

Balans is een centraal thema in het professionele en persoonlijke leven van PV. Maar wat betekent dat precies voor hem? Waarom zijn evenwichten belangrijk binnen een onderneming? Over welke evenwichten gaat het dan? En hoe zorg je als ondernemer voor een balans die jezelf én je bedrijf naar successen leidt.

*Balance is a central theme in PV's professional and personal life. But what does it mean exactly for him? Why are balances important in a company? What balances is this about? And how do you as an entrepreneur guarantee a balance that leads both you and your company to successes.*

This is how a 6-episode entrepreneurial podcast is presented on Spotify: one statement followed by four questions. The paragraph is – in Hyland's (2002) words – “governed by questioning” (529). They are all questions that the listeners could be asking and hence reasons why they should listen to the podcast in the first place. They highlight specific issues that the listeners might be curious about. In doing so, the podcast makers are putting themselves in the listeners' shoes and anticipating what they would like to learn about entrepreneurship. Interestingly, for the fourth question the question mark is missing as if it is not a question but an announcement of the topic, framing the podcast as a sort of “how to” session.

Clearly, this use of questions can be seen as a means of attention-grabbing in today's highly competitive social media environment (cf. Hyland 2002). It should be noted that the questions here are making the paragraph interactive in a non-traditional way: instead of raising issues that the podcast listeners are invited to address, they are bringing up topics that the listeners themselves could be raising and that the entrepreneur will then go on to deal with in the podcast. It is this perspective that determines our analytical gaze in the inquiry into questions in entrepreneurial podcasts reported on in this article: in line with Goffman's (1979) notion of participation framework we aim to figure out who is voicing the questions in these entrepreneurial podcasts and who they are addressed to as well as what this might tell us about the use of podcasting in strategic leadership communication.

## 1. Introduction

From the early 2000s, when the first podcasts were launched (Hammersley, 2004), to today (with over 60% of America's adult population now listening to podcasts, Edison Research 2022), podcasts have been among the fastest rising genres in our contemporary digitized mediascape. At the same time, the scholarly literature has devoted relatively little attention to them. Most research on podcasts can be situated within journalism and communication studies. Recently, two new key full-length publications, McHugh's (2022) *Power of Podcasting: Telling Stories through Sound* and Baham III & Higdon (2022)'s *Podcaster's Dilemma: Decolonizing Podcasters in the Era of Surveillance Capitalism*, have documented the emergence of this ‘homespun medium’ that was – at least initially - unhampered by

institutional gatekeepers (McHugh, 2022: 7) and that is predominantly characterized by interactivity, reflexivity and storytelling. Most podcasts, these two studies argue, feature some sort of dialogue or multi-party talk, they include a fair degree of speaker self-reflection on the underlying podcasting process and they draw on the dynamics of narrative. Given the essentially discursive nature of these key features, it is all the more intriguing that the language of podcasts has received little or no interest from a discourse studies perspective.

This article can be seen as a first step towards addressing this gap. In particular, it is focused on the use of questions in podcasts for entrepreneurial communication, i.e. business leaders producing podcasts to disseminate their professional visions. Our analytical point of departure is that while the interactive question-answer format is a signature feature of podcasts, previous case-based research on selected entrepreneurial podcasts has shown how the interaction is phased out of the podcast, leaving only the entrepreneur's voice (Jacobs, 2023). This 'de-dramatization' can be associated with the use of entrepreneurial podcasting as a so-called leadership branding project (Learmonth & Morrell, 2019), indexing the genre's transition to a corporate medium and echoing the notion of media re-colonization (with the capitalist imaginary recuperating emerging ideas and grassroots technologies) (see Baham III & Higdon, 2022, and Jacobs, 2023). It follows that, with overt interaction excluded from the entrepreneurial podcasts, we believe that it is worth going more deeply into possibly hidden forms of interaction by focusing on the use of questions voiced by the entrepreneurs themselves in their one-person podcasts. The underlying reason for this is that questions have been argued to be a prime resource of interactivity. As Hyland (2002) has put it, questions are "the strategy of dialogic involvement par excellence" (530); in his analysis of academic blogging he argues that questions are among "the most obvious ways that writers project the perceptions, interests, and needs of a potential audience into their unfolding argument" (531). One of their effects is "to create rapport and intimacy" (530), which – incidentally – are typically associated with podcasting (see McHugh, 2022 and Baham III & Higdon, 2022) but which seem to have been phased out of the one-person variant used for entrepreneurial communication.

The key question that we will address in this article is therefore if and how entrepreneurial podcasts, in spite of their de-dramatized format, draw on questioning as an interactive device and what this could mean for future scholarly inquiry into podcasts in leadership settings. We will first go into the dataset that was used for this study as well as the methodology. Next, we will present our findings and conclusions.

