoliticians were *prefaced questions* implies that interviewers frequently asked open-ended questions that allowed interviewees flexibility in describing and explaining events and issues in the polity. These results contrast with Bull's (1994) report that the majority of the questions (71.5%) directed at British politicians by interviewers were either closed *yes/no* or declarative questions. Bull's results, in which only 23.2% of questions posed were open-ended, suggest that televised interviews in the UK transmit political information through a conflictual communication style. Conversely, the current study indicates that televised interviews in Japan prefer to transmit information through a calm and gentle communication style, that avoids placing pressure on interviewees.

Furthermore, the high proportion of *topical shift* or *topic extension* questions posed to both politicians and nonpoliticians (81.5% and 81.4% respectively) not only shows that interviewers took the same stance toward interviewees from both groups, but also leads to the conclusion (following Jucker, 1986: 133) that interviewers were not very aggressive or insistent. If they had been, they would have used more *reformulation* or *challenging* questions to probe for more detail or to pressure interviewees into clarifying their positions. Thus, by being gentle rather than assertive and persistent in their questioning, by refraining from challenging interviewees directly, and by allowing interviewees flexibility in presenting their viewpoints and opinions on social and political activities and issues, Japanese interviewers usually propelled interviews forward by extending or shifting the topic of discussion rather than by challenging interviewees' stated positions in order to provoke debate. This amiable interview environment was further illustrated by the frequent use of grammatically incomplete (i.e., lacking the questioning particle *ka*) and therefore gentler and less formal questions. In the formal, honorific, hierarchy-oriented Japanese language this communication style reduces status differentials between conversation participants and therefore also the formality of the discussion. The flow of information through televised interviews, whether political or not, was therefore conducted by and large tranquilly and casually, marked by an exchange of opinion in which interviewers shared their own ideas and assessments of events along with their questions, rather than relying on outside sources to back up their arguments.



Identifying the *type* of interview questions and the *manner* in which they were asked, the study further examined the extent to which these factors affected the way interviewees handled the questions posed to them, i.e., the interviewees' replies along the four dimension (*sender, receiver, content, and context*) of equivocation. Three distinct features were noted in this regard.

First, the attitudes interviewees take in replying to questions are affected by the nature of the televised interview program itself; the timing of the interview; and the political position of the interviewees. Interviewees, especially politicians, showed different response tendencies on different televised programs. In one program they tended to address the interviewers, reply to questions in clear language, yet avoided directly answering the questions. In contrast, on another program, their replies were not clear, were aimed at other audiences rather than the interviewers, but were direct replies. In other words, the *manner* and the *communication style* in which questions were posed to interviewees and perhaps the atmosphere in the studio itself, affected interviewees' responses. The timing of the interview also exerted an influence. For example, during the LDP administration, politicians as well as nonpoliticians showed difficulties in revealing their personal views and opinions, and politicians were especially unlikely to address the interviewers directly in response. It is conceivable that some political constraints or "instructions from above" during this particular administration restrained interviewees' verbal behavior. Similarly, a politician's position in government also affects their response tendencies. *Government Party*, referring to the period when an interviewee's political party was in power shows that ruling party members appeared more at ease disclosing personal views and opinions but tended to give obscure and indirect responses to questions. This illustrates how members of parties in power can exploit their position in government to disseminate the information they wish regardless of the interviewer's actual questions.

Second, all interviewees were affected by the manner in which questions were presented. When questions were *reformulated* or extended (*topic extension*), interviewees sensed that they needed to simplify their responses and thus provided easier to understand replies while addressing the interviewers. When *challenged*, interviewees may have felt threatened and, perhaps in an attempt to shield themselves, did not reply directly to the questions, although politicians gave clearer replies. When questions were posed in a less formal, friendlier style (*grammatically incomplete*) and in a more personal manner based on the interviewers' own thoughts rather than quoting other sources, interviewees replied more to the interviewers themselves, gave more complete replies, and national-level politicians were more willing to self-disclose personal thoughts.

Perhaps the most noteworthy result in this regard concerns closed-ended questions, considered more difficult to reply to. When confronted with *yes/no*

*questions* (32% in this study), members of the three groups of politicians and non-politicians tended to reply in an unequivocal way. As seen in Tables 5 through 7, in response to *yes/no* questions interviewees addressed their replies to the interviewers and formulated easy to understand responses. Moreover, Diet members and nonpoliticians both provided more complete replies, and Diet members were more willing to reveal their own thoughts and ideas. In contrast, neither politicians nor nonpoliticians replied to the *alternative questions*.

