

A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERRUPTION IN MIXED-SEX CONVERSATIONS REFLECTED IN *GOSSIP GIRL* TV SERIES

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Abstract

This research investigates interruption in the mixed-sex conversations presented in *Gossip Girl* TV series. The objectives of this research are to identify the types and to discover the functions of interruption in the mixed-sex conversations in *Gossip Girl* TV series.

This research employed sociolinguistics as the approach of analysis. It was conducted by using mixed-method qualitative and quantitative. The data were in the form of utterances spoken by the characters of *Gossip Girl* TV series in the mixed-sex conversations. In addition, the context of the data was the dialogues that contained interruption. Meanwhile, the source of data of this research was the videos of the first season of *Gossip Girl* TV series. The primary instrument of this research was the researcher herself and the secondary instrument was a data sheet. The data were collected by selecting the dialogues that contained interruption, and then classified the collected data into the data sheet. The techniques of data analysis were conversation analysis and referential analysis. The analysis of research findings were checked by conducting triangulation. The triangulation was done by discussing and consulting the data to the supervisors and the peer reviewers.

The results of this research are explained as follows. First, all types of interruption are found in *Gossip Girl* TV series. The findings show that overlap becomes the most frequent type and butting-in interruption becomes the least frequent type of interruption. Overlap interruption occurs 24 times in men's speech and only 9 times in women's speech. It indicates that men have more urgency to express or say their opinion in the middle of conversations by grabbing others turn of speaking. Therefore, in this case, they tend to perform overlap interruption over butting-in interruption. Second, all functions of interruption are found in the TV series. The functions of interruption are divided into intrusive and cooperative interruption. The result shows that the male and female characters of *Gossip Girl* TV series use interruption as an intrusive act rather than as a cooperative act. The male characters tend to use interruption which functions as topic change. It is because they are not interested with the topic of discussion. On the other hand, the female characters in *Gossip Girl* TV series perform interruption as tangentialization which means that they use interruption to end the discussion with men in mixed-sex conversations in the TV series.

Keywords: sociolinguistic analysis, interruption, mixed-sex conversations, *Gossip Girl* TV series

INTRODUCTION

People have conversation to communicate with others in a society. Conversation can be defined as a spoken interaction among people within a society in everyday life (Wardhaugh, 2006: 12). The conversation occurs between two or more people as the participants of a conversation. In addition, conversation functions as a medium to obtain or deliver message, information or news where this function can be achieved by a successful conversation. An indication of a successful conversation is a smooth interaction

between the participants in a conversation. However, sometimes the smoothness of interaction cannot be achieved because there is a gap or an interruption within a conversation.

Interruption in a conversation is categorized as a violation of turn-taking system (Zimmerman and West, 1983: 104). The violation means that a speaker takes over the previous speaker's turn. It occurs when a speaker talks before the previous speaker completes the utterances. However, interruption is not always regarded as a disruptive act of conversation. In line with this statement, James and Clarke (in Tannen,

1993: 238) state that interruption can function as a supportive and a cooperative speech act.

In addition, Zimmerman and West (1975: 116) state that interruption is commonly found in mixed-sex conversations and rarely found in same-sex conversations. However, this phenomenon is found as a problematic case since men and women employ different speech strategies to interact with each other within a society where consequently interruption may lead to misunderstanding between men and women in a conversation. For that reason, interruption seems to be an interesting phenomenon to be analyzed.

Sociolinguistics is one of the approaches to analyze interruption since this phenomenon occurs in daily conversation. Sociolinguistics is the study of the ways people use language in social interaction (Chaika, 1982: 2). Thus, the ways men and women interact are related to the social function of interaction as well as the speakers' social status are related to this study.

Since the research deals with social phenomenon, daily conversations become the suitable object to be analyzed. Daily conversations occur in many forms in various media of which one is in television drama or series. *Gossip Girl* is one of the television dramas. There are many interruptions occur since it deals with the daily life of men and women in America.

