

Who is Martin McGuinness? On Contextualizing Reported Political Talk.

(Originally published in S. Cmejrkova et al (Eds.) Dialogue Analysis 6, Vol. 2, Tübingen: Niemeyer. (pp. 217-224).

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### Synopsis

1. Martin McGuinness appears on British TV in “On the Record”.
2. British national papers report his performance on the program.
3. Contextualizations in newspaper reports.
4. Proximal and distal contexts, the concept of dialogical network.
5. Contextualizations in television interviews.
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#### 1. Martin McGuinness appears on British TV in “On the Record”.

London, Sunday 23/10/1994. Our subject, Martin McGuinness, was in London for the first time in 22 years. When he returned to Northern Ireland, he left behind him, in Monday's newspapers, some interesting headlines. These are some of them: “Major backs unity, claims Sinn Fein” (Daily Mail), “Sinn Fein claims unity “assurance”” (Times), “Sinn Fein deputy in united Ireland storm.” (Daily Mirror), “Row as Sinn Fein Boss Exploits End of Mainland Ban (Daily Express), “Sinn Fein stir “secret deal” row” (Today), “Boast over unity by McGuinness” and “Violence may return if IRA hopes are thwarted says McGuinness” (Daily Telegraph), “Bumpy Ride.” (Guardian), and “McGuinness stirs up a storm” (Phoblacht).

So we know McGuinness is a deputy leader of Sinn Fein, but what did he do to raise such a storm? He was interviewed on the BBC television programme “On the Record”. This goes out every Sunday lunch time, hosted by John Humphrys. Humphrys usually interviews a political figure of some importance. His aim, like that of all the TV hosts, is to maximise the ratings of his program; he achieves this by getting his politicians to make, in public, politically significant and if possible controversial claims. He is usually successful - what his guests have said is regularly reported in the next day national papers, and other politicians react. In effect, many of his interviews are significant political events, not just entertainment. The programme audience members millions; this includes journalists, politicians, and analysts of discourse.

#### 2. British national papers report his performance on the program.

So what did McGuinness say in the “On the record” interview? Let us look under the headline of the “Daily Mirror”, a tabloid with Labour Party leanings. (It used to be Robert Maxwell's flagship.)

PAGE 2 DAILY MIRROR, Monday, October 24, 1994

#### **Sinn Fein deputy in united Ireland storm**

SINN Fein's Martin McGuinness yesterday sensationally claimed that the government was secretly working for a united Ireland.

The deputy to Gerry Adams, making his first trip across the Irish Sea for 22 years, rocked the boat in a TV interview.

He said: "In March last year I had a meeting with a representative of the British Government."

"He said the outcome of all that Britain was trying to do would be that the island would be as one." McGuinness refused to disclose whether his contact was a civil servant or a politician.

But he bragged: "We have set the agenda and everyone else is jumping to the Irish Republican tune."

His claim on BBC TV's *On The Record* programme was denounced as "patent nonsense" by Ulster supremo Sir Patrick Mayhew. He said: "No government representative has ever been or ever will be authorised to say that it supports a united Ireland unless it is by the consent of the people of Northern Ireland."

Even Sinn Fein tacticians were dismayed to hear their deputy leader's loose talk less than 48 hours after the exclusion order that kept him out of Britain was lifted by John Major.

The *Mirror* journalist first reports, indirectly, that McGuinness "sensationally claimed" that the British Government is "secretly working for united Ireland" (first paragraph). This is certainly a very reportable claim, if it had been made, and an astonishing news, if true. The indirect report of such political significance, made in the journalist's voice, needs a warrant. And the reader is indeed provided with one - what McGuinness had actually said is reported directly in third and fourth paragraphs. So the *Mirror* journalist quotes McGuinness twice on the same point but despite this, there seems to be no obvious redundancy. Why? The indirect report is presented to the *Mirror* readers as the journalist's assessment of what McGuinness has said; the direct report is the evidence for the assessment, its backing. But why does the journalist not use just the direct quote? This is arguably related to the management of voice polyphony in the report. It has been shown in several studies that even the talk in quotes - the directly reported talk - is not always verbatim. There is usually some editing and co-authoring (e.g. Leudar, 1995; Redeker, 1991; Tannen, 1992). Instead, the quotation marks in the *Mirror* article indicate that the voice of the quote is that of McGuinness. So the indirect and direct quotes are in two different voices - one is the journalist's, the other politician's. This ironic voice "duet" has the effect of distancing the Journalist from McGuinness. McGuinness is, as we shall see, a controversial figure - an official of Sinn Fein, and thus possibly a terrorist. One is tempted to formulate a maxim: "Avoid speaking in one joint voice with terrorists." and to say that journalists follow it. (The "management" and "ownership" of the category "Sinn Fein" is contested, cf. Sachs, 1992, Part II, lecture 7).

