“Smoking ruin” failure or hard work?

Analysing a real-life example of how people negotiate meaning in context

Analysis Report by Phil Willcox and Ashley Hilton
Emotion at Work - 2022

emotionatwork.co.uk

1. Introduction

In the workplace, conversation drives a huge amount of the work that we do, and we are often reliant on others for our work to succeed. Conversation is a complicated, confusing, and yet an organised process. Talking with others is also how we build relationships, forge connections and influence others. Understanding the mechanics of talk, how it is formed, regulated, and organised can be a hugely useful skills to have. So, if we are able to analyse, make sense of and control conversation(s), what we have at our disposal is a discipline that can wield numerous benefits. It can make meaning clearer and reduce confusion, speed up meetings and gain greater alignment, as well as build relationships and increase our influence.

We have all been in those conversations that go around in circles, or those meetings that drag on. If you control the conversation then you control the flow of information, the meaning that is made, and often the productivity and benefits of the interactions you have.

Through socialisation, we learn how we interact and talk with others. We then go on to learn about how in certain settings, or when doing certain things, we are supposed to interact and talk in a particular way. Analysing these interactions and seeing what actually happens (vs what should happen) is a discipline of research called ‘conversation analysis.’

A good example of the real life application of conversation analysis is in the form of questions, with the two common classifications of questions being ‘open’ and ‘closed’. Open questions are often said to begin with: what, where, when, why, who or how, and the response(s) to these questions are reported to glean lots of information in return. Contrastingly, closed questions are those that are supposed to get you a single word answer, often yes or no.

Before we look at an example of this process, it is important to introduce the method through which much of the analysis takes place within this report.

There will be a detailed review of specific sections of the interview transcription. The benefit of a transcription is that it allows the reader to 'see' how speakers interact in a report such as this. Image 1.1. below breaks down how the transcription brings things to life.

These 'line numbers' allow us to orientate the reader to things happening in the text. For example "at lines 22 and 23 we can see overlapping talk".

The initials indicate who is saying the words on that particular line. Here we have MH and SR talking simultaneously.

The [square brackets] indicate where speakers are talking at the same time.

10.	MH:	down, and that that really hit me. And I remember at the start, we thought
11.	SR:	
12.	MH:	that you couldn't pass this disease on unless you have symptoms . And that's
13.	SR:	
14.	MH:	what errr ya know that was the that was the assumption and that underpinned
15.	SR:	
16.	MH:	some of the early policies. Um And we've learned a lot, we've learned a lot as
17.	SR:	
18.	MH:	a society and, you know, thankfully, now we can see a route out of this. Uh but
19.	SR:	
20.	MH:	it's it's probably been the hardest year this country's had for, for a generation.
21.	SR:	
22.	MH:	[And everybody's].. [And everybody's been touched=
23.	SR:	[I wonder if one of your] =Yes and and and that is
24.	MH:	
25.	SR:	absolutely true. I just wonder if one of your biggest regrets was that it wasn't
26.	MH:	
27.	SR:	taken seriously enough at the beginning, we seem to have a sort of sense of
28.	MH:	
29.	SR:	exceptionalism it's happening over there, it's not going to hit us And we didn't

Image 1.1

The = symbol here indicates that the exact moment one speaker (MH in this example) finished another speaker (SR here) immediately began speaking.

This may appear as a typing error and is included as it is an exact representation of what happened in speech. So here, SR said the word 'and' three times in a row.

173.	BS:	[So do you think] it's gonna come within a year, is it? Is it going
174.	MH:	
175.	BS:	to come before the autumn?
176.	MH:	Uh I think it depends on circumstances. As you
177.	BS:	
178.	MH:	know, and more importantly, as everybody watching this knows, we're working
179.	BS:	
180.	MH:	incredibly hard right now to keep the country safe. And that means looking at
181.	BS:	
182.	MH:	what has gone well, looking at what hasn't gone well, doing everything with the
183.	BS:	
184.	MH:	best possible judgement on what are some really big calls. I mean, if I just
185.	BS:	
186.	MH:	pick up on a couple of those suggestions that were made, for instance, um
187.	SR:	
188.	MH:	the uh I we, of course, have learned the importance of having onshore supplies
189.	SR:	
190.	MH:	of PPE for instance, and now 70% of our PPE, other than gloves, 70% of our
191.	SR:	
192.	MH:	PPE is manufactured here in the UK [you know that is an that is a uh if I can jus

Now, let's have a look at an example in the data set we are reviewing in this piece of analysis which illustrates conversation analysis.

Image 1.2

As we can see, the interviewer asks two closed questions in succession and yet the interviewee gives a much longer answer than the classification of question would suggest. Image 1.2 is taken from the transcription we have completed of the interview.

There are other aspects or phenomena that happen during interaction, and this piece of analysis is going to focus on one called the Co-Operative Principle (Grice, 1975).

This is an important area as it links in with how we make meaning in interaction as well as the rules and conventions we apply to talk. We will explore this phenomenon in more detail and give some examples of how it works in interaction using the data set for this analysis. This data set will be set in context (as it is everything) and any problems and challenges with it explored.

Then we will investigate how the (Co-Operative) principles are adhered to, bent and broken during conversation and why that matters. Finally, we will summarise the analysis and explore the practical implications for the workplace.

2. The Co-Operative Principle

The study of pragmatics is a field of linguistics which, in its most basic terms, refers to meaning in context: what meaning can be generated from the environment in which the communication is delivered. For this piece of analysis, the focus rests on a particular process within pragmatics called implicature, which looks to discern the way in which communication between individuals moves from expressed meaning (literal or semantic meaning) to implied meaning (potential additional meanings).

