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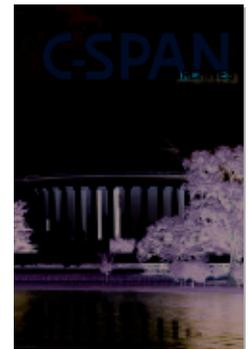Published by Purdue University Press

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CHAPTER **7**

PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON AS A PRACTICAL ETHNOMETHODOLOGIST: A SINGLE-CASE ANALYSIS OF SUCCESSFUL QUESTION-ANSWERING TECHNIQUES IN THE 1998 GRAND JURY TESTIMONY

Angela Cora Garcia

Previous conversation analytic research has addressed how the organization of interaction in talk in institutional settings differs from ordinary conversation (e.g., Antaki, 2011; Boden & Zimmerman, 1991; Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Garcia, 2013; Heritage & Clayman, 2010; Heritage & Maynard, 2006; Sacks, 1992; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). While the speech exchange system of ordinary conversation provides for maximum flexibility in such things as the organization of turns at talk, types of turns produced by participants, and topics of talk, talk in workplace settings is often more highly structured or constrained on these types of dimensions (e.g., see Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Heritage, 1985). For example, talk in airplane cockpits (Nevile, 2004), medical settings (Heritage & Maynard, 2006), television news interviews (Clayman

& Heritage, 2002; Heritage, 2002), and mediation hearings (Garcia, 1991; Greatbatch & Dingwall, 1997) differs from talk in ordinary conversational settings in a variety of ways.

The term *talk in institutional settings* is commonly used in conversation analytic research not to claim that talk in workplace interactions is always different from that in everyday life, in fact ordinary conversation takes up a good part of the workday of many people. In addition, the work-specific talk that does occur in institutional settings is typically based on many of the same procedures and techniques that are used in everyday contexts. However, the organization of interaction differs in systematic ways in institutional settings because that is how the work of that setting is done and institutional roles are accomplished. Heritage and Clayman (2010) focus on how questions and answers are organized as they explain what they mean by "talking institutions into being" (p. 32):

> We do not mean by this to suggest that every time persons talk they invent institutions from scratch. Far from it: the institutions of education, news, courts, and medicine plainly antedate the lives and actions of the persons who participate in them. But these institutions do draw life from, and are reproduced in, those actions. The word we have used for this in this chapter is "instantiate." By this we mean that the sequences of talk we have examined are aligned with, and embody, some of the basic imperatives of the institutions within which they are found. Talking in these ways is, in part, how these institutions are realized: that is, are rendered observable and consequential in everyday life as the real entities that persons take them to be. Talking in these ways is part of being a teacher or a student, an interviewer, a lawyer or a doctor. These roles are enacted by talking in these ways. Failing to talk in these ways, by contrast, can lead to difficulties in realizing, or being recognized in, these institutional roles and activities. Speakers in these institutions are accountable for bringing off their question-answer sequences in these ways, and institutions are accountably reproduced in these sequences. (p. 32)

Talk in institutional settings is designed by participants to accomplish the goals of that particular institutional context. In the case of talk in legal settings, this often involves not just the elicitation of information through

questions and answers but also a contest between opposing sides in a dispute or legal case. The holders of different institutional roles therefore may be in an oppositional relationship (as in a prosecuting attorney interviewing a defense witness). How each participant constructs an action will take account of the role the participant is playing in the interaction.

Previous conversation analytic research has revealed a variety of techniques that can be used to evade answering questions. In televised news interviews, Clayman (2001) found that interviewees used a range of techniques to avoid answering questions, such as first answering the question, but then elaborating the answer in a way that redirects the interaction; reformulating a more favorable version of the question before answering it; or providing incomplete or hypercomplete responses (Clayman, 2001). Lynch and Bogen (1996) analyzed the Iran-Contra hearings, and found that Col. Oliver North used several of these techniques to avoid direct answers to questions in order to deflect blameworthy implications. Another technique that can be used is to first answer a question and then take advantage of having the floor to switch the agenda and attack the questioner. This strategy was used by then-Vice President George H. W. Bush in a televised news interview with news anchor Mr. Dan Rather (Clayman & Whalen, 1988/89).

President Clinton's 1998 grand jury testimony was subpoenaed as part of the Paula Jones case in which she accused President Clinton of sexual harassment. The questions asked by the attorneys during this testimony revolved around the nature of his relationship with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky and whether he had perjured himself in previous statements in a deposition in the Paula Jones case. President Clinton's grand jury testimony in the Paula Jones case is important historically because it was part of the charges involved in his presidential impeachment trial (Starr, 1998). In terms of reactions from Congress, the press, and the public at the time, it seemed to be a Watergate moment for the Clinton presidency with at least the potential to bring his presidency down by either impeachment or resignation (Baker, 2000; Posner, 2000; Wilson, 2015). It also arguably crystalized a trend that had been occurring in recent American history towards increasingly less division between the public and private spheres of the lives of Presidents (see, e.g., Perloff, 1999). Some also argued that it contributed to the trend of diminishing news-media control over access to information (e.g., Williams & Carpini, 2004).

Research on President Clinton's 1998 grand jury testimony has been conducted from a variety of analytical perspectives including sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and conversation analytic approaches, each of which focuses on different aspects of the testimony. In addition, there is research on the effectiveness of the speech President Clinton gave after the testimony (e.g., Kramer & Olson, 2002; Simons, 2000; Wilson, 2015), as well as media framing of the coverage of the scandal (e.g., Larson & Wagner-Pacifici, 2001; Yioutas & Segvic, 2003). Wilson (2015) analyzed the pragmatics of President Clinton's grand jury testimony. Some studies are concerned with whether the President was telling the truth during his testimony (e.g., Hirsch & Wolf, 2001; Upchurch & O'Connell, 2000). These studies examined a range of verbal and nonverbal behaviors including pauses, hesitation markers, qualifiers, expanded contractions, speech errors, and body language and gestures. However, these behaviors are studied independently of the immediate sequential context they occur within (Sacks, 1992). Jaworski and Galasinski (2002) analyze media reporting of President Clinton's nonverbal behaviors during his grand jury testimony, and conclude that there was little agreement in terms of what mood or emotion his nonverbal behavior signified to the media. They found that the British press media's portrayal of President Clinton's emotions and honesty in the pictures, captions, and text of news articles differed with type of publication.