## 2. Data and methodology

In this article we focus on the single case of an entrepreneurial podcasting initiative started in the fall of 2022 by a 56-year-old businessman in a North Western European country. He is the chairman of a privately owned accounting and consulting firm that he took over from his father about 25 years ago. The company had just a handful of employees at that time, with a turnover of a couple of millions of euros. Today there are well over a 1,000 employees and

the turnover for 2022 was around 135 million euros. There are 25 regional offices all across the country. The company's baseline is 'helping customers grow'.

As part of a personal development project that was suggested to him by his mentor, the entrepreneur set out to produce a 6-episode podcast series. The longest episode is about 16 minutes, the shortest is 10 minutes. The podcast is in Dutch, one of the country's official languages; for this article, we present the original extracts with the first author's translation in English. The overarching theme of the 6 episodes is the concept of balance, as indicated in the announcement that we discussed at the start of this article. The pun at the double meaning of 'balance' is intended here: on the one hand, balance refers to a person's 'equilibrium' (both physical and mental), which – according to the entrepreneur – is what leaders need to be successful; on the other hand, it hints at the 'balance sheet', a bookkeeping term for the correspondence between assets and liabilities in a firm's financial make-up. The latter reference is appropriate given the fact that one of the core areas of expertise of the entrepreneur himself and of his firm is accounting. Each of the six episodes is focused on one entrepreneurial quality that the entrepreneur goes on to illustrate based on his own personal experience. The qualities discussed include authenticity, humility, life-long learning and spirituality.

The data set for the analysis presented here includes

- The audio and the first author's transcripts of the 6 episodes;
- Transcripts of the interviews that the first author conducted with the entrepreneur in the course of a couple of months as they were making the podcast as well as with the firm's marketing manager who facilitated the entire process and with the self-employed communication consultant who was in charge of producing the podcast (also referred to as the podcast producer);
- a collection of preparatory materials, including the entrepreneur's scripts as well as wide-ranging e-mail feedback he received from the other two on them;
- fieldwork notes based on a single "making of" behind the scenes session that the first author attended for episodes 4 to 6 – the session lasted for about 3 hours.

In terms of methodology, our analysis of the questions in the podcast under scrutiny follows Hyland's (2002) work on questions in academic writing and sets out to explore 'explicit interrogatives' (529). Note that Hyland starts from "a simple operational definition of questions based mainly on syntactic form, to include any independent interrogative clause, tag, or sentence fragment which concluded with a question mark. All instances were examined in context to determine their pragmatic function and those found in quotations were disregarded" (533). In our analysis we will start from the same basically grammar-oriented definition (distinguishing between yes/no questions, which are marked by inversion or, alternatively, a rising intonation, and question-word questions), but of course we could not rely on orthography or punctuation marks. Also, we did not leave out the questions in quotations because they too can create interactivity; in fact we present them as a separate

key category of so-called reported questions in our analysis. Hence, our grammar-oriented approach is complemented with a pragmatic take: it is not strictly focusing on formal features but drawing on a largely functional interpretation of what the entrepreneur is actually doing in the podcast.

In the typology below we distinguish between questions that are presented as having been raised on some previous occasion (we call them reported questions) and questions that are not and that, hence, the entrepreneur can be assumed to be raising at the very moment of speaking; we call the latter direct questions). A further subdivision for the reported questions depends on who asked the questions and who they were addressed to.

## 1. Reported questions

### 1.1 Reporting of questions that the entrepreneur asked

1.1.1 Questions that the entrepreneur asked other people:  
I ASKED THEM: "WHERE IS IT?"

1.1.2 Questions that the entrepreneur asked himself  
I ASKED MYSELF: "WHERE IS IT?"

### 1.2 Reporting of questions that other people asked

1.2.1 Questions that were addressed to the entrepreneur  
THEY ASKED ME: "WHERE IS IT?"

1.2.2 Questions that were addressed to a third party  
THEY ASKED THEM: "WHERE IS IT?"

1.2.3 Questions that the other people asked themselves  
THEY ASKED THEMSELVES: "WHERE IS IT?"

## 2. Direct questions WHERE IS IT?

Fig. 1: typology of questions in entrepreneurial podcasts

In the spirit of triangulation (Dörnyei, 2007) our analysis of questions in the 6-episode podcast is enriched with linguistic ethnographic and multimodal perspectives. In terms of linguistic ethnography, we are combining close, language-focused scrutiny of what is actually said in the podcast product as it can be accessed on platforms like Spotify with a broader sensitivity to the people in the process and to how the podcast was actually produced (including its material, economic base as well as "the potential importance of what [got] left out", cf. Rampton, 2007: 596). Conceived as a radically qualitative perspective, linguistic ethnography merges a focus on how people use language as well as what they believe about it and why (Heller, 2008), which it shares with sociolinguistics, with a so-called emic perspective, aimed at accounting for lived experience through the local point of view, by close observation of actions and situations, and describing how 'members' understand and participate in them (Rampton et al., 2004). Linguistic ethnography, in particular, assumes that "language and the social world are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms of

social and cultural production in everyday activity” (Rampton et al., 2004: 2) as contexts of communication are dynamic, interactionally accomplished and intrinsic to communication (Blommaert & Jie, 2020; see also NT&T 2011 on the need for an ethnographic dimension in the study of news media discourse, including newsroom fieldwork and interviewing journalists). In this specific case, our ethnographic analysis follows the full process of the podcast production: from discussing the script and making adjustments to it, to recording, editing and finally making the recording available online (this is where the announcement on Spotify presented earlier comes in).