For example, if a speaker states something which does not necessarily make ‘literal’ sense, this can still possess meaning which can be understood by the hearer.

Colleague 1: “Will the project you’re working on be delivered on time?”

Colleague 2: “I don’t think so because I’m drowning at the moment.”

In this example, Colleague 2’s response to the question suggests that they are in a body of water drowning at that moment in time.

Whilst this utterance possesses no literal truth, Colleague 1 will understand that the literal meaning is inaccurate and is likely to understand that Colleague 2 is referring to the volume of work that they have to complete.

As stated, the Co-Operative Principle (Grice, 1975) – a theory rooted within implicature - will be the focal point of this research. Within this theory, Grice works on the assumption that we, as people in a conversation (also known as interlocutors), expect the conversations we have to follow an accepted direction; whereby we make contributions at appropriate times and these contributions have relevance to the purpose of the conversation.

The Co-Operative Principle is underpinned by 4 maxims

QUANTITY

Be informative. Provide as much information as is required and do not provide too much information.

QUALITY

Be truthful. Ensure you believe or understand the information you are providing to be true and that it holds evidence.

RELATION

Be relevant. Do not discuss or contribute something which does not have relevance to the purpose of the conversation.

MANNER

Be unambiguous. Avoid obscurity in your contribution whilst being brief and orderly.

Whilst these maxims signify rational principles that allow us to be cooperative within a conversation, the maxims are not always adhered to and nor does Grice suggest they should be. Instead, he notes that should a speaker break or bend a maxim then there is often a sound reason as to why they have chosen to do so. Thus, there is meaning to be generated should a speaker disobey one – or more than one – maxim.

When a speaker bends or breaks a maxim, it can often be clear to the hearer why they have chosen to do so. Yet, the intent of the speaker does not always match the meaning denoted by the hearer. It can also prove challenging to be certain of a potential bend or break of a maxim.

Whilst it may be clear when a speaker breaks the relation maxim (for example, if they interject a topic or subject which has no relevance to the purpose of the conversation), it can be more difficult to know when a speaker breaks the quality maxim (as the speaker may believe what they are saying to be true despite the hearer believing or knowing otherwise).

3. The Data Set

This piece of analysis is going to review an openly available television news interview, and use the Co-Operative Principle as a way to review and assess what is happening in the interaction.

It is important to place this data set in context to account for, and perhaps help explain, some of the things that happen within this interview. Firstly, the interviewee is a politician; a serving MP who, at the time of filming, was also the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Both the position of the individual as well as the nature of their work is important to consider. In an attempt to maintain a desired or particular image, political figures are often evasive in their responses when being questioned. This allows for the politician to give an answer which is non-committal and provides room for manoeuvre. It is also important to recognise that in pushing a particular topic or agenda, this will often lead to responses which may be structured (or potentially scripted) to suit the narrative of the speaker.

Additionally, the activity type is in an interview format, using a question and answer approach to communication, and the data set is a television interview conducted and broadcast by Good Morning Britain (GMB).

Whilst TV interviews with political figures are often renown for being confrontational, it is also known that this particular platform is one which, historically, has fostered many hostile conversations and interviews. In this interview, confrontation and impoliteness come into play at numerous times, which in turn impacts the responses given from both the interviewer(s) and the interviewee.

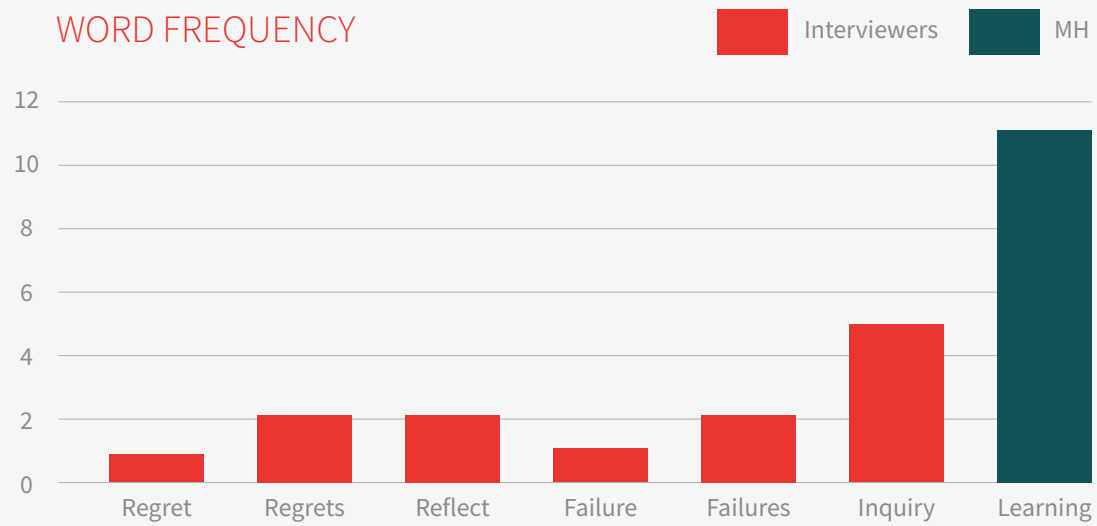
4. Analysis

4.1 Changing the Frame

In activity types (Levinson, 1979) like this TV interview, there are times when the interviewee has a particular line or agenda that they want (or need) to promote or stick to. However, this may be at odds with the line or agenda that the interviewer has or wants to explore. These lines or agendas can then come to light for those in the interaction and (as in this case) the audience through the way the interviewee and interviewer frame their contributions and the particular word(s) that they choose to use.

