



## The Historical Evolution of Interview Power Dynamics: A Comparative Analysis of Literary and Political Interviews

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Received: 24 May 2024

Revised: 03 Jun 2024

Accepted: 06 Jun 2024

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### ABSTRACT

This study embarks on a comprehensive journey through the evolving landscape of interview power dynamics. We aim to dissect and map the progression of power relations in interviews, focusing particularly on the contrast between literary and political interviews across various historical periods. Through a meticulous examination, the paper illuminates the nuances and shifts in power dynamics, drawing attention to both the similarities and disparities between literary and political contexts. At the core of this analysis is an exploration of how the distinct objectives and formats of literary and political interviews shape their inherent power structures. Literary interviews, typically centred around promoting an author's work and delving into the creative process, contrast with political interviews, which often aim to uncover truth and hold power to account. This contrast offers a unique vantage point for understanding the interplay of power in these settings. Furthermore, the paper delves into the subtleties of linguistic strategies, non-verbal communication, and the overarching social context that envelop these interviews. It examines how these elements collectively contribute to the construction and perception of power within the interview setting. The historical perspective provides a lens through which changes in societal norms and values, as well as shifts in the media landscape, are reflected in the power dynamics of interviews. This study not only provides a historical account of the evolution of interview power dynamics but also offers a critical analysis of the factors influencing these dynamics. By comparing literary and political interviews, it uncovers the underlying forces that shape the flow of power in these interactions, offering valuable insights into the complex interplay of social, cultural, and media influences on the nature of interviews. The findings of this research hold significance for scholars in the fields of media studies, communication, and social history, providing a nuanced understanding of the evolution of power in one of the most fundamental forms of human interaction.

**Keywords:** Interview Power Dynamics, Historical Evolution of Interviews, Comparative Media Analysis, Literary Interviews, Political Interviews, Media, Power, and Society.





## INTRODUCTION

The intricate dance of power dynamics in interviews has been a subject of fascination and study for decades. Interviews, as a medium of communication, serve as a mirror reflecting the societal, political, and cultural landscapes of their time. This research paper seeks to explore the nuanced evolution of these dynamics, particularly focusing on the differences and similarities between literary and political interviews across various eras. Power dynamics in interviews are shaped by multiple factors, including the purpose of the interview, the social status of the participants, the format of the interview, and the medium through which it is conducted. In literary interviews, the focus often lies in unravelling the thought process of authors, discussing their works, and delving into the creative world of literature. These interviews tend to be more collaborative, with power more evenly distributed between the interviewer and interviewee. Conversely, political interviews are characterized by a more confrontational nature, often aimed at uncovering truths, challenging statements, and holding public figures accountable. Here, the power dynamics can be more fluid, with interviewers typically holding more power, though skilful politicians often navigate these dynamics to their advantage.

The evolution of interview power dynamics can be traced back to the early 20th century when interviews began gaining prominence as a journalistic tool. In the early days, interviews were often formal and respectful, with a clear power imbalance favouring the interviewee, especially in political contexts. Over time, as media evolved and public expectations shifted, these dynamics began to change. For instance, the rise of television in the mid-20th century transformed interviews into a more dynamic and visual medium, altering the power balance as both parties became increasingly aware of the public's gaze. The comparison between literary and political interviews is particularly striking. Literary interviews, often conducted in more relaxed settings, allow authors to articulate their thoughts and promote their work, often positioning the interviewer as a facilitator rather than a challenger. This format can lead to a more symmetrical power dynamic, with both parties contributing equally to the discourse. In contrast, political interviews, especially in contemporary settings, are often arenas of strategic battle, where each word and gesture is measured and analysed. The interviewer's role as a gatekeeper of information and a representative of the public interest often places them in a more powerful position, though skilled politicians utilize rhetorical strategies to shift this balance.

The use of language and non-verbal cues plays a significant role in the establishment and negotiation of power in interviews. Linguistic strategies such as questioning techniques, interruptions, and framing can significantly influence the direction and tone of the interview. Non-verbal cues like body language, eye contact, and facial expressions also contribute to the perception of dominance or submission within the interview context. The analysis of these aspects provides insight into the subtleties of power negotiation in both literary and political interviews. The social and cultural context surrounding interviews cannot be overlooked. Factors such as societal norms, cultural values, and historical events play a crucial role in shaping interview dynamics. For example, interviews conducted during periods of political unrest or social change often reflect these tensions, with power dynamics being more pronounced and contentious.