As for the multimodal dimension, we acknowledge the variety of resources, or semiotic modes, through which meaning is conveyed in the podcast series (Kress, 2010; Lemerond and Rourks, 2022). It seems essential that for a medium that relies predominantly on voice our analysis of meaning-making includes aural semiotic modes, essentially discourse intonation dynamics (Brazil, 1997), i.e. how questions are realised paralinguistically and how this ties in with our understanding of what kind of questions are asked and with our contextualized knowledge of the way they came to be asked in the first place (see Valeiras-Jurado, Ruiz Madrid and Jacobs, 2018 on the notion of the skillful orchestration of different semiotic modes). Another element that will be touched on briefly is the role played by non-embodied, material modes, i.e. music.

### 3. Findings

Based on our triangulated analysis of questions in the 6-episode podcast under scrutiny, we will detail how both reported and direct questions are used as a rhetorical listener-oriented move, creating a sense of interaction and heteroglossia in what is essentially a monologue. This can be seen as a way of re-dramatizing the podcast (putting dialogue back in) after the podcast producer’s voice had been eliminated (de-dramatization, as illustrated in Jacobs, 2023). At the same time, we will argue that this use of questions is essentially ventriloquist in nature (Cooren, 2015). Ventriloquism refers to “actions through which someone or something makes someone or something else say or do things” (476). We will demonstrate that through reported questions the entrepreneur makes himself or others say something, staging a specific past situation (real or imagined) where questions were asked and thus creating an enhanced sense of author-ity (see also Cooren (2010, 2012). As for direct questions, we will show that they allow the entrepreneur to present as his own a series of concerns that could be (or were) raised by others, thus anticipating listener reactions or echoing the podcast producer’s previously voiced questions (as part of what we will label double ventriloquism). It is added that, along the same lines, music can be strategically integrated not simply as a mood-related element or as a structuring device, but to allow space for listener reflection, contributing multimodally to the same sense of interactivity and heteroglossia.

#### 3.1 Reported Questions

### *A. The entrepreneur asking himself*

The following is an example of a reported question that is used in the podcast as a rhetorical listener-oriented move (with the questions under scrutiny henceforth marked in italics in our transcripts). In the extract the entrepreneur talks about the retirement of his current CEO Hans, who has always been very complementary to him, and the arrival of a new CEO, who, drawing on colour-based leadership personality typologies, seems perhaps too similar to himself:

(1) en dan dacht ik van oei

and then I thought oops

Hans en ik zijn altijd zo complementair geweest

Hans and I have always been so complementary

*gaat da wel werken met erhm*

*is it going to work with erhm*

*twee keer exact dezelfde hoofdkleuren*

*twice exactly the same main colours*

*in tandem*

*in tandem*

The question in this extract corresponds to type 1.1.2 in fig. 1: it is a self-report, i.e. a report of a question that the entrepreneur says he was asking himself at some point (not literally, out loud, but something he was wondering about). Clearly it is part of the entrepreneur's storytelling as he phrases the question in direct speech in what seems an effort to make the narrative more vivid and bring it closer to the listener. The rather informal expression "oops" and the filler "erhm" support the impression that it is a spontaneous, authentic episode, creating a real sense of interaction, which can be seen as a rhetorical listener-oriented move: making the one-man show more exciting for the listener.

Our analysis is reinforced by a look at the intonation used in the question, which is represented below (with double lines separating intonation units, all capitals representing

emphasis – that is, prominent syllables- and falling and rising arrows pointing to falling and rising intonation):

GAAT dat wel WERken // met erhm TWEE KEER // exACT dezelfde HOOFdkleuren // in TANdem



The question is uttered in four tone units. This is a rather slow-paced articulation, one that suggests it was actually rehearsed despite the spontaneity markers discussed above. The first three units have rising intonation to signal that the information is not complete: there are more elements coming. The final tone unit has falling intonation, which marks this information as something that has not been mentioned, discussed or agreed on; the latter is consistent with the communicative intention of sharing a professional narrative that the audience is not expected to be familiar with.

In Cooren's terminology, this type of self-report can be seen as ventriloquist in the sense that the entrepreneur makes himself say something (2015: 476), staging a specific past situation (real or imagined) where he asked himself a series of questions. Rhetorically speaking, this is an interesting move as it allows him to create effects of authenticity, lending extra weight to the podcast: adding an author to what is said (even when this additional author is yourself) creates enhanced author-ity (see also Cooren (2010, 2012) and Cooren & Matte (2010), as well as Cooren & Sandler (2014) for how ventriloquism ties in with Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia).

