

Politicians in celebrity talk show interviews: the narrativization of personal experiences

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Abstract

This article concerns interviews with politicians taking place on a popular talk show. These interviews are informal and playful in character, and above all are structured around personal narratives of the “real life” or “behind-the-scenes life” of the guest. It is often claimed that such interviews have become more important for the politicians. The approach of the study addressed in the article is influenced by research on conversational storytelling and aims at exploring how politicians’ more personal narratives are initiated and elaborated on by the participants. The data are comprised of six interviews with leading politicians on a Swedish celebrity talk show, Sen kväll med Luuk [Late night with Luuk]. The analysis shows that personal narratives progress in close collaboration between the host and the politician, and that this collaboration often aims at exploring the humor potential of the stories and invoking laughter from the studio audience. The main argument in this article is that for politicians an appearance on a celebrity talk show is not such a trouble-free method for self-presentation as is often assumed.

Keywords: celebrity talk shows; interviews; politicians; conversational story-telling; studio audience; laughter.

1. Introduction

This article concerns interviews with politicians taking place on a popular talk show, what Haarman (1999: 4–9) defines as “the evening or celebrity format”.¹ In times when the traditional news interview seems to be losing its significance, such interviews are becoming more and more important for politicians (see Young 2008; cf. Baum 2005; Clayman and Heritage 2002 [chapter 9]; Lauerbach 2007) and for their “careful presentation of self before distant others” (Thompson 1995: 137). Talk show interviews are, in contrast to news

interviews, informal and playful in character (Tolson 1991) and are primarily structured around personal narratives oriented towards the “real life” or “behind-the-scenes life” of the invited guest (Montgomery 2000). More specifically, in this article I explore how leading politicians’ more personal narratives are interactively initiated, elaborated and accomplished by the participants in talk show interviews. This approach is influenced by earlier research on conversational storytelling (Jefferson 1978; Sacks 1992; Blum-Kulka 1997; Thornborrow 1997, 2001; Ochs and Taylor 1992; Ochs and Capps 2001). A basic premise is that a narrative is embedded in the ongoing talk and is designed for the audience present at the particular moment of telling. From this viewpoint, narrativization in talk show interviews is understood as a collaborative project; it is a turn-by-turn interplay which involves the host, the guest and reactions from the studio audience.

Looking more closely at the research on politicians and talk shows one could easily conclude, as Lauerbach (2007: 1389) does, that “little is known about the practices of hosts and politicians in talk show interviews”. I believe there are particularly two noteworthy aspects of this situation. First, in the extensive and growing body of research on political interviews that thoroughly analyzes the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, the talk show interview has been overlooked (Lauerbach 2007). Prominent perspectives are the conversation-analytic (CA) approaches to political interviews (see e.g. Clayman and Whalen 1988/1989; Clayman and Heritage 2002; Greatbatch 1988; Ekström et al. 2006). This research has concentrated mainly on interviews occurring in news and current affairs programs (termed news interviews) and is organized mainly around questions on the “adversarialness” or “neutrality” of journalists in the course of interviews. Secondly, talk show interviews have been analyzed within a number of theoretical frameworks within Media and Communication Studies (see e.g. Carpignano et al. 1990; Livingstone and Lunt 1994; Haarman 1999; Montgomery 2000; Hutchby 2001, 2006; Hamo 2006; Patrona 2006). Several of these studies have explored the democratic potential of the talk by focusing on lay participants and the possibility to make their voices heard and to query expertise knowledge (see Tolson 2001). Linked to this research is an interest in how lay experiences are narrativized and transformed into public discourse (Thornborrow 1997, 2001; Hamo 2006). One important point made in this research is that these narratives are interactively accomplished and fill different interactive functions. However, these studies are delimited to lay experience, and do not involve politicians’ personal experiences.

The data for the present study comprise six interviews with leading politicians on a Swedish celebrity talk show, *Sen kväll med Luuk* [*Late night with Luuk*] and are described more in detail below. In order to discuss the conditions for politicians’ appearances on celebrity talk shows, a section dealing with the

specific format is presented. Thereafter, the analytic framework is briefly presented. The analysis is organized around three main themes concerning the collaboration between the host and the guest: how stories are elicited, elaborated, and brought to a humorous climax with laughter from the studio audience. The main argument in this article is that for politicians an appearance on a celebrity talk show is not such a trouble-free method for self-presentation as is often assumed. Stories are jointly produced by the participants and the narrativization of politicians' personal experiences is reliant on how this cooperation works.

2. Data

All the data are from the Swedish celebrity talk show *Late night with Luuk* broadcast by TV4.² The show was hosted by Swedish comedian Kristian Luuk, aired on Friday nights (around 10.30 to 11.30 pm) between 1996 and 2004. Each episode included interviews with two or three guests, musical performances and filmed sketches. The data consist of six interviews with leading politicians conducted between 2000 and 2004. Each interview lasted between 10 and 14 minutes. The interviews have been transcribed according to established norms and translated into English (see Appendix 1 for transcription key and Appendix 2 for original transcripts). It is also important to note that except for applause in the opening and ending phases of the interviews (or just before or after commercial breaks) the reactions from the studio audience are spontaneous and not prompted by the production team.