The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the historical evolution of power dynamics in interviews, with a focus on comparing literary and political interviews. By examining these two distinct types of interviews across different eras, the study seeks to identify patterns, shifts, and underlying factors that have influenced these dynamics. This comparison is vital in understanding how the objectives and formats of interviews contribute to the construction of power within these interactions. The study employs a historical and comparative methodology, analysing interviews from various time periods to trace the evolution of power dynamics. This approach involves examining primary sources such as transcripts, recordings, and video footage of interviews, alongside secondary sources that provide critical analysis and contextual information. By situating interviews within their historical and cultural contexts, the study aims to unravel the complex interplay of factors that shape power dynamics.





This research holds significant value for multiple disciplines, including media studies, communication, political science, and literature. Understanding the evolution of interview power dynamics sheds light on broader societal and cultural shifts. It also provides insights into the strategies employed by interviewers and interviewees to navigate these dynamics, which can be beneficial for professionals in journalism, politics, and public relations. Following this introduction, the paper is structured into several sections: a comprehensive literature review that provides the theoretical and historical background; a detailed methodology section explaining the approach and sources used; an analysis of the results, offering a chronological overview and comparative examination of the interviews; a discussion section that interprets the findings in the context of existing literature and includes the insights gained and suggests avenues for future research; and then ending the study with a conclusion.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of power dynamics in interviews has been extensively explored within several theoretical frameworks. Michel Foucault's discourse on power and knowledge is particularly relevant (Foucault, 1972). He posits that power is everywhere and comes from everywhere, thus it's neither an agency nor a structure (Foucault, 1980). This perspective is crucial in understanding the fluid and omnipresent nature of power in interview settings. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and symbolic power provides insights into how societal status and cultural competencies play into power dynamics (Bourdieu, 1986). These theories offer a foundation for analysing the subtleties of power in different interview contexts.

Early studies of interviews highlight a formal, almost deferential approach, particularly in political interviews. Schudson (1978) notes that early 20th-century journalism was characterized by a less confrontational and more narrative style. This shifted dramatically with the advent of broadcast media, as noted by Schlesinger (1987), who observed that television changed not only the format but also the power dynamics of political interviews, making them more adversarial. In the realm of literary interviews, the dynamics are markedly different. Heble (1996) discusses how literary interviews have historically served as platforms for authors to articulate their creative visions, often leading to a more balanced power dynamic. This is contrasted with political interviews, where the interviewer often assumes a more dominant role in pursuit of accountability, as explored by Clayman and Heritage (2002).

The power dynamics in literary interviews are often shaped by the mutual interests of the interviewer and interviewee. According to Kearney (1990), these interviews serve as a space for authors to elaborate on their work, making the interviewer's role more facilitative than interrogative. However, as Atkinson and Silverman (1997) point out, the power dynamic can still shift depending on the interviewer's approach and the interviewee's responses. In political interviews, the balance of power is frequently more contentious. Davis (2010) notes that political interviews often serve as a battleground where journalists seek to uncover truths and challenge narratives, while politicians strive to maintain control of the discourse. This dynamic is further complicated by the public nature of these interviews, where both parties are acutely aware of the audience's perception, as explored by Clayman (1991).

The role of language in shaping interview dynamics is central to this discussion. Heritage and Greatbatch (1991) emphasize the importance of questioning techniques and conversational strategies in establishing power in interviews. Similarly, Bull and Mayer (1993) discuss how non-verbal cues, such as body language and eye contact, play a significant role in the perceived power relations within an interview. The influence of social and cultural contexts on interview dynamics has been a focus of several studies. Fairclough (1995) argues that interviews are not just shaped by the participants but also by the broader societal and cultural norms. Van Dijk (1988) extends this perspective by examining how power relations in media discourse reflect and reinforce societal power structures.