Question (2) below is another example of the same type 1.1.2, a double question this time and the analysis for this one is identical to that for the previous extract. It is taken from the episode on humility and the entrepreneur wonders whether he himself is humble enough:

(2) (MUSIC PLAYING)

ik heb me dan de vraag gesteld

I have asked myself the question then

*ben ik zelf nederig*

*am I humble myself*

*ben ik zelf nederig genoeg*

*am I humble enough myself*

en dat was eigenlijk een heel moeilijke vraag.

and that was actually a very difficult question

The two questions are uttered after a discussion of what humility actually means and how important it is for entrepreneurs. They are preceded by a stretch of music, which, in addition to fulfilling a structural function, provides time for a reflection, one that the entrepreneur was engaged in at some point in the past and that he is now prompting listeners to undertake as well (see 3.4 below also for a more extensive analysis of the role of music in another extract). The two questions seem to be part of this reflection on the concept of humility. As can be seen below, they are paralinguistically organised in three tone units. The fact that the word “humble” stands alone as a tone unit of its own reinforces the key importance of the concept and matches the doubt that the entrepreneur is voicing (i.e. is “humble” a good term to describe myself?). The prominence in “enough” is consistent with the rephrasing offered in the second question, and provides a sense of spontaneity, as if the reflection is taking place at the very moment of speaking, combining the authority of ventriloquism (as described above) with a unique sense of directness.

ben ik ZELF // NEderig //ben ik zelf NEderig geNOEG



### *B. The entrepreneur asking somebody else*

In the next example the entrepreneur reports on a question that he says he is always asking his employees. Again, it is a self-report, but where the first two examples referred to a question that he asked himself (most probably without actually voicing it), here we have a quote of a generic question that the entrepreneur says he is actually, really asking his collaborators on a regular basis, followed by a generic answer that he says he typically receives from them (even if it is framed hypothetically) and a generic follow-up question that the entrepreneur says he is typically asking his collaborators in response. It is a type 1.1.1 according to our classification in fig. 1, since the entrepreneur is addressing the questions to other people, not to himself:

(3) als een project bezig is

when a project is ongoing

en ik stel de vraag van

and I raise the question of



*hoever staan we met dat project*

*how far are we with that project*

en als ik dan als antwoord krijg

and if I get as an answer then

we zijn er mee bezig

we're on it

dan heb ik onmiddellijk de tegenvraag

then I have immediately the counterquestion

*ja maar wanneer gaan we er mee klaar zijn*

*yes but when will we be ready with it*

It should be clear from the above that this use of questions goes some way towards creating the dynamism and interactivity (re-dramatizing) that is ostensibly missing in the monologic, de-dramatized one-person podcast. This is especially noticeable in the last question, which is pronounced as a separate tone unit and with a falling tone typical of wh-questions that are genuinely seeking information (as opposed to rhetorical questions or questions anticipating a specific answer). This provides the impression that the entrepreneur is actually asking the question to some of his employees at that very moment and contributes a sense of dialogue. At the same time, just like for the examples in section A above, there's ventriloquism here: the entrepreneur is quoting himself, combining the dynamism of direct speech with a unique sense of authority.

Another example of the same 1.1.1 type is part of a story about a public lecture that the entrepreneur delivered and where he says he addressed the following question to his audience:

(4) ik stelde de vraag in het publiek

I asked the question to the public

*wie van jullie heeft een coach*

*who among you has a coach*

Here again ventriloquism allows for both directness and authority.

*C. Somebody else asking the entrepreneur*

In the next example the entrepreneur talks about the way in which his mentor has helped him articulate existentialist matters. In full ventriloquist fashion he reports on a question that he says his mentor had asked him, followed by his own (negative) response. It's a type 1.2.1, since this time the question is not a self-report, but a report of a question that was addressed to him by somebody else.

(5) traject van mentoring

mentoring track

waar we echt op zoek gaan naar antwoorden op existentiële vragen in het leven

where we really embark on a search for answers to existential questions in life

dat gaat over dingen als

it's about things like

*heb je ooit in je leven met je ouders al over de dood gesproken*

*have you ever in your life already talked with your parents about death*

neen

no

goed

ok

dat was dan mijn huiswerk voor de volgende keer

then that was my homework for next time

Below is another example of the same ventriloquism, again a question raised by his mentor:

(6) de vraag die ik kreeg was  
the question I received was

*kan jij tot rust komen*

*can you reach tranquillity*

*D. Somebody else asking a third party*

Finally, extract (7) shows ventriloquism through a type 1.2.2 question. It is taken from a story in which the main character (not the entrepreneur but somebody else) asks two different third parties two questions. Once again, the use of reported questions makes the entrepreneur sound dynamic and authoritative at the same time.