However, in spite of the embarrassing details of President Clinton's relationship with Ms. Lewinsky, which were revealed during the testimony, and the potentially injurious accusations of perjury, President Clinton's popularity during this crisis did not take the plunge that many predicted it might (Larson & Wagner-Pacifici, 2001; Simons, 2000; Yioutas & Segvic, 2003). Some previous studies have addressed this public response in terms of the motivations of particular subgroups. For example, Danielson (2013) argued that African Americans typically continued to support President Clinton because of his previous actions and their strong belief in the sincerity of his advocacy of their concerns. In general, the public, while extremely interested in the grand jury testimony and the subsequent impeachment trial, did not seem to share the same concern with the issues that Congress and others in government and in the media did.

In this chapter I will consider how President Clinton's construction of his grand jury testimony may have contributed to the relative loyalty of the public during this crisis. In particular, I will utilize Locke and Edward's (2003)

conversation analytic study of the techniques President Clinton used to successfully avoid implications of blame and how he used framing devices to manage the impressions given by his answers to the attorneys' questions. Locke and Edwards' study of the grand jury testimony focused on how references to emotions and psychological states were used to construct favorable accounts. For example, they show how President Clinton distances himself from Ms. Lewinsky by attributing emotions to her rather than to himself.

Locke and Edwards (2003) also investigated how President Clinton works to recast potentially damaging facts into ordinary, routine actions. They showed how President Clinton reformulated aspects of the attorneys' questions to remove the implications of blame or guilt by presenting the events or situations as normal or routine, at least in the context of the role of president in the White House. For example, they describe how President Clinton invokes the routine process of exchanging Christmas gifts to provide a rationale for one of his meetings with Ms. Lewinsky. This provides an alternative to the implication of the attorney's question, which raised the possibility that the purpose of the meeting was to interfere with her testimony in response to the subpoena she had received. President Clinton also uses the routine expectation that a "going away" gift is a suitable rationale for the large number of gifts he gave her. He argues that they were not just Christmas gifts, but also "going away" gifts. Finally, President Clinton uses commonsense assumptions about the membership categories *man* and *woman* to explain that people in those categories can give each other gifts without a romantic relationship being implied (Locke & Edwards, 2003).

In sum, Locke and Edwards (2003) identified a range of ways that President Clinton answered questions while avoiding some of the negative and potentially damaging implications of them. In this chapter I will extend their analysis of his testimony to include a range of ways in which President Clinton uses a *practical ethnomethodological* approach pedagogically—instead of simply answering the question, he explains how his answers are consistent with routine, ordinary procedures and techniques that people typically use. This explanation instructs the recipient (the questioning attorney and the grand jury itself) in how to understand and interpret his answers. Following Garfinkel's (1967) work on the commonsense background assumptions and everyday procedures used to accomplish social organization, and Sacks' (1984b) work on how people "do being ordinary" in everyday interactions, I will show how

President Clinton used everyday commonsense reasoning to provide alternative interpretations of his actions. This work as a practical ethnomethodologist enabled him to deflect negative interpretations of his actions and substitute ordinary, everyday, and innocent interpretations of, and explanations for, his actions in specific contexts. I will also draw on conversation analytic research on evasive answering in legal and other institutional contexts (e.g., Clayman, 1993; 2001; Clayman & Heritage, 2002) and apply it to understanding President Clinton's testimony.

The chapter begins with a description of the methods and data used. I will then analyze President Clinton's use of evasive answering techniques and his pedagogical use of commonsense knowledge and understandings of how things are routinely done to show how he effectively defended himself against attorneys' accusatory questions.

DATA AND METHODS

The theoretical and analytical perspective used in this project is conversation analysis, a qualitative method of analyzing talk in interaction that grew out of the ethnomethodological perspective developed by Harold Garfinkel (1967). Conversation analysts study talk in its sequential context in order to discover the commonsense understandings and procedures people use to shape their conduct in particular interactional settings (Heritage, 1984; Sacks, 1984a; Schegloff, 2007). Members' shared interactional competencies not only enable them to produce their own actions but also to interpret the actions of others. Roles do not just affect behavior by providing a set of rights, obligations, and expectations; people instantiate their roles by their actions (Halkowski, 1990).

In this chapter I use a single-case analysis approach. The purpose of a single-case analysis is not to create new findings but to use findings from previous conversation analytic research to understand a particular event, in order to gain insights and understandings of that event (e.g., Osvaldsson, Persson-Thunqvist, & Cromdal, 2012; Schegloff, 1987; Whalen, Zimmerman, & Whalen, 1988). By means of this single-case analysis, I will show how President Clinton successfully used a wide range of evasive answering techniques and other defensive moves to avoid and counter blame-implicatory moves on the part of the interrogating attorneys.

I analyzed the 4 hours of video of grand jury testimony by President Clinton in the *Jones v. Clinton* case regarding allegations of sexual harassment by Ms. Paula Jones. This testimony was given on August 17, 1998. The video of this testimony is available online in the C-SPAN Video Library. Selected excerpts from this video have been transcribed using a simplified version of conversation analytic conventions (Jefferson, 1984, 1985, 2004). While the official transcripts produced by the Office of the Independent Counsel (published online by JURIST, 1998) are of high quality, there are several ways in which they are not adequate for conducting an analysis of the interaction that occurred during the testimony. In order to facilitate the analysis, additional details have been added, including timing of pauses (estimated), indications of stress or emphasis or noticeable changes in volume, repetitions and errors in speech, and where relevant, indications of nonverbal behavior such as facial expressions, gestures, or body movements. The transcribing conventions used are in the Appendix to this chapter. Some of the more common symbols and transcribing conventions used in this chapter include the use of punctuation to indicate intonation rather than grammatical structure, the timing of pauses, the use of underlining to indicate a word was stressed, and capitalization to indicate loud speech. Simultaneous talk is marked by brackets showing where the simultaneity began and ended.

The benefits of using the C-SPAN Video Library as the source for this data are several. First, the entire 4 hours of testimony are available in an easy-to-access format that anyone can use. This makes the data available to anyone who wants to check the transcription of the excerpts quoted in the chapter, or who wants to listen to more of the hearing than can be excerpted in a short book chapter, in order to gain more understanding of the interaction as a whole. The public availability of the data is especially important to conversation analysts. From the perspective of conversation analysis, the data (at least in detailed transcript form) should be available to the readers so that they can understand the analysis and check the data themselves to see if the analysis is sound (Psathas, 1995). Readers can easily listen to the original data to verify or challenge the interpretations presented in the research. Second, the video is set up on the C-SPAN website such that it is easy to play, start, stop, and rewind, and to make clips of specific parts of the testimony for use in conference presentations. For those studying the communication style and practices of public figures, whether presidential or otherwise, the C-SPAN Video Library is an excellent source of public-domain examples of their speeches, testimony, and other public appearances.