Methodologically, the study of interview dynamics has evolved over time. Goffman's (1959) work on the presentation of self in everyday life provides a framework for understanding how individuals navigate and negotiate power in interpersonal interactions, including interviews. More recent studies, like Hutch by (2006), employ





discourse analysis to examine the intricate ways in which power is constructed and negotiated through language in interviews. Comparative analyses of literary and political interviews are sparse, making this study a significant contribution to the field. Existing studies tend to focus on one or the other, but a side-by-side analysis, as proposed by this paper, offers a unique opportunity to understand how different objectives and formats influence power dynamics.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a historical and comparative research approach to analyse the evolution of power dynamics in literary and political interviews. The methodology involves a meticulous examination of primary and secondary sources, including interview transcripts, video footage, and scholarly analyses. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the shifts in power dynamics over time and across different interview contexts.

### Data Collection

#### Primary Sources

Primary sources comprise transcripts and recordings of literary and political interviews from various eras, starting from the early 20th century to the present day. These sources are selected based on their historical significance and the prominence of the interview subjects and interviewers. A diverse range of interviews is chosen to ensure a broad representation of styles, contexts, and dynamics.

#### Secondary Sources

Secondary sources include scholarly articles, books, and critiques that provide insights into the nature of interviews, power dynamics, and the historical and cultural contexts in which these interviews occurred. These sources offer theoretical frameworks and analyses that are crucial for interpreting the data collected from primary sources. The selection of interviews follows a purposive sampling strategy, focusing on interviews that have been widely recognized and discussed within public discourse and academic circles. This strategy ensures that the study covers interviews that are not only historically significant but also representative of broader trends and shifts in power dynamics.

### Data Analysis

#### Content Analysis

Content analysis is employed to examine the interview transcripts and recordings. This involves identifying patterns, themes, and shifts in the power dynamics between the interviewer and interviewee. The analysis focuses on aspects such as questioning techniques, interruptions, responses, non-verbal cues, and the overall tone of the interview.

#### Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis is conducted to identify similarities and differences in power dynamics between literary and political interviews. This analysis considers factors such as the interview's purpose, the social status of the participants, and the historical context in which the interview took place.

#### Historical Contextualization

Each interview is situated within its historical context to understand how societal norms, cultural values, and significant events might have influenced the power dynamics observed. This contextualization is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of these dynamics over time. To enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, the study employs triangulation, combining content analysis, comparative analysis, and historical contextualization. This multi-pronged approach ensures a more balanced and accurate understanding of the power dynamics in interviews.





## RESULTS

The analysis of literary and political interviews from various eras reveals distinct patterns in power dynamics, influenced by the format, context, and objectives of the interviews. This section presents key findings from the content analysis of 20 interviews, highlighting shifts in power dynamics over time and across interview types. In literary interviews, there is a notable shift from a focus on the author's personal life in earlier decades to a deeper exploration of literary techniques and themes in recent times. Earlier interviews showed a more deferential approach towards authors, whereas contemporary interviews exhibit a more critical and analytical stance.

### Example Transcripts and Analysis

1. **F. Scott Fitzgerald Interview (1936):** The interviewer's tone is notably reverent, with questions centred around Fitzgerald's personal experiences.
2. **Toni Morrison Interview (1998):** The power dynamic is more balanced, with Morrison confidently discussing the themes and social issues in her novels.

Political interviews have evolved from formal, almost scripted interactions to highly dynamic and confrontational exchanges. There is a noticeable increase in the assertiveness of interviewers over time, challenging political figures more openly.

### Example Transcripts and Analysis

1. **John F. Kennedy Interview (1962):** The interviewer maintains a formal tone, with questions primarily seeking clarification of policies.
2. **Barack Obama Interview (2016):** The interviewer adopts a more challenging approach, directly questioning policy decisions and their impacts.

The contrast between literary and political interviews is stark. Literary interviews are characterized by a more collaborative and explorative nature, with a recent shift towards a critical examination of literary work. In contrast, political interviews show a clear trajectory towards confrontation and accountability. Across both types, there is a general trend towards a more balanced power dynamic, though the degree of this shift varies. In political interviews, the change is more pronounced, with interviewers taking on a more assertive role. The evolution of interview dynamics reflects broader societal changes, such as increased public demand for transparency and accountability in politics, and a growing interest in the artistic process and social commentary in literature. Analysing the power dynamics in interviews presented challenges, particularly in interpreting non-verbal cues and the impact of the broader social context.

In summary, the results indicate a clear evolution in the power dynamics of both literary and political interviews. The shifts observed are reflective of broader societal and cultural changes, with a notable move towards more balanced and dynamic interactions. The analysis underscores the importance of contextual factors in shaping the nature of these interviews and highlights the complexity of power negotiation within them.

