Telling it like it is or just telling a good story?

Editing techniques in news coverage of the British parliamentary expenses scandal

Peter Bull, Ralph Negrine and Katie Hawn
Department of Psychology, University of York, UK / Department of Journalism, University of Sheffield, UK / Department of Communication, University of California at Santa Barbara, USA

According to recent research, there has been a marked shift in television new journalism from a fact-based to a more interpretive style, through editing techniques such as *de-contextualization* and *re-contextualization*. The aim of this study was to investigate whether such techniques might be identified in British news bulletins, broadcast during the parliamentary expenses scandal of 2009. Audio-visual clips utilized by more than one television channel were identified, in order to analyze the interpretation of identical audio-visual content across different news bulletins. In addition, clips taken from House of Commons debates were checked against Hansard (the written record of all parliamentary proceedings). Specific editing techniques identified were: contextualization before and after an utterance; interpolation; and the creation of imaginary dialogues. News bulletins were conceptualized as a form of narrative, with politicians as actors, political journalists as narrators, and clips from different political events edited into the overall framework of an interpretive storyline.

Keywords: television news, news editing, British parliamentary expenses scandal, de-contextualisation, re-contextualisation

The television news is for many people the main — and sometimes the only — source of information about political events (Johnson-Cartee 2005). According to a substantive body of research (e.g., Ekström, 2001; Eriksson, 2011; Salgado and Strömbäck 2012), there has been a marked shift in journalistic practice in television news away from a fact-based to a more interpretive style, characterized by a "greater emphasis on the 'meaning' of news beyond the facts and statements of sources" (Salgado and Strömbäck 2012, 145). According to Eriksson (2011, 66), politicians in old style news journalism politicians were "set up to talk more

Lang
ISSN

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

directly to the viewer", such that viewers were was able to formulate their own judgements about the politician's utterance. Today, "viewers are given ready-made packages of ideas of what is going on in politics and how it should be understood". Although there is still ongoing debate about what interpretive journalism actually means in practice (e.g., Salgado and Strömbäck), the interpretive view of contemporary television news is now widely held.

In the study reported here, an innovative methodological approach to the analysis of news editing was introduced, based on bulletins broadcast during the British parliamentary "expenses scandal" of 2009. This major political scandal was triggered by the leak and subsequent publication in the broadsheet *The Daily Telegraph* (in daily installments from 8 May 2009) of expenses claims made by Members of Parliament (MPs) in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords over several years. These claims were considered to show blatant misuse of the expenses system for personal gain by many MPs across all parties, including government and shadow cabinet ministers. The scandal dominated the British media for weeks, and made headlines on all the major television news channels over a three-week period, notably *BBC Ten O Clock News*, *Sky News at Ten,* and *Channel Four News*.

Given that the scandal was so widely reported, it was possible to identify specific audio-visual clips, which were utilized by more than one news channel. Thereby, analyses could be conducted of how identical audio-visual content (or parts thereof) could be interpreted differently across different news bulletins. A second technique was to compare audio-visual recordings of debates in the House of Commons with Hansard (the written record of all parliamentary proceedings). Hansard, it should be noted, is not a full verbatim record of parliamentary proceedings. It is intended to be "substantially the verbatim report, with repetitions and redundancies omitted and with obvious mistakes corrected, but which on the other hand leaves out nothing that adds to the meaning of the speech or illustrates the argument" (May 2004, 260). Notably, however, Hansard is intended to be comprehensive. Thereby, it provides the researchers with a tool to assess the extent to which selective editing might have occurred in audio-visual recordings of parliament, as broadcast on the television news.

Using both these methods, an analysis was conducted of editing techniques in news bulletins, as broadcast during in the British parliamentary expenses scandal. The analysis was conceptualized in terms of what has been referred to as "decontextualization" and "re-contextualization" by Ekström (2001) and Eriksson (2011) in their analyses of Swedish news broadcasts. Eriksson's research was based on news bulletins broadcast in 1978, 1993, and 2003 (the programmes *Rapport*, *Aktuellt*, and *Nyheterna),* Ekström's on the same news programmes as broadcast in 1998 and 1999. Thus, a further research aim was to test the extent to which

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

concepts as developed in research on Swedish television news might be applicable in the British context.

Most of the clips analyzed by Ekström (2001) and Eriksson originate from independent events (e.g., news conferences, speeches, or interviews), but before inclusion in the bulletin, these clips are extracted from their original source (typically an interview). Typically, the edited segment does not include the interview question that prompted the answer or the initial context for the interview. As a result, the clip becomes merely a sound bite or utterance that contributes to the journalist's representation of the story. In practice, then, a clip is removed from its original context (de-contextualized), and set in a new one by the journalist (re-contextualized). The viewer is thus reliant on the journalist's voiceover to make sense of the politician's utterance as it relates to the news story. In essence, a journalist can re-contextualize virtually any utterance from a politician.

