Non-Replies in Interviews with Iranian Politicians

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Abstract

Iran has been at the centre of international controversies since 1979 when the Islamic Republic of Iran was established. The controversial issues that Iran is associated with include its involvement in nuclear programme and the violation of human rights in Iran. Iranian politicians are often criticised for the Iranian government's non-conformity with Human Rights Council and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In this study we examine what strategies or non-replies Iranian politicians employ to respond to interviewers' face-threatening questions. The data consist of thirty political interviews conducted from 2001 to 2015 with a total of twelve hours of talk involving journalists working for western broadcasting companies and Iranian politicians collected from YouTube packaged for public consumption. It was explored that Iranian politicians employed eight kinds of superordinate non-replies to avoid answering the interviewers' face-threatening questions to save, protect or enhance their face. The findings of this study can shed light on the avoidance strategies of Iranian politicians.

Keywords**:** Non-replies, Iran, political interviews, nuclear programme, human rights

1. Introduction

Political interviews are 'institutional forms of talk aimed for 'overhearing audience' (Heritage, 1985, p.95). In this kind of mediated context, the interviewers are usually argumentative and controversial and actively involve themselves and the interviewees in confrontational interaction. Adversarial questions are common in political interviews with Iranian politicians as Iran is frequently criticised for non-conformity with the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and violation of human rights. However, Iranian politicians always maintain that Iran's nuclear programme is for technological and peaceful purposes and that Iran does not violate human rights as specified by the Human Rights Council. In face-sensitive political interviews, the interviewees try to employ various strategies or non-replies to handle the challenging questions of the interviewers, protect or save face and present a positive image of themselves in the global space. The aim of this paper is to provide a detailed analysis of non-replies employed by Iranian politicians to explore how they handle face threatening encounters to avoid their face loss.

2. Background to the Study

Iran's nuclear programme and human rights in Iran provide the context for the analysis and interpretation of our data.

In 2002, Iran faced international censure with respect to its nuclear activities, when the International Atomic Energy Agency (henceforth, IAEA) discovered that Iran failed to declare its two nuclear sites, a uranium enrichment plant in Natanz and a heavy-water reactor at Arak.

Iran signed an agreement in 2003 to suspend its nuclear enrichment programme and in return, Iran was allowed to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. In 2005, Iran resumed its nuclear enrichment programme and halted any progress in talks. There was a lot of distrust of Iran's nuclear activities, and it was suspected that Iran was planning to develop nuclear weapons.

In February 2012, IAEA declared Iran's refusal and continued non-compliance with the obligations of Nuclear Power Treaty (Rorrison, 2012). The pressure on Iran by the U.S. influenced the 2013 presidential election in Iran in which Mr. Hassan Rouhani, who was a relatively moderate candidate, was elected as the President of Iran (Katzman, 2017).

In April 2014, a framework deal was reached. After lots of negotiations between Iran and P5+1 (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States plus Germany), ultimately, on 14 July 2015 a nuclear agreement was signed (Khodadadi, 2016).

In addition to its nuclear programme, Iran has also been warned about its continued abuses and violations of human rights (Afshari, 2011; Kienzle, 2012). A broad range of criticisms of human rights abuses being committed in Iran have come from the officials of the United States (Katzman, 2017).

Some issues that Iran is often criticised for are the unequal rights between men and women, the filtering of Internet, religious freedom and stoning, and the virtual arrest of opposition leaders, Mr. Mehdi Karroubi and Mr. Mir-Hossain Mousavi (Katzman, 2017).

3.   Literature Review

As politicians are interviewed on various face-threatening topics in political interviews, the issue of face is significant.

3.1   Face

Face has been studied by various scholars the most influential of whom are Goffman (1955, 1967) and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). Goffman's notion of face has been used in pragmatics since the 1970s (André, 2013; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Goffman (1967, p. 5), taking the notion of face from Chinese, defines face "as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact". He asserts that during social interaction, social values are learned and feelings are attached to self and they are expressed through face. Furthermore, face is something that we do not own but that is loaned to us; if we do not present appropriate behaviour in society, it will be taken from us (Goffman, 1972, p.322). So, in order to maintain face, one should not engage in activities which might lead to face loss.

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) define face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". It is 'public self-image', which is invested, maintained, lost or enhanced emotionally and must be paid attention to in everyday interaction constantly. They divide 'face' into 'positive face', one's desire to be approved and appreciated by others, and 'negative face', which represents one's wish to be unimpeded and to have autonomy, independence and freedom of action (Brown & Levinson 1987, p. 129).