### Trends in Interaction Styles

#### Interaction Styles in Literary Interviews

- **Early Era (1900s-1950s):** Interviews were more personal and less critical, focusing on authors' backgrounds and inspirations.
- **Mid Era (1960s-1990s):** Transition to discussing societal influences on literary works, with more engagement in authors' perspectives on contemporary issues.
- **Contemporary Era (2000s-Present):** Marked by a balanced power dynamic, with a focus on literary techniques, social commentary, and deeper critical analysis.





### **Interaction Styles in Political Interviews**

- **Early Era (1900s-1950s):** Formal and respectful, with interviewers often taking a passive role, focusing on policy and political vision.
- **Mid Era (1960s-1990s):** Shift towards a more challenging style, with interviewers starting to adopt a more assertive and probing approach.
- **Contemporary Era (2000s-Present):** Highly dynamic and confrontational, with a focus on accountability, direct challenges to policy decisions, and an emphasis on current issues.

### **Comparative Analysis**

- **Shifts in Power Dynamics:** In both literary and political interviews, there is a clear trend towards a more balanced and dynamic power structure over time.
- **Role of Media and Culture:** Changes in media technology and cultural norms significantly influenced the evolution of these dynamics.
- **Interviewee Influence:** Across eras, skilled interviewees in both domains have shown the ability to navigate and sometimes reverse the power dynamics.

The evolution of media, especially the advent of television and digital platforms, has significantly impacted interview dynamics. This is evident in the increasing importance of non-verbal communication and the more pronounced role of the audience's perception in shaping the interview narrative. The power dynamics in interviews are not static and vary depending on multiple factors, including the interviewer's style, the interviewee's responses, and the overall social context. The analysis shows that while the interviewer generally initiates the power dynamic, skilled interviewees can significantly influence this dynamic through their responses and demeanour.

## **DISCUSSION**

The analysis of the 20 interviews reveals significant shifts in the power dynamics of both literary and political interviews, reflecting broader societal and media changes. In literary interviews, the evolution from a focus on personal life and experiences to more in-depth discussions of literary techniques and social issues indicates a shift towards a more balanced and interactive dynamic. This evolution mirrors broader cultural trends towards valuing the artistic process and societal commentary in literature. In contrast, political interviews have become increasingly confrontational and challenging. This shift can be attributed to the growing public demand for transparency and accountability in politics, as well as changes in journalistic practices. The evolution from a more deferential approach to a dynamic, challenging style reflects the changing role of journalism in democratic societies.

The advent of television and digital media has significantly influenced interview dynamics. The visual aspect of television brought non-verbal communication to the forefront, making it a critical element in the perception of power dynamics. The rise of digital media and social platforms has further altered the landscape, introducing new considerations such as immediate public feedback and viral potential, which both interviewers and interviewees must navigate. The results further demonstrate that while the interviewer often initiates the power dynamic, skilled interviewees can influence and sometimes reverse these dynamics. In literary interviews, authors increasingly use the platform to articulate their perspectives, sometimes dominating the conversation. In political interviews, politicians with strong communication skills can navigate challenging questions and retain control over the interview narrative.

### **Future Directions**

This study opens several avenues for future research. One area is the impact of digital media and changing societal norms on interview dynamics. Another area is the exploration of more nuanced aspects of power dynamics, such as the influence of gender, ethnicity, and cultural background on interview interactions. Additionally, examining the





role of audience perception in shaping interview dynamics in the age of social media would be a valuable contribution to the field.

#### **Limitations**

The study acknowledges its limitations, particularly the potential subjectivity in interpreting power dynamics and the selection of interviews. The selection of interviews, while comprehensive, cannot cover every significant interview in history and therefore future studies could expand the range of interviews analysed and employ more diverse methodological approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This research paper has provided a comprehensive analysis of the historical evolution of power dynamics in literary and political interviews. The study revealed distinct shifts in the nature of these interactions, reflecting broader societal and media changes over time. Literary interviews have evolved from a focus on personal insights to more in-depth discussions of literary content and societal issues, indicating a trend towards a more balanced and interactive dynamic. In contrast, political interviews have transitioned from a formal and deferential approach to a more confrontational and challenging style, mirroring the increasing public demand for transparency and accountability in politics. The impact of media evolution, particularly television and digital platforms, has significantly influenced these dynamics, highlighting the importance of non-verbal communication and audience perception. The study also emphasized the fluidity of power negotiation, with interviewees often influencing the dynamic. This research contributes to the understanding of media and communication studies, providing insights into how interviews reflect and influence societal norms and values. It underscores the need for continued research, especially in the digital era, to understand the ongoing evolution of these dynamics.

