

**Motivations of Teacher-Student
interruption in a University Classroom**

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Abstract

This research deals with conversation analysis of interruption that occurs between student and teacher negotiation for meaning in class. Its main concern is to shed lights on types of interruption on one hand and functions of interruption on another. The approach that is going to be applied within this paper is a qualitative one to describe this phenomenon in an appropriate way. The data of this research is obtained from short excerpts of conversations that occurred in class between students and their teacher. The analysis of the data was achieved through conducting a textual analysis by describing and interpreting interruptions occurred between characters within the class. According to the findings, four types of interruption are gained which are simple, overlaps, butting-in and silent interruption. The results indicate that in most cases the students tend to leave their turns when they were interrupted and give the floor to those who interrupt them (i.e. teachers) and there are cases that force you to interrupt others during speaking which are the main objective of this research that readers should be exposed to clear misunderstanding that interruption is a bad behavior whenever it occurs. So, the identification of the motivations behind these interruptions are shown which are cooperative and intrusive ones with their subdivisions.

Keywords: Conversation Analysis, Interruption, Function and Types of Interruption, Features of Conversation Analysis.

1. Introduction

Language as a means of communication is used to deliver messages, convey thoughts, feelings, ideas or desires between people. It can be used in many fields such as education, law, medicine or even in performing arts for the purpose of entertainment. Language cannot be separated from humans since they use it in the form of conversation to interact or socialize or sustain their relationship with each other.

As humans we spend a large part of our life doing various activities that involve a sequence of actions. Whether we are walking to or returning from work or even at home spending time with our family members, there will be synchronized coordination of talk with others and it is these actions and interactions and how they are performed that constitute conversation analysis (CA) with its analytic focus.

Conversation analysis (CA) is an approach to discourse analysis that concentrates on everyday life and methods that used by people to achieve a skilled accomplishment (Fairclough, 1992). Various aspects of

conversation have been produced by conversation analysts: conversational openings and closings, turn-taking and so on. Sequential implicativeness is an important factor in CA. It is based upon the claim that any utterance will constrain what follows. For instance 'question & answer' or 'complaint & apology'. In order to produce a fruitful discussion, participants in conversations have to know what and when to speak. They should think about their turn-taking. Turn-taking does not necessarily occur in the form of sentences but it could be forms as 'really, mm, uh or yeah' to inform the talker that we are in line with him and we do not want to interrupt him till his turn taking is accomplished.

In most cases, interruption is considered impolite and offensive though there are situations or cases it can be regarded as beneficial or crucial depending on the type and function of interruption. The main objectives of this research are to identify those types and functions that occur in conversations between the students and their teacher within the class.

2. Literature Review on Conversation Analysis

As human beings, we need to communicate with each other to negotiate our ideas, feelings and everyday concerns and this communication is accomplished through conversation. Owing to the significance of conversation, a great number of researchers have devoted their attention to the analysis of conversation. The pioneer of CA were Harvey Sacks, Gail Jefferson, and Emmanuel Schegloff since 1960s. The approach of CA can be applied not only to conversation but also to political speeches, media genres, professional talk, and verbal interaction (Drew & Heritage, 1992). As it has been mentioned earlier conversation is one of the ways that is used by people in order to socialize or interact with others. According to Liddicoat (2007), conversation is a system that is used to maintain relations between people while Pridham (2007) adds it expresses the way that people cooperate.

Conversation analysis studies the organization of conversation. What rules are used when we communicate and in what ways. Hutchby and Wooffitt describe CA as “systematic analysis of the talk produced in everyday situations of human interaction” (1998:13). CA deals with questions such as “how is ordinary talk organized, how people coordinate their talk in interaction, and what is the role of talk in wider social processes” (ibid: 1).

CA is related to the study of recorded or naturally occurring interactions and the aim behind these interactions is to know how partakers

respond to each other in their turns (ibid: 18). CA shed lights on the details of events that happen. According to Farrel & Vos (2018), CA is "part of an analytical interaction used as a tool for analyzing data that was evaluated both individually and collaboratively in peer conversations". Through evaluating the CA data we can explore the relationship of the student's visible behaviors and the teacher beliefs in the classroom.

3. Features of Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis has many characteristics that can distinguish it from other approaches or fields. First, how conversation is organized within a context is the most fundamental feature of this approach. Then, CA deals with those conversations that occur naturally. Other researcher like Septiani (2015), points out that transcription is the basic feature of CA since it enables much analysis of how people interact. According to Schegloff (2000), turn taking and sequences organization make response in interaction easy as it is the core of interaction. Each participant responds to the other and every turn involves a message through which each speaker analyses and expects what comes next. There are some rules of turn-taking which are considered fundamental features in any conversation that occurred in an ordinary social interaction.