Due to the adversarial nature of political interviews, politicians are involved in face-threatening and face-attacking contexts, in which 'communicative conflicts' are common (Bull, 2008) therefore, politicians have to use facework as a communicative skill (Bull, 2008) to save, protect, or enhance their face.

3.2   Political Interviews

A political interview is a purposive encounter which occurs in an institutional context between an interviewer and an interviewee. Political interviews are a significant means of political communication (Bull & Mayer, 1993) and have become the focus of research not only in sociology and psychology but also in linguistics (Bull, Elliot, Palmer, & Walker, 1996). They are a tool for politicians to speak directly to many thousands of people, as well as to their fellow politicians, and "an instance for enhancing positive images of their own and their political groups" (Feldman, Kinoshita, & Bull, 2015, p. 66).

Anchimbe (2009, p. 97) defines the political interview as "a highly ritualized, mediated, public game of politically face-threatening thrusts by the interviewer and parries by the interviewee". Political interviews are a unique social context in which the participants are engaged in performance rather than a conversation (Bull & Mayer, 1993). Interviewers should try to take an impartial and neutral stance in questioning interviewees (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). This can be achieved through "polite, deferential and carefully scripted questioning" and "eliciting information, opinions and beliefs in a way that [treat] these as facts" (Emmertsen, 2007, p. 571).

Until the mid-1950s, questions in British political interviews were mainly deferential questions (Waddle & Bull, 2015) and were considered as "a form of social action" (Heritage, 2002, p. 1427) to elicit information (Feldman & Kinoshita, 2017, pp. 123-124). However, recently political interviews have increasingly become adversarial as "being adversarial ensures that the IE [interviewee] will be held accountable before the viewing public, and it also helps to generate lively discussions with maximum audience appeal" (Clayman 2002, p. 1387). Questioning of presidents has also become more adversarial now compared to in the 1950s (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, p. 751).

Political interviews "are set up to produce face-to-face confrontational and challenging encounters with journalists and politicians" (Feldman, Kinoshita, & Bull, 2016, p. 142). Questions in political interviews challenge the views that the co-participants express (Gialabouki & Pavlidou,

2019, p.18) and pose 'threats to face' (Bull, 2003) and communicative conflicts, thereby making 'face' a significant issue in political interviews. Anchimbe (2009, p. 97) believes that "the interviewer's job is to ask questions that systematically threaten the candidate's political face". Therefore, 'face' becomes prominent in political interviews as politicians are challenged by the interviewers' adversarial questions. They have to use various tactics to protect their face or their colleagues or allies' face, also they do not want to 'support the face of negatively valued others' (Bull & Fetzer, 2010).

Jucker (1986) argues that upholding face is very important for politicians because their political survival depends on the approval of the majority of people. Some questions asked by interviewers might be challenging or confrontational to the interviewees, which might lead to their face loss or face threat. Jucker (1986) believes that challenging questions result in more interesting interviews in which journalists often deliberately oppose the interviewees.

By "political interview", we refer to a generally in depth or short interview conducted by journalists with major political representatives, i.e., government ministers or politicians appearing in their professional political roles.

3.3   Answers in Political Interviews

Due to the adversarial questions asked by interviewers in political interviews, the interviewees may violate the topical agenda which is set by the interviewers (Greatbatch, 1986) thereby making them equivocate in order to avoid face damage (Feldman *et al.*, 2015). Equivocation is defined "as a form of speech that does not directly answer a question that has been posed" (Alhuthali, 2018, p.70).

When politicians do not want to answer the challenging questions of the interviewers, they equivocate. In other words, they do not give a clear reply to the question(s) asked. Bavelas, Black, Bryson, and Mullet (1988) disagree with the idea that politicians are intrinsically evasive, asserting instead that the nature of political interviews makes them equivocate. Conflictual questions and the interview situation may be the main reasons for politicians' equivocation because they might be put in situations in which they have to give certain answers which may threaten their face. Therefore, they try to employ various non-replies.

Politicians are frequently placed under 'an avoidance-avoidance conflict' in which all the potential replies to the questions may have negative consequences (Bull, 1998, p. 36), but they

should at least give a reply. So, evasiveness or equivocation happens not because of their interest or desire to be equivocal, but because of the demands of the communicative and social situation.

3.4   Politicians' Avoidance Strategies

People always want to present a positive image of themselves or to be evaluated positively. In face-threatening situations which involve criticism and verbal attacks, face is threatened, or lost. Politicians are involved in face threatening situations in which they have to manage face (Bull 2008). In order to avoid face damage (Feldman *et al.*, 2015), they apply various techniques or strategies to avoid responses which may cause their face look bad or restrict 'their future freedom of action' (Bull & Fetzer, 2010). But as Bull (2008) points out, face management is not just avoiding making yourself look bad, but also saying the things that make you look good.