To accomplish re-contextualization, Ekström (2001) identified four different journalistic strategies:

1. The reporter's voice reformulates the original question in the voiceover before the politician's utterance is transmitted. By rewording the question and establishing a background, the comments provided by the interviewee are used to support the journalistic goals of the story.
2. The reporter not only re-contextualizes the content of the utterance, but may also attribute to the politician underlying thoughts and emotions.
3. Reporters may oversimplify and generalize to keep their story moving forward. This may happen not only with a summary of an event, but also with the summary of a politician's actions or thoughts. While this may facilitate quick and productive means of storytelling, situations that are glossed over with generalizations may also lead to gaps in knowledge and misinterpretation.
4. Answers from different interviews may be put together to form an imaginary "dialogue" (Ekström, 2001, 579). This may involve two different politicians, although for the strategy to work effectively, each actor must be talking about the same subject and have some grammatical consistency in their answers. An imaginary dialogue may also be created for one person, by compiling different interview clips to form a single answer for that broadcast. If done effectively, the response will seem seamless to the audience, appearing to be simply a longer response to a question than a quick utterance.

Notably, Eriksson (2011) has built on this research to develop the concept of the news broadcasts as a narrative. This Eriksson (2011, 54) defined as the way "different sequences or elements of talk are organized in news stories." These elements are the narrators, usually the anchor or a journalist, and different characters, such as politicians and other interviewees. Narratives comprise edited clips from different

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

events that are fitted into the broadcast, as well as a narration that provides the overall framework for a coherent news story.

Thus, the news anchor provides context by introducing the story before cutting to the journalist's piece (Eriksson 2011; Salgado and Strömbäck 2012). Once the narrative has begun, the reporter explains what the story is about, localizes its time and place, describes the involved characters, and moves the plot forward by linking various sequences together (Ekström 2001). The journalist may also describe politicians in terms of their thoughts, feelings, and actions before cutting to politicians' comments. This style of narrative reporting not only provides facts, but also gives the journalist considerable freedom in interpretation both when telling the story, and in piecing it together.

In the context of Ekström (2001) and Eriksson's (2011) Swedish research, it is important to appreciate the impact of recent technological changes within news journalism on re-contextualization. In the Swedish news bulletins broadcast in 1978, answers were fully synchronized with pictures of the politician, so that the viewer could observe the answer from start to finish. In later periods, the politician's answers may be covered with pictures, or the viewer may hear the politician speaking before they see his/her image on the screen, or the picture may shift to something else before s/he has finished talking. Clips from two originally separate parts of one answer (or even from two different answers) may be spliced together to form what appears to be one continuous answer. Today's technology allows news journalists to make very precise cuts and edits, thereby choosing which part of an answer to reproduce. These cuts are almost impossible for viewers to detect, so they cannot tell whether an answer is genuine. Thus, through this technology, news journalism has greater power than ever before over what constitutes an answer.

In summary, the overall aim of this paper was to investigate the extent to which techniques of de-contextualization and re-contextualization as identified by Ekström (2001) and Eriksson (2011) in their analyses of Swedish news broadcasts could also be identified in British news broadcasts, based specifically on news coverage of the parliamentary expenses scandal of 2009.

Method

The news broadcasts

53 news bulletins from Sky, BBC, and Channel 4 News broadcast during the height of the parliamentary expenses scandal on weekdays between 11 May and 3 June 2009.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

Apparatus

DVD recordings of all 53 news broadcasts.
MacBook DVD player.
Transcripts of news broadcasts.
Hansard

Procedure

All broadcasts also included items on other issues besides the parliamentary expenses scandal, but only those items relating to the parliamentary expenses scandal were transcribed in full.

From these transcripts, nine scenarios were identified where the same clip of film was utilized by more than one news channel. Editorial comment by the anchor and/or journalist relating to each clip was then content analyzed. Where video extracts were shown of debates in the House of Commons, these were checked against Hansard to assess whether any video editing had taken place. On the basis of these analyses, and following the work of Ekström (2001) and Eriksson (2011), a fourfold typology of editing techniques was devised, and applied to each of the nine scenarios. In the Results section, the nine scenarios and the fourfold typology are reported, together with an illustrative example for each of the four categories in the typology.

Results

1. The nine scenarios

The nine scenarios are listed below, together with dates and details of the TV channels on which they were broadcast. In total, there were 23 video clips. Contextual information for each scenario is provided below,

1.1 Hazel Blears and her cheque

The Daily Telegraph reported that Hazel Blears (Labour MP for Salford) had made a £45,000 profit on the sale of a London flat without paying capital gains tax (the Telegraph, 8 May). On 12 May she volunteered to pay the £13,332 capital gains tax she had avoided on the sale of her "second home". As a result of these allegations, Blears appeared on Sky and BBC News (twice) showcasing her cheque to the Inland Revenue. Despite this attempt to appease her constituents, Blears announced her resignation as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on 3 June.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

1.2 Julie Kirkbride

Julie Kirkbride (former Conservative MP for Bromsgrove) and her husband Andrew MacKay (former Conservative MP for Bracknell) owned two homes: one in her constituency of Bromsgrove, the other a house close to Parliament in Westminster, but were claiming Additional Costs Allowance for both homes (so-called "double-dipping"). This meant that "they effectively had no main home but two second homes — and were using public funds to pay for both of them" (*The Telegraph*, 14 May). A long statement from Kirkbride was broadcast on Sky from which an edited clip was broadcast on Channel 4 (27 May).

