

**A SOCIOPRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERRUPTIONS
BY THE MALE CHARACTERS IN MARC CHERRY'S *DESPERATE
HOUSEWIVES SEASON 1* TV SERIES**

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Abstract

In this research interruptions performed by male characters in *Desperate Housewives Season 1* TV series are analyzed using sociopragmatic approach. This research has three objectives: to find out the types of interruption performed by the male characters, to identify the linguistic features employed in the interruptions performed by the male characters, and to describe the purposes of the interruptions performed by the male characters in *Desperate Housewives Season 1* TV series. This research employed descriptive qualitative method and was supported by quantitative method in presenting the occurrence of the data in frequency. The results of the research are presented as follows. First, there are three types of interruption found in the TV series. Those types are simple, overlap, and butting-in interruption. Second, all the linguistic features are found in the research: report talk, command, teasing, and swearing. Third, all the interruption phenomena found in the TV series have cooperative or disruptive purposes.

Keywords: sociopragmatic, interruption, *Desperate Housewives Season 1* TV series

INTRODUCTION

Conversation is an indispensable thing in human's life. Through conversation, people can communicate their minds and interact with their communities. Generally, conversation is conducted by two or more people. When people have conversation, they have to know when to speak and when to listen to the others to achieve a

flowing conversation. Nevertheless, in practice, some people talk when the previous speaker has not yet completed his/her utterances. They take the turn of their partners and make the conversation flow not smoothly. This act of taking the others' turns in conversation is called interruption (Sacks et.al in Meziane, 2013: 13).

In conducting a conversation, the participants are expected to follow the turn-taking rule which clarifies that only one speaker may talk at a time. However, many of them violate the role of turn-taking and perform interruption. They start talking when another person is talking. The act to cut someone's utterances is the basic idea of interruption.

Interruption is performed differently by men and women because they carry different linguistic features. They have different behaviors when interrupting their partners in the conversation. Men more often use swear words, teasing, command, and report talk than women to dominate and control the conversation (Tannen, 1990). The different behaviors of men and women in performing interruption are related to the gender that becomes their identities (Wardhaugh, 2006: 316). The unequal role of men and women in society has become the main reason for different styles and different linguistic features in conversation.

In this study, the researcher uses an American TV Series entitled *Desperate Housewives*. TV series is one of the media that shows the real life of human beings in the society. *Desperate Housewives* TV series shows the dominant role of male characters in their society. In this series, male characters are seen as the characters that are more powerful than female characters in their communication and in their social life. Therefore, it can be the object of this study because interruption is one of the ways people use their dominant role.

This research has three objectives: to identify the linguistic features employed in the interruptions, to find out the types of interruption performed by the male characters, and to describe the purposes of the interruptions.

The linguistic features that are observed in this research are the men's linguistic features when performing interruption. The researcher uses Tannen's theory. There are four men's linguistics features analyzed in this research: swearing, teasing, command, and

report talk. The researcher chooses the male characters to be analyzed because they tend to interrupt more than women in cross-sex conversation.

To find out the types of interruption, this research uses the theory classified by Ferguson in 1977 (in Marche, 1993:394). He concludes that there are four types of interruption. He divides the types of interruptions into four that are simple interruptions, overlaps interruptions, butting-in interruption, and silent interruptions.

The last problem is the purposes of the interruption. There are two functions of interruption suggested by Murata (in Li, Han Z, 2001: 235) cooperative and intrusive / disruptive / competitive interruption while Goldberg (1990) (in Li, Han Z, 2001: 235) adds one function that is neutral interruption.

Interruptions can be categorized as a cooperative one when the function of turn-taking is to finish another's utterance or to add a supportive comment. It is used by an interrupter to show agreement, understanding, interest in topic, and

the need for clarification. On the other hand, speech turns can be classified into disruptive interruption when the balance / symmetry in a conversation is lost. The speaker disrupts another's turn and restricts their contribution. It is used by an interrupter to show disagreement, to change topic, and to take the floor of the conversation. Interruption is also can be classified as neutral interruptions when they neither clear cooperative, nor clear competitive.