When we interact with others, people can be aligned in their use of framing and in the use of language, for example similar words (synonyms or connotations), or words that tend to occur near others (collocations). There are also times where there is a difference or divergence in framing or language. So, if we are going to look at the language or frames that MH uses, we need to also consider the language or frames that SR and BH use as well.

In this interaction, there are two examples where the frame(s) from the interviewers differ to the one that MH seems to want to use. MH seems to want the use a frame of 'learning' as he uses it 11 times during the interview, and specifically he uses the terms 'learn', 'learned' and 'learning' through the interaction. In contrast, the term 'learning' is only used once by the interviewers (at 04:26). The interviewer's do use regret (x1), regrets (x2), reflect (x2), failure (x1), failures (x2) and inquiry (x5). There could be an argument to say that reflect and learning may be synonyms of each other. In contrast, this argument doesn't stack up with regret(s), failure(s) and inquiry. It may be useful to see how these words are occurring in context. Image L1.1 on page 8 is a transcript of the opening 1:20 of the interview:

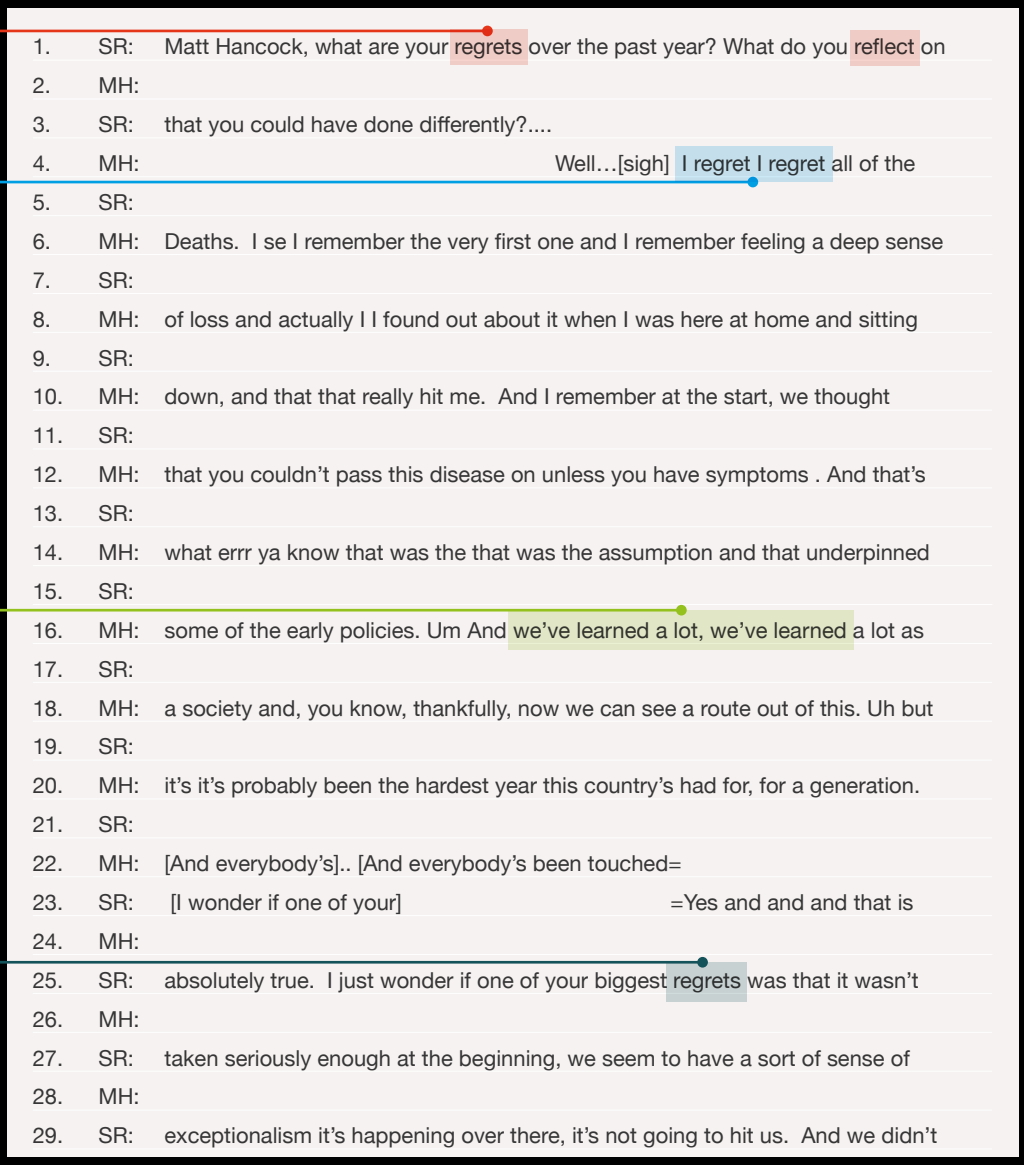


We begin with SR asking about biggest regrets and what MH reflect(s) on

Which MS seems to notice and reciprocates with “I regret, I regret”

Here MS switches from regret to “learned” and from I to “we’ve”