Gossip Girl is a popular TV series in America. The first season of this TV series was aired from September 19, 2007 until May 19, 2008 with total 18 episodes. It brings a story about Upper East Side people in New York City. This TV series shows the daily life of upper class people in America. The stories within are organized

naturally like the real life of people in America particularly Upper East Side's people life.

Two problems that are related to interruption are found in this TV series due to the limitation of the researcher's ability, knowledge and time. The first is the types of interruption in mixed-sex conversations. The second problem is the functions of interruption.

The objectives of this research are (1) to identify the types of interruption in the mixed-sex conversations in *Gossip Girl* TV series, and (2) to discover the functions of interruption in the mixed-sex conversations in *Gossip Girl* TV series.

This research is expected to give some benefits both theoretically and practically. First, this research the research findings are expected to enrich the knowledge about Sociolinguistic phenomena in the society, particularly on interruption. Second, this research may be useful for other researchers to broaden knowledge on this phenomenon.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted by using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative method. According to Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge (2009: 7), qualitative research is a type of research which focuses on description and interpretation of social phenomena. It fitted this research as this study was aimed to find and to describe types and functions of interruption in mixed-sex conversations in *Gossip Girl* TV series. To support the qualitative analysis, the data were also analyzed quantitatively with percentages showing the occurrence of interruption. The percentage was used to show the most and the least prominent

types of interruption in mixed-sex conversations in *Gossip Girl* TV series.

The data of this research were in the form of the utterances spoken by the characters of *Gossip Girl* TV series within mixed-sex conversations. On the other hand, the context of this research was dialogues that were contained interruption. The source of data of this research was the videos of the first season of *Gossip Girl* TV series. Several episodes of the first season in this TV series were chosen as the sample based on the frequency of occurrences of interruption in mixed-sex conversations. Those episodes were 5, 6, 7, 9 and 12.

Since this research was basically qualitative, therefore the researcher became the key instrument of this research. In addition, this research was also supported by the second instrument which was the data sheet. It was employed to note the occurrences of interruption in mixed-sex conversations from the selected episodes of *Gossip Girl* TV series.

In collecting the data, the researcher used visual analysis by watching and interpreting the TV series. Therefore, the researcher took several steps. First, the researcher watched the selected episodes from the first season of *Gossip Girl* TV series. Second, the researcher took notes of the characters' utterances from the dialogues of the selected episodes which contained interruption and writing the time of interruption. Third, the researcher classified the collected data into the data sheet.

In analyzing the data, the researcher used conversation analysis and referential analysis.

researcher to interpret the data. Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 213) state conversation analysis is used in the interpretation of a naturally occurring conversation. Therefore, in this research, conversation analysis was used to analyze the types and functions of the utterances in the mixed-sex conversations. In addition, referential analysis was used to analyze the data by referring back to the theory.

To gain trustworthiness of this study, the data were checked against two criteria: validity and reliability. In qualitative research, the concept of validity and reliability is called as triangulation. In this research, triangulation was done by discussion and consultation to the supervisors and the peer reviewers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are four types of interruption that are classified by Ferguson (1977) and developed by Beattie (1982: 100-103). Those are simple interruption, overlap interruption, butting-in interruption and silent interruption. The data show that overlap interruption has the highest frequency which appears 33 times (50%) in the mixed-sex conversations in selected episodes of *Gossip Girl* TV series. On the other hand, butting-in interruption occurs only twice (3%) and appears as the lowest rank in the types of interruption.

Overlap appears as the frequent type on this research because the male and female characters in the TV series have an urge to voice their own opinion at the same time by successfully making interruption. Therefore, in this case, they

tend to perform an overlap interruption over a butting-in interruption.

On the other hand, the functions of interruption are divided into intrusive and cooperative interruption. Intrusive interruption has four subcategories namely disagreement, floor taking, topic change and tangentialization. On the other hand, cooperative interruption is classified into three subcategories; they are agreement, assistance and clarification. Tangentialization of intrusive interruption becomes the most frequent function of interruption which appears 17 times (27%). In contrast, clarification of cooperative interruption occurs 4 times (6%) and appears as the lowest frequency in the functions of interruption.