3. The celebrity talk show interview

Talk show refers to a wide variety of different television formats for which “the performance of talk” is essential (Haarman 1999: 1). Haarman (1999: 4–9) differentiates the *evening or celebrity talk show* from the *audience discussion format* and the *issue-oriented format*. What these formats have in common is that a host, one or several guests (but rarely more than eight) and a studio audience are present and involved in the production of talk. Typical for the evening or celebrity talk show format is that the studio resembles a theatre and the interview takes place on a raised platform with an audience present, sitting in front of the host and guests. The interview is managed by the host who introduces the guests, initiates topics, and accomplishes the closings of the talk. The celebrity talk show interview shares these characteristic features with the news interview (Lauerbach 2007: 1392–1393). In general, celebrities or others judged to be newsworthy turn up as guests, and such appearances frequently

coincide with the promotion of films, television shows, books, CDs, etc. In the U.S., politicians' appearances seem to be more frequent during election campaigns (Clayman and Heritage 2002: chapter 9).

In the talk show interviews, narratives are essential (Simon-Vandenberg 2004); they are, as Thornborrow (2007: 1437) states, "a key interactional resource". In audience discussion shows, stories are often used to oppose or challenge expertise knowledge (Livingstone and Lunt 1994; Tolson 2001; Hutchby 2006), but on the celebrity talk show the narratives are mainly resources to engage and entertain the viewers (cf. Montgomery 2000: 122). A thrill of these narratives seems to be that they can reveal something of the guest's more personal or private life, which was not publicly known before.

In more naturally occurring conversations, the space to tell a story is negotiated in the ongoing conversation. As Sacks (1992: 222) observes, stories "routinely take more than one utterance to do" and are cautiously fitted into the specific situation by their teller. A story is often announced by a first turn, a "story preface". This preface is typically followed by a response from other participants that shows that they are ready to receive the story (see also Goodwin 1990: 235), and then the teller can proceed with the telling. However, in the course of the interaction on a talk show, the guest does not necessarily have to do the work of making space for the story (Thornborrow 2001: 120–122). Instead, the host is often keen to initiate and set off the stories and the host's prompting for stories can naturally take different forms, ranging from being clearly explicit ("Tell me about x") to being more indirect invitations.

One important aspect of the elicitation of stories is that the talk is planned in advance (Thornborrow 2001: 120). The preparations often include pre-interview talk or some kind of research (often from earlier media appearances) about the guest in question.³ These preparations do not necessarily mean that the guest is informed in detail about what question will be posed during the talk, but he or she knows in broad terms what the talk will be about. This means that the host is often familiar with the story to be told, which, of course, has consequences for the talk and how it is elaborated.

The narratives develop and are accomplished in close collaboration between the host and the guest, but it is the host's responsibility to make sure that the stories get told (Thornborrow 2001: 122). Lauerbach (2007: 1392) claims that the celebrity talk show interview occurs in a question-and-answer format (at least when politicians appear), but with the term "chat" Tolson (1991) illustrates that this format is occasionally set aside in these shows. Generally, the talk show interview is playful and bantering in character, but the crucial point made by Tolson is that chat "always works by opening up the possibility of transgression". As a consequence, the pre-allocation of roles could (at least momentarily) be overthrown and, for example, allow the interviewee to ask questions. On such occasions, the talk show interview turns into acts of "verbal

improvisation” in which interviewer and interviewee participate on more or less equal terms (Tolson 1991: 185).

An essential aspect of the narrating that occurs on a talk show is that the recipients are not only the other participant (the host) in the interaction, but also the studio audience and the television viewers. Reactions from the studio audience play an important role in the production of something that can engage and entertain the viewer. The studio audience’s reaction, to use Thompson’s (1995: 105) words, “. . . provides the viewers with a set of model responses with which they may empathize or sympathize (laughter, approval, etc.)”. Reactions from the studio audience, especially laughter, are invited and are an appreciated element in the ongoing talk (see Montgomery 2000: 122–125). One indication of this is that when laughter occurs there is rarely any attempt by the participants to interrupt it. The host and guests “manage their talk around the laughter, treating it as in no way disruptive” (Montgomery 2000: 124).

4. Analytical framework

In the following analysis I will particularly focus on the organization of participant roles in the narrative activity. This approach is influenced by the research carried out by Thornborrow (1997, 2001, 2007) on the narrativization of lay experience on audience discussion shows. Here, I treat the process of narrating as a dynamic interplay between the participants in the interview. A story, how it progresses and is accomplished, is reliant on the actions performed by the host, the guest and the studio audience. In the on-going talk, they operate in diverse and sometimes interchangeable participant roles. In accordance with the previous research, I make use of a broad definition of narratives. One of the most influential frameworks for analyzing narratives in spoken discourse is the model elaborated by Labov (1972). In this model, a narrative involves certain linguistic techniques: *Abstract* (one or two initiating clauses that briefly inform what the story is about); *Orientation* (which will tell about who, when, what, where); *Complicating Action* (what happened in temporal order); *Evaluation* (where elaborate arguments are developed); *Result or Resolution* (which shows what finally happened); and *Coda* (which closes off the narrative and “brings the narrator and listener back to the point at which they entered the narrative”) (Labov 1972: 365). A basic problem with this framework identified by Thornborrow (1997: 246–247) is that it restricts narratives to a description of past events. Based on Goodwin (1990), Thornborrow suggests a broader description: a story is “a temporally ordered, linked event sequence which can refer to past, present and anticipated actions” (Thornborrow 1997: 247). This also

means that the narratives that evolve in interaction (and it also concerns the ones in celebrity talk show interviews) are not always of high “tellability” (Ochs and Capps 2001: 33–35).

