

## A CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF INTERRUPTION IN *HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL* MOVIE SERIES

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#### Abstract

This research focuses on attaining two objectives, i.e. to reveal the types and the functions of interruption in *High School Musical* movie series. As the research design, a mixed-method design was applied where a qualitative approach was employed as the primary method supported by a quantitative approach as the secondary method. In this research, the researcher played a role as the key instrument while a data sheet, a movie player and transcripts of the dialogues served as the secondary instruments. The data were collected through note-taking technique. In analysing the data, the researcher conducted a textual analysis. The results of the research are as follows. Four types of interruption are found, i.e. simple, overlap, butting-in, and silent interruption. The highest number of occurrence is achieved by simple interruption, whereas the lowest one is equally possessed by butting-in and silent interruption. Furthermore, there are 10 functions of interruption derived from three categories of function. The first category, namely intrusive, contains five functions which consist of disagreement, rejection, floor-taking, topic-change, and tangentialization. The second category, which is cooperative, has four functions, viz. agreement, assistance, clarification, and collaborative completion. The third category called neutral only comprises one function, i.e. neutral function. The findings show that floor-taking is mostly performed in the movie series while assistance, in contrast, is the least frequent function carried out by the characters in the movie series. Based on the findings, it can be inferred that the characters in the movie series are inclined to share their own ideas by taking each other's floor and are less likely to help each other when they experience problems of speaking.

Keywords: conversation analysis, interruption, *High School Musical* movie series

#### INTRODUCTION

One of the most basic needs for human beings is to communicate with each other since communication provides a way for them to transact their daily business through exchanging information, ideas, feelings, and/or wants. For a very long period of time, conversation has been used by most people in the world as a practical method for establishing communication. As a widespread communicative means, conversation is considered important and worth exploring. Some former scholars who were interested to observe aspects of conversation had successfully developed a new area of study to the analysis of conversation called Conversation Analysis (CA). In relation to the present research, CA is applied

to examine a conversational phenomenon, namely interruption.

Generally, interruption is viewed as a violation of turn-taking rules where one person intrudes into another turn's to talk. Interruption is also often associated with the act of violating someone's right to speak because it seems likely to appear to prevent one person from finishing what s/he intends to say (Baso cited by Murray in Okamoto et al., 2002: 41). Yang (2001: 2) declares that interruption deals with a disruption to the course of one person's speech which is caused by another person. Zimmerman and West (in Tannen, 1994: 57), additionally, explain that interruption occurs as a result of one speaker's desire to acquire the conversational floor when there is evidence that the ongoing speaker has not yet planned to yield the floor.

Although interruption is predominantly assumed to be a disturbance in conversation, it is actually not necessarily negative and harmful. A number of findings from several investigations conducted by some scholars have suggested that certain kinds of interruption possess positive characteristics (Dindia, Kennedy and Camden, Murata, Smith-Lovin and Brody, and Tannen in Zhao and Gantz, 2003: 350). Moreover, James and Clarke (1993: 240) mention that, in particular circumstances, interruption may also carry out functions which are neutral in nature.

In conversation, interruption cannot be predicted when to emerge because it is usually produced spontaneously by the initiators. The initiators normally perform the interruption when they are in an urgent need for conveying their ideas quickly to the ongoing speakers concerning the topic of discussion. Since its presence is unpredictable, interruption may happen in various ways. It can take place in mid-sentence, at about the end of one's utterance, or even during a silence in the middle of one's turn. In connection with this, interruption can certainly be divided into several types based on how it occurs.

A classification of interruption which has been widely acknowledged and adopted by many researchers is proposed by Ferguson (Beattie, 1982: 100; Marche and Peterson, 1993: 394-5). In order to differentiate one interruption from the others, Ferguson takes into account three features, including the success of the interruption, the completion of the current speaker's speech and the presence of simultaneous speech. Through the analysis of these three components, Ferguson succeeds to develop four types of interruption which she calls simple, overlap, butting-in, and silent interruption.