In relation to the functions of interruption, the male and female characters of *Gossip Girl* TV series use interruption as an intrusive act rather than as cooperative act. The male and female characters in *Gossip Girl* TV series perform interruption when they know what the current speaker's wants to say. Then, they grab the current speaker's floor to end or to shorten the utterances. Therefore, they frequently use tangentialization of intrusive interruption rather than clarification of cooperative interruption.

On the other hand, in this research, the use of interruption occurs differently in men's and women's speech in the mixed-sex conversations. In this research, both male and female characters employ certain types and functions in the use of interruption within mixed-sex conversations. From total 65 data, the male characters make interruption 42 times and the female characters make interruption 23 times within their speech.

24 times in male's speech and only 9 times in female's speech in the mixed-sex conversations within this TV series. Meanwhile, butting-in interruption do not occur in the male characters' speech in the mixed-sex conversations and appears twice in the female's speech.

On the other hand, the male characters of the TV series mostly use interruption which functions as topic change. They rarely use interruption as clarification in which it only occurs once in their speech. On the other hand, the female characters mostly use interruption which functions as tangentialization and do not use interruption as floor taking.

To make the explanation about the types and functions of interruption clearer, some examples provide as follows.

The first example occurs in the conversation between Lily and Eric. Eric wants to leave the rehabilitation place. Her mother has given him permission to come back home, but suddenly she changes her mind. In the conversation, Lily refuses Eric's request to come home. She says that Eric could come home yet and he is better to be in the rehabilitation place rather than at home. She thinks that Eric still needs treatment. However, Eric tries to defend his opinion.

Lily : What he said is that you could come home, not that you should.
 Eric : But, mom, *I thought*
 Lily : *I don't wanna* argue about this. I need time to think.

}

(1/5/00:06:17-00:06:23)

In the conversation above, Eric tries to convince her mother by saying, "But, mom, I thought. However, he gets interrupted before he

finishes the utterance. Lily, as the interrupter, refuses any excuse from Eric. She takes Eric's floor to emphasize her utterance. The type of interruption is categorized as simple interruption because Lily cuts Eric utterance before he can complete his utterance. In addition, the interruption functions as tangentialization because Lily takes Eric's floor to emphasize her previous utterance before. Lily refuses any excuse from Eric and he does not want to hear any rejection of her order from her son.

Another example occurs in the conversation between Serena and Dan.

Nate : I mean, I guess he thought it'd be easier on everyone if I took the hit, but they were his.
 Anne : I don't { *understand*.
 Nate : { *No*. He promised me he'd flush the coke, then I caught him buying more.
 (32/7/00:19:53-00:20:03)

In the conversation above, Nate discuss with her mother about his father's problem. Nate explains that his father is the one who buys the drugs not himself. However, his father puts the blame to Nate and he makes Nate to be the person who uses the drugs. In that conversation, Anne does not believe Nate's explanation by uttering, "I don't understand". However, Nate tries to cuts Anne's utterance because he has not finished the explanation yet.

This type of interruption is classified as an overlap because Anne still finishes her utterance when Nate starts to interrupt her. It functions to show disagreement because Nate disagrees to hide his father's problem like what his mother does by saying "No" firmly.

The other example of interruption also occurs in the following.

Lily : Yeah, it made me feel { *a little nostalgic?*
 Rufus : { *Nauseous*.
 Lily :

(29/6/00:32:44-00:32:46)

In the example above, Lily and Rufus are discussing a sudden kissing which just happens between them. In that conversation, Lily wants to say her opinion about the kissing. However, Rufus tries to interrupt Lily to help her finishing the utterance. In the interruption, Rufus fails in providing the word which makes him interrupted back by Lily.

In this case, the type of interruption is regarded as a butting-in interruption since Lily grabs back her floor after Rufus interrupts her. It means that Rufus, as the interrupter, fails to do the interruption. It functions as floor taking since Lily keeps continue and finish her utterance. An example of another the type and function of interruption is also shown below.