The following analysis is (as is Thornborrow’s analysis) influenced by the research on dinner talk in two-parent American families, carried out by Ochs and Taylor (1992; see also Ochs and Capps 2001). A crucial point made by this research is that story-telling is often embedded in other social activities and involves a number of participant roles, which fill vital functions for how the story progress. The following are of relevance for this analysis: the *Protagonist* is the leading or main character in the narrative; the *Elicitor* acts as a co-narrator and is the one who asks for a narrative to be told (“Tell me about x”); the *Initial Teller* expresses the first declarative proposition; the *Problematizer* points out possible problems with an action, thought, feeling, etc. In her analysis of audience discussion shows, Thornborrow (2001) recognizes a further participant role, that of the *Dramatizer*. This role occurs mainly when the host is trying to make the most of the performance potential of the developing stories, which, for example, can involve moments when a narrative’s humorous potential is exploited. These are moments when the produced stories are designed to invoke studio audience reactions—particularly laughter, but other plausible reactions are applause and cheers. For Ochs and Taylor the role of *Primary Recipient*, the one to whom the narrative is primarily directed, is of vital interest. As mentioned above, in this analysis the studio audience and the wider television audience are seen as primary recipients of the interviews, but the host can also act as a primary recipient.

5. Constructing narratives, producing performances

To a considerable extent, the talk performed together with the politicians in *Late night with Luuk* often revolves around the everyday life of politicians, concerning their relationships with colleagues, what happens before and after political meetings, and how daily work is organized. But the talk is sometimes also oriented towards more personal aspects, such as family life (though not in detail), childhood experience, health issues, etc. At the end of each interview the politicians are asked to partake in a playful game. For instance, Laila Freiwalds, as newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, is asked to find and color three different countries on a world map. In the analysis I have distinguished three phases of vital concern for how stories progress. The first concerns how the participants initiate and elicit narratives about the politicians’ life; the second is about how the narratives are elaborated and developed; and the third focuses on how the stories’ humorous potential is exploited.

5.1. *Eliciting narratives*

To elicit and realize stories in the talk show setting, the host and guest have to collaborate and agree that there is a story to be told. In general, the host operates as the Elicitor of the stories about the politicians' personal experiences in the show. In family conversations this role could be optional; that is, a narrative can be initiated without any elicitation (Ochs and Taylor 1992). But, since constructing narratives is the main activity on the celebrity talk show this role is essential for the host. The eliciting of stories can, of course, as I will show below, be done with various techniques, and also involve the role of Initial Teller.

One obvious technique the host uses is to explicitly invite the guest to tell the story, as in Example 1. In this case, the host is the Elicitor, while the guest is the Initial Teller.

- (1) Guest = Laila Freiwalds, Minister of Foreign Affairs
 1 Host: okay we'll change the subject [you don't >>
 2 Guest: [hm
 3 Host: >>eat dark chocolate (.) [tell us why you don't
 4 Guest: [no huh-huh
 5 no it's actually true I don't eat dark cho- not
 6 this really dark chocolate no it has to do with
 7 um when I was little and we were at a refugee camp
 8 in Germany well eh you know it's World War II there
 9 wasn't much food and then here come the American
 10 soldiers and they had dark chocolate so what we got
 11 from them was dark chocolate [so I lived on
 12 Host: [so you were living on
 13 that
 14 Guest: =yeah I don't know for how long but it might have
 15 even been weeks

On line 1, the host marks that he will change the subject and says "you don't eat dark chocolate" and explicitly asks the guest to tell why (lines 1–3). Through this action, he is not revealing anything about the story behind the guest's disapproval of dark chocolate and it sets up the guest in a position from which she becomes the Initial Teller of the story. First, she confirms that the host's proposition is true ("no it's actually true") (line 5). She then initiates the story (line 6) ("it has do with um when I was little and . . .") and starts telling about her childhood experiences at a concentration camp in Nazi Germany at the end of World War II.

In Example 2, the host's eliciting is also evidently explicit, but in this case he uses another technique and operates as both Elicitor and Initial Teller. This elicitation forms an abstract, which also constrains the guest's telling.

(2) Guest = Fredrik Reinfeldt, Party leader of Moderaterna (The Conservatives)

- 1 Host: eh I read in the paper here about a month ago an
 2 intruder at eh a party thrown by the Conservatives
 3 Guest: hm
 4 Host: =and there was a knife- what happened
 5 Guest: yes actually I don't know because I didn't see any
 6 of this but I [heard afterward that there had>>
 7 Host: [aha
 8 Guest: >>been a person who had been thrown out / . . . /

Here, the host refers to something he has read in a newspaper about an intruder at a party festivity (lines 1 to 2). This elicitation offers a context for the story, and with a brief “hm” the guest confirms that he is familiar with the incident (line 3) but does not offer any more details about it. The host is then in a situation in which he takes on the role of Initial Teller and introduces another important feature of the event, the knife (line 4). Now, the host has told listeners (and viewers) who is involved (“an intruder”), when it took place (“about a month ago”), where it happened (“at / . . . / a party thrown by the Conservatives”) and also something about what occurred (“and there was a knife”), which altogether function as an orientation of the story. He explicitly invites the guest to continue the telling of the story when he asks “what happened” (line 4). The guest orients towards this request as if he has been asked to give an eyewitness statement. He starts explaining that he did not see it happen with his own eyes and that he can only refer to what he was later told about it (lines 5–6). Then he goes on to tell what he knows about the incident.