Here SR brings us back to “regrets” as she leads into her next utterance



1. SR: Matt Hancock, what are your regrets over the past year? What do you reflect on
2. MH:
3. SR: that you could have done differently?....
4. MH: Well…[sigh] I regret I regret all of the
5. SR:
6. MH: Deaths. I se I remember the very first one and I remember feeling a deep sense
7. SR:
8. MH: of loss and actually I I found out about it when I was here at home and sitting
9. SR:
10. MH: down, and that that really hit me. And I remember at the start, we thought
11. SR:
12. MH: that you couldn’t pass this disease on unless you have symptoms . And that’s
13. SR:
14. MH: what errr ya know that was the that was the assumption and that underpinned
15. SR:
16. MH: some of the early policies. Um And we’ve learned a lot, we’ve learned a lot as
17. SR:
18. MH: a society and, you know, thankfully, now we can see a route out of this. Uh but
19. SR:
20. MH: it’s it’s probably been the hardest year this country’s had for, for a generation.
21. SR:
22. MH: [And everybody’s].. [And everybody’s been touched=
23. SR: [I wonder if one of your] =Yes and and and that is
24. MH:
25. SR: absolutely true. I just wonder if one of your biggest regrets was that it wasn’t
26. MH:
27. SR: taken seriously enough at the beginning, we seem to have a sort of sense of
28. MH:
29. SR: exceptionalism it’s happening over there, it’s not going to hit us. And we didn’t

Image L1.1

Here, we can see that MH does initially address the regrets that SR proposes and then changes the frame to learning/learned. After this, SR reintroduces regret when she takes the next turn at talk. It may be that here SR is resisting the attempt by MH to (re)frame things as learning. Regret also has a stronger emotional stance than learning, and so SR may ‘want’ to use this frame as it adds emotion and seriousness to both the interview and the topic at hand.

Sticking with this section of the interview, we can also see MH bending and breaking some of the Co-Operative Principle maxims as shown in image L1.2 on page 9:

> **It may be that here SR is resisting the attempt by MH to (re)frame things as learning.**

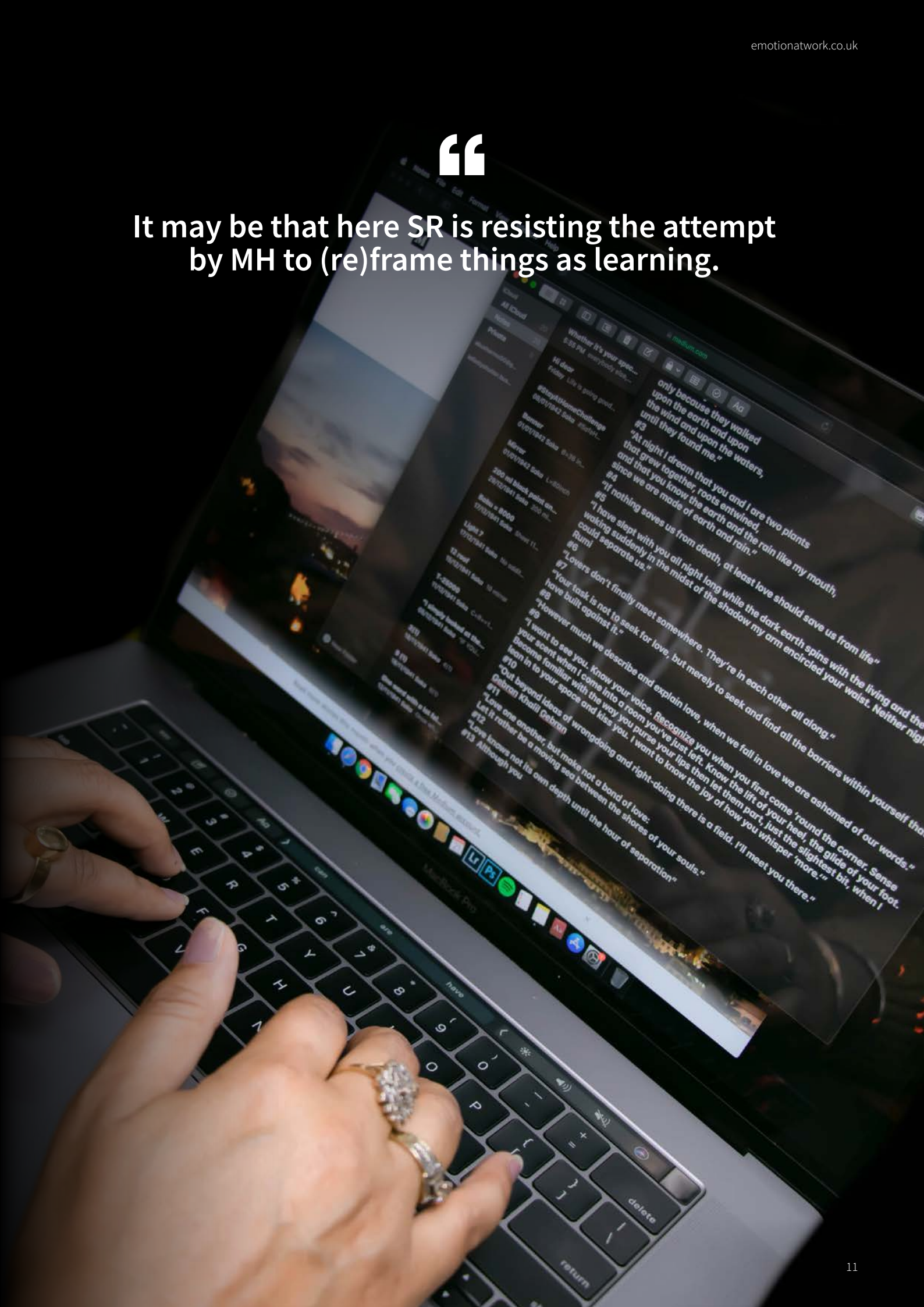


Image L1.2

MH begins with how he regrets all the deaths and it is enough information, it isn't contradicted by evidence, it is relevant and clear. Here then, MH seems to comply with the maxims.