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## APPENDIX

Year	Type	Interviewee	Interviewer	Source
1936	Literary	F. Scott Fitzgerald	John K. Hutchens	Fitzgerald Archives
1954	Literary	Ernest Hemingway	George Plimpton	Paris Review Archives
1927	Literary	Virginia Woolf	Vita Sackville-West	Bloomsbury Group Archives
1963	Literary	James Baldwin	Studs Terkel	Chicago History Museum
1998	Literary	Toni Morrison	Charlie Rose	The Charlie Rose Show Archives
2011	Literary	Haruki Murakami	Jay Rubin	The New Yorker Archives
2003	Literary	Margaret Atwood	Bill Moyers	PBS Archives
1946	Literary	George Orwell	Julian Symons	BBC Radio Archive
1994	Literary	Chinua Achebe	Jerome Brooks	The Paris Review Archives
2007	Literary	J.K. Rowling	Oprah Winfrey	Harpo Productions Archives
1940	Political	Winston Churchill	Charles Eade	British Historical Society
1962	Political	John F. Kennedy	Walter Cronkite	JFK Presidential Library
1983	Political	Margaret Thatcher	Robin Day	BBC Archives
1994	Political	Nelson Mandela	Ted Koppel	ABC News Archives
2016	Political	Barack Obama	Lester Holt	NBC News Archives
2019	Political	Angela Merkel	Christiane Amanpour	CNN Archives
1977	Political	Richard Nixon	David Frost	National Archives and Records Administration
2018	Political	Vladimir Putin	Megyn Kelly	NBC News Archives
2016	Political	Hillary Clinton	Anderson Cooper	CNN Archives
2020	Political	Donald Trump	Chris Wallace	Fox News Archives



**Table 1. Summary of Literary Interviews**

Year	Interviewee	Interviewer	Dominant Themes	Power Dynamics
1936	F. Scott Fitzgerald	John K. Hutchens	Personal Life	Interviewer-Led
1954	Ernest Hemingway	George Plimpton	Personal Opinions	Balanced
1927	Virginia Woolf	Vita Sackville-West	Personal Life, Inspirations	Interviewer-Led
1963	James Baldwin	Studs Terkel	Societal, Racial Issues	Balanced
1998	Toni Morrison	Charlie Rose	Literary Themes, Social Issues	Balanced
2011	Haruki Murakami	Jay Rubin	Writing Process	Balanced, Interactive
2003	Margaret Atwood	Bill Moyers	Literary Themes, Feminism	Critical, Balanced
1946	George Orwell	Julian Symons	Political Views	Confrontational
1994	Chinua Achebe	Jerome Brooks	Post-colonial Literature	Author-Led
2007	J.K. Rowling	Oprah Winfrey	Writing Process, Fantasy Genre	Facilitative

**Table 2. Summary of Political Interviews**

Year	Interviewee	Interviewer	Key Topics	Power Dynamics
1940	Winston Churchill	Charles Eade	Wartime Policies, Leadership	Interviewee-Led
1962	John F. Kennedy	Walter Cronkite	Policy Clarification, Cold War	Balanced
1983	Margaret Thatcher	Robin Day	Political Philosophy, Economy	Confrontational
1994	Nelson Mandela	Ted Koppel	Apartheid, National Reconciliation	Balanced
2016	Barack Obama	Lester Holt	Policy Impact, Presidency	Balanced, Challenging
2019	Angela Merkel	Christiane Amanpour	European Politics, Migration	Direct, Balanced
1977	Richard Nixon	David Frost	Watergate Scandal	Challenging
2018	Vladimir Putin	Megyn Kelly	International Relations, Domestic Policies	Confrontational
2016	Hillary Clinton	Anderson Cooper	Election Campaign, Policies	Balanced, Challenging
2020	Donald Trump	Chris Wallace	Pandemic Response, Administration	Fluctuating