(7) en de voorbijganger vraagt aan die man  
and the passer-by asked that man

*wat ben je aan het doen*

*what are you doing*

(...)

en hij stelt ook dezelfde vraag  
and he also asks the same question

*wat ben je aan het doen*

*what are you doing*

To sum up, our overview of reported questions in the 6-episode podcast has shown considerable effort as well as creativity on the part of the entrepreneur to add interactional dynamics to what is essentially a monologue. We have proposed to call this re-dramatization (following the de-dramatization analysed in Jacobs, 2023). At the same time, we have shown that this wide-ranging use of reported questions is ventriloquist in nature (Cooren, 2015), as the entrepreneur makes himself and others say certain things, thus rendering his own words more authoritative.

Let us now turn to the second main group of questions, viz. the real ones, which the entrepreneur is ostensibly not reporting from a previous occasion but seems to be raising at the very moment of speaking. We will distinguish between two sorts of them: direct questions that anticipate listeners' reactions (see 3.2) and 3.3 direct questions that integrate external input (see 3.3).

### 3.2 Direct Questions that anticipate listeners' reactions

The following set of two questions is taken from an episode in which the entrepreneur talks about the need for organizations to have a so-called 'noble purpose'. He addresses the fact that it may be difficult to put noble purpose into practice:

- (8) we hebben eigenlijk onze noble purpose in 1 zin al gedefinieerd  
we have actually already defined our noble purpose in 1 sentence

*maar hoe krijgen we die tot leven in ons bedrijf*

*but how can we bring it to life in our company*

*hoe krijgen we die doorleefd in ons bedrijf*

*how can we get it experienced in our company*

helping you thrive in a changing world

Unlike for the questions discussed earlier, the questions in this extract are not presented as having been raised on some previous occasion either by the entrepreneur himself or by some third party; they do not seem to be reported questions. Hence, the entrepreneur can be assumed to be raising them at the very moment of speaking and they belong to the category that we have termed 'direct questions'. In this case they are part of a rhetorical move to build up to the company mission statement 'Helping you thrive in a changing

world'. Like for the question-governed Spotify announcement presented at the very beginning of this article, the entrepreneur is imagining what the listeners would or could be asking him (or, some would say, what he would *hope* they would be asking him). In this sense the questions are essentially ventriloquist in nature, something they share with the reported questions discussed earlier: the entrepreneur presents as his own question what is essentially a question that he imagines could be raised by somebody else, in this case the listeners – or at least some of them.

Our reading of the extract is confirmed in the analysis of the intonation visualized below. The first tone unit in the excerpt (“we have actually already defined our noble purpose in 1 sentence”) has a rising intonation because it is recalling something that has just been said, as a cohesive device, and therefore it represents known, already negotiated information. The subsequent questions, on the other hand, are a way of introducing the ideas that he is going to discuss next, the company’s mission statement in particular. The way the entrepreneur raises the questions makes them look as if they come from the listeners and he now seems to be trying to please their curiosity: both questions use a falling intonation signaling that the answer to these questions is not already negotiated and that it is not something that can be easily inferred. This adds to the perceived relevance of the questions and may help trigger audience interest.

//we hebben Eigenlijk onze noble PURpose in 1 zin al gedefinieerd//



//maar hoe KRIJgen we die tot LEven in ons bedrijf//



//hoe KRIJgen we die doorLEEFD in ons bedrijf?



More or less the same is happening in the next example, with a three-fold ventriloquist question about putting noble purpose into practice that seems to be mouthed by the entrepreneur on behalf of the listeners:

*(9) maar wat betekent dat nu voor elk van de medewerkers van [de organisatie]*

*but what does it mean for each of [the organization's] collaborators*

*wat betekent dat nu eigenlijk voor [de organisatie] zelf*

*what does it now actually mean for [the organization] itself*

*wat betekent dat nu voor mij*  
*what does it now mean for me*

heel concreet da's wat we willen  
very concretely that's what we want

en da's de reden waarom we de oproep hebben gelanceerd  
and that's the reason why we have launched the call

Interestingly, the excerpt is uttered in a very fast pace and in relatively long tone units that have a parallel rising intonation pattern (see below), as if the entrepreneur is compiling a list of questions that he has just heard from the listeners:

*//maar wat beTEkent dat nu voor elk van de medewerkers van [de organisatie] //*



*//wat beTEkent dat nu eigenlijk voor [de organisatie] zelf//*



*//wat beTEkent dat nu voor MIJ//*



Compared to the reported questions discussed above, the direct questions here can be said to serve a similar interactional, re-dramatizing role, rendering the entrepreneur's narrative more dynamic. On the other hand, there is no explicit reference to some specific previous occasion on which the questions were raised either by the entrepreneur himself or by some third party and so, unlike the reported questions, they do not make the podcast sound more authoritative. Instead, the ventriloquism that we have analysed helps the entrepreneur pursue his own storytelling as if it was pushed forward by the listeners' questions.