In the analysis that follows I will extend two previous lines of conversation analytic investigation in talk in legal settings in general and the presidential grand jury testimony in particular. First, I will extend and apply the analysis of how witnesses can evade answering or construct answers to avoid damaging implications of questions. Second, I will extend the consideration of the techniques used to present actions or interpretations as normal or routine by investigating President Clinton's pedagogical use of commonsense understandings and assumptions in his testimony. I will show that he uses it to instruct the questioner and the overhearing grand jury in commonsense background assumptions for his actions that enable him to sidestep blame-implicative aspects of the attorney's questions. In the concluding section of this chapter I summarize the results of the analysis and discuss its implications for understanding question-answering techniques and President Clinton's successful performance of them.

EVASIVE ANSWERING: MANAGING THE IMPLICATIONS OF ANSWERS

In this section of the analysis I apply findings from previous conversation analytic studies of talk in legal and other institutional contexts to show how President Clinton is able to successfully to resist the implication of blame in attorneys' questions and transform any negative implications of his answers to their questions to more favorable formulations. Here I build on Atkinson and Drew's (1979) analysis of the *prospective management* of accusations in trials and tribunals, and Clayman's (1993; 2001) analysis of the techniques interviewees use to avoid answering challenging questions in television news interviews. I will analyze the construction of questions and answers in the grand jury investigation and explore how accusation-implicative questions and morally accountable evasive answers are constructed. The problem for the witness is how to avoid answering potentially damaging questions while appearing to answer the question.

One way witnesses can resist potentially damaging implications of an attorney's question (or what Atkinson and Drew [1979] call the prospective management of accusations) is to resist the answer categories the question provides. For example, in Excerpt 1 the first two questions the interrogator asks (in lines 1–2 and lines 5–6) are yes/no questions. Both questions

are designed with a preference for a yes answer (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987). They are both answered quickly by President Clinton in lines 3 and 8, respectively.

Excerpt 1: Presidential Grand Jury Testimony 1998 (45:26)

1	Q:	have you reviewed thuh <u>rec</u>ords for december twenty eighth,
2		nineteen ninety seven, mister president?
3	A:	<u>yes</u> sir, I have.
4		(0.2)
5	Q:	do you be<u>lieve</u> that miss lewinsky was at thuh white house, (0.2)
6		and saw <u>you</u> on December twenty eighty, nineteen ninety seven?
7		(0.2)
8	A:	yes, sir, i do.
9		(1.5)
10	Q:	and (0.2) do you remember talking with miss lewinsky (0.2) about
11		her subpoena that she had received for thuh paula jones case on
12		that day.
13		(1.4)
14	A:	<u>I</u> remember talking with miss lewinsky about her <u>testimony</u>, (0.4)
15		u:h or about thuh <u>pros</u>pect that she <u>might</u> have to give testimony.
16		(0.8) A:nd=u:h (0.3) she uh (1.7) she talked to me about that. °I
17		remember that.°

The third question, however (lines 10–12) is answered only after a delay (note the 1.4-second pause in line 13). When President Clinton answers the question in lines 14–17, his answer avoids the categories projected by the question (yes or no). Instead President Clinton describes what he remembered but avoids answering the main point of the question which was to establish the day on which it happened. He avoids mentioning the subpoena, and avoids stating whether he discussed the subpoena with Ms. Lewinsky. He instead reports that he remembers talking about her testimony (lines 14–15). He then repairs this utterance (Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), and replaces it with a statement about "thuh <u>pros</u>pect that she <u>might</u> have to give testimony." Note that this is not the same thing as talking about the testimony itself. Note also that President Clinton does not admit to remembering talking about the subpoena or the Paula Jones case in particular.

Locke and Edwards (2003) describe how President Clinton uses claims to remember or not remember specific facts as a strategic move. President Clinton uses explicit statements about what he can and cannot remember, to avoid appearing to evade answering specific questions:

> The everyday categories 'remember', 'recall', 'forget', and so on, are not merely references to inner, psychological processes, but coins of verbal exchange that have a public, discursive use in managing accountability (Coulter, 1990; Lynch & Bogen, 1996). Clearly we are not looking simply at recall on Clinton's part, in the sense of pure memory at work, but at testimony produced under cross-examination—at memory as a participant's discourse category, as a social psychological phenomenon (Middleton & Edwards, 1990). Potentially threatening implications are worked up by Q and handled, re-worked, or warded off in Clinton's responses. This echoes findings from a variety of close studies of courtroom dialogue, including Bogen and Lynch (1996), and also Drew's (1990, 1992; cf. Atkinson & Drew, 1979) demonstration of how questions and responses in court re-work descriptive content and implications for culpability. (Locke & Edwards, 2003, p. 244)

Drew (1992) notes that witnesses can use "I don't remember" as a strategy to avoid having to confirm information in an interrogating attorney's question:

> As a sequential object *I don't remember* not only avoids confirming what is proposed in the question, but also avoids disconfirming it: that is, the witness thereby avoids directly challenging or disputing a version proposed by the attorney, but nevertheless neutralizes that version, at least for the present. (p. 483)

Drew also notes that by stating "I don't remember," the witness is claiming that it is not something that one would typically notice, for example, due to its unimportance or insignificance.

In sum, the third question in Excerpt 1 is answered quite differently from the first two questions because it is a different type of question. Atkinson and Drew (1979) would describe it as a question that foreshadows a prospective

accusation. It may be leading up to an implication that President Clinton coached Ms. Lewinsky on her testimony or intervened in some way with her testimony. Mr. Clinton's answer as constructed preemptively avoids any such implications that might ensue.

In Excerpt 2, the questioner next shifts the topic to the Christmas gifts that President Clinton had given Ms. Lewinsky:

Excerpt 2: Presidential Grand Jury Testimony (45:04)

19	Q:	and, you also gave her uh- <u>chris</u>tmas! gifts, is that not correct,
20		mister president?
21		(0.3)
22	A:	th- That <u>is</u> correct. They were christmas gifts and they were going
23		a<u>way</u> gifts. she was moving to new york (0.5) to, aye uh taking
24		aye new job, starting uh new life. and uh i gave her: some gifts.