Anchimbe (2009, p. 104) found six linguistic avoidance strategies in political interviews namely "valence strategy, generalisation strategy, specificity strategy, correction strategy, non-committal strategy, and evidentiality strategy". In a valence strategy, the politician applies 'less negative or positive connotation'. In a generalisation strategy, the politician transforms a clear reference or concept into a vague and general concept in order to maintain a positive face. In a specifity strategy, the politician shifts from a general issue or concept to a particular one which helps him/her to maintain a positive face. In a correction strategy, the politician withdraws, redresses or reassesses an earlier misunderstood statement and gives a new one. In a non-committal strategy, the politician avoids words and making commitments to future action. In an evidentiality strategy, the politician shifts authorship to a third party.

Weilin and Xiaoying (2008) studied political interviews and found that there are two types of evasion: overt evasion and covert evasion. Overt evasion is easy to identify as the speaker signals the interviewer that s/he is going to refuse replying the questions but in a covert evasion, the speaker, by employing different strategies, strives to conceal that s/he is not going to answer the interviewer's questions. Weilin and Xiaoying (2008) investigated Chinese and American political press conferences and found that American spokespersons used overt evasion more and Chinese spokespersons used covert evasion more. They attributed this to America's invidualistic culture and China's collectivist-based culture, in which non-assertiveness is encouraged in interpersonal communication in China (Weiling & Xiaoying, 2008) and also, the concept of face in Chinese is wider than the one in America.

Bull and Mayer (1993) analysed eight televised political interviews of Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock. They identified eleven superordinate categories of non-replies. These were divided into thirty subordinate types. The eleven superordinate categories are: questioning the question, ignoring the question, attacking the question, apologies, declining to answer, giving incomplete reply, attacking the interviewer, making a political point, stating or implying that the question has already been answered, repeating answer to the previous question, and acknowledging the question without answering it. One more superordinate category namely 'literalism' and four more subordinate types were later added to this typology by Bull (2003). The politicians refused to reply to questions in interviews by inhibiting awkward questions, attacking the interviewers, and being defensive, e.g., Margaret Thatcher did not reply to 56% of the questions and Neil Kinnock did not reply to 59% of the questions. Bull *et al.* (1996, p. 271) argue that one of the main objectives of politicians is "to present the best possible face both for themselves and for the party which they represent". Thus, these are a number of good reasons for arguing that face is of central importance.

Bull (2008) examined non-committal political discourse in televised political interviews using Bavelas, Black, Chovil, and Mullett's (1990) equivocation theory and then reconceptualised their equivocation theory in terms of face and face management (Bull, *et al.* 1996). He concluded that Bavelas et al.'s theory of equivocation can be used with the consideration of the notions of face and face management as they can have implications for the analysis of equivocal and non-equivocal political discourse.

Bull and Strawson (2020) examined 23 sessions of Prime Minister's Questions during the time when Theresa May held office to investigate whether the typologies of the equivocation in broadcast political interviews could be extended to the analysis of Prime Minister's questions. They found that she employed various strategies of equivocation which were ignoring questions, acknowledging questions without answering them, stating or implying that she had already answered questions and also modifying questions she was asked.

Çakir, Kaya and Kara (2016) analysed 19 hours and 42 minutes of Turkish political discourse and observed that 10 out of 14 evasion categories introduced by Bull (2003), Clayman (2001) and Galasinski (2000) were also employed by Turkish politicians.

4. Methodology

The data consists of thirty political interviews conducted wholly in English from 2001 to 2015 with a total of twelve hours of talk. They were downloaded from YouTube, which is considered "the world's largest town hall for political debate" (Blitvich, 2010, p. 541). The interviews involved three Iranian politicians (named in Table 1), and ten journalists working for six western broadcasting companies (CNN, NBC News, PBS, Euronews, France 24 & ABC news) as listed in Table 2.

