

TURN-TAKING AND OVERLAPPING IN A NIGERIAN ONLINE POLITICAL INTERVIEW

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Abstract

Previous studies on media discourses in Nigeria have not given adequate attention to the language of television interviews. The broadcast media seems not to have many admirers like the print media does. This study therefore attempts to fill this gap by analyzing turn-taking types and overlapping in a news interview. The specific objectives are to describe the turn-taking pattern and describe the overlapping speech patterns. The interview, which was downloaded from YouTube and transcribed using SayMore, was selected because of the importance of the politician in Nigerian politics. The method used in this study is qualitative and the analysis is inductive. The findings of the study revealed that the turn-taking pattern in the interview deviates from the question-response pattern expected of news interviews. The pattern identified in this study is explanation, question and response. Interruptive and non-interruptive overlaps were identified in the study. Interestingly, this study also identified a recursive interruptive overlap. Finally, it was observed that disagreement between the interviewer and the interviewee often led to cases of overlaps.

Keywords: Turn-taking patterns; overlapping; political interview; conversation analysis

Introduction

Nigeria's political system is one which is filled with a lot of rivalry and resentments. According to Tamir (2019) "many Nigerians are sceptical about the country's political and judicial systems" (Tamir, 2019). The people of Nigeria, despite this, are hopeful that the political system will change for the better. Therefore, they have expectations for politicians and hope that they become concerned about the plight of the masses. Since, the vast majority of the people may not have direct access to the politicians, one of the ways in which they can see and hear their politicians is through the media. Political news interviews are

a way of assessing politicians and what they have to offer the people in their capacity as leaders. As Beattie points out:

Intimate conversations between a politician and an interviewer are broadcast, to millions of viewers who witness at close quarters the speech and nonverbal style of the politician. Many people seem to have become aware of this and that viewers were more likely to forget the content of the political message than the way it was delivered (Beattie, 1982:95).

Being aware of this, it is important for politicians to be adept at turn-taking Skills during their interviews since the people's perception of them is highly significant. Political interviews, a means of passing on political messages, make it very essential for politicians to dialogue effectively. Interviews, in general, have a particular turn-taking pattern that involves questions by the interviewer (henceforth to be referred to as IR) and answers by the interviewee (henceforth to be referred to as IE) but this pattern is not often adhered to. Non-adherence to this pattern causes overlapping. Turn taking is an essential part of every conversation. This is important for both normal everyday interaction and institutional talk. Every conversation type has its rules as to who speaks and at what time one is to speak. Despite the differences in context, Sacks et al. (1974) postulate that turn taking in conversation should have only one person speaking at a time and speaker change should occur. Heritage and Greatbatch have perfectly described the turn-taking system for news interview:

Turn-taking is organised through a distinctive normative procedure in which – unlike conversation – the types of turns that may be produced by each speaker are provided in advance. News interview talk should proceed as sequences of IR questions and IE responses to those questions. Correspondingly, speakers who act as IRs may not properly engage in actions other than questions, while those who take part as IEs should refrain from initiating actions (such as unsolicited comments on prior talk) or sequences (for example, asking questions to which the IR or other IEs would be obliged to respond) (Heritage and Greatbatch 1991:97–98).

Also, journalists are obliged to hold politicians accountable when they try to avoid answering questions that are of interest to the large populace. These questions may be related to how well they have functioned as politicians or if they have been indicted for corruption at any point. As the mouthpiece of the people, the journalist is expected to act in this capacity, else, the people would no

longer trust the journalist. The journalist may thenceforth be seen as a partaker in the political discourse that is full of propaganda.

Overlapping in interactions occur when two speakers are talking at the same time. Overlapping varies across different conversations. Sacks et al. (1974) opine that overlaps whenever they occur are usually brief and are accountable with regards to the turn-taking rules. Overlapping in news interviews usually occur as a way of accepting what the other has said, refuting what the other has said (this is usually in the case of the IE) or a way of stopping the IE from talking too much or deviating from the topic of discussion (this is done by the IR). Overlapping may be interruptive or non-interruptive. This study will identify the interruptive and non-interruptive overlaps and see what this does to meaning comprehension and what it tells us about the participants.