Mr. Bittman's question in lines 19 and 20 is also formulated as a yes or no question. President Clinton begins with a brief hesitation (line 21), then says "th- That <u>is</u> correct," thus answering the question with something approximating the type of answer requested. However, instead of stopping and waiting for the next question, as would be typical for a witness in a legal proceeding, the President continues speaking and elaborates his response (lines 22–24). This elaboration is a repair of the original question: the gifts were not just Christmas gifts, they were also "going away gifts." No doubt anticipating the questioner's subsequent questions about the large number of gifts he had given Ms. Lewinsky, President Clinton preemptively challenges their categorization as Christmas gifts by reframing them as also going away gifts. This additional reason for the gifts provides a preemptive defense for the large number of gifts he had given, thus taking some of the steam out of the interrogator's line of questioning. This elaboration could be seen to be prospectively responsive to the questioning trajectory that Mr. Bittman is establishing here. The interrogator's questions implied a prospective accusation (Atkinson & Drew, 1979) that the gifts were evidence of a romantic relationship. President Clinton's responses, here and elsewhere in the testimony, work to convey a more mundane interpretation of his actions. Locke and Edwards (2003) describe this strategy of supplanting a problematic explanation for his actions with an ordinary explanation:

This is a robust rhetorical pattern, where the notion that one is spe-
cially accountable for an action or situation, such that a motive or
account is required, is resisted by defining that action as common-
place, normal, or 'scripted' (Edwards, 1994, 1995, 1997; cf. Sacks,
1992). (Locke & Edwards, 2003, p. 245)

This strategy is consistent with the concept from the communications
literature of *framing* (e.g., Fairhurst, 2011a; Yioutas & Segvic, 2003). For ex-
ample, Fairhurst (2011b, p. 43) describes this skill: "Framing involves the
ability to shape the meaning of a subject—typically the situation here and
now—to judge its character and significance through the meanings chosen."
Another line of questions about the gifts appears in Excerpt 3:

Excerpt 3: Presidential Grand Jury Testimony (45:20)

40	Q:	you were alone with her on december twenty eighty, nineteen
41		ninety se[ven,]
42	A:	[yes,] sir i was.
43	Q:	the gifts that you gave her (0.2) was aye (0.2) were aye CANvas
44		bag from thuh blackdog restaurant at martha's vineyard, is that
45		right?
46		(0.3)
47	A:	well, that was just, that was just something I had in thuh place to-
48		(0.3) to contain thuh gifts.= but (0.2) I believe that thuh gifts I gave
49		her were- I put 'em in that bag. that's what I had there, and I <u>knew</u>
50		she- liked things from thuh black dog.=so, I gave her- (0.2) i pu- i
51		<u>think</u> that's what I put thuh presents in. i remember what thuh
52		presents were, .h i don't remember what thuh bag was i gave them
53		in.
54		(0.2)
55	Q:	Did you also give her aye marble bear bear's head carving from
56		vancouver, canada?
57	A:	i <u>did</u> do that. i remember that.
58	Q:	and you also gave her a rockettes blanket? that has thuh famous
59		rockettes from new=york?
60		(0.1)
61	A:	tch i <u>did</u> do that. i had that, i had had that in my possession for a

62		couple of years but had never used it, and she was <u>going</u> to- new
63		york. so, I thought it would be uh nice thing to give='er.
64		(0.1)
65	Q:	you gave her aye box of cherry chocolates, is that right?
66		(2.8)
67	A:	i don't remember that, sir. i mean, it th- there could have been. i-
68		(0.6) i- i just don't remember. i remember giving thuh BEAR,
69		(0.4) and thee (.) throw.

As Locke and Edwards (2003) note, at times President Clinton conveys that he does not always recall events referred to in the attorneys' questions. While Drew (1992) notes the strategic uses of "I don't remember" in hostile questioning environments, overuse of this technique can also be problematic for a witness. Note that President Clinton is very careful to balance these "I don't remember" answers with some very quick responses to questions (e.g., line 42 overlaps the prior question). In addition there are times when he specifically states his ability to remember. In line 57 President Clinton answers a yes/no question with "i <u>did</u> do that. i remember that." This lengthy way of saying "yes," plus the addition of "i remember that" may serve to display that he does not always fail to remember. There were times he didn't remember, and said so, but when he does remember, instead of just saying so, he flags it as something he remembered by stating that explicitly.

In his response to the question about the Rockettes blanket Mr. Bittman asks about in lines 58–59 President Clinton displays his ability to remember by detailing unsolicited information about why he gave her the blanket. Note that in lines 68–69 President Clinton reformulates "blanket" to "throw"—a blanket being something you might put on a bed, while a throw could be draped over an arm chair. Because Ms. Lewinsky was moving to New York, something from New York was relevant. These are ways of displaying that he's not always saying he can't remember, sometimes he does remember. Also, this information serves to normalize the gifts by displaying reasons for them that are not romantic reasons (cf. Locke & Edwards, 2003). When he is next asked a question, about the "box of cherry chocolates" (line 65), there is a 2.8-second pause and he then replies, "i don't remember <u>that</u>, sir" (line 67). Again, the "I don't remember" answers look less like he's trying to hide something when they are balanced by other answers in which he clearly does remember.

However, note also that the box of cherry chocolates is a gift that could be construed as a romantic gift, and this is the one he's not remembering.

President Clinton also uses elaborations of his answers to questions as a form of resistance to the questioner's implications. In Excerpt 4 below President Clinton takes advantage of having the floor to answer the question to do much more than take the floor. He uses his turn to accuse the opposing side in the lawsuit of various things, including illegally leaking information about the case to the press. Baker (2000) argues that Clinton prepared several such minispeeches prior to the testimony, with the intention of inserting them in relevant places to strengthen his position.

Transcript Excerpt 4: Presidential Grand Jury Testimony (52.25)

7	Q:	do you agree that she was up<u>set</u> about being
8		subpoenaed?
9		(0.5)
10	A:	tch oh, yes, <u>sir</u>, she was upset. she- well- she- (0.4) we she didn't
11		<u>we</u> didn't (0.2) <u>talk</u> about uh subpoena.=but she was <u>upset</u>.=she
12		said, <u>I</u> don't want to testify. (0.2) I know <u>nothing</u> about this. (0.2) I
13		<u>cer</u>tainly know nothing about sexual harassment. (0.4) <u>why</u> do
14		they want me (0.2) to testify. (1.5) and uh (1.5) I ex<u>plain</u>ed to
15		her?, (0.2) why they were (0.2) <u>doing</u> this, and why all these
16		women were on these lists, and (0.2) people that they knew good
17		and well had nothing to do with any sexual harassment. (0.4) I
18		ex<u>plain</u>ed to her that it was uh po<u>lit</u>ical lawsuit. (0.2) they wanted
19		to get <u>what</u>ever they could under oath that was damaging to me,
20		and then they wanted to leak it in violation of thuh judge's orders,
21		.hh and turn up their nose and say, well, you can't <u>prove</u> we did it.
22		(0.5) now, that was their strategy. and that- (0.2) they were <u>very</u>
23		<u>fru</u>strated because everything they'd leaked so far was old news.
24		so, they <u>desperately</u> were trying to validate this <u>ma:</u>ssive amount of
25		money they'd spent (0.9) uhm by finding some (0.3) <u>new</u> news.
26		and-
27		(0.4)
28	Q:	(you [were familiar)]
29	A:	[and she] didn't want to be caught up in that, and <u>I</u>
30		didn't blame her.