Table 1: Interviewees

No.	Interviewees	Role/Position
1	Larijani, Mohammad- Javad	o Head of Iranian Human Rights Council of Judiciary since July 27th, 2004 o Adviser to the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei o Member of the parliament of Iran from May 28th 1992 to May 28th, 2000
2	Mottaki, Manouchehr	o Minister of foreign affairs from August 24th, 2005 to December 13th, 2010
3	Zarif, Mohammad Javad	o Minister of Foreign Affairs since August15th, 2013 o Chief nuclear negotiator of Iran from September 6th, 2013 to July 14th, 2015 o The permanent representative of Iran to the United Nations from August 5th, 2002 to July 25th, 2007

Table 2: Details of Interviewers and Broadcast Companies

No.	Interviewers	Broadcast Companies
1	Amanpour, Christine	CNN
2	Amoric, Hérve	France 24
3	Azim, Mohammad Abdel	Euronews
4	Curry, Ann	NBC News
5	Davies, Jon	Euronews
6	Franey, James	Euronews
7	Mavaddat, Fariba	Euronews
8	Rose, Charlie	PBS
9	Shantyae, Sanam	France 24
10	Stephanopoulos, George Robert	ABC News

The analysis focuses on interviewees' strategies to deal with the interviewers' challenging questions. We examine what strategies the interviewees employ to avoid replying to these questions. The methodology of the study is based on the typology of equivocation proposed by Bull and Mayer (1993) which was further developed by Bull (2003). As this typology provides the techniques of the analysis of political interviews, we aim to investigate the interviewees' non-replies. Typology of equivocation (Bull, 2003) is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Typology of Equivocation (Bull, 2003)

No.	Superordinate Categories	Subordinate Categories
1	Ignores the question	
2	Acknowledges the question without answering it	
3	Question the question	(a) Request for clarification: The politician asks for further information about the question.
		(b) Reflecting the question back to the interviewer
4	Attack the question	(a) The question fails to tackle the important issue.
		(b) The question is hypothetical or speculative.
		(c) The question is based on a false premise.
		(d) The question is factually inaccurate.
		(e) The question includes a misquotation.
		(f) The question includes a quotation taken out of

		context.
		(g) The question is objectionable.
		(h) The question is based on a false alternative.
5	Attack the interviewer	
6	Decline to answer	(a) Refusal on grounds of inability.
		(b) Unwillingness to answer
		(c) can't speak for someone else
		(d) Deferred answer. It is not possible to answer the
		question for the time being
		(e) Pleads ignorance
7	Makes political point	(a) External attack - attacks opposition or other rival groups.
		(b) Presents policy
		(c) Justifies policy
		(d) Gives reassurance
		(e) Appeals to nationalism
		(f) offers political analysis
		(g) Self-justification
		(h) Talks up one's own side
8	Gives incomplete reply	(a) Starts to answer but doesn't finish (self-interruption)
		(b) Negative answer: The politician states what will not happen instead of what will happen
		(c) Partial reply (answers part of a single-barrelled question)
		(d) Half answer Half answer (answers one half of a double-barrelled question)
		(e) Fractional reply
9	Repeats answer to previous question	
10	States or implies that has already answered the question	
11	Apologies	
12	Literalism: The literal aspect of a question which was not intended to be taken literally is answered	

4.1   Procedures

The collected data were transcribed orthographically. The transcribed data were examined in detail to identify those most relevant for the study of non-replies in political interviews based on Bull's (2003) typology of non-replies. Non-reply is defined as the reply in which either a part, incomplete or none of the requested information is given by the politician (Bull & Mayer, 1993; Bull, 2003).

First, the data were examined to identify the category of the superordinate non-replies and then the superordinate non-replies were scrutinised to identify the type of the subordinate non-replies employed by the Iranian politicians.

5.   Analysis and Discussion

Extracts 1 to 17 demonstrate what non-replies the Iranian politicians employ in their interviews with journalists working for western broadcasting companies:

5.1   Acknowledging the Question Without Answering It

Extract 1: PBS November 18th, 2011

Rose	: Would you like to see Saudi Arabia having nuclear weapon? Would you like to see?
Larijani	: Nuclear weapon or nuclear technology? Two things
Rose	: Ok, fair, nuclear weapon, would you like to see Saudi Arabia to have a nuclear weapon?
Larijani	: We are a signatory to NPT we are a sincere signatory to NPT. We think non-proliferation is a benefit to Iran and all of us.

In Extract 1, the interviewer asks the politician "Would you like to see Saudi Arabia having a nuclear weapon?". Larijani does acknowledge that the interviewer had asked a question, but he does not answer the question and states his own opinion that nuclear weapon and nuclear technology are two things. The interviewer accepts the politician's reply by stating "Ok, fair" and then he repeats his question one more time. The politician, again acknowledges the interviewer's question, but states his opinion that "we are a sincere signatory to NPT and we think non-proliferation is a benefit to Iran and all of us".

5.2   Questioning the Question

On 20 June 2014 a lady named Ghoncheh Ghavami, a British-Iranian law graduate was detained in solitary confinement in Evin prison in Iran for protesting against unequal rights of men and women in sporting events. However, Iranian politicians deny the connection between watching a men-only volleyball match with her detention and state that she was detained not because of watching a match but because of safety and security reasons.