Moreover, this research uses sociopragmatic approach to analyze the interruption phenomenon related to gender. It is the combination of sociolinguistic and pragmatic approach. The researcher applies sociolinguistic theories to identify the linguistics features employed in the interruptions performed by the male characters. To investigate the types and purposes of interruption, this research deals with conversation analysis in pragmatics approach. In pragmatics, the term conversational analysis is used to investigate natural conversation (Alan Cruse, 2006: 36). It is used to analyze casual conversation. Because interruption

happens in the people's daily conversation, conversation analysis is the appropriate approach to analyze it.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used descriptive qualitative as the main method because the data of this research were analyzed descriptively. As stated by Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009:7), the qualitative method was used to describe the phenomenon in narrative or textual form.

By using qualitative research, the phenomenon in its context can be analyzed clearly and described deeply in a narrative way. This is in line with Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009:167) who said that qualitative research is aimed to be more descriptive in order to make a deep and understandable research. However, to interpret the data and to support the findings, the research also used quantitative method. It was used to present the number of data found in this research.

The primary data of this study were the utterances performed by the main male characters in the

Desperate Housewives Season 1. The data were in form of words, phrases, or sentences uttered by them. The context of the data was the dialogues or conversation taken from the TV series. The source of the data was the first-ten episodes in the first season of *Desperate Housewives* TV series and its transcription. The researcher collected the data by watching the TV series, reading the transcript, and selecting the dialogue.

According to Lincoln and Guba (in Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009: 188), the best instrument for qualitative research is human. They argued that human instruments are shaped by his/her experience and he/she can adjust the circumstance of the research easily. Therefore, in this thesis, the primary instrument was the researcher herself. The researcher was involved in all process of the research observation, analysis, and the data interpretation. The secondary instrument of this research was the data sheet where when the raw data were classified and arranged.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From all the analyzed utterances, the total data collected in this research are 20 data. There are three types of interruption found in the *Desperate Housewives Season 1* TV series. Those types are simple, overlap, and butting-in interruption. Not all types classified by Ferguson are found in this TV series. Silent interruption is the type which is not found in this research. It means, in the *Desperate Housewives Season 1* TV Series, there is no interruption which is happened in the pause of the current speaker's utterance.

In terms of men's linguistic features, all the features mentioned by Tannen are found in this research. There are four linguistic features employed by the male characters in performing interruption, i.e. report talk, command, teasing, and swearing. The most frequently used is report talk. It is employed 17 times out of the total 20 data. It indicates that the male characters mostly show their knowledge through verbal performance.

All the interruption phenomena found in this TV series

have cooperative or disruptive purposes because neutral interruption is not found. The frequency of cooperative interruption is less than disruptive interruption. It implies that the male characters in this TV series more frequently use interruption disruptively than use it cooperatively. Among the 20 purposes, the most dominant purpose is to show disagreement. In contrast, the purpose of showing agreement is not found in this research.

1. Men's Linguistic Features

a. Report Talk

The following is an example of report talk.

Bree: Mrs. Stark, you handle this however you see [fit ...

Rex : **Bree!** I've gone to an attorney, you're gonna be served divorce papers later today.

(12/7/00:10:22-00:10:27)

In the dialogue, interruption performed by Rex contains report talk. He conveys the report talk by giving information to his wife. Bree, does not know that he goes to an attorney and prepares a divorce. Rex interrupts her by using report talk to prevent her in continuing speech. Because of the information he said,

his wife is speechless and cannot continue her utterance.

The dialogue takes place in the headmaster's room in Andrew's school. Andrew, the son of Rex and Bree, amuses some of his friends by shoving a freshman's head into a locker. He breaks the boy's nose. The headmaster calls Rex and Bree to inform that the school cannot tolerate their son's action. She says that Andrew has to leave the school. Rex thinks that her son is angry because of his parents' marital problem. When his wife attempts to ask the headmaster to handle the problem, Rex cuts her utterance because he thinks that they are the ones who must take the responsibility of their son's action.

b. Command

An example of command is presented in Bree and Rex conversation.

Bree : This is family time I think
[we...

Rex : **go ahead and play**.
(2/1/00:26:47-00:26:48)

The interruption performed by Rex clearly contains a command. Rex cuts his wife's utterance and gives command to their children who ask

their permission to play at the play room in the restaurant. Bree thinks that it is family time so they must spend the time together. She does not accept the children's permission. Before she completes her utterance, his husband cuts her utterance and gives command to the children to play.

c. Swearing

The following is an example of swearing.

Bree: all we need is a few more sessions and I'm sure we
[can...