In order to analyse any conversation, there are some element we should shed light on as they are described by Van Dijk (1997):

3.1 Activities and Actions:

People usually organize what they do in terms of 'activities' for instance, giving a lecture, doing a laundry, or calling a friend. Within any activity, there is one or more sequence of conversational actions. While actions refer to what people do interactionally one after another (Schegloff, 1996). For instance, inviting relatives to dinner or inquiring about questions are all actions can be performed in and through the enactment of other actions. For instance, when someone invites you to a beef burger sandwich and you response by saying 'I am not a meat eater', it could be understood to be a request to be replaced by a vegetarian meal.

3.2 Turns:

Turn is an interactional time segment that is taken by participants. Each participants takes his turn and there could be occasion when you allowed into intruding someone else's turn (Van Dijk, 1997). For instance, in the previous example of invitation to eat beef burger, imagine that you are invited with your friend and both of you do not like meat. When the inviter responds by saying 'you could eat chicken or fish instead'. This offer can be

understood to be directed to any of you and whether you answered or your friend it does not matter if you overlapped with each other.

3.3 Sequential Organization:

The central interest of CA is the sequential organization of conduct over time. In this element, the participants display a response to someone else's suggestion with either an agreement or disagreement. In the case of suggesting something else to be eaten as 'chicken or fish', your response will confirm or disconfirm the invitation.

3.4 Repair

Repair is related to the way the interactant repairs or corrects himself 'self-repair' or corrects the talk of someone else. For instance, when you invited to eat beef burger and you said 'I'm not interested in meat or I'm not a meat eater'. This expresses an example of 'self –repair' of the turn.

3.5 Epistemic Order

It is best clarified when participants in conversation are expected to know something about themselves. For instance, when I ask someone if you have any restriction concerning this thing for instance, 'this type of food', I assume he does or when I ask 'do you have any objection concerning eating beef burger'? If he/she replies yes or I suggest him something else instead it means I already know something about this restriction or his eating habits.

3.6 Interaction Episode

Most interactions usually start and end with a range of sequences in order to be distinguished from other activities for example by starting with greetings and ending with good-byes.

4. Research Method

The method of this research paper was a descriptive qualitative one since its main concern was to describe a certain language phenomenon. The data of this research were some excerpts of conversations between teacher and students in classes of college of education for women at Al-Iraqia University analyzed according to types and functions of interruption in conversation analysis.

5. Findings and Discussion

Within this section, the readers will be exposed to a deep explanation of the excerpts of exchanges occurred between the teacher and students at

Al-Iraqia university classes focusing on types and motivations of interruptions.

5.1 Interruption

When you interrupt someone during talking, you do not intend to spoil the conversation but it may indicate that you are engaged during the talk which is a sign of an active conversation. In order to define interruption in a proper way, we need to shed lights on viewpoints of many linguists among them Wardaugh who sees it as "an early topic change within a conversation" (2006: 302) while Lu and Huang mention that interruption is "a disturbance in turn taking principle" (2006:1).

Interruption can also indicate a tool to maintain power and domination in conversation. Among those scholars who support this idea James and Clarke (1993). They see it as a device of power imposed by the interrupter on the interruptee. Some interruptions are considered to be power shows and conversation is a continuous battle between participants of the conversation to dominate over or seize the floor. The idea of interruption due to gender is not a matter of dominance but it is related to the stylistic communicative differences. Both genders adopt distinguished conversational styles through which men are expressing their opinions to either oppose or reject the talker's viewpoint whereas women are using their comments to support others utterances (Bartolome, 1993). Differences in the definitions of interruption are related to the variations in researcher's viewpoints.

To sum up, in regard to the varied definitions provided by those researchers, interruption is the case that occurs when one speaker interrupts the other before finishing his turn for two main purposes which are mainly cooperative and competitive ones as they are going to be clarified within the next section.