1.3 David Cameron's apology

Three days after the expenses scandal broke (12 May), David Cameron (at that time Leader of the Conservative Opposition) held a press conference to apologize to constituents on behalf of the MPs, promising that those who abused their allowances would pay the money back. Clips from the press conference were broadcast on both the BBC and Sky (12 May).

1.4 Gordon Brown's "Gentlemen's Club"

In a press conference (19 May), Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown stated: "Westminster cannot operate like some gentleman's club where the members make up the rules and operate them among themselves". The clear implication was that the previous rules allowed MPs to act in their own interests, rather than in the interests of the country as a whole. This clip was broadcast on both BBC and Sky (19 May).

1.5 Gordon Brown and David Cameron on leadership

At Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) (13 May), David Cameron challenged Gordon Brown about leadership. This scene was broadcast on all three television channels (13 May).

1.6 The Speaker's apology

When the scandal broke, the Speaker (Michael Martin) initially directed blame toward MPs for talking to the press, instead of addressing the issue of whether their expenses claims were justified. Because of the public outcry and criticism of his response from other MPs, the Speaker made a public apology in the House of

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

Commons, which was broadcast the same day on all three television channels (18 May).

1.7 The Speaker's rebuke to Kate Hoey

On 11 May, Labour MP Kate Hoey criticized the Speaker in the House of Commons for his handling of the expenses scandal, and was then publicly rebuked by him. This rebuke was broadcast on the BBC, and twice on Sky News (11 and 19 May).

1.8 The Speaker's resignation

As a result of his failed apology and inability to lead the House of Commons after the scandal broke, the House voted on a motion of no confidence in the Speaker leading to his announcement to resign his post. His resignation statement was broadcast on all three channels (19 May).

1.9 David Cameron, Gordon Brown, and Nick Clegg on the general election

A sequence of three quotes from Gordon Brown, David Cameron, and Nick Clegg (Leader of the Liberal Democrats) was broadcast by Channel 4 and the BBC (3 June).

2. The source of the nine scenarios: De-contextualization

One scenario, as analysed below (4.1), can be established as an interview with Hazel Blears. However, the question preceding the first clip of Blears was not broadcast; furthermore, from the analysis in 4.1, it can be seen how her de-contextualized response is progressively re-contextualized by the journalists over several bulletins. A second scenario with Julie Kirkbride (1.2) might have come from an interview, but if so, none of the questions to Kirkbride are broadcast, hence the source of her remarks is not clear. Thus, in neither of these scenarios is the source of the politicians' remarks acknowledged in the news bulletins.

The source of a further two scenarios (1.3, 1.4) can be identified as press conferences from reports in *The Daily Telegraph* (*The Telegraph*, 12 and 19 May), although in neither case is the source explicitly acknowledged.

The source of the remaining five scenarios can be identified from Hansard as parliamentary debates. Two come from PMQs (1.5, 1.9), two from oral questions (1.6, 1.7), one from a special statement by the Speaker (1.8). The location of these scenarios is recognizable from visual and auditory cues, such as the image

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

of the Speaker wearing his gown, shouts of "Hear, hear" from the audience of the MPs, or the decor of the chamber of the House of Commons. However, in only one instance is the location of a clip explicitly acknowledged, when Glenn Oglaza (on Sky) introduces the Speaker's apology (1.6) as follows: "Three thirty, a packed House of Commons, and a statement from a Speaker under pressure to resign".

Thus, with the solitary exception of the above statement by Oglaza, it can be seen that all 23 clips for the nine scenarios are de-contextualized, that is to say, neither the source or the location of each clip is acknowledged.

3. Techniques of re-contextualization in broadcast news

On the basis of these nine scenarios, and following the work of Ekström (2001) and Eriksson (2011), four main types of re-contextualization were identified:

3.1 *Contextualisation before and after the utterance*. The journalist or news anchor establishes context by providing narration before the clip. Afterwards, the narrator may provide a summary of subsequent events, interpretation, or introduce another story, anchor, or journalist.

3.2 *Interpolations*. The narrator acts as a storyteller through interpolations at various points within the extract in the form of a voiceover to explain or interpret what is happening on screen.

3.3 *Elimination of text from the utterance*. By editing out text from the original utterance, a new utterance is effectively created. Because of the seamlessness of the editing, it is virtually impossible for the viewer to identify that editing has occurred.

3.4 *Editing the order of utterances*. Extracts from three different politicians may be presented in one order on one channel, and in a different order on another channel, thereby in effect creating an imaginary dialogue.

4. Analysis of the four editing techniques

4.1 Contextualisation before and after the utterance

Each clip is contextualized, with an introduction before the utterance, and further comment afterwards. There was only one exception, that of Gordon Brown's "Gentlemen's Club" (1.4), where a lack of post-clip narration by Sky left the audience with the task of interpreting what Brown has just said. Here, the narration

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

was strictly used to contextualize the quote prior to its broadcast, not to explain it afterwards.