It is obvious from these examples that the host is familiar with the stories he is about to bring out. The talk has been prepared in advance and the host's knowledge about the stories turns his elicitation into strong requests for the guest to tell. It creates an expectation that there is a story to be told, and in front of the audiences it is difficult for the guest to turn such an invitation down. In the eliciting phase in Example 3, the guest is managing this invitation in a playful manner when he pretends to be unwilling to answer.

(3) Guest = Göran Persson, Prime Minister; SA= studio audience

- 1 Host: have you ever made prank calls yourself
 2 Guest: (.hh) (hh:) next question
 3 SA: hah-hah-hah-[hah
 4 Host: [because there there is namely
 5 a rumor going around about Göran Persson that
 6 eh Ingvar Carlsson got a prank call about a year
 7 ago from someone claiming to be Bhutros Bhutros
 8 Gali

- 9 SA: hah-hah-hah-hah
10 Host: is that a true story
11 Guest: (1,3) yes
12 SA: hah-HAH-HAH-[HAH-hah
13 Guest: [hah-[hah *it's true and it>>
14 Host: [now you have to
15 Guest: >>worked*[Ingvar was
16 Host: [yeah

The initial question (“have you ever made prank calls yourself”) is an invitation to the guest to tell about a particular prank call (line 1). The question does not reveal that the host has any knowledge about this prank call, and the guest uses this invitation as a resource to produce something laughable. He answers this yes/no question with an audible breathing and asks for the “next question” (line 2). By this answer the guest is playing with the expectations on him to tell. He is also playing with certain conventions when he seems to simulate that he is partaking in a form of interrogation and that the answer could be a troublesome for him. For politicians, such situations sometimes occur in news interviews or political press conferences, when they are called to account for their actions. The politician’s action invokes laughter from the studio audience (line 3). The host then takes on the role of Initial Teller and introduces the story by mentioning “a rumor going around about Göran Persson / . . . /” (lines 4–8), which also illuminates why he posed the initial question. It becomes obvious that there is a story to tell and that the host has knowledge about it. The studio audience is apparently amused by the abstract of this story and reacts with laughter (line 9). Then, the host invites the guest by asking if it is a true story (line 10). The guest continues to play with the interrogation-conventions and constructs his answers in a playful mode. He produces a pause (1.3 sec) before he states “yes”, in an action that in a witty manner implies that the answer was forced out of him by the host (line 11). This invokes loud laughter from the studio audience and the guest laughs along with the audience. With a smiling voice he ends the abstract part of the story by saying “it’s true and it worked” (lines 13–15).

The host’s elicitation of narratives is sometimes less successful. Situations occur when the host and the guest do not instantly agree that there is a story to tell. In Example 4, the host’s actions are oriented towards getting the guest to tell about the more daily work he conducts at the Justice Department, but the guest does not recognize this as an invitation to start telling.

- (4) Guest = Thomas Bodström, Minister of Justice
1 Host: you’re the Minister of Justice that’s fancy
2 Guest: (.) hm
3 Host: sounds really fancy where do y- whe whe- how

basic technique used in this activity is supporting the guest with receipt tokens or continuers. Another technique is to prompt for more detailed information from the guest. S/he could also act as a Problematizer and point out a possible problem with an action.

In Example 5 the host encourages the guest with frequent receipt tokens that display an understanding of what is being told and signals to the guest to go on with his story.

- (5) Guest = Göran Persson, Prime Minister
- 1 Guest: so I call from a tour bus
 - 2 Host: =aha
 - 3 Guest: the day he turns sixty
 - 4 Host: =aha
 - 5 Guest: and say it's the UN General Secretary
 - 6 Host: okay
 - 7 Guest: and he falls for it
 - 8 Host: is that so
 - 9 Guest: yeah

The guest's telling starts on line 1 and continues on lines 3, 5 and 7 ("so I call from a tour bus / . . . / the day he turns sixty / . . . / and say it's the UN General Secretary / . . . / and he falls for it"), which together form the story. The host's actions during this telling are limited to receipt tokens (lines 2, 4, 6), suggesting that he is an uninformed recipient. Such receipt tokens are often (like in lines 2 and 4) immediate responses to what is being told. Through these actions, the host shows the guest that the story is comprehensible and that he can go on with it. His role as an uninformed recipient is emphasized by his question on line 8 ("is that so"). In some cases this could be an action that treats something as a problem, but his voice suggests that he is surprised that the call succeeded, and the guest does not understand this as a request to develop the story, since he only answers with a short, stressed "yeah" (line 9).