5.1.1 Functions of Interruption

According to the functions, it is shown that interruption does not necessarily mean that the interrupter wants to violate the conversation but he can also interrupt to help the interruptee to complete the utterance or to create involvement or stimulate feelings of enthusiasm and mutual interest between interlocutors. Some forms of interruptions can be used to rescue the talker or to elaborate the content of his speech. It could be used as a cooperative purpose while some researchers view this interruption as intrusive. To sum, interruptions can be viewed under many labels as 'power

and nonpower', 'confirming and disconfirming', 'disruptive and supportive' or 'conflicting and less conflicting' depending on the purpose they assume within the context itself. Now I will focus on two main functions which are cooperative and intrusive ones as they will be explained in the following subtopics:

5.1.1.1 Cooperative Function

Interruption can be used to denote a cooperative purpose to indicate the progress of conversation or to help the speaker with his ideas i.e the ongoing conversation. We can see that cooperative interruption can function to denote three subcategories which are clarification, agreement, and assistance:-

A. Clarification:

This sort of interruption is usually used by the addressee or the listener with the intent to understand what was said by the speaker (Kennedy & Camden, 1983). The fundamental aim of this sort is to make the talker explain or clarify an idea that is not clear for the listener. For example:

A Student: Professor, you are. You gave me a C+ on my last essay. That's the third C you've given me now. I guess I just don't understand what it is just you are looking for. And I think

A Teacher: Well you're not alone Michelle I'm afraid most of the class is doing poorly this term. Now I have tried to explain what I want you all to do several times.

In this extraction of the conversation that happened between the student and the professor, the professor tried to clarify and explain to Michelle why she took C+ by mentioning that she is not alone who got this grade and the reason behind doing so. Instead of understanding his speech as if he wants to stop her completing her complaining, we can get the idea of clarification clearly in his utterance.

B. Agreement:

Kennedy & Camden (1983) state that agreement can express an understanding, compliance, or coincidence by the side of the interrupter as in:

A Student: Would you mind trying one more time with me? I understand that you want to see a clear, efficient development of a thesis and I thought I done...

A Teacher: Have you got your paper with you?

A Student: yes, here it is right here.

A Teacher: Let me have a look. Hmm yes I remember now actually you have a good thesis here I like. I just wish you could have represented it more effectively.

Here, the professor agrees with student's request to have a look at her paper so he interrupts her utterance to show his approval directly.

C. Assistance:

Here the listener comprehends the idea that the speaker is in need to be helped through providing an idea or even completing a word or a sentences which is said by the talker.

A Teacher: I want to know when do you think childhood ends and when do you become an adult?

A Student: I don't think it can be a specific age, its different for everyone. I think it's at any point you can take care of yourself and you are not like dependent on somebody else and emmmm ↓

A Teacher: I think being an adult includes having a burden of responsibility of some kind whether it's a job or your house payments or whatever it is.

A Student: Yeah. You are right.

5.1.1.2 Intrusive Function

According to Li (2001), the ongoing conversation is being interrupted here by the addressee or the listener. There are three subdivisions of intrusive interruption which can be labeled under topic change, disagreement and floor taking:

A. Topic Change:

In this type, the interrupter described as being more aggressive since he is trying to change the topic of the conversation:

A Student: Professor, do you think that we can have another chance for the exam.

Give us one more ↓

A Teacher: Time is up. I don't have time to talk in this matter.

The interruption is clear here from the side of the teacher. He does not want the student to complete his utterance by saying that time of the lecture is up and he does not have enough time to talk about giving his students one more chance to repeat the exam.

B. Disagreement:

Disagreement interruption happens when the listener disagrees with what is being said by the speaker and wants to express his idea:

A Teacher: Dear students, do you have any question?

A Student: I think the first part of the topic is very clear while

A Teacher: But don't you think that we have focused on the second section more than three times today. Aren't you with us?

The speaker/professor disagrees with the student by interrupting him directly before even completing his utterance by saying 'but' to express his opinion or refuse to the point of probability of being not understood clearly by the student.

C. Floor Taking

The interrupter here wants or intends to develop the ongoing conversation by taking over the floor from the speaker instead of changing the topic or disagreeing with what was said.

A Teacher: I want to know what are some of your favorite foods specifically to cook at home.

A Student: usually I go for bulk items, not bulk items bulk meals, something I can eat for days and days

A Teacher: or you can put it in the freezer and have the next week.

A Student: This is a very Uh I think a male way to think about it, you are going to make a bulk and make it last.

A Teacher: Uh, utilitarian cooking. Hot tip, don't leave it on your counter for three days and then try to eat it. It should always go in the fridge after you eat it if not you get sick.

In this small extract between student and the teacher, we cannot see any sort of topic change or disagreement to what is being said but the

professor tries to take the floor to express his opinion and develop the topic concerning food and how it should not be kept out of the fridge.