Is this style of reporting political talk idiosyncratic to *Daily Mirror*? Only that one newspaper article is used here as an example but the analysis is in fact based on the reflections of the "On the Record" interview in *all* the national papers. The textual reporting strategy just outlined (indirect reports supported by direct quotes) is a common genre in British press, it is not just an invention of *Daily Mirror*.

### 3. Contextualizations in newspaper reports.

The main problem addressed in this paper is how speech reports are contextualized. One reason for looking at the reports of public political talk in newspapers is to determine what the participants in the process see as its relevant context. Is the context bound to the here and now of the talk, and if not, how are the absent actors recruited in? One can, so to say, use journalists as "participant analysts". So the point of interest is how the reported talk of McGuinness is contextualized in the *Mirror* piece.

The first notable point about the *Mirror* journalist's contextualizing practice is that he does not

provide the proximal sequential context of the quoted talk. All we are told is that the claim has been made in an interview, on a named public TV program. In fact, the journalist does not provide proximal context for any talk he reports (paragraphs 6 and 7). But this does not mean that there is no contextualization. Instead of providing or reporting the proximal contextual information, the reported claims are related to events which has taken place not in the interview, but elsewhere and elsewhere. (We are not here analysing precisely how this exophoric contextualization is achieved - the first aim is to establish what the contextualizations are.)

• First, McGuinness is said to have “rocked the boat in a TV interview”. So the talk is contextualized in terms of its negative effects on something unspecified, but clearly the “boat” is not the interview. Other newspapers say more. Today, another tabloid, said “The timing could not have been worse” and it spells out the possible consequences of what McGuinness had said in the interview on the “imminent summit of the Irish and British premiers”. Today also points out that the comments are likely to play “on Unionist fears of a “secret agenda” in the peace process”. So the contextualization is in terms of effects of the interview talk on the events outside of it. The contextualizing events, introduced by the Mirror journalist, are dialogical (the summit) and psychological (fears of the Unionists). In each case the actors in contextualizations are the key participants in the political conflict and negotiations.

• Second, the reported claim (paragraph 4) is paired with Sir Patrick Mayhew's subsequent “denouncement” of it (paragraph 6). (Note, by the way, that the textual formats of the reported claim and of the reported denouncement are the same). The Mirror explicitly formulates the relationship between the two quotes dialogically: McGuinness *claims* something in a TV studio, and the Sir Patrick Mayhew *denies* it subsequently, but elsewhere.

We are not told where Mayhew spoke, this seems irrelevant. Phoblacht is more specific on the circumstances of Mayhew's denial. It formulates them thus: “The story became the banner headline on British television news on Sunday and the publicity led Patrick Mayhew to issue a statement describing McGuinness” claims a “patent nonsense”.” Only Phoblacht reports McGuinnesses reaction to the Mayhew's denial:

Phoblacht, October 1994

Commenting on Mayhew's reaction to his TV interview, Martin McGuinness said:

“It is significant that Patrick Mayhew is not denying that a meeting took place between a British Government representative and myself. All he has indicated is that the British Government representative was not authorised to say that “the British were working towards a united Ireland”. This is an implicit admission that the comments were in fact made.

This comment is clearly a reaction to Mayhew but its actual time, space, and the proximal context are not specified. They do not seem to matter and one could say the comment is made in Phoblacht when it is published.

So what we have is a distributed argument sequence consisting of:

- a claim made by McGuinness on BBC TV on Sunday followed by
- a warranted denouncement performed by Mayhew in a press release later that Sunday, and finally
- a comment on the denouncement by McGuinness.