President Clinton's elaboration of his answer to the question fills similar purposes, as does Vice President George H. W. Bush's initial answer in the controversial interview he did with Mr. Dan Rather in the 1980s. Clayman and Whalen (1988/89) noted that in the first question/answer sequence of that interview, Vice President Bush first briefly answered the question he was asked by Mr. Rather and then continued to speak at length. In the extension and elaboration of his response, he departed from answering the question and made several topic shifts, which included complaints and accusations directed at Mr. Rather.

Similarly, in Excerpt 4, above, President Clinton uses his answer slot to produce more than an answer. His elaboration and extension of his answer is an attempt to reframe, not only this line of questioning, but the whole hearing and the legal case in general. In line 10 President Clinton first provides a yes answer, which is the preferred response to Mr. Bittman's question from lines 7–8. He then repairs his response, to clarify that she (Ms. Lewinsky) was upset. He also reiterates his earlier point that they did not "<u>talk</u> about uh subpoena" (lines 10–11). Note the latches (equal signs) in the transcript in line 11. These symbols indicate that there was no pause at all between those words. President Clinton ran them together so that these possibly complete *turn constructional units* (Sacks et al., 1974) would not be treated as *transition relevance places* (would not signal to the questioner that he was done with his turn). What he continues with is an elaboration of his answer, which is not just a topic shift but a shift in utterance type— instead of responding to Mr. Bittman's question, he is now introducing a complaint about the whole case.

Excerpt 5 below illustrates several avoidance strategies. First of all, notice that President Clinton does not answer the question Mr. Bittman has asked in lines 17–18 and 21.

Excerpt 5: Presidential Grand Jury Testimony (105:40)

17	Q:	she professed her love to you in these cards after thee end of thuh
18		relationship, didn't she?
19		(3.0)
20	A:	well,-=