Considering some points stated earlier, the researcher is stimulated to scrutinize two aspects of interruption, namely the types and functions of interruption. In this case, a movie series entitled *High School Musical* is particularly employed as the object of

investigation by the researcher. As in everyday contexts, conversation held by the characters in the movie series might also contain interruption since the characters play their roles to portray people in the real life where the way they talk and communicate is just typically the same as that of people in the real life. In this regard, the researcher believes that the movie series can represent the occurrence of interruption in daily conversation, and therefore it is thought suitable for being inspected in the present research.

To sum up, there are two objectives that the researcher intends to achieve in this research. One objective which becomes the first objective of the research is to identify and describe types of interruption performed by the characters in *High School Musical* movie series. Furthermore, the second objective is to investigate functions of interruption in the movie series. Finally, the researcher expects that, by reading the research results, readers in general and linguistics students in particular can broaden their knowledge of the phenomenon of interruption and are able to take appropriate action before practising interruption by considering performing interruption which is less disruptive and more cooperative.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The present research applied a mixed-method research design in which qualitative and quantitative approaches were utilized together as the methods for assessing the topic under study, i.e. interruption. Nevertheless, the analysis of the issue under research was relied heavily on the use of the qualitative method since the main goal of the research was to describe and explain the occurrence of interruption appearing in *High School Musical* movie series. The quantitative approach, additionally, only functions to quantify the data findings derived from the qualitative investigation to establish the numerical facts of the phenomenon being examined. As informed by Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 7), a qualitative approach is used to create the narrative or textual description

of the topic under scrutiny, while a quantitative approach serves to provide the statistical information of the issue under study.

As the research was basically a qualitative study, the primary instrument of the research was the researcher herself. Lincoln and Guba (in Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009: 188) note that, in a qualitative research, human becomes the best instrument. In addition to the researcher, some secondary instruments were also deployed. The instruments involved a data sheet, a movie player and transcripts of the dialogues.

The data in the research which were in the form of utterances were obtained from the videos and the transcripts of the dialogues. Thus, the contexts of the data were dialogues spoken by the characters in the movie series. To collect the data, the researcher conducted note-taking, that is, by taking notes of the occurrences of interruption while watching the movie series and reading the transcripts of the dialogues. Meanwhile, the data were analysed using a textual analysis by describing and interpreting the verbal texts, i.e. interruptions, uttered by the characters in *High School Musical* movie series.

Furthermore, to attain the trustworthiness of the data, triangulation was undertaken by the researcher. Triangulation serves as a method for cross-checking the data findings using various data sources, theories, investigators, and/or methods (Denzin in Guba, 1981: 85). In this way, the researcher conducted a theory triangulation by adopting and combining theories from several scholars. In addition, an investigator triangulation was also performed by the researcher to enhance the data trustworthiness. To do the triangulation, the researcher asked her two linguistic classmates to check the accuracy of the research findings and interpretation. The results of the research were also validated by her two supervisors.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting a full investigation into the occurrence of interruption in *High School*

*Musical* movie series, the researcher found out that there are totally 56 cases of interruption in the movie series. With regard to the types of interruption, the findings reveal that four types of interruption are employed by the characters in their conversations. The four types consist of simple interruption, overlap interruption, butting-in interruption, and silent interruption. Based on the statistical analysis, the biggest frequency of occurrence is possessed by simple interruption with 41 cases. In second position, there is overlap interruption which appears nine times during the movie series. Meanwhile, butting-in and silent interruption have the same frequency each of which gets three data and becomes the least type of interruption performed by the characters in the movie series.

In terms of the functions of interruption, the researcher learned that the characters practice three kinds of functional categories, i.e. intrusive, cooperative and neutral. From those categories, the intrusive category has the highest number of occasion followed by the cooperative category in second place and the neutral category in last place. Apart from the neutral category, each of the other two categories, which are intrusive and cooperative, comprises several subcategories of function. In total, there are 10 functions of interruption that can be detected in the movie series including five functions of the intrusive category, four functions of the cooperative category and one function of the neutral category which represents the neutral category itself.