In Example 6 (which is a continuation of Example 4), the host's actions are oriented towards getting the guest to tell about his workplace, the Ministry of Justice, and he prompts for more detailed information from the guest. This sequence starts with a question concerning their lunch hour and whether they have a lunchroom at the department. The guest is involved in telling about his (almost) daily lunches with members of the government.

- (6) Guest = Thomas Bodström, Minister of Justice
- 1 Guest: but then all ministers are out travelling so it's
 - 2 maybe seven [eight people
 - 3 Host: [yes you mean you ea- the ministers

- 4 eat [together
 5 Guest: [we have a we have lunch together every day
 6 but there are maybe seven eight people every day
 7 Host: yeah okay what then a booked table that's always
 8 set and waiting for you
 9 Guest: yeah I mean it's quite like other people we have
 10 lunch coupons [and it we have two meals to >>
 11 Host: [hm
 12 Guest: >>choose from so it's quite like it is
 13 for [most people
 14 Host: [yeah okay.hh

The host poses the question of whether “the ministers eat together” (lines 3–4). The guest’s answer indicates that he understands this as an invitation to elaborate more on how it works on those occasions (lines 5–6). However, the host then goes on to prompt for more detailed information about the lunches (“a booked table that’s always set and waiting for you”) (lines 8–9). This leads the guest to talk more about how the lunch is organized and its ordinariness (lines 9–13).

To elaborate stories is an activity linked to what Labov (1972: 366–370) describes as “the evaluation of narratives”, which is “. . . the means used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, its *raison d’être*: why it was told, and what the narrator is getting at” (Labov 1972: 366). This activity concerns telling the “So what?” of the narrative. For Labov this is a vital aspect of storytelling, and he proposes that a good narrator does not meet the “So what” question. Instead, the skilful storyteller often receives more astonished or surprised reactions like “He did?” or “Really?”

On the celebrity talk show, it is a joint project for the host and the guest to elaborate stories that can fascinate the (studio) audience, but the host is always the one who is responsible for this work. The prompting for more information, like in Example 6, is one technique the host can use in this activity, but there are also other ways to achieve a more elaborated story. In the following example, the host acts as Problematiser.

(7) Guest = Göran Persson, Prime Minister

- 1 Host: is that so
 2 Guest: yeah
 3 Host: but your accent too
 4 Guest: = yea:h we used some kind of English with a
 5 Sörmland accent there from a bus in Skaraborg
 6 Host: yeah yeah
 7 Guest: with a little interference from the [mobile phone
 8 Host: [how did / . . . /

This is the continuation of Example 5, in which the guest (the Prime Minister) is talking about his prank call. The host, acting as a Primary Recipient, performs a surprised reaction, or a “he-did reaction”, to the story told by the guest (line 1). This action does not prompt any elaboration from the guest, so the host makes a comment on the English accent the guest used during his phone call (line 3). The guest treats the comment from the host as if the latter is questioning the conduct of the prank call, which leads the guest to explain how it was possible to make it work (the accent, he was in a bus, the interference from the mobile phone) (lines 4–7). This development makes the story more vivid. The guest is also (which I will return to in Example 9) invited to replicate his prank call. This work, elaborating and somehow dramatizing the narratives produced in the ongoing talk, is essential for the host and something I will deal with in more detail below.

5.3. *Accomplishing the narrative as a performance*

The collaborative production of something amusing or laughable is one central characteristic of the celebrity talk show (Montgomery 2000). This is not to say that this talk is only dedicated to banter; it can also be very serious, and when politicians are involved, discussions concerning politics also occur (van Zoonen and Holtz-Bacha 2000). However, the host’s actions are often oriented towards making use of the stories’ humorous potential in order to make the most of the interview as a performance (Thornborrow 2001: 130). Studio audience reactions, especially laughter, are an almost indispensable ingredient in such moments of the talk.

Generally, laughter is an action that immediately follows something that can be considered worth laughing at (see Glenn 2003; Haakana 1999; Jefferson 1979). On the celebrity talk show, such invitations are dependent on the guest’s and host’s capacities to create something laughable. The elaboration of stories is to a large extent oriented towards dramatizing the stories and invoking laughter from the studio audience. One technique the host uses to stress a humorous potential is invoking laughter by producing unexpected and (potentially) laughable comments or questions about what is being told. In Example 8, the host acts as a Dramatizer. His actions are oriented towards producing something amusing out of an everyday situation.

- (8) Guest = Thomas Bodström, Minister of Justice
- 1 Guest: quite like it is for [most people
 - 2 Host: [yeah okay.hh but it
 - 3 can happen sometimes that Göran sits by himself
 - 4 and nobody wants to sit next to him

- 5 SA: hah-hah-[hah-hah-hah
 6 Guest: [no no (0,7) I don't think so we sit we
 7 sit at a table sort of like this one /. . ./

This is the continuation of the interview with the Minister of Justice (Examples 4 and 6, above) and a part in which the politician is involved in describing the lunches at Rosenbad. He ends his turn by describing their ordinariness. The host then poses a question concerning “Göran”, Prime Minister and head of the government, about whether he “sits by himself and nobody wants to sit next to him” (lines 2–4), which invokes laughter from the studio audience (line 5). Obviously, the studio audience is amused by the image of the Prime Minister in an “outcast position”.