As an illustrative example, the following analysis is presented of the scenario of Hazel Blears and her cheque (1.1), broadcast twice on the BBC and once on Sky. The segment first appeared on the BBC during a broadcast on May 12, 2009 introduced by the BBC's political editor, Nick Robinson, then again on the BBC following Blears' resignation (3 June 2009). Both versions are presented below in parallel (text in common to both versions in italics both here and in 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4):

BBC broadcast on May 12, 2009 introduced by political editor, Nick Robinson.	**BBC June 3, 2009 after Hazel Blears had tendered her resignation.**
Robinson: The community secretary, Hazel Blears, originally denied claims that she'd flipped her homes from Salford to London to play the property market. Tonight though, she promised to repay the thousands in capital gains tax that she'd saved.	Robinson: (……) In her resignation letter she didn't pay the usual departing tribute to her boss, she barely mentioned him. She wrote, 'I'm returning to the grass roots where I began, to political activism, to the cut and thrust of political debate. Most of all…' she added ominously, '… I want to help you and the Labour Party reconnect with the British people.' [HB now on camera showing check] 'This is the real reason she's gone,' mutters those close to Gordon Brown.
Hazel Blears: It isn't enough to comply with the rules and the law and that's why *I've decided to send to the Inland Revenue a cheque*, which is the equivalent of what would have been paid in capital gains tax, had it been liable when I've moved flats whilst I've been an MP. What's really important to me is what people think about this issue and what they think about me.	Hazel Blears: *I've decided to send to the Inland revenue a cheque.*
Robinson: There is it seems nothing like the whiff, or should that be the stench of scandal to concentrate the minds of our political leaders. What was unthinkable, not just a few weeks ago, but a few hours ago, suddenly looks unavoidable.	Robinson: [Blears emerging from her house] She is furious that she's the only cabinet minister who was singled out by the PM who dubbed her behaviour totally unacceptable. [Bird's eye view of Westminster] The news of her resignation came just two hours before Question Time.

Sky News took a different approach with the Blears clip on May 12, 2009:

Simmonds: Okay, well, as you heard John [Craig, political journalist] say to the Prime Minister, earlier this evening the Communities Secretary,

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

Hazel Blears promised to pay more than £13,000 to the Inland Revenue to cover Capital Gains Tax after she sold a home in London. Well, this is what she told us.

Hazel Blears: Well, I've heard absolutely the outrage and the anger that the public feel about what's been going on, and I wouldn't ever knowingly do anything to let down the people that I represent and serve, and that is the most important thing to me. Um, over the weekend, and today, I've been discussing this with my husband, and I've decided that *it isn't enough just to comply with the rules and the law, and that's why I've decided, uh, to send to the Inland Revenue a cheque which is the equivalent of what would have been paid in Capital Gains Tax had it been liable when I've moved flats whilst I've been an MP. What's really important to me is what people think about this issue and what they think about me.* Now, I know this won't be enough, and people will still be angry, and it'll take time, but I think now the responsibility of all of us, as Members of Parliament, and me in particular, with my Salford people, is to rebuild our relationship and try and re-establish some trust between Parliament and the people, and that's what I mean to do.

There follow two questions from Sky journalist, John Craig, to which Blears responds. At the end of the interview, the broadcast returns to the anchor, Simmonds ("Well, back to John Craig now. John, this news broke four days ago, why has Hazel Blears made this decision now?"). The two additional questions from Craig suggest that in the extract above, Blears was also responding to a question from Craig.

The Sky News clip illuminates the BBC's use of de- and re-contextualization. The clips shown by the BBC are part of a much longer response to what seems to be a question from Craig. The BBC de-contextualizes the clip by removing any indication that Blears' response was part of an interview. From the BBC viewer's perspective, it is simply Hazel Blears showing her cheque to the camera with no indication of a question before or after her utterance. The de-contextualized clip is then re-contextualized according to Robinson's narration. This use of re-contextualization illustrates that different narrations can change the viewer's perspective of the clip. In the BBC's first use of the clip, Blears appears to identify with her constituents and sympathize with the public to maintain their support. However, when this scene is removed from the interview, the cheque appears to be a failed attempt to win back public support, since the viewer already knows of her resignation. Also, just as the length of the clip differs within the various uses, so too does the length of the journalist's involvement: the longer the journalist's narration, the shorter the segment.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

4.2 Interpolations

This was the second most frequently used technique, utilised six times by the BBC and Sky (but not by Channel Four) in relation to four of the scenarios: David Cameron's apology (BBC); the Speaker's apology (BBC, Sky); the Speaker's rebuke to Kate Hoey (BBC); and the Speaker's resignation (BBC, Sky). In each of these six instances, the narrator provides commentary between various extracts of a longer scene in the form of a voiceover.