From 10 functions overall, all the five functions of the intrusive category take the first five positions as the most frequent functions carried out by the characters by means of their interruptions. The topmost position is occupied by floor-taking which occurs 14 times, followed by disagreement that happens 11 times and rejection which emerges nine times. Moreover, the remaining functions of the intrusive category, viz, tangentialization and topic-change, are in fourth and fifth place with six cases and five cases respectively. In addition, neutral function

attains sixth place by having four data, whereas three functions which belong to the cooperative category, namely agreement, clarification and collaborative completion, gain the same quantity of occurrence, that is, two occasions each, and are equally placed seventh in position. Lastly, assistance that takes place once during the movie series achieves eighth or last position.

To get the comprehensive descriptions of the phenomena of interruptions in *High School Musical* movie series, some excerpts of dialogues which involve interruption taken from the movie series are explained and provided as examples.

The following dialogue demonstrates one instance of simple interruption that has floor-taking function.

- Troy : Guys, if you don't know that I'll put a 110% of my guts into that game, then you don't know me.  
 Chad : But we just **[thought-**  
 Troy : **[I'll** tell you what I thought. I thought you're my friends. Win together, lose together, teammates.  
 (13/1/01:00:33-01:00:35)

The dialogue presents that Troy starts his utterance when Chad has not completed talking. As the result, simple interruption happens in which Troy succeeds to take the floor while Chad stops his speech incompletely. On this occasion, Troy interrupts Chad not to change the topic but to share his idea in relation to the topic through grabbing the floor. As Chad is going to convey his thought by saying *But we just thought-*, Troy anticipates by stating *I'll tell you what I thought...* in order to reveal his mind first in advance of Chad. That is to say, the interruption performed by Troy contains the function of floor-taking since Troy as the interrupter develops the topic brought up by Chad without any intention of shifting the topic.

Moreover, a case of overlap interruption containing disagreement function is portrayed in the dialogue below.

- Mr Evans : (*inaudible talk*) ...and she stepped **[on the ball.**

Mrs Evans : **I did not.**

(24/2/00:41:32-00:41:33)

The interruption produced by Mrs Evans above is considered overlap interruption because Mrs Evans launches her disruption when Mr Evans almost finishes his sentence. Mrs Evans begins her speech *I did not* at the time Mr Evans says the last parts of his utterance ...*on the ball* so overlapping or simultaneous speech occurs. In that situation, Mr Evans is still able to complete his sentence, whereas Mrs Evans obtains the floor to speak. In the dialogue, Mr Evans is telling a funny story about when Mrs Evans stepped on the ball while they were once playing golf together. Since Mrs Evans believes that she did not ever do it, she quickly interrupts Mr Evans to deny his statement. That is to say, Mrs Evans' interruption displays disagreement function.

Another example shown below illustrates how butting-in interruption happens and fulfils agreement function.

- Ms Darbus : Playing a role is easy, but being yourself, now that's a challenge.  
 Troy : **[Yeah,** Ms Darbus, exactly-  
 Ms Darbus : **[Kelsi** will compose,  
 Ryan will choreograph and I will direct. (*doing a high five with Troy's raising hand*)  
 (48/3/00:20:19-00:20:25)

Butting-in interruption is noticed when Troy fails to convey his opinion by means of his interruption. Ms Darbus as the interruptee or the interrupted speaker seems to disregard Troy's statement in which she continues her speech despite Troy's intrusion. In the end, Ms Darbus still can maintain her turn while Troy gives up his attempt to have a turn prematurely. At that moment, Troy holds his hand up to express his agreement to Ms Darbus' remark by stating *Yeah, Ms Darbus, exactly-*. Yet, before successfully completing his idea, Troy decides to break off speaking and lets Ms Darbus carry on

with what she is saying to show his respect for her.

Furthermore, the dialogue in the following part exhibits an occurrence of silent interruption which carries out assistance function.

Ms Darbus : ...And the reason for your visit is?