Producing something laughable is highly dependent on the host's actions, but the host is also oriented towards involving the guests in being an active part in these efforts. In Example 7 above, the guest treats the host's comment as if the latter is pointing out a potential problem with the conduct of the prank call. Although this dramatization could have been the end of this story, the host continues to strive for an elaboration from the guest (Example 9), getting him to perform and reproduce the prank call. Through these actions the story's potentially amusing feature is realized and made use of.

(9)⁴ Guest = Göran Persson, Prime Minister; SA = studio audience

- 1 Guest: with a little interference from the [mobile phone
 2 Host: [how did it
 3 sound approximately if you remember
 4 Guest: hmhm *this is no- this is the general secretary*
 5 [(1.2) *how are you* .hh
 6 SA: [hah-hah (.) hah-hah-hah-[hah-hah-hah-hah
 7 Host: [HAH-HAH-[hah
 8 Guest: [Prime
 9 Minister [and then we went with it
 10 Host: [with that inhalation there
 11 Guest: yeah [ehh it was very well thought-out and then>>>
 12 Host: [hah-hah
 13 >>>ah I pulled it off at any rate I'm happy about it

When the host asks the guest to reconstruct the call he made (lines 2–3), he is aiming at a more detailed description of the prank call, and seeking to explore something potentially amusing. The guest accepts this invitation directly and starts imitating the introductory phrase of his call (lines 4–5). He gives up his first attempt but then starts his imitation, which invokes laughter from the studio audience (line 6). The host aligns himself with the studio audience and laughs loudly with them, showing that he is evidently amused by the guest's performance (line 7) and that this is a wanted element in the program.

In Example 9, the story develops in a question-and-answer format (the host asks the questions and the guest is the answerer), but in Example 10, the host and the guest together make up a story as they go along chatting. According to Tolson (1991), chat is an act of dialogical improvisation based on the participants' skills at getting along in the talk and handling the situations that are occurring. In this part of the talk, the guest (who is leader of *Moderaterna* [the Conservative Party]) describes a recent conference with the three other party leaders within the non-socialist alliance (in Swedish referred to as *Alliansen* [the Alliance]). This conference took place at the home of the leader of the *Centerpartiet* [Centre Party] in northern Sweden, and it was altogether a rather extensive media event. This example starts with a jocular question (line 1), aimed at getting the guest to reveal what happened at the house when the media were not present.

(10) Guest = Fredrik Reinfeldt, Party leader of Moderaterna; SA = studio audience

- 1 Host: who got the most drunk late at night
- 2 SA: hah-[hah
- 3 Guest: [yeah eh you know the- there are eh two pretty
- 4 much complete teetotallers and one half I was
- 5 about to say so [that
- 6 Host: [it's that Christian Democrat
- 7 guy who doesn't drink [anything
- 8 Guest: [eh: noo nothing really
- 9 no *it was quite [careful* hah-hah (.hh)
- 10 SA: [hah-hah-hah-hah
- 11 Guest: so it wasn't real [ly
- 12 Host: [so it was you and
- 13 Leijonborg [(xxx)
- 14 Guest: [*yeah*-hah-hah
- 15 SA: hah-hah-hah-hah
- 16 Guest: no Leijonborg is a teetotaller and
- 17 Host: =oh yeah he sure is [right
- 18 Guest: [that's right
- 19 Host: you and Maud [well what do you kn[ow
- 20 Guest: [yeah
- 21 SA: [hah-hah-hah
- 22 Guest: we sat there and sang [hm
- 23 Host: [yeah
- 24 Guest: =yeah
- 25 Host: did you
- 26 Guest: yeah a little of that sh- she likes to sing /.../

The brief laugh from the studio audience stresses the initial question as a humorous one (line 2). The guest answers this question by telling that two of the other party leaders are teetotallers (lines 3–5). His answer suggests that the initial query is more or less irrelevant, which also implies that there is nothing spectacular to tell from this event, but since he starts telling about it, the host takes the opportunity to ask if it was “that Christian Democrat guy who doesn’t drink” (that is, the party leader of the Christian Democrats, who the host has made a joke about earlier in the show) (lines 6–7). In his answer, the guest continues to play along with the host’s joking and confirms this, partly with a smiling voice (lines 8–9). His answer invokes laughter from the studio audience (line 10) and the guest laughs with them, and he tries to make his point that there is not much to tell about that night (line 11). The host continues to ask what went on and suggests that the guest was drinking with Leijonborg, Leader of the Liberal party. The guest answers this with a “yeah” in a smiling voice before he starts laughing (line 14), which in turn invokes laughter from the studio audience (line 15). He waits for the laughter to fade before he states that Leijonborg is also a teetotaller (line 16). The host realizes his mistake (line 19), and concludes that the guest spent the evening with the female leader of the Centre Party. He emphasizes her name (Maud) and explicitly expresses his astonishment. This comment could be interpreted either as a suggestion that something happened between the guest and Maud Olofsson, or as a surprise that she drinks. The guest then takes the initiative to elaborate the story a bit further by saying that they “sat there and sang” (line 22), and the host responds to this with a question (“did you”). This is confirmed by guest, who adds that Maud “likes to sing” (line 26).