Rex : **Damn it,Bree!**] a few more sessions isn't gonna fix us.
(7/3/00:16:08-00:16:12)

The interruption performed by Rex clearly contains swearing. Rex performs swearing by saying "damn it" to his wife. In this case, Rex uses that word to emphasize his anger toward what his wife says before. Rex interrupts Bree after she talks to Dr. Goldfine in their marriage counseling that they need a few more sessions to fix their relationship. He interrupts his wife in order to prevent her in completing her idea because he thinks that their relationship cannot be fixed.

2. Types of Interruption in *Desperate Housewives Season 1* TV Series

a. Simple Interruption

An instance of simple interruption is presented below.

Lynette: So put the fish sticks in toaster oven at five **[o'clock**

Tom : **For half an hour]**. I know that's the third time you've told me.

(9/3/00:22:43-00:22:45)

Before Lynette finishes her utterance, Tom starts talking and prevents her in continuing her utterance. Therefore, the interruption performed by Tom is categorized into simple interruption. Furthermore, there is simultaneous speech between Lynette and Tom. By saying "for half an hour", Tom prevents Lynette to continue her speech because he already knew what she wanted to say.

The conversation takes place in the house. Lynette is going to dinner party with her best friends to reminisce about Mary Alice Young, her bestfriend who dies because of the suicide. Both of them are invited

but Tom must stay at home because they cancelled the nanny to keep their children. Before leaving home, Lynette reminds her husband about their children's schedule. She also explains what time the children eat and what foods must be prepared. Tom interrupts her because she talks about the same thing many times.

b. Overlap Interruption

An example of overlap interruption is presented in Susan and Mike conversation.

Susan : Well, every little detail is one thing, weird secret is **[another.**

Mike : **Whatever!** I don't wanna be with somebody who doesn't trust me.

(17/8/00:30:53-00:30:58)

The dialogue shows that Susan and Mike can finish their utterances although there is a simultaneous speech in the middle of their speech. Susan succeeds in holding her floor even though she is being interrupted by Mike. Thus, the interruption performed by Mike is categorized as overlap interruption.

Mike interrupts Susan to show his anger because she comes to his house to ask about the gun and cash she found in his shelf. He explains that those things are used for protection and emergency. Before the dialogue happens, he says that he has no obligation to share every detail of his life to others. She thinks that it is a weird secret and she keeps asking about it. Because of the suspicion, he cuts her utterance and says “Whatever! I don’t wanna be with somebody who doesn’t trust me”. He shows his anger because she does not trust him.

c. Butting-in Interruption

The following dialogue presents an example of butting-in interruption performed by Zachary and Bree.

Zach: If my dad found-

Bree : **out...
I won’t tell you your father!
I promise! Zach, its all ...**

Zach : **No, I just,
I can’t get you involved]**
(10/5/00:26:52-00:26:58)

There is a simultaneous speech in the dialogue above. Both speaker attempt to hold the floor. The first speaker, Zachary is interrupted by Bree. Ignoring what she says, he takes the floor back and interrupts her. He does not give any chance to her to speak. Zachary is able to complete his speech while she cannot deliver her idea completely.

The dialogue takes place at Bree’s house. She invites Zachary to dinner and makes plum pudding that reminds him to his mother, Mary Alice, who committed suicide. She sees his sadness so she tries to share her sadness story about her mom. She tells him about her mother who died because she was hit by a car. She talks to him that she never tell the story to anyone before. Knowing that Bree shares her secret, Zachary wants to share his secret too. He tells her that he knows why her mother committed suicide. Suddenly, there is a slight tremor in his hand because of his fear. He remembers that his father never let him to share the secret story of his family. Then, he stops telling about his family and tries to go out from the house. She

tries to calm him by telling him that she will not tell his father about their conversation, but it does not work.

3. Purposes of Interruption in *Desperate Housewives Season 1* TV Series

a. Disruptive Interruption

1) Disagreement

The example comes from the dialogue between Lynette and Tom after they have a dinner with Tom's colleague.

Lynette : No, no, I'm sorry, I didn't mean **[that ...**

Tom : **No, no, no!**] we both know that your career was going so much better than mine before we had kids and you never let me to forget that.
(14/7/00:39:28-00:39:35)

Tom shows his disagreement directly by saying "No, no, no". He repeats his utterance and interrupts his wife to emphasize that his idea contradicts with hers. Tom interrupts Lynette to prevent her in continuing her speech because he thinks what she is going to talk is not true. Lynette says that she does not intend to do something Tom supposed by saying " I'm sorry, I didn't mean that ...". She attempts to explain her

opinion but Tom interrupts her by saying "no" meaning that he disagrees with what she said.