Let's now move on to a third use of questions, which we have essentially been able to identify based on our fieldwork experience.

### 3.3 Direct questions that integrate external input

In the following example, the entrepreneur asks for a definition of the episode's key concept, viz. authenticity.

(10) en dat draait eigenlijk altijd rond  
and actually it's always about

dezelfde rode draad authenticiteit  
the same recurring idea authenticity

*ja wat is authenticiteit*  
*yes what is authenticity*

eigenlijk is authenticiteit niet veel meer dan gewoon uzelf zijn  
in fact it's not much more than just being yourself

uzelf respecteren  
respect yourself

uw eigen grenzen kunnen bewaken  
be able to protect your own boundaries

en eigenlijk doen wat jou energie geeft en doen  
and actually do what gives you energy and do

doen zoals je gemaakt en geboren bent  
do like you were made and born

Again, like with the other real questions presented under 3.2 above and different from the reported questions discussed earlier, the question here is not reported, or – to be more precise – it is not presented as reported; it is not explicitly linked to an earlier occasion where the entrepreneur or somebody else would have raised it. However, based on the ethnographic input as well as the multimodality of the extract, we have good reasons to assume that here too (not unlike for the reported questions and different from the real

questions presented under 3.2 above) the entrepreneur is echoing a previously asked question. In this case, it is a question that the first author of this article heard the podcast producer address to the entrepreneur during the recording as part of the production process: the podcast producer was concerned that the listeners would not grasp the authenticity concept and insisted that the entrepreneur should provide a transparent definition.

In fact, the use of “Yes” in this extract can be seen as a way of acknowledging the podcast producer’s previously voiced concern about the meaning of authenticity. It is an interactional device, invoking dialogue (in this case, a covert, behind-the-scenes dialogue that took place between the entrepreneur and the podcast producer previous to the recording). Put differently: the only reason why the entrepreneur would say ‘yes’ is that it should serve as a response to what somebody else (i.e. the podcast producer) asked him previously. As for multimodality, the question is uttered as a new tone unit, including the initial “yes”, and in a rather fast pace, which contributes to the abruptness and the markedness of the question. The fact that the “yes” and the question come together in a single tone unit supports the idea that it is a response to the podcast producer’s feedback. The rising tone confirms that this is known information, already shared and negotiated, and suggests that the speaker is referring back to something mentioned earlier. The latter is actually true for the real, behind-the-scenes interaction that took place between the entrepreneur and the podcast producer (and which the first author was able to observe during the fieldwork), not for the implied interaction between the entrepreneur and the listeners (as the listeners were of course not present during the recording and are therefore not aware of the negotiation that happened behind the scenes between the podcast producer and the entrepreneur).

//JA wat is authenticiteit//



Once more we are looking at what Cooren (2015) would label a “ventriloquized question” in the sense that other people addressed it to the entrepreneur but he presents it as his own question. This time he is not imagining what the listener could ask him, though. The results of our combined ethnographic and multimodal inquiry indicate that the entrepreneur is voicing what he was previously asked by the podcast producer.

Put differently, at first sight the question here – just like the ones discussed under 3.2 - seems what Pascual (2014) terms a “fictive question” in the sense that the entrepreneur is merely pretending to ask a question. This is different from a rhetorical question because the entrepreneur does go on to provide an answer to his own question. In other words, the illocutionary force of the question appears to be that of an announcement; by raising the question, the entrepreneur seems to say: let me explain what I mean by authenticity. On closer scrutiny, however, and drawing on the fieldwork experience, we can conclude that it is a real question, one that was raised by somebody else (viz. the podcast producer as part of the podcast prepping) but where the entrepreneur does not acknowledge that it was.



As suggested earlier, one reason why the podcast producer would have asked the entrepreneur about the exact meaning of ‘authenticity’ is of course that he is anticipating the listener’s response (just like he was doing in the podcast announcement for Spotify analysed earlier in this article): the podcast producer asks the entrepreneur what he means by authenticity because he believes it is not going to be clear to the listeners. In this way, we can argue that we have a double ventriloquism here: the entrepreneur is voicing the podcast producer’s question, which – in turn – is a voicing of the listener’s (anticipated) concern.

Here is a second example of the same category from the dataset:

(11) dat geldt ook

the same is true

in een bedrijf

for a company

*het woord authentiek past niet echt bij een bedrijf*

*the word authentic doesn't really fit with a company*

ik zou dan eerder spreken over de waarden de cultuur de ziel het DNA van het bedrijf