An example is discussed below in relation to the Speaker's apology to the House of Commons (18 May, 2009). On both the BBC and Sky, each narrator talks throughout the same sequence, but at different points, as can be seen below (interpolations from each narrator are numbered consecutively):

BBC	Sky
Nick Robinson-1: It is one of the highest offices in the land. People doff their hats to the speaker, they don't criticise him in public, they don't expect him to apologise, until now that is.	Glen Oglaza-1: Three thirty, a packed House of Commons, and a statement from a Speaker under pressure to resign.
Michael Martin: Order, *Please allow me to say to the men and women of the United Kingdom that we have let you down very badly indeed. We must all accept blame and to that extent I have — that I have contributed to the situation I am profoundly sorry.*	Michael Martin: *Please allow me to say to the men and women of the United Kingdom, that we have let you down very badly indeed. We must all accept blame. And to that extent I have, that I have contributed to the situation I I am profoundly sorry.*
Nick Robinson-2: He did not utter a single word about his future, others certainly did:	Glen Oglaza-2: But of his own future, nothing. MP Winnick: If you gave some indication of your own intention to retire, *your early retirement, Sir, would help the reputation of the House.* Michael Martin: The honourable member has served under more speakers than I have, and he knows that that's not a subject for today. Glen Oglaza-3: But he came under attack from all sides of the House.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

MP Prentice: *A motion of no confidence in you Sir will appear on the order paper tomorrow. Am I right in thinking it will be debated tomorrow and voted upon?*
Michael Martin: *Order, this is not a point of order.*
MP Prentice: *Oh yes it is.*
Nick Robinson-3: Not in order maybe, but it was the mood of the Commons.

MP Carswell: *When will members be allowed to choose a new Speaker with the moral authority to clean up Westminster and the legitimacy to lift this house out of the mire?*
Nick Robinson-4: Faced by the man who has tabled the motion to remove him the Speaker struggled to explain.
Clerk: *It's a motion on the remaining orders.*
Michael Martin: It's a motion on the remaining orders.
Nick Robinson-5: At times seemed to struggle why it could not be heard.
Michael Martin: It's a remaining order on the remaining orders.
Nick Robinson-6: If that wasn't clear what followed certainly was.
MP Winnick: *Your early retirement Sir would help the reputation of the house.*

MP Shepherd: *Many out there will not believe we are serious about the changes that are necessary as long as you are in the chair.*

MP Prentice: *A motion of no confidence in you, Sir, will appear on the order paper tomorrow. Am I right in thinking it will be debated tomorrow and voted upon?*
Michael Martin: **Now**, *order, this is not a point of order.*
MP Prentice: *Oh yes it is.*
Michael Martin: Order. Please allow me to answer. Please allow to me answer. These are matters for debate on an appropriate motion.
MP Carswell: *When will members be allowed to choose a new speaker with the moral authority to clean up Westminster and the legitimacy to lift this House out of the mire?*

[Sounds of disruption in the House]

MP Shepherd: This is a constitutional crisis when we have to now hear a statement about the future, when *many out there will not believe that we are serious about the changes that are necessary, as long as you are in the chair,* and that is the terrible situation we are. It is with the greatest sadness and um thing that I even have to raise this point. There is a motion on the order paper, and it should be debated and the government should acknowledge that it will be.

Michael Martin: Well please give me the credit for have some experience in the chair. It's not a substantive motion, it is an early day motion, and the honourable gentleman knows—
MP Bacon: It is a substantive motion.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

Male Speaker: On a point of Mr Speaker.
Michael Martin: Or, order, or, order, or order.
MP Bacon: Just told me that it is a substantive motion.
[Disruption in House]
Michael Martin: Order.
Glen Oglaza-4: At that point he needed help.
Michael Martin: Well, let me ask the clerk because I'm wrong, I'll say so. The clerk.
Clerk: *It's a, it's a, it's a motion on the remaining* (inaudible 0:16:47).
Glen Oglaza-5: Senior MPs tried to persuade him to allow the no confidence motion to be debated.
Male Speaker: Is it within the power of a backbencher to put down a substantive motion, and if so, how?
Glen Oglaza-6: He didn't know, and again had to be told what to say by his clerk.

MP Cormack: Can I ask you Sir that to bear in mind that the condition of the house today is rather like the condition of the country at the time of the Norway debate, and could you reflect on that.
Nick Robinson-7: They knew just what he meant. He was comparing the Speaker's condition to that of Neville Chamberlain, at the time he was driven from office during the Second World War, but the Speaker was not without friends.

Between the two commentators, there are five moments where Robinson interpolates during the BBC broadcast [Robinson (2), (3), (4), (5), and (6)], and three moments where Sky's Glen Oglaza interpolates [Oglaza (2), (3), and (4)]. Notably, this technique takes the process of contextualization and re-contextualization one stage further than that described in 3.1. Through interpolations, the journalist acts more as a narrator, telling the story of the MPs' hostility and the Speaker's inability to control the House.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

4.3 Elimination of text from the same utterance

As discussed above, journalists have the ability to determine how much of a quote which they may use to substantiate their broadcasts. They may both de-contextualize and re-contextualize the clip; in addition, they may act as narrators through interpolating between a series of clips. But they may do more than this. Given the high technical quality of modern editing, they may cut out chunks of text to create what is in effect a new utterance. Because these broadcasts do not have any obvious cuts, it is virtually impossible for the viewer to identify that this has occurred.