Next though, MH begins to give more detail(s) around his memory, feelings, location and physical position. Here MH seems to be breaking the quantity (too much information) and relation (irrelevant to the question from SR).

As well as the shift to "learning" explored above, we also see some other changes. MH is talking about "thought", "assumption" and being "thankful" which seem to lack relevance to regret(s).

MH has shifted the timing frame as he's started to look to the future and "see(ing) a route out of this".

He has also broadened the focus from him personally to one of the "country".

All these shifts seem to go away from SR's opening question and suggest therefore that MH is breaking the relation maxim as it is information he does not 'need' to include.

1.	SR:	Matt Hancock, what are your regrets over the past year? What do you reflect on
2.	MH:	
3.	SR:	that you could have done differently?....
4.	MH:	Well…[sigh] I regret I regret all of the
5.	SR:	
6.	MH:	Deaths. I se I remember the very first one and I remember feeling a deep sense
7.	SR:	
8.	MH:	of loss and actually I I found out about it when I was here at home and sitting
9.	SR:	
10.	MH:	down, and that that really hit me. And I remember at the start, we thought
11.	SR:	
12.	MH:	that you couldn't pass this disease on unless you have symptoms . And that's
13.	SR:	
14.	MH:	what errr ya know that was the that was the assumption and that underpinned
15.	SR:	
16.	MH:	some of the early policies. Um And we've learned a lot, we've learned a lot as
17.	SR:	
18.	MH:	a society and, you know, thankfully, now we can see a route out of this. Uh but
19.	SR:	
20.	MH:	it's it's probably been the hardest year this country's had for, for a generation.
21.	SR:	
22.	MH:	[And everybody's].. [And everybody's been touched=
23.	SR:	[I wonder if one of your] =Yes and and and that is
24.	MH:	
25.	SR:	absolutely true. I just wonder if one of your biggest regrets was that it wasn't
26.	MH:	
27.	SR:	taken seriously enough at the beginning, we seem to have a sort of sense of
28.	MH:	
29.	SR:	exceptionalism it's happening over there, it's not going to hit us. And we didn't
30.	MH:	
31.	SR:	listen to the scientists. I uh I mean, you say that asymptomatic transmission
32.	MH:	
33.	SR:	wasn't known about, actually it was discussed by Sage scientists as early as

It is important to remember that the context of this interview is on the one-year anniversary of the first UK lockdown restrictions imposed because of COVID-19. While this overall frame has a reflective component to it, and the interviewer asks about regrets here, we can see how MH seems to bend and break two of the maxims to discuss areas that may be less relevant to the question asked, and instead may be more supportive of the overall narrative or story that he wants to tell.

In the subsequent sequence of turns, shown in image L1.3 on page 11, a similar pattern is displayed. Here, MH begins his turn seeming to want to demonstrate the relevance of his utterance (thereby satisfying the relation maxim) by highlighting his addressing of the "first point you make." It is interesting when a speaker makes the effort to signal the relevance or linkage of one point to another to then look at how they continue (or not) to do this. For example, here SR has outlined a number of (what she frames as) "failings" (see full transcript for details), and indeed asymptomatic transmission was the first one. However, MH goes on to discuss the development of tests which is a topic that was absent from the question or statement by SR.

MH does refer to the "challenge" with buying PPE that SR did refer to towards the end of his utterance.

This combination of opening the utterance by seeming to acknowledge that there are a number of areas to address (using "first"), then referring to a topic that was not mentioned by SR and instead returning to another topic (PPE), indicates that MH may be being selective about the topics he wants to discuss in line with ones that suit his agenda or narrative.

Towards the end of his utterance, MH once again nods to the numerous areas previously stated by SR, with his utterance being "so all the points you raise." This repeated recognition of there being several topics of discussion, whilst also acting as a phrase which encompasses the areas stated by SR rather than stating them individually, further suggests MH's selectiveness within his response.

Image L1.3

Here MH signals, through the use of "first" that he knows there are a number of points made by SR and the implicature is that he will address them. MH is also spotlighting his apparent adherence to the relation maxim.

Despite signalling that there were more of SR's points to address, MH actually introduces a new point that was not mentioned at all by SR. Here then, he is breaking the quantity maxim, (given extra information not needed) and bending the relation maxim as while it is a linked topic, it is not one that SR raised.

MH returns to the "learn" frame that he introduced in his previous turn which is in contrast to the "failings" and "fix" frames that SR used in the opening question.

Here he also uses the phrase "all the points that you raise" thereby creating a catch all to potentially close the "firstly" as he knows he did not address all the points.

46. MH:
47. SR: just one week earlier. If we were, if we were marking lockdown a week ago
48. MH:
49. SR: we might have saved 20,000 of those lives. When you reflect on those failures
50. MH:
51. SR: what would you now fix?
52. MH: Well, eh I think this point about that you rai the first
53. SR:
54. MH: point you make about not um not know abou what's called asymptomatic
55. SR:
56. MH: transmission not knowing that this can be passed on. I think that was i i incredibly
57. SR:
58. MH: important and Sage did discuss it. But they came to the conclusion that ummm
59. SR:
60. MH: that we should assume that you couldn't pass it on um I was working on this as
61. SR:
62. MH: health secretary since the start of January last year um and, for instance, you
63. SR:
64. MH: know developing those test which were absolutely critical, that didn't exist last
65. SR:
66. MH: Uh January, so all the points that you raise, absolutely, it's important to uh
67. SR:
68. MH: to learn from from the future, we did have a challenge in terms of buying
69. SR:
70. MH: PPE, and we worked incredibly hard to uh make sure that we had as much
71. SR:
72. MH: as we had uh [and um it was a]
73. SR: [Why has Dominic] Cummings.. Why has Dominic Cummings
74. MH:
75. SR: who was at the heart of Government during that time. Why has he described
76. MH:
77. SR: your department as a smoking ruin?
78. MH: Well, I think he was describing how how
79. SR:

The (re)framing to "learn" or "learning" is one that MH uses consistently throughout the interview. It could be that this is something that he planned (or was briefed) to do as it supports a particular impression he wanted to manage or narrative to create. This hypothesis is also supported by the near absence of the use of this frame by the interviewers, and at times the stark contrast between the frame used (e.g. regret(s)/ mistake(s) vs learn). This contrast of (re)framing is something that continues after the section shown in image L1.3, as SR goes on to ask MH a question based on a description of the Health Department put forward by former Government aide Dominic Cummings.

4.2 Smoking Ruin

An important section of this interview, where there is evidence to indicate several maxims being bent or broken, occurs during the questioning of MH's understanding as to why Dominic Cumming's described the Department of Health as a "smoking ruin."

Firstly, it is important to dissect the idiom being used before turning to MH's response. As "smoking ruin" is conventionally used to indicate a failure, through the portrayal of destruction and disintegration within its imagery, it is reasonable that a conclusion which would be drawn from Cumming's statement is that the department had been significantly unsuccessful in its efforts.

What is interesting is MH's perceived understanding of what was meant by this idiom. In his response, MH stated that he believed this statement to be indicative of the effort of the department to acquire sufficient PPE, and the subsequent workload which was required to obtain it. Looking at MH's response (see image R1.1) in contrast to the above understanding of this statement may be an area of interest.

Image R1.1

72.	MH:	as we had uh [and um it was a]
73.	SR:	[Why has Dominic] Cummings.. Why has Dominic Cummings
74.	MH:	
75.	SR:	who was at the heart of Government during that time. Why has he described
76.	MH:	
77.	SR:	your department as a smoking ruin?
78.	MH:	Well, I think he was describing how how
79.	SR:	
80.	MH:	much work had to be.. undertaken to buy the PPE that we had to buy. [But I think
81.	SR:	[He was
82.	MH:	th]
83.	SR:	describing] it as a failure Mr Hancock
84.	MH:	Well, the, the the truth is that the
85.	SR:	
86.	MH:	department include, and actually across government, we were working incredibly

As discussed, here we see the utterance from MH which is the key indicator of this misalignment

This misalignment is further signified in this interruption from SR during MH's utterance. Here, the interviewer noticed this discrepancy and intercepted to provide clarification

Image R1.1 (page 12.)

Consequently, both the quality and manner maxims are broken in this interaction. As previously stated, the quality maxim can be particularly challenging to identify, and indeed justify, when it appears to be bent or broken; as the individual may believe what they are saying to be true despite evidence to the contrary. However, in this instance there appears to be linguistic evidence which suggests that MH is aware of the meaning intended through Cumming’s statement – through both the conventional use of the idiom described above and the clarification of meaning given by SR during the interview. Therefore, there is much to legitimise the impression that MH understood his utterance to demonstrate a false narrative, particularly when looking to the continuation of his utterances.

Image R1.2 begins at line 84 where MH opens with the words ‘the truth is’, suggesting that something else (in this case Dominic Cummings assertion) is untrue. If the truth is X then the other must be false or untrue.

The use of the word truth is important here because of the quality maxim and also as it allows MH to, through implication, cast Dominic Cummings as a liar.

Both of MH's utterances (as shown) indicate that he is suggesting both the truth and importance of the discussion had prior. MH seems to be putting some things in the foreground, for example, what the 'truth' is and the work that was 'undertaken' (line 92). He also highlights the 'important thing' on the same line (suggesting other things are less important) and returns to 'learn'(ing) frame discussed previously.

As well as foregrounding some aspects, MH also appears to be backgrounding other things here, such as the assertion his department is a smoking ruin and a failure.

It can be interesting, and oftentimes valuable, to assess the elements which are being fore or back grounded and assess why this may be happening as this can suggest what is more (or less) important to the speaker and/or where they would like the audience or hearer to focus.

80.	MH:	much work had to be.. undertaken to buy the PPE that we had to buy. [But I think
81.	SR:	[He was
82.	MH:	th]
83.	SR:	describing] it as a failure Mr Hancock
84.	MH:	Well, the, the the truth is that the
85.	SR:	
86.	MH:	department include, and actually across government, we were working incredibly
87.	SR:	
88.	MH:	hard to buy PPE, because there was a global shortage and a global sudden
89.	SR:	
90.	MH:	surge in demand, as you can imagine. So that was the that was the work that
91.	SR:	
92.	MH:	was undertaken. But the important thing I think, is that we learn all of these
93.	SR:	
94.	MH:	lessons constantly, we've got to be looking always to improve our response,
95.	SR:	
96.	MH:	both learning from things that went badly, and learning from things that
97.	SR:	
98.	MH:	went well [like vaccination roll out]
99.	SR:	[So why not use today, for] instance why not use today to announce an
100.	MH:	

Image R1.2

Using this utterance to preface his answer indicates MH may be aware that he is bending or breaking the quality maxim.

Similarly, to preface this utterance with "the important thing…" suggests that MH is attempting to background aspects of the previous discussion and foreground other things.