Extract 2: Euronews, November 7th, 2014

Franey (IR)	:	But isn't it a show of weakness that the Islamic Republic of Iran is so scared of a 25-year-old law graduate?
Larijani (IE)	:	Not at all. *Why weakness?* We are very strong in pursuing our way of life and our regulations.

In Extract 2, the interviewer states implicitly that Iran government is "scared of a 25-year-old law graduate". The question asked by the interviewer implies lack of power on the part of the Iranian government. The interviewee's face is attacked by the ascription of 'fear' and 'weakness'. The interviewee, instead of replying to the interviewer's question, reflects the question back to the interviewer "why weakness?".

5.3   Attacking the Question

Extract 3: CNN, July 17th ,2014 (part 2)

Amanpour: (IR)	Please continue our conversation about what you just said sanctions what have they achieved, what they have achieved, they have achieved a crippling Iran's basic economy. Let's be serious about this. That's why you are your President was elected, he tried to change this economic problem, if you cannot deliver a nuclear deal, what will that mean for this President and the people of Iran?
Zarif (IE):	Well, I have a different narrative about why this President was elected, *this President was elected because he had a serious programme to gain international respect for Iran, we had better economists running for this office, so this is not about economy.*

In Extract 3, the interviewer states that sanctions on Iran have crippled Iran's economy and the reason why Iran's President was elected was to change the crippling economy of Iran for better. The interviewee states his disagreement with the interviewer by stating "well, I have a different narrative about why this President was elected" and then he argues that the President was elected not because of changing Iran's economy but because of gaining "international respect for Iran". Stating this, the politician attacks the question as it is factually incorrect.

5.4   Attacking the Interviewer

The interviewee criticises the interviewer personally which is different from attacking the question. Extract 4 demonstrates how this non-reply is employed. But first, a brief note on the Tehran Declaration is given. This is the Joint Declaration by Iran, Turkey and Brazil which was signed in Tehran on May 17, 2010, in which they agreed to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other nuclear issues (Borger, 2010).

Extract 4: France 24, June 10th, 2010

Amoric (IR): In the case of the Tehran Declaration the international community didn't seem convinced by the proposals Iran agreed to take in Brazil, you think that Iran can now reassure the international community on the base of this proposal?
Mottaki (IE): Fifty-seven countries accepted this Declaration, supported Declaration and recommended the other countries to support for implementation of this declaration. *How do you say we have not convinced the international community?*

In Extract 4, the interviewer says that the international community does not "seem convinced by the proposals Iran agreed to take in Brazil" and then asks the interviewee if Iran can reassure the international community on the base of this proposal or not. In response, the interviewee states that many countries accepted and supported the declaration and then attacks the interviewer by stating "How do you say we have not convinced the international community?".

5.5   Declining to Answer

Iranian politicians use 3 ways to decline to answer questions: (a) refusal on grounds of inability, (b) unwillingness to answer and (c) can't speak for someone else.

Extract 5: PBS, November 18th, 2011

Rose (IR)	: How close are you if you wanted today to produce a nuclear weapon an explosive device? How close are you if in fact you make that decision?
Larijani (IE):	Well, *professionally I cannot answer it rigorously* only because it depends on a lot of points …

In Extract 5, the interviewer asks the interviewee a wh-question, how close Iran is to produce a nuclear weapon. However, the interviewee does not give a direct reply and states "Well professionally I cannot answer it rigorously only because it depends on a lot of points". Stating this, the interviewee declines to answer on the grounds of inability.

In Extract 6, the interviewer asks about the meeting in Switzerland with the 5+1 countries (the U.S., France, England, Russia, China plus Germany) and Iran. The issues discussed were the sanctions on Iran, uranium enrichment and a halt of Iran's nuclear activity for ten years.

Extract 6: CNN, March 5th, 2015

Amanpour: (IR)	Are the issues around sanctions, are the issues around the length of time? For instance, President Obama this week said that the deal would require a halt of the nuclear activity for about ten years at least.
Zarif (IE):	Well, *I'm not going to negotiate on the air*. There are a lot of details that need to be discussed.

In Extract 6, the interviewer asks the politician about the details of the nuclear deal. But the interviewee states that "I'm not going to negotiate on the air". He is thus unwilling to answer.

Extract 7 concerns Jason Rezaian, an Iranian-American journalist with the *Washington Post*. In 2015, he was convicted of espionage and was taken into custody.