There was one example of this technique in the nine scenarios analysed, namely, the Speaker's rebuke to MP Kate Hoey (May 11, 2009). The rebuke was broadcast by Sky on two separate occasions (11 and 19 May, 2009). Below is the original Hansard transcript (on the left), with the two Sky broadcasts (on the right):

Hansard	**Sky News, version1:**
Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order to point out that many of us — I hope from all parts of the House — feel that bringing in the Metropolitan police, who have a huge job to do in London at the moment in dealing with all sorts of problems, *to try to find out who has leaked something, when, as has been pointed out, the newspapers have handled the personal details very responsibly by blanking them out, is an awful waste of resources Will the public not see this, whatever the intention, as a way of hiding —*	Kate Hoey: To bring the police in to try and find out who has leaked something when actually the *newspapers as been pointed out have handled the personal detail in terms of blanking out very responsibly, would it not be, is it not an awful waste of resources and will the public not see this, whatever it's meant to be, to be a way of hiding —*
Mr. Speaker: *Let me answer the honourable lady. I listen to her often when I turn on the television at midnight, and I hear her public utterances and pearls of wisdom on Sky News — it is easy to talk then. Let me put this to the hon. Lady and to every hon. Member in this House: is it the case than an employee of this House should be able to hand over any private data to any organisation of his or her choosing? The allegations — I emphasise that they are allegations — are that that information was handed over to a third party* in order *to find*	*Michael Martin: Let me answer the honourable lady. I listen to the honourable lady often, when I turn on the television at midnight and I hear her public utterances and her pearls of wisdom on Sky News, and it's easy to talk then. Let me put this to the honourable lady and to every honourable member in this House. Is it the case that an employee, an employee of this House, should be able to hand over any private data to any organisation of his or her choosing, and bear the, and say, and the allegations, and I say they're allegations, is that that information*

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

the highest bidder for private information. If I do not ask, or rather if the Clerk of the House does not ask, for the police to be brought in, we are saying that that employee should be left in situ with all the personal information of every hon. Member, including the hon. Lady's own information and that of her employees. Let me say that anyone who has looked at their own un-redacted information can see that the signatures of employees are exposed, that private ex-directory numbers are exposed and that passwords — telephone passwords — are exposed. I just say to the hon. Lady that *it is easy to say to the press, "This should not happen," but it is a wee bit more difficult when you have to do more than just give quotes to the Express — or the press, rather — and do nothing else; some of us in this House have other responsibilities, other than just talking to the press.*

was handed over to a third party to find the highest bidder for private information.

Sky News, version2:
Glen Oglaza: 12 days of exposure and confessions, but how did it come to this? The first Speaker to be forced out of office since 1695. Michael Martin was ultimately responsible for approving and paying MPs' expenses, which he tried to keep secret. He called in the police to investigate not suspected fraud, but to find out who'd leaked the information to *The Telegraph*. MPs were shocked when he slapped down anyone who dared to question his judgement.
Kate Hoey: *— be a way of hiding —*
Michael Martin: Let me answer the honourable lady. It's easy to say to the press, this should not happen. It's a wee bit more difficult when you just don't have to give, how do you say, quotes to The Express or, or to, to the press rather, not The Express but the press, but, and do nothing else. Some of us in this House have other responsibilities just than talking to the press.

Sky News reported the scene in two separate broadcasts. The first scene (11 May, version 1) showed a longer version of the Hoey quote as the Speaker addresses

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

her involvement with Sky News. In this clip, the Speaker answered Hoey's criticisms by drawing attention to the need to protect private information. When this material is re-used after the Speaker's resignation on May 19, 2009 (version 2), the interaction between Hoey and the Speaker is placed in a different context. Oglaza's segment begins as a voiceover of various clips of Speaker Martin throughout his years before changing to the MP Hoey scene from May 11. Only the end of Hoey's question is broadcast "… be a way of hiding" followed by Martin's initial response "Let me answer the honourable lady". Then a huge chunk of Martin's response appears to have been deleted (where the Speaker justifies his criticism of Hoey's behaviour), what follows is just Martin's attack on Hoey for speaking to the press.

These segments bring de- and re-contextualization to a different level from previously seen. Here, the Speaker responds to Hoey with the same "Let me answer the Honourable Lady", but the rest of the response changes depending on the broadcast date. When compared with the Hansard transcript, the first clip presents the Speaker's quote in its original form, but the quote from the second clip takes from the beginning of the original response, but finishes with the end, eliminating the middle portion. Because the broadcasts do not have any obvious cuts, it is nearly impossible for the viewer to be aware of these changes. To the viewer, what is shown on screen is not what actually happened, but what has been created is effectively a new utterance.

4.4 Combining texts from different utterances

This aspect of framing only appears once, specifically in the exchanges between Gordon Brown, David Cameron, and Nick Clegg as broadcast by Channel 4 and the BBC (June 3, 2009), but it represents the most drastic form of editing, in effect creating an entirely imaginary dialogue:

Channel 4	**BBC**
David Cameron: *Get down to the palace, ask for a dissolution, call that election.* Nick Clegg: *The country doesn't have a government, it has a void.* Gordon Brown:I think it would be unfair for us to pass this question time without acknowledging that in each parts of the House people have found it difficulty with the pressures upon them.	Gordon Brown:On all sides of the house the events of the last few weeks have been difficult. David Cameron: *Get down to the palace, ask for a dissolution, call that election.* Nick Clegg: *The country doesn't have a government, it has a void.* Labour is finished.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

Each of these clips is edited out of a much longer utterance from each of the participants as recorded in Hansard at PMQs (3 June 2009). David Cameron's "Get down to the palace, ask for a dissolution, call that election", comes at the end of the question: "Why does he [i.e., Gordon Brown] not take the one act of authority left to him — get down to the palace, ask for a dissolution and call that election?" Brown responds, "Once again, the right honourable gentleman proves to the whole country that there is absolutely no substance in anything that he says".