We say that the argument is distributed because the parties were not co-present in time and space. In fact, the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland are peculiar in that some participants rarely meet face to face,

and indeed some never do. Their discourse is mediated through mass media - television, radio, and newspapers. What the Mirror article does is to collect such distributed argument together in one place. This seems to be one general function of the newspapers in the distributed network of political events - to collect events relevant to each other in one place.

- Third, the embarrassed reaction of “Sinn Fein tacticians” is mentioned in the last paragraph of the article. This quote is a claim which is idiosyncratic to Daily Mirror. It is not backed and the function seems to be to manage McGuinness's political identity - there is something wrong with him, even in the eyes of his comrades. (Russell Jenkins, in Today, also “manages” the political identity of McGuinness when in the last paragraph he reports “the memorial service for the victims of an IRA bomb” reminding us of McGuinness's relationship to IRA (a terrorist organization).

Let us then summarise the analysis so far. First, what McGuinness had said in the interview is, in the article, not specified in its original proximal, sequential context (except through one verb of communication – see Leudar, 1995), but rather it is tied to events outside of the TV studio. Some of these are non-verbal (emotional reactions of the Ulster Unionists), others are verbal (e.g. denials by British Ministers). What matters to the journalist is the significance of what McGuinness has said to the other participants in the political process. McGuinness's claim and Mayhew's denouncement are a fragment of a distributed discursive network. Second, it seems that managing the political identity of a controversial political figure is an important part of doing the contextualizing in newspaper articles. In the case of McGuinness this involves managing the category he represents. Who are the Sinn Fein?

Now, did the Mirror journalist construct an artificial discursive network or did he bring together talk, and other events, which were always meant for each other by the participants? Are these contextualizations just journalists’ constructions, or correct assessments of mutual relevance of distributed events?

The first point is that the Mayhew's denouncement is real, not imagined. The second point is that the style and the details of contextualizations are not unique to Daily Mirror, they are common to all the national newspapers. All of them report the reaction of the British Government to what McGuinness had said. It could still be held that all the newspapers produce the same arbitrary constructions. So what needs to be determined is who McGuinness was speaking for in the interview, and whom was he addressing. Just the interviewer? Or somebody else in addition? What was actually said in the interview and how was it contextualized then and there?

Let us then turn to the interview. It starts with John Humphrys setting out the problem for the peace process as the polarisation of positions. The Protestant side is determined to maintain the union with the rest of the United Kingdom; the aim of the nationalist side is united Ireland. According to Humphrys, both opposing collectivities seem to assume that the British Government is siding with them, and thus, as he puts it “somebody (.) somewhere has either been deceived or is deceiving himself.” So the argument has a position for each party to the conflict, and McGuinness slots himself in this frame as a “nationalist”, arguing that the position of the opposing side (“Loyalists”) is untenable. The argument with Humphrys proceeds from there (1).

(1) McG&Hump, 23/10/1994

004 McG well I think it makes sense I think that er more and more people are are coming to accept (.) that there can be no internal settlement within the six counties (.) the reality is that the place where I live is a political slum that that that state is a slum (.) it has failed (.) and there can be no: papering over the cracks (..) the British Government have to accept (.) the right of various people to self-determination (.) and they have to accept (.) that that the Catholic and Protestant communities (.) in Ireland (.) can live at

peace (.) if we're allowed by the British Government. (..)

005 JH but the Unionist cease-fire (.) is (.) firmly deeply totally rooted in the belief that the Union is secure (.) so (.) they are being deceived? (..)

006 McG well it's quite clear that nothing (.) is secure. it's quite clear that everything is about to go into the melting pot and it's quite clear that many people within the British establishment accept (..) which I think is very significant and that the British Prime Minister John Major on Friday said (.) that he accepted there could be no an internal settlement. this has been repeated by Michael Ancram the minister for political development (.) at the NIO (.) and they have made it quite clear (.) or by implication in my opinion (.) that that the state in which I live has failed that the partition of Ireland (.) has er been a disaster (.) that British rule has not worked (.) and it's quite clear after seventy years that there is an expectation now (.) not just in Ireland but in Britain as well (..) and I think within the the international community (.) that there must be er (.) change and that change must be fundamental (.) political and constitutional.

007 JH well you say that but the British establishment as you described it has (..) made it abundantly clear to the Unionists that (.) to repeat that phrase "the union is secure", it is absolutely safe, (.) there's no argument about that (.)