What is interesting in this sequence is that the host and guest engage in chat-like conversation. They transgress the question-and-answer format and the narrative progresses as they go along chatting. This narrative, which at first did not seem particularly spectacular (drinking with two teetotallers and another who was nearly one), develops in close collaboration with the studio audience and its laughter. By playing along in this bantering conversation, the guest is collaborating and turning this sequence of talk into an improvised and humorous performance, with entertaining potential.

6. Conclusions

Appearing in more popular interviews has become increasingly important for politicians in recent decades. It has often been assumed that these appearances, which Clayman and Heritage (2002: 341) characterize as “more relaxed and feel good alternatives to the news interviews”, present a trouble-free method of constructing an appealing political persona, as they offer politicians the possibility to present themselves in a favorable manner. One important conclusion

from this study is that an appearance on a talk show is not simply a question of giving the politician the space for favorable self-presentation. The narrativization of personal experiences is carried out in close collaboration between the host and the guests. Politicians' stories are to a large extent elicited, elaborated and accomplished in cooperation with the host.

In the eliciting phase, the host seeks ways to invite and agree with the guest that there is a story to be told. Then, the stories are elaborated through diverse techniques used by the host (recipient tokens, prompting for more information, pointing out actions as problematic). The host's actions are mainly oriented towards dramatizing the narratives and exploring their humorous potential. The studio audience is of particular significance in these activities, since it functions as a primary recipient of the (potentially) laughable moments. Those moments in which the studio audience is invoked and participates in the show with laughter often seem to be the "So what?" of the stories; they seem to be the stories' *raison d'être*. This management of stories emphasizes the performance character of the talk (cf. Thornborrow 2001) and transforms the politicians' more personal experiences into a public and entertaining show.

The "personality effect" of politicians' appearances on celebrity talk shows is certainly dependent on the politicians' willingness to get involved in the chat-like conversation. Politicians who participate in talk shows must be prepared "to take the risk of playing this kind of public verbal game" (Tolson 1991: 185). The politician who fails to play along and fails to engage in talk that invokes laughter can easily appear as impersonal and too formal (cf. van Zoonen and Holtz-Bacha 2000: 54–55). But, this venture is a balancing act. Politicians cannot take the chatting game too far since their political identity and the position they have achieved within the political sphere are also at stake.

Appendix 1: Key to transcriptions

in the <u>long</u> run	Underlined items were audibly stressed
the gy:m	A colon indicates that the prior sound was prolonged
shi-	A hyphen denotes a glottal stop or "cut-off" sound
.hh	Marks audible breathing or sighs
(1.3)	Numbers in parentheses denote elapsed silence in seconds
(.)	A period denotes a pause shorter than 0.5 second
HAH-hah	Marks laughter. Capital letters indicate louder volume
=	An equal sign indicates that one sound followed directly after the other
yes I [am	Brackets mark the onset of simultaneous speech or
[which you. . .	speech simultaneous with audience reactions

- *yes I am* Indicates that these words were uttered in a happy tone or smiling voice
- >> Indicates that a continuous utterance with no break or pause was broken up in order to accommodate the placement of overlapping talk

Appendix 2: Original transcripts

- (1) Gäst = Laila Freiwalds, utrikesminister
- 1 P-l: okej vi byter ämne [du äter inte mörk
2 Gäst: [hm
3 P-l: choklad (.) [berätta för oss varför du inte gör det
4 Gäst: [nä huh-huh
5 Gäst: nä det är faktiskt sant jag äter inte mörk cho- inte
6 sån här riktigt mörk choklad nej det har å göra med
7 att em eh när jag var liten å vi var i flyktingläger
8 i Tyskland så eh det är ju alltså andra världskriget
9 det var dåligt med mat å så kommer dom amerikanska
10 soldaterna in å dom hade med sig mörk choklad så det
11 vi fick utav dom det var mörk choklad
12 [så att jag levde på
13 P-l: [så du livnärde dig på det
14 Gäst: ja jag vet inte ja jag vet inte hur länge men det
15 kanske var vecker till och med
- (2) Gäst = Fredrik Reinfeldt, partiledare, Moderaterna
- 1 P-l: eh jag läste i tidningen här för nån månad sen
2 våldsman på eh moderatfest
3 Gäst: hm
4 P-l: =å då var det nå kniv- vad var det som hände
5 Gäst: ja egentligen vet jag inte för jag såg ingenting
6 av detta utan ja [g hörde i efterhand att det hade>>
7 P-l [jaha
8 Gäst: >>varit nån person som hade avvisats / . . . /
- (3) Gäst = Göran Persson, statsminister; Sp = Studiopublik
- 1 P-l: har du busringt själv nån gång
2 Gäst: (.hh) (hh:) nästa fråga
3 Sp: hah-hah-hah-[hah
4 P-l: [för det det går nämligen
5 ett rykte om Göran Persson att
6 eh Ingvar Carlsson fick en busringning för nåt år

7 sen där det uppgavs att det var Bhutros Bhutros
8 Gali som ringde
9 Sp: hah-hah-hah-hah
10 P-l är det en sann historia
11 Gäst (1,3) ja
12 Sp: hah-HAH-HAH-[HAH-hah
13 Gäst: [hah-[hah *det är sant och det>>
14 P-l: [nu får du
15 gäst: >>lyckades* [Ingvar va
16 P-l [ja