I would rather speak of the company’s values the culture the soul the DNA

ik gebruik eigenlijk liever ziel he dan DNA

I actually prefer soul right to DNA

Again we have a double ventriloquism here. Based on the fieldwork, we know that the entrepreneur is echoing the podcast producer’s earlier remark in the middle of recording that he felt authenticity was a human characteristic and that he did not think the concept of authenticity could be applied to companies – or at least that he was afraid that it was not going to make sense to the listeners. Zooming in on the details of the interaction, again the question seems to be rather abruptly inserted as grammatically there is no connection with what came before. There is also a mismatch between the grammatical structure and the communicative function, since it is a question phrased as a declarative. As shown below, the question is a single tone unit (despite the minor pause after “echt”). The marked rising intonation suggests that the speaker is referring back to a question raised previously, one that is therefore known, negotiated information. Again the reference is to the podcast

producer's earlier question, which - once more – was in anticipation of a potential reaction from the audience (i.e. they might not understand this concept of authenticity and how it applies to companies). In line with this interpretation, the two prominent syllables in this tone unit are the final syllable of "authentiek" and "echt". Especially the second prominence is noteworthy: the alternative would have been that "past" was prominent instead, expressing significantly more skepticism. By stressing "echt", the entrepreneur is downplaying the podcast producer's concern that there would be no fit. The strong rise in pitch can also be seen to compensate for the unusual grammatical structure, which is that of a declarative.

//het woord authenTIEK past niet ECHT bij een bedrijf//



Let's look at a third example of the same sort:

(12) dat brengt mij tot drie heel belangrijke vragen  
that brings me to three very important questions

*wat is nederigheid*

*what is humility*

*hoe belangrijk is nederigheid voor een ondernemer*

*how important is humility for an entrepreneur*

*een onderneming*

*a company*

*en voor een leider*

*and for a leader*

*en ben ik zelf eigenlijk nederig*

*and am I myself actually humble*

*ben ik nederig genoeg*

*am I humble enough*

en als dat dan niet het geval is

and if that's not the case

*hoe kan ik eigenlijk toch meer nederig worden*

*how can I actually become more humble after all*

We have a list of up to five questions here, one that can be broken down into three clusters: the meaning of humility, the place of humility in a professional context and whether the entrepreneur is humble himself. Drawing on the ethnography we know that the first and the last were already in the entrepreneur's original script, so these questions were not raised by the podcast producer, or at least not as far as we know. The middle question, however, was not included in the script from the beginning, and author 1 did in fact hear the podcast producer raise the issue in the recording session. So we could have a mix here of a cluster of questions that the podcast producer had raised and two clusters that the entrepreneur asked himself. Paralanguage in this example has a more structural function and is used to mark a list. The questions in the first cluster have a rising intonation, indicating that there is yet another item coming. The questions raised by the podcast producer are seamlessly integrated in the list and are not marked otherwise.

The fourth and final example has a series of questions about identity. It is slightly different from the other questions in this section in the sense that we have no evidence that the entrepreneur is referring back to questions that the podcast producer had asked him earlier. Instead, it is fair to speculate that the entrepreneur may well be ventriloquizing his mentor's language here (i.e. voicing questions that his mentor previously confronted him with).

(13) echt weten wie je bent

really know who you are

hoe je zelf in elkaar zit

how you fit together

wat jou drijft

what drives you

dus de ijsberg

so the iceberg

jouw gedragingen

your behaviour

*hoe ontstaan je gedragingen,*

*how does your behaviour originate*

*wat zit er onder de het wateroppervlak*

*what is beneath the the surface*

*voor wat sta je*

*what do you stand for*

*waarom ben je op deze wereld*

*why are you on this world*

*wat is je noble purpose*

*what is your noble purpose*

In this section, we have seen more examples of ventriloquism and at least two of them are special cases in the sense that the questions are the entrepreneur's hidden, i.e. unmarked, way of including the podcast producer's previously voiced concerns. We have called these cases double ventriloquism because by taking into account the podcast producer's feedback, the entrepreneur was also indirectly raising questions that the listeners might have had as well.

Next, the fourth and final finding zooms in on the use of music in the podcast.

### 3.4 Questions preceded by music

The following example features music followed by a cluster of questions on the meaning and scope of spirituality.

(14) (MUSIC PLAYING)

*ik heb eigenlijk nog niet geantwoord op de vraag van wat is spiritualiteit*

*I actually haven't yet answered the question of what is spirituality*

*ik zal het anders definiëren: wat is spiritualiteit voor mij*

*I will define it differently: what is spirituality for me*

*wat is spiritueel leiderschap*

*what is spiritual leadership*

*en hoe kunnen we streven naar een meer spiritueel leven*

*and how can we strive towards a more spiritual life*

*voor mij is eigenlijk spiritualiteit vooral geconnecteerd zijn met jezelf*

*in my view spirituality is actually most of all to be connected with yourself*

The entrepreneur starts by acknowledging that “the” question of the meaning of spirituality was raised earlier. It is not made clear in the podcast who raised it, though: the entrepreneur may have raised it himself or it may have been raised by others. It is also not clear who it was originally addressed to. As the entrepreneur goes on to rephrase the question in his own words before coming up with an answer, it does seem like it was addressed to the entrepreneur by somebody else, which would make it a 1.2.1 type (see fig. 1). Unlike for the other examples of reported questions quoted in 3.3, this is not very clear, however, and so the example shown here could equally be seen as the kind of ventriloquism

referred to in 3.2, with the entrepreneur voicing a question that may have been on the listener's mind. To be clear, we did not hear the podcast producer raise the question and so the example is different from the two special cases quoted in 3.3, unless the entrepreneur extrapolated from the podcast producer's concern about authenticity and concluded that he was going to be equality sceptic about his use of spirituality.