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21  Q:                    =she said she loved you?
22                        (6.0) ((President Clinton puts his hand up in a "stopping"
gesture—palm raised toward the questioner—nonverbal request for the questioner
to wait until he produces his response))
23  A:        sir, (5.0) thuh truth is (0.8) that most of thuh ti:me, (0.4) even when
24            she was: expressing her (0.2) feelings for me in affectionate terms,
25            (0.5) I believe that she had accepted, understood (3.0) my: decision
26            (0.5) to stop this inappropriate contact. (0.5) she knew from thuh
27            very beginning of our relationship that I was apprehensive about it.
28            (0.5) and I think that (4.0) in uh way she felt uh little freer to be
29            affectionate, (0.3) tch because she knew that nothing else was
30            going to happen. I can't explain entirely what was in her mind.
31            (0.7) but most of these messages (0.4) were not what you would
32            call over thuh top. they weren't things that, (0.4) if you read them,
33            you would say, oh, my goodness, these people are having some
34            sort of sexual affair.
35            (0.4)
36  Q:        mister president, thuh question=
37  A:                                 =but some of them were quite
38            affectionate.
```

Notice the long silence in line 22 prior to President Clinton's answer to the question "=she said she loved you?" This question, on the face of it, is straightforward, asking for a simple yes or no answer. But clearly, in the context of the hearing the answer is very sensitive. The lengthy 6-second pause could have negative implications for President Clinton. However, the video and transcript show that President Clinton "puts his hand up in a 'stopping' gesture" during this pause. He raised his palm toward the questioner in a gesture that conveyed a nonverbal request for the questioner to wait until he produced his response. This request transforms the meaning of the silence from simply not answering the question to asking for more time to produce his answer. By means of this gesture President Clinton makes the 6-second pause accountable. In addition, through this gesture he transforms any negative implications of his delay in responding into a visual demonstration of the questioner's interruption of him (Mr. Bittman's line 21 interrupted President Clinton's line 20 where he had already started to answer the question).

Once President Clinton produces his answer (lines 23–34), it must be apparent to the questioning attorney (and probably the overhearing audience as well) that Mr. Clinton has not answered the question that was asked. He used the technique of producing an elaborated answer that transforms the question (Clayman, 2001).

In sum, President Clinton used a wide range of techniques for evading answering or avoiding the damaging implications of answers as he responded to the attorneys' questions during the grand jury testimony. In the next section I show how President Clinton used commonsense understanding of everyday terms, contexts, and situations in order to challenge the construction or implications of attorneys' questions.

THE PEDAGOGICAL USE OF COMMONSENSE KNOWLEDGE

In the 4 hours of grand jury testimony I have identified at least 20 instances in which President Clinton uses his practical knowledge of everyday procedures (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1984b, 1992) as a resource when constructing his response to questions. By this I mean that he uses this everyday knowledge about how things ordinarily work to instruct the questioning attorneys and the overhearing grand jury in alternative or blameless interpretations of his actions. These instances fell within five broad categories of commonsense knowledge and assumptions. First, there is the contrasting of the legalistic meaning of a term (e.g., *sex*, *oral sex*, or *alone*) with a commonsense meaning of that term. Second, there is the provision of an alternative (typical, ordinary) interpretation/explanation of actions that supplants the blame-implicative interpretation of the question. For example, President Clinton used several explanations for the gifts he gave Ms. Lewinsky; these explanations worked to challenge the assumption that the gifts implied a romantic relationship. He proposed that gift-giving is an ordinary thing at Christmas time or as a going away gift. He also argued that gift-giving between men and women did not necessarily imply a romantic relationship. In addition, when challenged as to Ms. Lewinsky's use of the word *love* in her letters to him, he argued that the use of this word was an ordinary occurrence between male and female friends and did not necessarily imply a romantic relationship. Third, President Clinton challenged implications of

questions by providing explicit instruction in how interaction works. For example, he explained how people typically answered questions in order to show how the attorney's interpretation of his responses was inaccurate. He explained how questions are routinely interpreted in context—in terms of the flow of questions that occurs. He also explained that an answer to a question may span more than one exchange of turns at talk. Thus what the attorney was treating as his answer to a question was actually an incomplete or partial answer rather than a falsehood. Fourth, the President instructs hearers as to the ordinariness of being vague and the nonordinariness of remembering every single detail (see Sacks, 1984b). Fifth, the President calls upon the audience's commonsense understanding of how the job of president is different from that of an ordinary citizen, and how the work of the White House legitimately involves construction of a public face in order to justify and explain actions taken. While the scope of this chapter does not allow examination of all of the examples of these categories of actions that occurred in the 4 hours of testimony, I will analyze some selected excerpts here to illustrate how President Clinton worked to recast the implications of his actions and his testimony through his pedagogical use of commonsense knowledge of how things are typically done.

Defining Terms: Challenging Commonsense Understandings of Terms

Perhaps the most famous instance of a challenge of the commonsense definition of a term in the grand jury testimony is President Clinton's definitions of sex and sexual relationships (cf. Wilson, 2015). In response to an attorney's question about his relationship with Ms. Lewinsky and her prior affidavit in which she had denied a sexual relationship with President Clinton, President Clinton challenges the attorney's taken-for-granted understanding of the term *sexual relationship* and instead instructs him on the ordinary way of defining it. On page 52 of the JURIST (1998) transcript of the grand jury testimony, President Clinton says about the term *sexual relationship*, "I was using those terms in the normal way people use them. You'll have to ask them what they thought I was saying." This use of commonsense knowledge echoes Harvey Sacks' (1984b) construction on how people do "being ordinary" in everyday life.

Excerpt 6 shows President Clinton explaining why Ms. Lewinsky was able to truthfully deny having a sexual relationship with him. He invokes the perspective of people having ordinary conversation, including the grand jurors themselves, and argues that they would assume that the term *sexual relationship* implies intercourse.

Excerpt 6: (JURIST [1998] Transcript, p. 11-12; C-SPAN Video 3:13:50)

1	A:	I believe at the time that (0.8) <u>she::</u> filled out this affidavit, (0.4) if
2		<u>she</u> believed that- thuh definition of sexual relationship was two
3		people having intercourse?, (0.2) then this is accurate. (0.2) And I
4		believe <u>that</u> is thuh definition that <u>most</u> (0.2) ordinary Americans
5		would give it. If you said s- (0.2) Jane and Harry have uh sexual
6		relationship, (0.5) and you're <u>not</u> talking about people being drawn
7		into uh lawsuit and being given definitions, and then uh great effort
8		to <u>trick</u> them in some way, but you're just talking about people in
9		ordinary conversation, (0.2) I'll bet thuh grand jurors, if they were
10		talking about two people they know, and said <u>they</u> have uh sexual
11		relationship, (0.2) they meant they were <u>sleeping</u> together, they
12		meant they were having <u>in</u>tercourse together. (0.2) so, I'm not at
13		all sure that this affidavit is not true!, (0.3) and was not true in Ms.
14		Lewinsky's mind at thuh time she swore it out.

President Clinton uses a similar tactic in his response to a question about whether he was ever alone in the White House with Ms. Lewinsky. He argues that being alone does not just mean being out of eyesight, it means the lack of aural access as well as the absence of open or unlocked doors through which others have permission to enter. By this understanding of the term *alone*, President Clinton argues that he was not alone with Ms. Lewinsky:

Excerpt 7: Definition of "alone" (JURIST [1998] Transcript, pp. 65–66; C-SPAN Video 3:13:50)

1	Q:	Do you <u>agree</u> with me that thuh statement, "I was never a<u>lone</u> with
2		her", (0.8) is incorrect? (0.2) You <u>were</u> alone with Monica
3		Lewinsky, weren't you?
4		(3.0)

5   A: Well, again, it depends on how you define alone. yes, we were
6   alo:ne (0.5) from time to time, even during 1997, even when there
7   were absolutely no improper contact occurring. Yes, there- that is
8   accurate. u::h (0.5) bu:t there were also uh lot of times when, uh
9   even though no one could- <u>see</u> us, thuh doors were open to thuh
10   ha:lls, on both ends of the hall, people could hear. uh thuh Navy