Dan : I know it may not compare to, uh, a suite at The Ritz in Paris or a chalet in Aspen, and it might be a fire hazard, but/
 Serena : { but it's perfect.

(37/7/00:34:04-00:34:13)

Dan and Serena want to make a date. They choose Dan's house to be the place rather than other expensive places. The conversation above occurs when Dan shows his decorated room to Serena. Dan says that his room is not like a suite room at The Ritz hotel in Paris or a chalet in Aspen. However, Dan intentionally does not complete his explanation. He gives a chance to Serena to express her opinion about Dan's room

decoration. Therefore, Dan makes a silent pause in the middle of the talk. This silence is used by Serena to perform interruption.

The type of interruption which occurs in the conversation above is regarded as a silent interruption. This means that interruption occurs when Dan performs a silent pause. This silent pause is intentionally performed by Dan. The pause is used by Serena as a chance to take the floor. It functions as assistance of cooperative interruption. It means that Serena helps Dan in completing the utterance.

Furthermore, the data show that the occurrences of interruption are found in both male and female characters' speech in *Gossip Girl* TV series. The result is suitable with the recent studies which propose that men and women have the same opportunity to use interruption within their speech. From total 65 data, the male characters use interruption 42 times within their speech and female characters use interruption 23 times. As the most frequent type, overlap interruption occurs 24 times in men's speech and only 9 times in women's speech. It indicates that men have more urgency to express or say their opinion in the middle of conversations by grabbing others turn of speaking. However, butting-in interruption only occurs in women's speech and none of them occurs in men's speech in this research. It is because the male characters give the opportunity to female characters to finish their utterances. On the other hand, the male characters tend to use interruption which functions as topic change. It is because they do not interested with the topic of discussion. Therefore, they use interruption to change the topic. Meanwhile, the female characters use interruption as tangentialization

which means that they use interruption to end the discussion with men in mixed-sex conversations in the TV series.

Furthermore, the data also show that interruption functions as both intrusion and cooperation in conversation. It means that interruption is not only shown as violation act in conversation, but also as cooperative act among the speakers. Therefore, in this case, interruption is not only used as domination, but also as a sign of social relationship.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

According to this research, it can be concluded that all types and functions of interruption are found in the mixed-sex conversations in the selected episodes of the TV series.

In relation to the first objective, overlap interruption becomes the most frequent type which occurs 33 times (50%). It indicated that male and female characters of the TV series have the same urge to voice their opinions at the same time by performing interruption. On the other hand, butting-in interruption appears as the least prominent type that is used by the characters. It is only used twice (3%) in the mixed-sex conversations. It occurs because most interuptees rarely grab back their turn when they notice their interlocutor interrupting them. Instead, they tend to give a chance for the interrupter to continue his/her turn because they know that there must be something more important he/she wants to convey when he/she is interrupting.

The second objective is the function of interruption in mixed-sex conversations in *Gossip*

Girl TV series. In this research, tangentialization of intrusive interruption becomes the most frequent function that occurs in the mixed-sex conversations. It indicates that the characters mostly use interruption to win over the other speakers in conversation. By performing this function, the characters do not want to hear any further explanation from the current speakers and prevent the speakers from finishing their explanation. On the other hand, clarification of cooperative interruption becomes the least function which occurs in the mixed-sex conversations. It rarely occurs between the characters because they tend to use interruption to cut or to stop other speakers from talking, not because they want a clarification.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusion above, several suggestions are proposed for several parties. First, the researcher suggests to the students of Linguistics to not only focus on seeing interruption as a violation, but also on analyzing its cooperative function as well will result better findings. Furthermore, the researcher also suggests to the other researchers to analyze interruption by focusing on different issues. As an example, they can analyze interruption that occurs in speakers of different ages or different cultures. Finally, by reading this research, the readers are expected to

have more understanding about interruption and they can use it appropriately in daily conversation.

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