5.1.2 Types of Interruption

The classification of interruption is not an easy job to be done since we have many scholars who classify it depending on their own viewpoints. Bull (2002) states that there are four types of interruptions which are single, complex, successful, and unsuccessful ones while the most used classification is what was used by Ferguson (1977), he classifies interruption into simple and overlaps, butting-in and silent ones.

5.1.2.1 Simple Interruptions

This type of interruption occurs when the interrupter succeeds in taking the floor from the talker by not letting him finishing his speech. It involves non fluency in speaker's talk since there is a break in the continuity of his utterance:

A Student: when it comes to prescriptive approach, it means an approach to grammar that describes the structure of the language as it was used not acc

A Teacher: wait a minute. You mean a descriptive approach but not the prescriptive one.

Here this sort of interruption must be done by the side of the teacher to clear misunderstanding about the matter the student is explaining when he makes a mistake and that's why the teacher should break his utterance.\

5.1.2.2 Overlaps Interruption

Overlaps mean that the though the first speaker (the teacher) is being interrupted but simultaneous speech is clear by his side. It can also be describes as unsuccessful interruption:

A Teacher: since our lecture is about to finish, so it's better to give you.....

A Student:

Methods of teaching

Here this overlap occurs when both speakers talk at the same time but the interrupter does not take floor. The student thought that the teacher wants to talk about the topic of the lecture while he wants to sum up so he

does not care about his misunderstanding and goes on what he wants to say.

5.1.2.3 Butting-in Interruption

Within this sort of interruption, the interrupter also does not succeed to seize the floor from the speaker. He tries prematurely to take the floor but with futility. His utterance is left incomplete. It is described as unsuccessful interruption:

A Teacher: A grammatical analysis that is designed

A Student: designed to show how small

A Teacher: to show how small constituents or components in sentences go together to form larger constituent.

From this excerpt, the student tries to initiate or complete the definition that the teacher started with but with no use because it is the turn of the teacher that he must deal with. The student tries to participate before the teacher allows him to do so.

5.1.2.4 Silent Interruption

We cannot find simultaneous speech here since if the interruption occurs when the speaker makes a pause may be when he takes a breath or just makes a stop to remember what he wants to say so that it is known as a silent interruption as in:

A Student: I didn't mean I guess I mean I was pressed for time and uh

A Teacher: It's okay settle down you are not going to get expelled when we're in a hurry we are all tempted to take shortcuts.

Within this short conversation between the student and the teacher concerning their discussion of the grades the student takes for writing an essay, we can see that there is a silence in the turn of the student, she is confused how to defend herself for not citing correctly may be she wants to take a breath or to think about the next word she is going to use or forget the appropriate word that is supposed to be used.

6. Conclusion

According to the analysis of the short excerpts of dialogues that occurred between the teacher and his student, two main points are being focused on which are types and functions of interruption. In regard to the first problem or concern i.e. types of interruption, we found four types of interruptions which are simple, overlap, butting-in and silent interruption. Simple interruption is the most frequently used types in our daily life since it involves taking the floor from the speaker by not letting him finishing his utterance as if there is a sort of non-fluency in his talk. The listener does not appear to be prepared to make this interruption since he does not know how the conversation will go on and on, it just happens which is considered as one characteristics of interruption to be spontaneous and naturally accrued. Consequently, as the interruption occurs suddenly, the speaker may lose his concentration and end his turns while in butting-in type the speaker appears to continue his utterance despite of the interruption that is made by the second part may be due to the reason that the interrupter/ the student is not powerful enough to take the floor from his teacher as a manner of respect that should be shown from the side of the student.

On the other hand, functions of interruption that focused on in this research are cooperative and intrusive. In regard to cooperative one, three subdivisions are found namely clarification, agreement, and assistance while in intrusive functions there are topic change, disagreement and floor taking.

Since the focus of this research is on the conversations that occurred between the teacher and his students, the students will not feel free to take the floor from their teachers as it is compared between friend's interruptions unless they want to express their ideas or defend themselves in other cases. As opposed to floor-taking, an assistance function can also be done when the interrupter wants to offer help to the speaker when he cannot express his ideas clearly.

After going in depth to have knowledge about types and functions of interruption, the partaker will not be misunderstood when he interrupts the speaker for one reason or another. There are many reasons behind interruption; it might be related not only to the functions and types of interruption but to the relationship between participants in classroom interactions as we saw between the teacher and his students i.e. social status, age, gender and the impact of differences in culture.

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