It is also worth noting here that the extract is preceded by a stretch of music, which seems to function as a short break. It is not that hard to imagine that the music allows space for listener reflection and that it covers up (or substitutes for) the listener's voice (asking the entrepreneur what spirituality is) more than just serving as a mood-related element or as a structuring device. This is further supported by the analysis of intonation. The first question has rising intonation (as shown below), which again suggests that the entrepreneur is treating this information as known (recalling something that has been mentioned before, as if the listener had in fact raised the question during the stretch of music and now the entrepreneur is recalling it). Then the rephrasing has a list of three questions that follow the usual pattern rise (unfinished) – rise (unfinished) – fall (finished).

//ik heb Eigenlijk nog niet geANTwoord//



//op de VRAAG van wat is spiritualiTEIT//



//ik zal het Anders defiNIERen//



//wat is spiritualiTEIT voor MIJ//



//wat is spiriTUEEL LEIderschap//



//en hoe kunnen we STREven naar een meer spiritueel Leven//



#### 4. Conclusion

This article has aimed to take a first step towards addressing the gap in the discourse studies literature when it comes to podcasts. Our focus was on podcasts for entrepreneurial communication. In particular, while previous research on selected entrepreneurial podcasts has shown that they are de-dramatized, with overt interaction excluded from what is

basically framed as a single-person delivery, we were inspired by Hyland's (2002) take on questions as a powerful dialogic device in blogging and we set out to investigate whether the use of interrogatives could play a similar interactive role in entrepreneurial podcasts.

Drawing on the case study of a 6-episode entrepreneurial podcast and integrating linguistic ethnographic and multimodal perspectives into our analytical framework, we have distinguished between questions that were raised previously (we called them reported questions) and questions that the entrepreneur is ostensibly raising at the very moment of speaking (which we called direct questions). Next, we detailed how both reported and direct questions are used as a rhetorical listener-oriented move, re-dramatizing the podcast in the sense that they are bringing back interaction and dynamism to what was essentially designed as a monologue. In addition, we have demonstrated that, across the various categories, the questions in our dataset can be seen as ventriloquist in the sense that the entrepreneur makes himself or others say something (Cooren 2015: 476). For the reported questions, staging a specific past situation (real or imagined) where the entrepreneur or others were seen to voice questions created an enhanced sense of 'author-ity'. Direct questions, on the other hand, were shown to anticipate listeners' concerns, driving the narrative forward, or to echo the podcast producer's previously voiced questions, which in turn anticipate listeners' concerns. We have labelled the latter 'double ventriloquism'. It has finally been demonstrated that, along the same lines, music can be strategically integrated in podcasts not simply as a mood-related element or as a structuring device, but to allow space for listener reflection.

We have thus sketched the contours of some of the intricate and complex ways in which questions are used in entrepreneurial podcasts. It remains to be seen what this could tell us about the use of podcasts in leadership settings. Our analysis has shown that it is worth further exploring how in using podcasts to disseminate their professional visions, entrepreneurs are potentially accommodating more actively to their listenerships than the strictly monologic, 'one-man-show' format seems to suggest at first sight. In fact, in our single-case analysis the entrepreneur's rich and creative use of questions seems to point to possibly deep and profound ways of engaging with other people's (the podcast producer's, the listeners') input, whether real or imagined, even if we do not get to hear these other people's voices directly. It follows that our analysis sheds interesting new light on the discourse features underlying these new ways of engagement (cf. Declercq et al 2021) and it can serve as a starting point for investigating how they may well reflect notions of media re-colonization and the podcast genre's gradual transition to a corporate medium (see Baham III & Higdon, 2022). No doubt, the capitalist imaginary is recuperating emerging ideas and grassroots technologies but the case documented here of an entrepreneur, like a ventriloquist, going out of his way to engage with others' input in his podcast-based leadership communication suggests that it is not a simple, automatic or unilateral process.

A final note about method is in order here. In the spirit of triangulation (Dörnyei, 2007) our analysis of questions in the 6-episode podcast was enriched with linguistic ethnographic and multimodal perspectives. In the analysis of the entrepreneur's use of direct questions, in particular, our fieldwork-based sensitivity to the people in the process and to how the

podcast was actually produced combined with close attention to its aural, paralinguistic qualities to deepen our understanding of the ventriloquist nature of the leadership discourse under consideration. If we had not been there when the podcast was recorded, our analysis of who is asking what and why could not have been the same. Likewise for appreciating the key role played by the human voice. In this respect, our multimethod approach is promising and deserves further exploration.

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