11   stewards could come in and out at will, (0.2) if <u>they</u> were around.
12   <u>o</u>ther things could be happening. so- there were uh lot of times
13   when we were alone, but I never really <u>thought</u> we were. (0.3) and
14   sometimes when we, when- (0.2) but, as far as I know, what <u>I</u> was
15   trying to determine, if I might, is that Betty was always <u>aro:und</u>,
16   and I believe she <u>was</u> always <u>aro:und</u>. (0.2) where I could
17   ((coughs)) basically call her or get her if I needed her.

In sum, President Clinton uses a technique of challenging the questioner's use of a term, and explaining how an alternative commonsense understanding of the term could replace it.

Precision, Vagueness, and Memory

President Clinton uses commonsense knowledge about how things work to justify his frequent failure to remember things he was asked about by the attorneys. He argues that things that look important in retrospect are not necessarily seen as important while they are occurring, therefore memories may be vague and imprecise. When an attorney asked about a previous problematic answer President Clinton had given to a question about when Ms. Lewinsky got her subpoena, the President first admitted that that answer was "sort of a jumbled answer" (JURIST [1998] transcript, p. 36), and then went on to offer this explanation for the lack of precision of his memory:

Excerpt 8: (JURIST [1998] Transcript, pp. 36–37; C-SPAN Video 1:49:06; Mr. Wisenberg)

1   A: <u>Aga</u>in, I say, sir, (3.0) just from thuh tone of your voice, and thuh
2   way you are asking questions here, (0.2) it's obvious that- (0.8)

3	this is thuh most important thing in thuh wo:rld, uh (0.5) and that
4	<u>ev</u>erybody was focused on all thuh details at the ti:me. (0.8) u::h
5	(0.5) but that's not thuh way it worked. I was, I was doing my best
6	to remember.

A few minutes later he makes a similar argument in his attempt to explain why an "I don't know" answer was not perjurious. He provides a commonsense explanation of why his memory is not as detailed as the attorney would like it to be, and explains how actions that in retrospect may seem important did not necessarily seem important at the time they occurred. Excerpt 9 shows part of President Clinton's answer to a question as to whether he thought it was okay to say "I don't know" when he really did know the answer to a question (JURIST [1998] transcript, p. 39). In his response he uses a commonsense understanding of how memory works and when details are memorable or not in order to justify his "I don't know" responses:

Excerpt 9: (JURIST [1998] Transcript pp. 39–40; C-SPAN Video 1:57:16; Mr. Wisenberg)

1	A:	<u>All</u> of you are intelligent people. you've worked <u>hard</u> on this.
2		you've worked for a long ti:me. (0.5) you've gotten all thuh facts.
3		you've seen uh lot of evidence that <u>I</u> haven't seen. (3.0) and it's,
4		it's an em<u>bar</u>rassing and personally painful thing, (0.5) thuh <u>truth</u>!,
5		about my relationship with Miss Lewinsky. (0.2) so, thuh natural
6		assumption, is (0.5) that while all this was going on, I must have
7		been focused on <u>no</u>thing but this; therefore, I must remember
8		<u>ev</u>erything about it (0.2) .h in thuh sequence and form in which it
9		occurred. All I can tell you is, I was con<u>cerned</u> about it. I was
10		glad she saw a lawyer. I was glad she was doing an affidavit. But
11		there were a <u>lot</u> of other things going on, and I <u>don't</u> necessarily
12		remember it all. And I don't know if I can convince you of that!
13		(0.5) but I tried to be honest with you about my mindset, about this
14		deposition. (0.3) and I'm just trying to explain that I- I <u>don't</u> have
15		thuh memory that you assume that I should about some of these
16		things.

In sum, by pointing out commonsense understandings about how interaction typically works, he is both defending himself against the specific charge in the attorney's question, and also displaying that, by contrast, the attorney's failure to understand these aspects of interaction may indicate either imprecision or disingenuousness on the attorney's part.

Explaining How Interaction Works

On several occasions President Clinton uses an explanation of how interaction works in order to explain or justify his response to a question. For example, in Excerpt 10 he challenges an attorney's critique of one of his responses. The attorney had represented his previous testimony as contradicting his later representations about when he knew that Ms. Lewinsky had been subpoenaed. President Clinton explains that answers to questions have to be understood in the context in which they occur. In the context of legal testimony, this means a series of questions and answers. President Clinton refers to this as the "<u>con</u>text of thuh flow of questions" (line 2). He goes on to explain that his answer was not complete in one turn at talk, and was actually continued and finished in the next turn.

Excerpt 10: (JURIST [1998] Transcript p. 33; C-SPAN Video 1:34:50; Mr. Wisenberg)

1	A:	well, mister Wisenberg, I think you have to- (0.5) a<u>gain</u> you have
2		to- (0.8) put this in thuh <u>con</u>text of thuh flow of questions, (0.4)
3		and I've already testified to this <u>once</u> today. I will testify to it (0.2)
4		again. (3.0) u::h (5.0) my answer to thuh <u>next</u> question, I think, is
5		uh way of (0.2) finishing my answer to thuh question and the
6		answer you've said here. I was trying to remember (0.2) who thuh
7		first person, other than mister- mister Bennett- I don't think Mr.
8		Bennett- who the first person told me that, who told me Paula
9		Jones had, I mean, excuse me, Monica Lewinsky had uh subpoena.
10		and I <u>thought</u> that Bruce Lindsey was thuh first person. And <u>that's</u>
11		<u>how</u> I was trying to remember that.

At another point in the grand jury testimony (Excerpt 11, lines 11–13), President Clinton argues that inconsistent answers are not necessarily a sign of something wrong with his testimony, because "people don't always hear thuh same questions in thuh same way. they don't always answer them in thuh same way." He then provides an account for the discrepancy between his answers in which he presents himself as working hard to make his answer as "honest" as possible, thus justifying the differences.

Excerpt 11: (JURIST [1998] Transcript p. 35, C-SPAN Video 1:41:19; Mr. Wisenberg)

1	Q:	Do you understand that if you answered, "I don't <u>think</u> so", to thuh
2		question, has anyone <u>o</u>ther than your attorneys (0.5) uh (0.2) told
3		you that Monica Lewinsky has been served with uh subpoena in
4		this case, that if you answered, "I don't think so", but you really
5		<u>kne:w</u> Vernon Jordan had been (0.2) telling you all about it, you
6		understand that that would be aye (0.2) false statement,
7		presumably perjurious?
8		(3.0)
9	A:	Mister Wisenberg, (1.5) I have testified about this three times.
10		now, I will do it thuh fourth time. (0.2) I am not going to answer
11		your trick questions. (2.0) I:: (0.2) people don't always hear thuh
12		same questions in thuh same way. they don't always <u>a</u>nswer them
13		in thuh same way. (1.5) <u>I</u> was so con<u>cerned</u> about thuh question
14		they asked me (1.0) that thuh next question I was asked, (6.0) I
15		went back to the previous question, trying (0.5) to gi:ve (0.5) an
16		honest answer (0.5) about thuh <u>first</u> time I heard (0.2) about thuh-
17		Lewinsky subpoena.

President Clinton instructs the questioner ("Mister Wisenberg") in the commonsense knowledge that "people don't always hear thuh same questions in thuh same way. they don't always <u>a</u>nswer them in thuh same way." He thereby makes it look like the attorney's assumptions about his answers were unfairly legalistic rather than based in commonsense knowledge of how people interact.

On "Doing Being Ordinary" in the White House

For some of his responses to questions, President Clinton invoked the ways in which the role of president differs from the role of an ordinary citizen, or how the White House as a political entity routinely conducts business. First, he describes how the demanding nature of the role of president challenges his memory, and makes it harder for him to remember things than it ordinarily would be. In Excerpt 12 he argues that his bad memory results from the "crowded" life of a president. In addition, he notes that the events being asked about were not important at the time they occurred; it is only in retrospect that the need for a detailed memory of these events has arisen (Excerpt 12 lines 17–19, see also Excerpt 8 and Excerpt 9 lines 5–12). In response to a question about his meetings with Vernon Jordan, President Clinton explains his failure to remember details in terms of the pressures of life as president:

Excerpt 12: (JURIST [1998] Transcript p. 35; C-SPAN Video 1:42:55; Mr. Wisenberg)

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1    A:    It's also- if I could say one thing about my memory. I have been
2          blessed and advantaged in my life with uh good memory. (2.0)
3          now, I have been shocked, and so have members of my family and
4          friends of mine, (3.0) at how (0.5) many things that I have
5          forgotten (0.2) in thuh last six years, I think because of thuh
6          pressure and thuh pace and thuh volume of events in uh president's
7          life, (0.2) compounded by thuh pressure of your four year (0.2)
8          inquiry, (2.0) tch and all thee other things that have happened, I'm
9          amazed there are lots of times when I literally can't remember last
10         week. if you ask me, did you talk to Vernon- when was the last
11         time you talked to Vernon Jordan?, what time of day was it, when