Extract 7: Euronews, November 7ᵗʰ, 2014

Franey: (IR)	I'd just like to move on to talk about some specific cases. There's a Washington Post reporter Jason Rezaian, who has been detained for more than 100 days. What has he done wrong?
Larijani: (IE)	Well, *I am not in a position to judge*, I am just reporting that the security officials filed against him charges that he was involved in activities beyond journalism.

The interviewer asks Larijani what Jason Rezaian has done to be sentenced to more than 100 days imprisonment. In response, Larijani says that he is not in a position to judge, employing the subordinate non-reply of 'can't speak for someone else'.

5.6   Making a Political Point

Iranian politicians make seven types of political point in their non-replies. First of all, they attack opposition or other rival groups: The United States, IAEA, the United Kingdom and Israel:

Extract 8: April 29ᵗʰ, 2014 (part 2)

Rose (IR) :	They're worried about a covered facility they can't know about and don't have access to.
Zarif (IE):	Charlie, let's look at the realities on the ground, what happened to Iran was a pattern of denial, Iran owns a part of a French consultium producing enriched uranium 10 percent of urodif, we haven't been able to get a gram of uranium, you know that the United States, in the 1950s and 60s, in the Atoms for Peace Project, built a nuclear research reactor in Tehran, then after the revolution, we started to need fuel for that reactor. *The United States refused to give us fuel for the reactor that it had built.* It's a peaceful reactor, it cannot produce weapons but the United States refused to give us fuel. We went and bought it in 1990 from Argentina, then in early 2000s we needed more fuel, that fuel ran out, we asked for fuel from *IAEA, they said we don't give it to you*, we said we will build it ourselves and then they started to panic why is Iran building its own fuel, why? Because you didn't give it to us.

Extract 8 is about Iran's lack of transparency in its nuclear programme. The interviewer calls Iran's nuclear programme 'covered' and states that P5+1 countries (the United States, France, England, Russia, China plus Germany) are worried because they do not have access to the nuclear sites in Iran. Zarif justifies Iran's activities stating that Iran had no choice because America and the IAEA did not provide Iran with uranium for its research reactor. Zarif is employing the non-reply of attacking other groups (the United States and IAEA).

Extract 9 is about Ms Neda Agha-Soltan who was shot dead during the Iranian election protest in 2009. The murder of Neda Agha-Soltan attracted the worldwide attention and her death became iconic in the Iranian people's struggle and challenges against the disputed election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Her death was captured on video and shared on the Internet and broadcast, making it a rallying point for the opposition. The person accused of killing her was identified as Abbas Kargar Javid who is said to be a pro-government militiaman.

Extract 9: Euronews, February 19th, 2010

Azim (IR)	:	The whole world saw the young Neda, who apparently died in front of the camera. How do you explain this?
Larijani (IE)	:	Neda Agha-Soltan… it was a very cruel thing that happened. It is a crime that we don't know the extent of yet. With all the information that we have, the person responsible for that criminal act right now is walking in one of the capitals of the European countries, with full support. We asked them extradition to Iran. They refused that.
Azim (IR)	:	But the video shocked millions of people in western countries.
Larijani (IE)	:	It shocked millions of people in Iran as well. Who did it? This is a big question. And how they were ready to do it, and how they took the film, and how… you know a guy came in the night before this crime and flew back to the capital of a European country the day after, with the whole movie with him. So, I think he is the key person. He knows all the information. *And the United Kingdom is in charge of that*. They are responsible. They should put that person into full interrogation. He holds the key for that crime.

In Extract 9, the interviewer asks the interviewee for an explanation regarding the death of Ms Neda Agha-Soltan. In response to the question, Larijani states "it was a very cruel thing that happened". Then, he claims that the person who killed Ms Neda Agha-Soltan is walking freely in one of the capitals of Europe "with full support". Articulating this statement, he employs the subordinate non-reply of attacking European countries, blaming them for their support of Neda Agha-Soltan's murderer and their refusal to extradite him to Iran.

In response to the interviewer's next question "But the video shocked millions of people in western countries", he claims the man came "the night before this crime and flew back to the capital of a European country the day after, with the whole movie with him", implying that the crime was planned with the support of European countries. Then, he blames the United Kingdom for not interrogating the supposed murderer. In his non-reply of making political point, he used the subordinate non-reply of attacking external group, the UK.

Extract 10: Euronews, March 15th, 2013

Mavaddat (IR):	Let me move to Iran's nuclear programme. Now Iran is under military threat from the international community, inflation is exploding and sanctions are hurting. All this for a meagre 20 percent enriched uranium for a half-baked programme?
Larijani (IE):	The situation is not as bad as you said because the country is moving and surviving. The issue of nuclear technology is not an issue of having only some kilos of 20 percent enriched, we are in the international community like any other person. Every right that an American has, we Iranians have. *The Israelis are very afraid of Iran. This is their problem. They are paranoid*.