(4) Gäst = Thomas Bodström, justitieminister

1 P-l: du är justitieminister det är flott
2 Gäst: (.) hm
3 P-l: låter flott värre va si- va va- hur går
4 ditt jobb till var sitter du eh
5 i Rose[nbad
6 Gäst: [vi sitter i Rosenbad
7 P-l: ja okej
8 Gäst: ja.hh
9 P-l: så justitiedepartementet sitter [i Rosenbad
10 Gäst: [det sitter
11 där [ja
12 P-l [ja okej det är där
13 Göran Persson sitter också / . . . /

(5) Gäst = Göran Persson, statsminister

1 Gäst: så ringer jag från en turnébuss
2 P-l =jaha
3 Gäst den dan han fyller sexti
4 P-l: =jaha
5 Gäst: å säger att det är från FN:s generalsekreterare
6 P-l: okej
7 Gäst: och han går på det
8 P-l är det sant
9 Gäst ja

(6) Gäst = Thomas Bodström, justitieminister

1 Gäst: men sen är ju alla minstrar ute å reser så att det
2 kanske är en sju [åtta stycken
3 P-l: [ja du menar att ni ät- ministrarna
4 äter [tillsammans

- 5 Gäst: vi har en vi har en gemensam lunch varje dag
 6 men det kanske kommer sju åtta stycken var dag
 7 P-l: ja okej vadå ett bokad bord som alltid står
 8 dukat för er
 9 Gäst: ja alltså det är ganska likt andra vi har
 10 lunchkuponger [å det vi har två maträtter >>
 11 P-l: [hm
 12 Gäst >>å välja på så det är ganska likt
 13 för [dom flesta
 14 P-l [ja okej .hh

(7) Gäst = Göran Persson, statsminister

- 1 P-l är det sant
 2 Gäst ja
 3 P-l: men din brytning också
 4 Gäst: ja vi körde nån slags sån härn sörmländsk engelska
 5 där från en buss i Skaraborg
 6 P-l jaja
 7 Gäst med lite störning från [mobiltelefon
 8 P-l [hur lät det / . . /

(8) Gäst = Thomas Bodström, justitieminister; Sp = Studiopublik

- 1 Gäst: så det är ganska likt för [dom flesta
 2 P-l: [ja okej .hh men är det
 3 så ibland att Göran sitter själv
 4 å ingen vill sitta breve honom
 5 Sp: hah-hah-[hah-hah-
 6 Gäst [nä nä(0,7) det tror jag inte vi sitter vi
 7 sitter vid ett sånt här bord ungefär / . . /

(9)⁴ Gäst = Göran Persson, statsminister; Sp = Studiopublik

- 1 Gäst: med lite störning från [mobiltelefon
 2 P-l: [hur lät det
 3 ungefär om du kommer ihåg det
 4 Gäst: hmhm *this is no- this is the general secretary*
 5 [(1,2) *how are you* .hh
 6 Sp: [hah-hah (.)hah-hah-hah-[hah-hah-hah-hah
 7 P-l [HAH-HAH-[hah
 8 Gäst: [Prime
 9 Minister [åh sen drog vi det
 10 P-l [me den inandningen där
 11 Gäst: ja [ehh det var mycket genomtänkt å sen>>
 12 P-l [hah-hah
 13 >>ah jag lyckades i alla fall jag är glad för det

- (10) Gäst = Fredrik Reinfeldt, partiledare, Moderaterna; Sp = Studiopublik
- 1 P-l: vem blev fullast sen på kvällen
- 2 Sp: hah-[hah
- 3 Gäst: [ja eh alltså de det är ju eh två nära nog
- 4 helnykterister å en halv höll
- 5 jag på å säga så [att
- 6 P-l: [det är han kd killen
- 7 som inte dricker [nå
- 8 Gäst: [eh: näej inge vidare "
- 9 nä *det var väldigt [försiktigt* hah-hah (.hh)
- 10 Sp: [hah-hah-hah-hah
- 11 Gäst: så blev det inte rikti[gt
- 12 P-l: [så det var du å
- 13 Leijonborg [(inaudible)
- 14 Gäst: [*ja*-hah-hah
- 15 Sp: hah-hah-hah-hah
- 16 Gäst: nej Leijonborg är ju nykterist å
- 17 P-l: =det är han också ja [just det
- 18 Gäst: [ja visst
- 19 P-l: du å Maud [dra mig baklä[nges
- 20 Gäst: [ja
- 21 Sp: [hah-hah-hah
- 22 Gäst: vi satt där å sjöng [hm
- 23 P-l: [ja
- 24 Gäst: =ja
- 25 P-l: gjorde ni det
- 26 Gäst: ja lite så där ho- hon gillar å sjunga /. . ./

Notes

1. "Chat show" is often used as a term for the evening or celebrity format in Britain (see Haarman 1999).
2. The data have been kindly supplied by the Swedish National Archive of Recorded Sound and Moving Images.
3. Former Prime Minister Göran Persson writes in his memoirs about his appearance on *Sen kväll med Luuk*, stating that his press secretaries provided the production team with some behind-the-scenes stories.
4. The italics used in this example indicate that these words were originally spoken in English and have not been translated.

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