12         did you see him, what did you say?, (0.2) my answer was thuh last
13         you know, if you answered me, when was thuh last time you saw
14         u::h (1.0) friend of yours in California, if you asked me uh lot of
15         questions like that?, my memory is not what it was when I came
16         here, because my life is so crowded. (0.5) and now that- as I said,
17         you have made this thuh most important issue in America!, (2.0)
18         eh (0.5) I mean, you have made it thuh most important issue in
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19		America!, from <u>your</u> point of view. At the time this was occurring,
20		even though I was con<u>cern</u>ed about it, and I <u>hoped</u> she didn't have
21		to testify, and I <u>hoped</u> this wouldn't come out, (0.5) I felt I will say
22		again, that she could honestly <u>fill</u> out an affidavit that, under
23		reasonable circumstances, would relieve her of thuh burden of
24		testifying.

In Excerpt 13 below, President Clinton provides a routine, everyday (in the life of the White House) explanation for why he spoke to Ms. Currie about his meetings with Ms. Lewinsky. As a "political organization" (i.e., the White House), "when you are subject to a barrage of press questions of any kind, (1.0) you always try to make thuh best case you <u>can</u> consistent with thuh facts; that is, while being truthful." (lines 12–15).

Excerpt 13: (JURIST [1998] Transcript p. 70, C-SPAN Video 3:26:54; Mr. Bennett)

1	Q:	If I understand uh your current line of testimony, (0.5) you are
2		saying that your <u>only</u> interest in (0.5) speaking with (0.5) uh (0.5)
3		Ms. Currie in thee uh days after your deposition was to refresh
4		your own recollection?
5		(1.0)
6	A:	tch yes.
7	Q:	It was not to impart instru:ctions on how she was to recall things in
8		thuh future?
9		(2.0)
10	A:	tch no, and certainly not under oath. that- (0.5) every day, sir-
11		mister Bennett, (3.0) uh (2.0) in thuh White House, and in every
12		other political organization when you are subject to a barrage of
13		press questions of any kind, (1.0) you always try to make thuh best
14		case you <u>can</u> consistent with thuh facts; that is, while being
15		truthful. uh but- so, I was concerned for uh day or two there, about
16		this as a <u>press</u> story only. I had no idea you were involved in it for
17		a couple of days. (0.5) I think Betty Currie's testimony will be that
18		I gave her ex<u>pli:c</u>it instructions (0.5) or encouragement to just go
19		in thuh grand jury and <u>tell</u> thuh <u>truth</u>. That's what I told her to do
20		and I thought she would.

In short, in the workplace that is the White House, specific types of actions must be performed on a regular basis (e.g., managing the public face of the White House to the media). In addition, the social role of president entails demands that ordinary people typically do not work under. In his ad hoc analysis of talk at work in this institutional setting, President Clinton constructs an argument for why coordinating his response with Ms. Currie (the White House secretary) was a normal, typical thing to do, rather than indicating some nefarious intent. In addition, his failure to remember is not a result of his pretending not to remember, but simply the result of the demands of the job of president.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has built on previous sociological research on the interactional organization of question/answer sequences in a range of institutional settings by applying it to the study of the 1998 presidential grand jury testimony. It has also extended prior research showing how President Clinton used common-sense knowledge and understanding to instruct the questioning attorneys and the overhearing audience (in particular the grand jury) on how to understand and interpret his actions and his previous testimony.

In terms of the techniques used to answer questions with accusatory implications, this analysis focused on how answers to attorneys' questions were designed to avoid damaging implications and present a positive face to the questioner, the grand jury, and the listening audience. In sum, this analysis has shown how President Clinton used several interactional techniques to avoid problematic implications of questions and/or to avoid answering them. These include evasive answering, reframing, reformulating, and extending or deviating from the answering role. For example, the analysis showed how President Clinton used techniques for resisting answer categories (such as yes/no or correct/incorrect), managing the moral accountability of silence (e.g., through gestures or facial expressions used to account for delays in responding), highlighting aggressive interrogation techniques (e.g., by flagging interruptions), and using "I remember" and "I don't remember" *turn prefaces* strategically. President Clinton volunteered the "I remember" frame to display cooperation and manage the interpretation of his subsequent "I don't

remember" responses. He also provides information or details not asked for by the questioner to display his ability to remember and to prospectively manage accusations. President Clinton also took advantage of having the floor to produce an answer to elaborate, shift the topic, and/or make accusations. These actions enabled him to take control of the agenda and the framing of the line of questions from the questioning attorney. President Clinton also often reformulated the question, and reframed or reformulated facts, person references, or events to change their meaning or implications. For example, President Clinton reformulated "gifts" to "Christmas gifts," and then reformulated "Christmas gifts" to "both Christmas and going away gifts"; he also reformulated "blanket" to "throw." Finally, he used nonverbal behaviors (e.g., wagging a finger, shaking his head) to challenge the questioner's assumptions and to flag an interruption.

In terms of his pedagogical use of commonsense knowledge and background assumptions about how interaction works and how things are done in the White House or when one is president, President Clinton used a range of approaches. This analysis showed President Clinton's pedagogical use of commonsense assumptions and background knowledge (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1984b) about how things work or how people ordinarily behave. He persuasively used commonsense understandings of what is ordinarily done and how ordinary people do things, either in an everyday context or in the specific context of the ordinary life of a president within the White House. Through these arguments he was able to explain his answers to problematic questions and to provide alternative contexts to interpret them, which contrasted with the legalistic context provided by attorneys' questions. President Clinton's success in defending himself against the blame-implicative questions of the attorneys in the grand jury testimony, and in maintaining relatively high public approval in spite of the potentially damaging information revealed, may be due in part to his use of these techniques rather than just to external political actions by others and media representations of the case at the time. The institutional role of president of the United States undoubtedly contributed to President Clinton's ability to make these arguments and rebuttals in the way that he did. More-ordinary witnesses in legal proceedings would most likely have been instructed to follow the requested answer format and avoid providing answers that deviated from what was asked (Atkinson & Drew, 1979).

What does it mean to be a "great communicator"? One answer to that question is that President Clinton's pedagogical use of commonsense understandings and shared background knowledge enabled him to successfully reach his public through this testimony. These techniques provide an everyday, understandable explanation for his actions that may have resonated better with the general public than the intrusive, legalistic, and often embarrassing questions asked by the attorneys during the testimony.

In sum, President Clinton's grand jury testimony was important historically because it was a defining moment of his presidency, as Watergate was for President Nixon. In addition, it may well become relevant for the 2016 presidential campaign if former First Lady Hilary Clinton is tied to President Clinton's history. Finally, the goal of conversation analysis is to discover how work is done in a variety of different interactional contexts, both informal and institutional. President Clinton's use of a wide range of techniques to avoid answering or to manage the implications of answering hostile questions in a legal setting provides an exemplar of how things are done in this type of talk in institutional settings. Further research should examine what it means to be a "great communicator" by comparing different approaches to evading questions in adversarial settings such as the grand jury testimony. For example, while both Presidents Reagan and Clinton are among those presidents commonly viewed as good communicators, do they use the same techniques or strategies to explain their positions and make connections with the public?

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APPENDIX: TRANSCRIBING CONVENTIONS

Symbol	Definition
.h	Inhalations and exhalations, respectively
ta::lk	A syllable is drawn out
that-	Word cut off abruptly
lot	Stress or emphasis
YOU	Increased volume
°cost°	Decreased volume
(1.4)	Length of pauses (in seconds)
(talk)	Tentative transcriptions
.,?!	Punctuation indicates intonation, not grammatical structure
A: [a copy of it] B: [I have]	Brackets indicate simultaneous speech
A: yeah= B:　　　=in order	Equal signs indicate one utterance or word is attached to another
A: are yuh gonna?	Words spelled as pronounced