In Extract 10, the interviewer states that due to Iran's nuclear programme and uranium enrichment, Iran is under military threat, sanctions and inflation. In response, Larijani blames an external group, Israel, for the situation, claiming that "the Israelis are very afraid of Iran. This is their problem. They are paranoid".

Extract 11: Euronews, November 7th, 2014

Franey: (IR)	Politicians in the US and Israel, some certainly on the right, think that you want to build a bomb.
Larijani: (IE)	I think that the right politicians, the right-wing politicians, should go and see a psychiatrist. I mean *something is wrong with mental status*. The world is not moving in the direction that they would like. We are much a strong country in the world and they cannot change it in the way they like.

To be less threatening, the interviewer in Extract 11, attributes the assertion that Iran wants to build a bomb to a third party, "politicians in the US and Israel". Instead of replying to the question, Larijani attacks them, calling them "right-wing politicians" mentally ill: they "should go and see a psychiatrist. I mean something is wrong with mental status".

In a second type of making a political point, Iranian politicians justify policy by citing the law, prevention of violence and disorder, and also comparing Iran to other countries.

Extract 12 is about two opposition leaders and presidential candidates, Mr. Mehdi Karroubi and Mr. Mir-Hossein Mousavi, who have been under virtual house arrest since the 2009 Iranian presidential elections. Mr. Mir-Hossein Mousavi, one of the leading candidates, was believed by many to have won. However, the official results showed Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to be the winner. Supporters of the other two candidates protested in the streets across the country. Mr. Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mr. Mehdi Karroubi were put under house arrest for urging their supporters to demonstrate.

Extract 12: Euronews, March 13th, 2012

Davies: (IR)	Could you explain that democracy, when opposition leaders are being held in detention and many candidates are not allowed to take part in an election. What kind of democracy is that?
Larijani: (IE)	First of all, the opposition in Iran, I mean the reformists in Iran have about 40 seats in parliament. *Those who are in jail are definitely not there because of their political views. It's because they're acting outside the legal structure.* To act in a civil society, *we should respect the laws even if they don't like the laws.*

The interviewer asks Larijani to explain how a country can claim to be a democracy "when opposition leaders are being held in detention...". This question is an accusation (Heritage, 2002) of dishonesty, of not presenting the real situation of human rights in Iran. Larijani claims that those

in jail violated the country's laws. He justifies the Iranian government's policy of preventing the candidates from participating in the election by citing the law.

Extract 13: Euronews, November 7th, 2014

Franey: (IR)	I just also want to move onto the case of Ghoncheh Ghavami, the British-Iranian lady who was protesting the right to watch a volleyball match. She's now been detained for more than 125 days. She didn't meet her lawyer until the lawyer came into court. What happened?
Larijani: (IE)	The idea is not about participating in going to watch the match. The idea is that *she broke the relation in creating violence and creating a lot of fusses around*…you know, the places around where the matches are holding are very volatile areas. You have it in the western countries, a small act and huge violence will start over there.

In Extract 13, the interviewer asks Larijani about the detention of Ghoncheh Ghavami, the British-Iranian lady who wanted to watch a men-only volleyball match (for more information on Ghoncheh Ghavami see Extract 2). In response, the interviewee implies that the lady was detained in order to avoid violence and disorder in the country. Stating this, he justifies the lady's detention on grounds of preventing violence and disorder.

Extract 14: Euronews, March 15th, 2013

Mavaddat (IR)	The report by the UN is filled with cases of abuse of human rights, unjustified imprisonment, torture and of executions including of minors. What is your response to the report?
Larijani (IE)	We are not claiming to be perfect, but we think that *our record on human rights definitely is not worse than the other countries* who are really putting the blame on us, such as a good number of EU members.

In Extract 14, the interviewer accuses Iran of violating human rights. In response, Larijani evades the question by comparing Iran to other countries claiming that Iran's "record on human rights definitely is not worse than the other countries".

The third type of making a political point employed by Iranian politicians is *giving reassurance* about the Iranian government's action or policy. Extract 15 is about three American

hikers who were taken into custody by the Iranian border guards for crossing into Iran on July 9, 2009.

<div align="center">Extract 15: NBC News, November 22nd, 2010</div>

Curry (IR):   Do you think if there is a chance it would be settled before the trial?

Larijani (IE): Well, I think it is a premature that I should say it right now, but *I hope that we can facilitate, we can facilitate this process* with this perception that let us assume that these people were innocent, they were really hikers and they were accidentally by bad chance they crossed into the most volatile area on the border.