4.3 Adhering to the Maxims

Whilst assessing where an individual bends or breaks a maxim during conversation provides insight and value for this style of analysis – as it suggests meaning beyond that which is expressed - it is important to demonstrate instances where MH adheres to Grice's maxims. This allows for a greater understanding of the Co-Operative Principle in action and presents contrast between instances where MH appears willing to be cooperative and those where he is not.

A particular instance where MH does respond largely in accordance with the maxims is during the discussion over the health sector and the potential introduction of mandatory vaccinations. Notably, MH does bend the relevance maxim at one point during this point in conversation as he interjects the topic of recruitment in this sector. However, aside from this instance, each of MH's responses do largely adhere to the maxims as shown in images A1.1 and A 1.2 on page 16.

Image A1.1

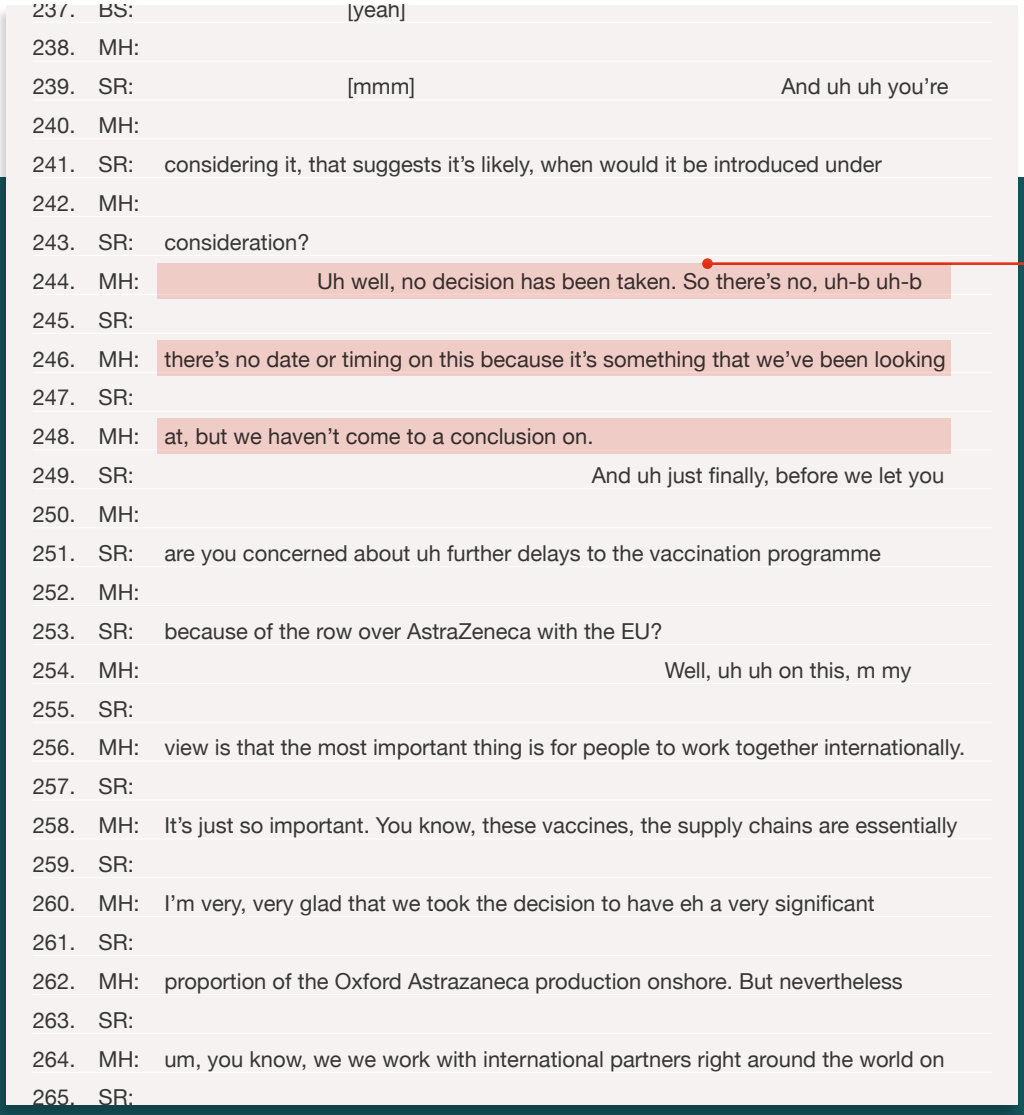
215.	BS:	[We heard from] a care
216.	MH:	
217.	BS:	home manager earlier, uh Mr. Hancock, if you are looking at trying to make it
218.	MH:	
219.	BS:	mandatory to saying the recruitment is a nightmare in the care home industry
220.	MH:	
221.	BS:	at the moment already. And if you do make it compulsory, people are going to
222.	MH:	
223.	BS:	leave that industry
224.	MH:	Well, no decision has been taken. And we've got to take into
225.	BS:	
226.	MH:	account all of these things. But I'm glad to say that recruitment is up in social
227.	BS:	
228.	MH:	care which is good news. Um but crucially, we also have a duty of care over the
229.	BS:	
230.	MH:	people who are in uh care homes. So both sides of this have to be taken into
231.	BS:	
232.	MH:	account. And and uh uh uh we've got to talk to people in the sector. There are
233.	BS:	
234.	MH:	many in the sector who are calling for this to happen, because a legal change
235.	BS:	
236.	MH:	would be required [and] it's it is something we're considering.
237.	BS:	[yeah]
238.	MH:	
239.	SR:	[mmm] And uh uh you're
240.	MH:	
241.	SR:	considering it, that suggests it's likely, when would it be introduced under
242.	MH:	

Within this section, this is the only time that MH can be seen to bend the relation maxim. Aside from this, his response adheres to the maxims.