Troy : I don't know. I think I feel like this is a good place

to- (.)  
 Ms Darbus : [Scream? Feel free.  
 (54/3/01:13:56-01:13:59)

Silent interruption is clearly identified in the dialogue in which Ms Darbus interrupts Troy when Troy pauses for a moment in the middle of a turn. When attempting to answer Ms Darbus' question, Troy is apparently at a loss for words so he stops talking suddenly. In fact, the silent period is perceived by Ms Darbus as a signal that Troy is in trouble communicating his thought. Therefore, to deal with Troy's problem, Ms Darbus initiates to help Troy express his idea by offering a word through an interruption. This case indicates that Ms Darbus' interruption serves one function of the cooperative category namely assistance.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

### Conclusion

In reference to the results of the research, the researcher draws two points of conclusion as follows. First, in regard to the first research problem, i.e. the types of interruption in *High School Musical* movie series, there are four types of interruption employed by the characters in their conversations, namely simple, overlap, butting-in, and silent interruption. In this case, simple interruption gets the biggest frequency of occurrences with 41 data out of the total 56 data. On the other hand, the smallest number of data is obtained by two types, viz, butting-in interruption and silent interruption, with three data respectively.

Simple interruption makes up the majority of occurrences in the movie series because most of the interrupted speakers are inclined to leave their utterances unfinished

immediately the interrupters distract their attention with their interrupting speech. By reason of this, butting-in interruption appears less within the movies series because, in the butting-in type, the interrupted speakers continue speaking despite the intrusion made by the interrupters. Another possible reason is that butting-in interruption in the movie series tends to happen when the interrupters who are known to be unsuccessful to take the floor are the characters that have lower social status than the interrupted speakers. As the conversation held by different status characters is minimal in number in the movie series, it appears plausible that butting-in interruption is less likely to occur. Moreover, silent interruption is also rare to be detected since the interrupters prefer to interrupt as soon as they want to convey their ideas without considering whether the speakers pause or not in their turns.

Second, in respect of the second research problem, the functions of interruption in *High School Musical* movie series, there are totally 10 functions performed by the characters through their interruptions which are derived from three different categories of function, i.e. intrusive, cooperative and neutral category. Five functions particularly belong to the intrusive category; they are disagreement, rejection, floor taking, topic change, and tangentialization. Moreover, there are four functions of the cooperative category, namely agreement, assistance, clarification, and collaborative completion. One more function is called neutral function; it comes from the neutral category which has no subcategory of function.

Among the 10 functions discovered in the movie series, floor taking is the most common function performed by the characters through their interruptions. It constitutes 14 data out of the total 56 data of interruption. Assistance, on the contrary, has the lowest number of data, i.e. one data, and therefore becomes the least common function of interruption appearing in the movie series. The characters who are close to each other are apt to share their ideas freely by taking each other's floor so floor taking function undoubtedly predominates in the movie series. Moreover, the small occurrence of assistance function may be because the characters who act

as the interrupters are inclined to give top priority to their own ideas to be delivered over the interrupted speakers'. Thus, the interrupters are less likely to initiate interruptions with the aim of helping the speakers verbalize their ideas.

### Suggestions

Considering the results of the research, the researcher offers some suggestions especially to the following parties. First, to linguistics students, the researcher hopes that they enhance their understanding and knowledge of interruption as there are many interesting issues surrounding the phenomenon which are worth learning. Second, to future researchers, it is expected that they may explore other aspects as well other than the types and functions of interruption, for instance, the characteristics of interruption through the analysis of prosodic features or the relationship between interruption and other variables, such as gender, social status, and personalities. Future researchers are also expected to employ other objects for investigation besides movie series, such as talk shows, radio chats, political interviews, medical consultations, classroom interactions, and so on, in order that the study of interruption can be more extensive and new findings may be derived. Third, to readers in general, the researcher suggests that they are better to avoid performing interruptions in conversations, specifically those that are typically competitive and troublesome, so as to achieve smooth interactional exchanges and, more importantly, to keep personal relationships with other interactional participants.

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