The interviewer asks Larijani if the American hikers' case "would be settled before the trial". The interviewee tries to reassure the interviewer that the Iranian government "can facilitate this process". He employs the non-reply of *giving reassurance* on the Iranian government's action or policy in dealing with American hikers.

5.7   Giving Incomplete Answer

<div align="center">Extract 16: France 24, December 4th, 2014</div>

Shantyae: Let's now move and talk about the number of executions that have been carried out
(IR)   in Iran: at the moment, some four hundred in the first part of 2014 alone. You yourself said that the majority of them are linked to drug related crimes and something that Iran is currently looking at, Mr Larijani, what about other non-violent-related crimes like adultery? Is that something that we are likely to see the back of any time soon in Iran?

Larijani: Well, first of all, nobody is happy to see the number of executions is high and it is a
(IE)   sad story that we have this much crime I mean drug-related crimes that according to the existing law which is they are receiving the capital punishment. We are crusading to change this law.

In Extract 16, the interviewer first mentions drug-related executions in Iran and then he asks about "non-violent-related crimes like adultery". However, the interviewee only replies to the first part of the interviewer's question about drug crimes and ignores the second part about the non-violent

ones. Thus, he employs the non-reply of an incomplete answer, answering only one-half of a double-barrelled question.

Extract 17: CNN, March 3rd, 2012

Amanpour: (IR)	Iran's Supreme Leader, the other day again mentioned his Fatwa against nuclear weapons. He called it again in public a great sin. What message is he sending? Is he sending a message to President Obama that Iran will not cross Obama's red lines, will not go military in its nuclear programme?
Larijani (IE):	Iran is a serious player in the region. Iran is not after nuclear weapon, the message is clear, deal with Iran as it is, Iran is not after nuclear weapon. Nuclear weapon is not an asset for us. It is more liability. Pakistan has nuclear weapon. It is a shamble country in terms of security. It doesn't add to our security. We are secure enough. We are strong enough without nuclear weapon and it is against the Fatwa of Ayattollah Khamenei. Nobody is daring to do that.

In Extract 17, the interviewer asks Larijani a multi-barrelled question (Bull, 2003), "What message is he sending? Is he sending a message to President Obama that Iran will not cross Obama's red lines, will not go military in its nuclear programme?". However, the latter chooses to focus on "the message": "deal with Iran as it is, Iran is not after nuclear weapon. Nuclear weapon is not an asset for us. It is more liability". He ignores the part about "a message to President Obama that Iran will not cross Obama's red lines". He employs a fractional reply, another non-reply of incomplete answer.

5.8   Claiming Rights

Extract 18: ABC News, September 29th, 2013

Stephanopoulos (IR)	But if you don't want nuclear weapon why enrich uranium to the levels you are enriching uranium?
Zarif (IE)	Because that's our right

In Extract 18, the interviewer asks Zarif, the interviewee why the Iranian government is enriching uranium if they do not want a nuclear programme. In response Zarif states that it is the right of Iran to do so. He employs the non-reply of claiming rights.

The analysis demonstrates that of twelve evasion categories suggested by Bull (2003), seven were used by Iranian political interviewees: 1) acknowledging the question without answering it, 2) questioning the question, 3) attacking the question, 4) attacking the interviewer, 5) declining to answer, 6) making a political point, and 7) giving an incomplete answer. In addition to the categories proposed by Bull (2003), a new evasion strategy was found in the data, *claiming rights.*

When *making a political point*, Iranian politicians attacked the United States, Israel, the European countries especially the United Kingdom and the IAEA. When justifying the Iranian government's policy, they cited the law and security reasons and compared Iran with other countries.

6.   Conclusion

Typology of equivocation (Bull, 2003) was employed to investigate how Iranian politicians handled face-threatening questions in interaction and what non-replies they employed to save, protect or enhance face. Studying the non-replies in threatening encounters elucidates the ways how interviewees cope and handle face threats by avoiding giving the replies which may threaten or damage their face. The results of this study can have implications in the analysis of political interviews and help us to understand political interviews better. The findings of this study can provide a deeper understanding and exploration of various evasion strategies and may have contributions to the studies that attempt to find out the evasion strategies employed by the politicians worldwide. As the Iranian politicians justified their policy by citing the law, prevention of violence and disorder and by comparing Iran to other countries, which were considered as the new instances of justifying policy, other studies can be carried out to investigate how the subordinate non-reply of justifying policy is employed to explore whether the other politicians of other countries justify their policy by citing the law, prevention of violence and disorder and by comparing their countries to other countries or not.

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