Both the clips of Gordon Brown come from the same utterance:

> Mr Speaker I hope, I hope that he [i.e., David Cameron] will acknowledge that on *all sides of the House the events of the last few weeks of the House have been difficult* and *I think it would be unfair for us to pass this Question Time without acknowledging that in each parts of the House people have found it difficult with the pressures upon them.*

This was a response to the following question from David Cameron:

> The fact is that what we see is a dysfunctional Cabinet and a dysfunctional Government led by a Prime Minister who cannot give a lead. Can he perhaps at least guarantee that there will be no further resignations ahead of his reshuffle?

Finally, Clegg's statement "The country doesn't have a government, it has a void. Labour is finished" comes in the middle of the following question:

> The Prime Minister just does not get it. His government are paralysed by indecision, crippled by in-fighting, and exhausted after twelve long years. It is a tragedy that exactly at a time when people need help and action, *the country does not have a Government; it has a void. Labour is finished.* Is it not obvious that the only choice now is between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats?

Brown responds: "I seem to remember the Liberals saying that at every election that I have ever fought".

Thus, the argument between the three party leaders as presented on both channels is entirely fictitious, based on edited extracts selected from different points in one session of PMQs. The BBC presents the clip of the Prime Minister first, followed by David Cameron asking for a general election, and finishing with Clegg's statement. In this order, it appears that Brown has the first say in acknowledging the hardships of the house, Cameron rebuts him, and Clegg supports Cameron's statement. Channel 4 begins the sequence with Cameron's firm stance on calling a general election, then moves to Clegg, and finally to the statement from Brown. This format suggests that the two party leaders are arguing directly with the Prime Minister and that Brown is refuting the claims by both Clegg and Cameron, given that his statement appears last.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

Thus, not only can an imaginary dialogue be created between different interview clips of one individual (Ekström 2001), but also between different clips from different individuals. In these sequences, an imaginary argument is created, in which who has the first and last word is varied between the two television channels. Notably, when the order changes, the argument itself changes, thereby making it seem as if a different politician had the upper hand.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate whether editing techniques identified by Ekström (2001) and Eriksson (2011) in their analyses of Swedish news broadcasts could also be identified in the British news, based specifically on coverage of the parliamentary expenses scandal of 2009. By identifying nine scenarios in which particular audio-visual clips were utilized by more than one television channel, it was possible to analyze how identical audio-visual content (or parts thereof) were interpreted and utilised differently across different news bulletins. A second methodological approach was to compare audio-visual recordings of debates in the House of Commons with the official parliamentary record in Hansard. The results of this study show not only that techniques of editing comparable to those in Swedish news broadcasts are used by the British news media, but arguably that they are even more pronounced.

Thus, the most pervasive technique found in this study was contextualization before and after the utterance (3.1), which occurred in all nine scenarios. Whereas in the Swedish broadcasts, Ekström (2001) noted how the reporter's voice reformulates the original question in the voiceover before the politician's utterance is transmitted, in the British broadcasts, questions are neither broadcast nor reformulated by the journalist in the two clips where the politicians might have been taking part in an interview (1.1;1.2). Nor in the other seven scenarios is there any indication whether or not the politicians are responding to questions from journalists, or from other politicians. Thus, the politicians' remarks are totally de-contextualized, and re-contextualized by the journalists' introductory and summary comments. Furthermore, clips may not only be de-contextualized from their original source, but then re-cycled and further re-contextualized for later broadcasts. For example, in the BBC's first use of the clip of Hazel Blears, she appears to identify with her constituents and sympathize with the public to maintain their support. However, on the second use of the clip (when Blears is just seen waving the cheque), she now appears to be engaged in a failed attempt to win back public support.

The second most pervasive technique in this analysis was that of interpolation (3.2), utilised six times by the BBC and Sky in relation to four of the scenarios.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

This strategy is not one of the four identified by Ekström (2001), but arguably goes further than simply providing context before and after the utterance. Through interpolations, the journalist acts as a narrator, telling the story through the intepretation of events.

The other two techniques identified in this analysis were elimination of text from the same utterance (3.3), and the combination of texts from different utterances (3.4). These correspond directly to Ekström's (2001) concept of the "imaginary dialogue". The Speaker's rebuke to Kate Hoey (1.7), in which the two different clips are spliced together with the middle section edited out, can be likened to Ekström's (2001) example of combining different interview clips from the same person to form a single answer to an interview question. Similarly, combining texts from different utterances (3.4) can be likened to Ekström's example of editing together answers from two different politicians in two different interviews. The notable differences between the BBC and Channel 4 in the ordering of the clips shows how different perceptions may be created through judicious editing, when the apparent argument betwen the politicians is entirely fictitious. In this instance, it would appear the news broadcasts are reporting a story that they have actually created.