The dialogue takes place in their home after they have dinner which is aimed to launch Tom's idea about some business project with his colleague. In the middle of his presentation, Lynette joins the discussion and conveys a brilliant idea to his colleague. They are more interested in Lynette's idea than Tom's. When the dinner is done, they have an argument. She says that she does not intend to humiliate him but he disagrees with her. He thinks that she wants to show him that she's better than he.

2) Floor Taking

An instance of floor taking is presented as follows.

Bree: Um, Doc **[tor ...**

Rex : **This**] is the thing you gonna know about Bree. She doesn't like to talk about her feelings.
(5/2/00:18:07-00:18:10)

Dr. Goldfine, asks Bree about what she feels about her marriage problem. When she tries to explain her problem and her feeling to Dr. Goldfine, Rex cuts his wife's

utterance to take the floor or to take her turn. He prevents Bree to finish her speech and takes his turn to deliver something he knows about Bree.

3) Topic Change

An instance of topic change interruption is presented below.

Bree : I'm thinking about chicken saltim**[bocca.**

Rex : **I want a divorce].**
(3/1/00:26:11-00:26:12)

The dialogue above shows that Rex interrupts Bree to change the topic of conversation. Bree as the current speaker talks about food and she expects Rex to give any comment about food too. Rex interrupts her in the middle of her speech and changes the topic that contradicts with what she discussed before. He does not want to talk about chicken saltimbocca but divorce.

b. Cooperative Interruption

1) To Show Understanding

The example of showing understanding in interruption is presented as follows.

Susan: Hi, Mike, I brought you a little house-warming gift. I should have brought something by earlier but
[...

Mike :**Actually]** you're the first for today to stop by.
(1/1/00:15:45-00:15:47)

The dialogue above shows that Mike cuts Susan's utterance before she completes her utterance. Susan wants to say something but Mike interrupts her because he knows what she wants to say. Susan says that she should have brought something earlier. It implies that she feels reluctant for the late gift she brought. Mike knows what she feels and knows what she wants to say. Mike shows his understanding by saying "Actually, you're the first to stop by" which implies "it's ok. You're the first one who give the gift even though you are not give it earlier".

2) To Show Interest in Topic

The example of interruption which is purposed to show interest in topic is explained below.

Paul : We're trying to move on.
It'sbeen pretty tough.

Susan: I can only imagine. Not knowing why Mary A**[lice**

Paul : **Why what?].**
(6/2/00:24:27-00:24:28)

The dialogue above shows that Paul cannot wait Susan to finish her speech. He starts talking when the name of his wife is mentioned by Susan. He shows his interest in topic, the topic about his wife. He does not intend to take the floor or to disturb Susan's speech but he shows his attention to Susan who talks about his wife.

3) To Show the Need for Clarification

The following dialogue presents an example of showing the need for clarification in the interruption performed by Carlos and Gabrielle.

Carlos : You've been like a nightmare for a month.

Gabrielle : **[stop.**

Carlos : **What's wrong?].**
(4/2/00:09:28-00:09:29)

The dialogue takes place in Carlos and Gabrielle's room. Gabrielle is mad because Carlos does not have much time for her and he does not make an excited relationship. Gabrielle wants him to excite her like the first time they meet. She wants Carlos gives her a romantic thing and gives enough

time to be spent together. Gabrielle actually does not want to say it literally. She expects Carlos to understand her feeling without any explanation from her. That is why she does not want to answer the question of her husband. Carlos interrupts her to emphasize his ignorance and shows his need for explanation.

CONCLUSION

To summarize the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the interruptions performed by the male characters in *Desperate Housewives Season 1* contain certain linguistic features as what Tannen said. Report talk, command, and swearing are found in the interruption performed by the male characters in this TV series. Report talk is the most appearing feature found in the male characters' utterances. It means that most of the interruptions used by the male characters are aimed to show their knowledge and to show their skills in speaking.

In terms of the types of interruption, simple and overlap interruption are the most frequent

types used. It indicates that in doing interruptions, male characters mostly can convey their utterances completely. Simple interruption is the highest rank of types of interruption, indicating that after being interrupted by the male characters, the interrupted speakers mostly cannot finish their utterances. Furthermore, the highest purpose of interruption is showing disagreement. It means the male characters mostly use interruptions disruptively as a tool to debate their partner and to show their different opinions.

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