The *yes/no* questions were easy to reply to because they were often used to feel out interviewees' reactions to certain issues and develop empathetic awareness, before pursuing and obtaining additional information. That is, to accentuate collaboration from interviewees, rather than presenting a tough question at the beginning and potentially impair the interviewees' honor or pride, interviewers attempted to avoid making interviewees lose face (*'mentsu wo tsubusareru,'* literally, "crushing the face") or disgracing (*'kao ni doro wo nurareru,'* literally, "painting the mud in the face") them by politely advancing the conversation to gain initial consent to approach a certain topic before moving to the questions themselves, which may be "tough" ones. Consider the following example from an interview with Haketa Shingo, an official at the Imperial Household Agency:

Yagi: Do the grand chamberlain (a chief functionary of the Imperial court and aide to the Emperor) and the Imperial Household Agency secretary communicate with each other on a daily basis?

Haketa: Yes.

Yagi: How? (*Puraimu Nyūsu*, January 8, 2013)

In other words, rather than as a tool for investigation or to provoke a discussion, as in the above-mentioned British case, *yes/no* questions in Japan are used as a technique aimed at respecting the interviewers' honor and public standing through cautiously sensing their reaction before venturing deeper into a topic.

In contrast, through *alternative questions* interviewees are asked, and expected to unambiguously reveal, their choices of policy and actions usually concerning controversial and divisive issues (e.g., changing of the constitution, resuming nuclear power stations). Confronted with *alternative questions*, interviewees, especially politicians, will likely be put in a *communicative conflict* or an "*avoidance-avoidance conflict*" situation (Bavelas et al., 1990: 246–49) whereby all possible responses to a question have potentially negative consequences for the respondents, their political parties, on-going negotiations, or their groups' standing in the political world (Feldman et al, 2016), but nevertheless a response is still expected by the interlocutors and the audience. Interviewees therefore have greater difficulty replying to such questions and tend to equivocate more.

Proper use of *yes/no* and *alternatives* questioning modes in political interviews can be regarded as a strategy for interviewers to either establish the frame for the following discussion or to get detailed information as to the essence of the interviewees' or their groups' beliefs, activities, and intentions.

Although analysis reveals great similarity in the *tone* and *nature* of the questions posed to all groups, there is a notable difference in the *type* of information requested from politicians and nonpoliticians. As politicians are invited to attend televised interviews because of the leadership and other roles they play within political groups, they were often asked to explain the thoughts and opinions most prevalent among colleagues in those groups, whereas nonpoliticians, including experts in various areas, were generally requested to share information and insights based on their personal knowledge, observations, and analysis of political, social or economic realities. This finding carries a special methodological implication within the context of the present study because politicians were generally not expected to reveal their own, private thoughts and ideas. In this sense, the *sender* dimension, which as a rule focuses on the extent to which the response is the *speaker's personal opinion, intention, or ideas*, should be modified in future research to examine the degree to which political interviewees reveal either opinions that exist within the groups they lead or represent, or their own ideas, based on a case-by-case examination of the questions they are asked.

Finally, regarding political and social issues, it is remarkable that when querying non-issue themes, e.g., familiarity with a certain issue (*knowledge/facts*), both politicians and nonpoliticians provided full and complete replies. Furthermore, even though national Diet members and nonpoliticians didn't reveal their own thoughts and ideas, they provided clear replies, and addressed the interviewers. However, the same interviewees were reticent to respond directly to questions on core social and political issues, equivocating in various ways. National level politicians tended to show more sensitivity (and therefore equivocated more) on issues that divide the national-level electorate. Local politicians equivocated when challenged with questions on issues that affect their constituencies and voters. Nonpoliticians, in turn, refrained from fully responding to an extensive-range of issues from local to global concern, including *reconstruction efforts, political parties' policies, the constitution, foreign policy, and national security*.

It is exactly under the situations of *communicative conflicts* – where interviewees are asked and are expected to reveal their thoughts and intentions on divisive and sensitive vital issues – that they feel their statements may endanger their own or their groups' reputations and images. They therefore turn to indirect, ambiguous, obscure or even evasive communication with the hope that their response will minimally satisfy interviewers while signaling to viewers that they are acquainted with the issue and that things are under their control. Placing interviewees in

*communicative conflicts* is probably one of the goals of the political interview but whether or not they provide clear and full replies is greatly influenced by the communication context, the communication style adopted by the interviewer, and the structure of the questions themselves.

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