008 McG well I think there's considerable debate about that and I think that er Albert Reynolds, George ((sic)) Hume (.) and ourselves have got an awful lot to say about this and the inevitable eh political negotiations (.) which will take place it's quite that everything is going to er go into the melting pot (.) and I think it's also quite clear that many people accept (.) that there has to be fundamental change (..)

009 JH you seem to be suggesting in that other answer that er the British Government's (..) private position (..) may perhaps be different from its publicly stated position

010 McG (..) well I should remind people that in March of last year I did have a meeting with er a representative of the British Government (..) who said to us that the eventual outcome of all that Britain was trying to do (.) would be that that the island would be as one (..) and I think that there's no doubt whatsoever that there are people within the British establishment (..) who are clearly having a rethink about their position (..) eh in Ireland as it stands at the moment (.) many people particularly in the in the twenty six counties believe that what is actually happening (.) is that the British Government are slowly but surely (.) disengaging from Ireland. (.) I think we have to test this in in the forthcoming talks (.) and we are quite interested in er speaking to the British Government (.) about all of these matters.

011 JH how senior was the figure who gave you that assurance? (..)

012 McG well as far as I'm concerned he was there and he was er there on the authority (.) of the British Prime Minister John Major (.) and the Secretary of State er for Northern Ireland er Sir Patrick Mayhew =

013 JH =a |civil servant | or a politician

014 McG | (???) | =there's no doubt about that (.)

015 JH |was this

016 McG |well I'm I'm not going to identify who the person is but I'm quite satisfied (.) that he was there with the full authority of the British Prime Minister (.) there's no doubt about that whatsoever (.)

The talk by Martin McGuinness which the newspapers have reported is to be found in his turn (010). We can see that the reports were *reasonably* verbatim, but the talk is stripped of contextual cues. This indicates that what has been said is being de-contextualized or re-contextualized in the report. But what about the contextualizations done by McGuinness and Humphrys in the interview?

## 5. Contextualizations in television interviews.

McGuinness is obviously addressing Humphrys. Humphrys has just challenged his view that the British Government share the view that the partition of Ireland has failed (005-007) and is on its way out. Humphrys has raised the possibility that the British Government speaks with two tongues (009). McGuinness counter argues these points by reporting on his meeting with a Northern Ireland Office official, whom he indeed refuses to identify, as the Mirror reports (016). Proximally, in the sequential structure of the interview "I did have a meeting with er a representative of the British Government (..) who

said to us that the eventual outcome of all that Britain was trying to do (.) would be that that the island would be as one (..) “ works as a backing of a counterargument. But still, is McGuinness talking *just* to Humphrys? No, he sets up the target of his talk broadly, he starts the his turn thus: “(..) well I should remind people that “ (010), broadcasting what he says outside of the interview. In other words what he says is “interdiscursive” (this word substituting for “inter-textual”), addressed both *within* and *out* of the interview. It seems warranted to report what he had said as a “claim”.

So McGuinness does not talk just to the present interviewer. He talks to political actors elsewhere, some of whom, as we have seen, react. Now who does he (and Humphrys) speak for? Just for himself? Or for collectivities with which he is or wishes to be aligned? What are these and how are they managed in the interview?

In his initial formulation of the problems in Northern Ireland, Humphrys has brought in parties and events not bounded by the studio - the IRA cease-fire, Mr Major's acceptance of it, Ulster Unionist and the juxtaposed of Sinn Fein/IRA. Right from start, the dialogue was oriented at parties and events beyond the here-and-now of the interview. This becomes even more clear as the interview progresses. In (005) Humphrys contradicts McGuinness hopes for negotiations, not by reference to what he *himself* believes about the logic of the peace process, but explicitly reporting the beliefs of the Unionists: “but the Unionist cease-fire (.) is (.) firmly deeply totally rooted in the belief that the Union is secure” (005). McGuinness does not challenge the *relevance* of this contextualization, he implicitly accepts it by contesting the validity of the reported Unionist beliefs (006). This “moving out” of the here-and-now is ubiquitous in the interview.