Of course, when confronted by these findings, broadcasters could retort that these techniques are used to tell a story without necessarily doing any "injustice" to the facts, that is to say, the essence of the story somehow remains true to the recorded events. In some cases, this might conceivably be so, for example, in the case of interpolations (3.2). But the elimination of text from the same utterance (3.3), and combining texts from different utterances (3.4) does much more than this. In the case of the Speaker's rebuke to Hoey (1.7), the viewer is presented with a very specific portrait of him acting against her, omitting his justification for the stance he is taking. In the case of the apparent argument between the three party leaders (1.9), impressions of the politicians can be manipulated by varying the order in which the three speakers appear.

In summary, the results of the analysis presented in this paper strongly corroborated those found in Swedish news broadcasting by Ekström (2001) and Eriksson (2011), and the view that contemporary news journalism is highly interpretive. In the Introduction, it was noted that there is still ongoing debate about what interpretive journalism actually means in practice (e.g., Salgado and Strömbäck 2012). In this study, through the detailed microanalysis of journalistic techniques, some specifics of interpretive journalism have been identified, notably, contextualization before and after the utterance, interpolation, and the creation of imaginary dialogues. This analysis sits well with Eriksson's (2011) concept of the news bulletin as narrative, with edited clips from different events that fit into the broadcast, as well as a narration that provides the overall framework. So are the journalists

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

telling it like it is, or simply telling a good story? The debate over interpretive journalism will continue!

References

Ekström Mats. 2001."Politicians Interviewed on Television News." *Discourse and Society* 12 (5): 563–584. DOI: 10.1177/0957926501012005001

Eriksson, Göran. 2011."Adversarial Moments: A Study of Short-Form Interviews in the News." *Journalism* 12 (1): 51–69. DOI: 10.1177/1464884910367588

Hansard (House of Commons Daily Debates). http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmhansrd.htm.

Johnson-Cartee, Karen S. 2005. *News Narrative and News Framing: Constructing Political Reality*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

May, T. Erskine. 2004. *Parliamentary Practice* (23rd ed.). London: LexisNexis, UK.

Salgado, Susana, and Jesper Strömbäck. 2012. "Interpretive Journalism: A Review of Concepts, Operationalizations and Key Findings." *Journalism* 13 (2): 144–161. DOI: 10.1177/1464884911427797

The Telegraph. 8 May2009. "MPs' Expenses: Hazel Blears Claims for Three Different Properties in a Year." http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/5293585/MPs-expenses-Hazel-Blears-claims-for-three-different-properties-in-a-year.html.

The Telegraph. 12 May2009. "MPs' Expenses: David Cameron Orders Tories to Pay Back Claims." http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/5315053/MPs-expenses-David-Cameron-orders-Tories-to-pay-back-claims.html.

The Telegraph. 14 May2009. "Andrew Mackay Resigns Over 'Unacceptable' Claims: MPs' Expenses." http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/5322961/Andrew-MacKay-resigns-over-unacceptable-claims-MPs-expenses.html.

The Telegraph. 19 May2009. "MPs' Expenses: Gordon Brown Criticises 'Gentlemen's Club' Commons." http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/mps-expenses/5351373/MPs-expenses-Gordon-Brown-criticises-gentlemens-club-Commons.html.

Authors' addresses

Peter Bull PhD
Reader in Psychology
Department of Psychology
University of York
Heslington
York YO10 5DD
United Kingdom
+44 (0)1904 323142

drpebull@gmail.com
http://drbull.nfshost.com

Ralph Negrine PhD
Professor in Political Communication
Department of Journalism Studies
University of Sheffield
18-22 Regent Street
Sheffield
S1 3NJ
United Kingdom
+44 (0)114 222 2508

ralph.negrine@sheffield.co.uk
http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/journalism/staff/negrine

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)

Katie Hawn
Department of Communication
4005 SS&MS Building
UC Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, CA 93106-4020
USA

khawn@umail.ucsb.edu

About the authors

Dr Peter Bull is a Reader in Psychology at the University of York, UK, a Fellow of the British Psychological Society, and Visiting Professor in Political Communication, University of Antwerp, Belgium. He has over 100 academic publications, primarily concerned with the detailed "microanalysis" of political discourse and nonverbal communication, his principal research interests. He is the author of *The Microanalysis of Political Communication: Claptrap and Ambiguity* (2003) and *Communication under the Microscope: The Theory and Practice of Microanalysis* (2002).
Homepage: http://drbull.nfshost.com

Ralph Negrine is Professor of Political Communication in the Department of Journalism Studies at the University of Sheffield. His main interest of research include political communication and media policy. His most recent book is *European Media* (2011), co-authored with Prof. S Papathanassopoulos. He is currently engaged in a study of the coverage of the 2014 European Parliament election.

Katherine Hawn is a recent graduate from the University of California, Santa Barbara, where she was awarded a B.A. in Communication and a B.A. in Political Science. From July to September, 2012, she spent eight weeks at the University of York, UK, working on the analysis of mediated political discourse under the supervision of Dr. Peter Bull in the Department of Psychology. Katherine is currently a Team Leader with AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps-FEMA Corps, working directly with natural disaster survivors at various sites across the USA.

BDD-A25565 © 2014 John Benjamins
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 04:56:34 UTC)