MH also adheres to the maxims when further prompted for an answer by SR.

When comparing the responses here with those which are given by MH in the 'smoking ruin' section above, the disparity in his cooperation becomes more prominent. There may be numerous reasons which help explain the difference between these sections.

One explanation may be that this is an area MH is comfortable with and therefore finds it easier to respond. Another may be that this section aligns with the script, or narrative, which MH may have prepared prior to the interview. This would make adhering to the maxims easier as he doesn't have to reframe or adapt his response in accordance with the question asked.



237.	BS:	[yeah]
238.	MH:	
239.	SR:	[mmm] And uh uh you're
240.	MH:	
241.	SR:	considering it, that suggests it's likely, when would it be introduced under
242.	MH:	
243.	SR:	consideration?
244.	MH:	Uh well, no decision has been taken. So there's no, uh-b uh-b
245.	SR:	
246.	MH:	there's no date or timing on this because it's something that we've been looking
247.	SR:	
248.	MH:	at, but we haven't come to a conclusion on.
249.	SR:	And uh just finally, before we let you
250.	MH:	
251.	SR:	are you concerned about uh further delays to the vaccination programme
252.	MH:	
253.	SR:	because of the row over AstraZeneca with the EU?
254.	MH:	Well, uh uh on this, m my
255.	SR:	
256.	MH:	view is that the most important thing is for people to work together internationally.
257.	SR:	
258.	MH:	It's just so important. You know, these vaccines, the supply chains are essentially
259.	SR:	
260.	MH:	I'm very, very glad that we took the decision to have eh a very significant
261.	SR:	
262.	MH:	proportion of the Oxford Astrazaneca production onshore. But nevertheless
263.	SR:	
264.	MH:	um, you know, we we work with international partners right around the world on
265.	SR:	

Image A1.2

MH's response here adheres to all maxims. It provides enough information, is relevant to the question asked, is unambiguous, and appears truthful.

Summary and Application

In these three examples (changing the frame, smoking ruin and adhering to the maxims) we have outlined how both the interviewer and the interviewee are ‘doing things’ that are more than the literal or semantic meaning. We have also outlined some hypotheses as to why this may be happening and what evidence may support or challenge these hypotheses.

This approach is important for workplace communication too. There will be times when others (or us as individuals) are bending and breaking the maxims.

Therefore, thinking about where and why we, or others, are doing this can aid in our understanding and improve communication. Next time you are in a conversation, and it is unclear what someone means, or you are struggling to see the meaning or relevance, think about what maxim(s) are at play and what is happening, then make some hypotheses and test them.

Some questions that you can ask, or statements to use that may help you clarify meaning include:

- What do you believe to be true or the case here?
- These are the thing(s) I am taking from what you said. Did I miss anything?
- Can you summarise your key points for me?
- I am hearing… is this what you meant?
- What are the main things you want me to know?
- Tell me about how you see the link(s) between… and what we are covering?
- I am thinking that what you said about… is relevant because… is that correct?
- What extra things would it help me to be aware of?
- There are a few ways I could interpret that, what did you intend to mean?
- That has left me feeling or thinking… is that similar to what you hoped?

5. Conclusion

When we talk with others or are part of a conversation, the people we are interacting with are often doing many things simultaneously. If the Co-Operative Principle is an underpinning, unspoken rule of conversation, should others bend or break those principles then we need to pay attention. We cannot read someone’s mind to know for sure ‘why’ someone has gone against the principles and noticing it is useful. It can help establish if there may be additional meaning(s) to be taken from what is (or is not) said.

Throughout this piece of analysis, we have explored the Co-operative Principle in detail and used examples of how it works in interaction from the data set. We situated the data set in context (as it is everything) and explored any problems and challenges it presented. Then we investigated how the principles are adhered to, bent and broken during conversation and why that matters. Finally, the report summarised the analysis and explored the practical implications for the workplace.

For our clients, communication is vital. How people interact matters as it is what drives a large amount of the value making activity in organisations. Misunderstandings, miscommunications, hidden meanings, unspoken messages and implicature are variables that undermine action and limit productivity. Our clients gain a level of insight and analysis that is available to very few. Our work enables improved communication, greater effectiveness and the making of better, more informed decisions.

If you want to know what is really being said (and what is not) then contact Emotion at Work.

Should you wish to find out more about the different services Emotion at Work offers, access our website here:

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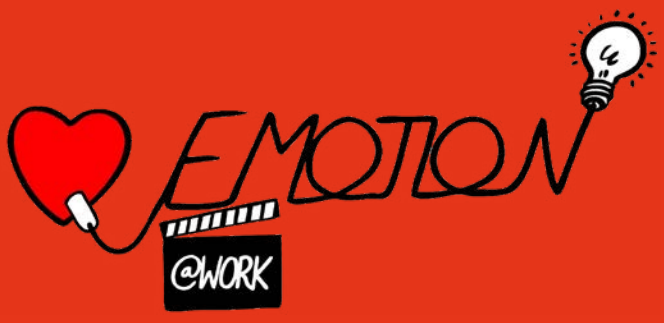
If you want to contact Phil directly, you can do so at: phil@emotionatwork.co.uk

07977 569398



Registered in England and Wales
Company Number 07738777
Office 7,
35-37 Ludgate Hill
London
EC4M 7JN

emotionatwork.co.uk