An interesting strategy is to talk in hybrid voices (cf. Bakhtin, 1984). In (006) McGuinness recruits the British establishment to his side, without apparent irony in his voice. He brings Major and Ancram into the dialogue, as his allies. His characterisation of their sentiments is very much his own, especially as he imperceptibly shifts, from speaking for the British establishment, to speaking for himself. Humphrys notes the alignment with a rather subtle irony (saying “the British establishment as you described it”) and responds in kind by positioning the “British Establishment” as allies of “the Unionists” (007). So an interesting method of bringing the absent actors into an argument is to recruit them as allies and to speak with them alongside.

But who does McGuinness speak for at different points in the interview, and in the newspaper reports? The headlines in most newspaper articles identified McGuinness with Sinn Fein. There is an interesting relevant infelicity in Daily Mirror's direct quote “We have set the agenda and everyone else is jumping to the Irish Republican tune.” In fact, McGuinness did not say “we”, he said “Irish republicans”. For Daily Mirror, however, McGuinness is an Irish republican, and speaks for them. McGuinness would not quarrel with this positioning as (2) shows.

(2) (McG&Dim/12/3/95)

001 Dim Er (..) Mr McGuinness I want to test (..) your commitment to the peace process (..) Before entering direct talks with you (..) the Secretary of State (.) wants you to make clear (.) that you will give him assurances (.) about (.) your commitment (..) to get rid (.) of weapons. Can you give such assurances? (..)

002 McGWell Sinn Fein's position is quite clear and has been clear for some time. (.) Our project is to take the guns all the guns (.) British and Irish (.) out of Irish politics that's what we're about. (..) And what people have to recognise and understand (.) is that Sinn Fein have been involved (..) in this process for quite some time not just since the start of the cease fire (..) but for many ah years before. (..)

McGuinness is asked to “give assurances”; he explicitly responds for Sinn Fein and this positioning is

accepted without a comment by the interviewer. McGuinness is aligned with Sinn Fein. But, who are Sinn Fein? Is “Sinn Fein” a finished concept, ready to hand, and mutually agreed on by everyone? Indeed not. Sinn Fein is a category with contested ownership, and it is managed in arguments. This is clear in (3).

(3) McG&Hump, 23/10/1994

045 JH as far as you know the IRA is prepared to sit and wait for you as long as is necessary=

046 McG =I am not a spokesperson | for the IRA, I can't comment

047 JH | no I didn't I didn't say you were although many people say you speak for them but (.) the fact is as far as you are concerned (...) they will wait, | indefinitely

048 McG | as far as as far I am concerned Irish republicans (.) will exhaust (.) this peace process (.) Irish republicans are totally committed (.) to the success of the peace process (...) Irish republicans have set the agenda (...) everybody else is jumping (.) to the Irish republican tune (..) I'm not saying that in a triumphalist way but it's eh clearly (.) has been in evidence for some time (..)

In (045) Humphrys invited McGuinness, to comment on the IRA position, “as far as (he) knows” it. This necessitates and *occasions* argumentative work on the category “Sinn Fein”. McGuinness immediately and explicitly rejected any alignment with the IRA (046). He does not see himself as a “spokesperson for the IRA” or Sinn Fein as a front for it. Humphrys retreated for himself (047), but maintained the connection between McGuinness and the IRA for others, saying “many people say you speak for them.” (The Mirror's bragging quote originates in (048).) How does McGuinness see Sinn Fein, if not as a public face of the IRA?

(4) McG&Hum, 23/10/94

030 ...it's quite clear that we are now moving (.) fairly quickly into a rapidly developing situation (.)and there is much hope (.)there is a very real opportunity now (.) for all the parties to this conflict (.) to get together and work out a new future (.) for all the people of Ireland(.) we've been working at this for several years (..) and we are now seeing that that the dividends of that paying off (..)

## 6. Contesting political identity in discursive networks.

McGuinness positions Sinn Fein, and himself, as a participant in the peace process, alongside with the other parties. Elsewhere his argument draws on the electoral mandate of Sinn Fein - when he comes to negotiations it is as a representative of a democratically elected party. His opponents, though, see him as a proxy for the IRA and hence terrorism. It is important to be clear about the following though: there are not two separate concepts of “Sinn Fein”. “Sinn Fein” is a disjunctive concept, distributed over the parties to the conflict, which is however coordinated and managed in their conflict. So the point of contention about the political identity of McGuinness is: is he a terrorist to be rejected and abhorred, the canonical Other of our days; or is he a well meaning representative of one party in a tragic conflict?

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