Turn-taking types and overlapping have been researched by scholars in various parts of the world. Fitroh (2016) carried out a study on turn-taking strategies used by Donald Trump in his interview at University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Adda-decker et al. (2008) carried out a study on annotation and overlapping speech in political interviews in Greece. Also, Konakahara (2015) examines overlapping questions in casual English as Lingua Franca (ELF) conversation. She identifies interruptive overlapping and its effect on the ELF participants. Furthermore, Roca-Cuberes (2014) compares broadcast political interviews in commercial and public broadcasts in Spain. A study on the determinants of turn-taking in Nigerian television talk shows was done by (Olutayo, 2013). The study identified seven main determinants and features of turn-taking in the talk shows. These studies have not accounted for the turn-taking patterns and overlapping in Nigerian political interviews. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyse turn-taking types and overlapping in the interview. The specific objectives are to describe the turn-taking pattern and describe the overlapping speech patterns. In line with this, Conversational Analysis (henceforth to be referred to as CA) as developed by (Sacks et al., 1974) will be used in the study. CA proposes the need to analyse naturally occurring conversations and identify how participants make meaning of what they say, the rules guiding their talk-in-interaction and how they build social relationships. The features of talk as stipulated by Gail Jefferson will be used in the transcription of the data. Heritage opines thus:

The central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explication of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behaviour and understand and deal with the behaviour of others (Heritage, 1984).

Methodology

The method used in this study is qualitative and the analysis is inductive. The spoken discourse selected for this project was an institutional talk. It was an interview on Fireworks, a weekly fiery interview programme on TVC News Nigeria. Fireworks is one of the television broadcasts that has several politicians coming up to answer questions on their political journeys, political interests and ways in which they have served the people. It is on one of such occasions that the data for this research is gotten from. Fireworks is anchored by Bukola Samuel-Wemimo. Currently at TVC News Nigeria, Bukola is a news Anchor, who runs commentaries during live broadcasts and doubles as Reporter and Presenter of TVC's Fireworks programme (City People, 2017). In this case, Bukola interviewed a well-known Nigerian politician who has at different times cross-carpeted from one political party to another and who the people look up to for a better Nigeria. This interview is of interest to Nigerians as it shows how the politician has progressed in his political career and how much he has the interest of the people at heart.

The duration of the data is 26 minutes and 37 seconds. The excerpts from this interview will be analysed according to their turn-taking patterns and the overlapping speech pattern. The recording was retrieved from YouTube and transcribed using the transcription notation by Jefferson Transcription System. There is a list of transcription notations from Jefferson Transcription System, however, only three of the notations are used in this project. Only overlaps (represented by brackets), continuation (represented by equal sign) and abrupt stop (represented by hyphen) would be noted in the transcription. The transcription uses three columns: the first column contains line numbers, the second column are the interactants, and the last column is the talk. The commas and full stops in this transcription are not indicative of Jefferson's transcription system. They are mere punctuations.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the data will focus on describing turn-taking patterns and the overlapping speech of the interactants.

Turn-taking Patterns

The pairs of talk in an interview should include questions from the interviewer and responses from the interviewees. Also, turn-taking rules state that one person should talk at a time. This is also important in political interviews since the interviewer is meant to ask questions in order to elicit information from the interviewee. The interviewer is therefore expected to ask clear questions and the interviewee to respond accordingly. In this study, we have identified three patterns from the recording, which is explanation, question and response.

Excerpt 1

IR : Now, you had served for 8 years under the All Nigeria's People's Party as a lawmaker and of course you benefitted from that party.
Now, do you, when your house is on fire do you leave and go to your neighbour's house whose house is not on fire?
IE : No no no, it was not like your house is on fire, these are different things it's like-

Excerpt 2

IR : Let's make progress, how do you... it is you know popular that you are the face of government as far as the National Assembly is concerned in terms of budgetary matters and all of that, you have been the face of the government.
How do you reconcile this key role that you're playing with your support for the Senate President in his travail?
IE : Well, I don't know where this interest conflicts...

Excerpt 3

IR : Now, let's make progress Your Excellency, let's now look at issues of the fallout of insurgency in the country. I know that you have been in the forefront of promoting the course of the IDPs and indeed you moved the bill that enabled them to vote during the elections.
Can we look at the North East Development Commission bill which is also generating a debate?

IE : No, it has been generating support

From these three excerpts, we see the interviewer gave an explanation on the background of the question before asking the question. This follows with a response from the interviewee. This is a pattern in the interviewee because the interviewer is trying as much as possible not to be misunderstood. Interviewer wants to ensure that the interviewee understands what interviewer is talking about since the topic of discussion is politics which happens to be sensitive especially in a country like Nigeria, where the people are at alert when it comes to political figures and what they say or do.

On the other hand, a reverse of the turn-taking pattern in news interviews was identified in this interview. This occurs when the IE asks the IR questions. This occurred a few times as can be seen below (excerpts 4 and 5):

Excerpt 4

299 **IR :** From your own perspective
300 **IE :** → No, not from my perspective. Are you not supporting it?
301 **IR :** =I think it is inconsequential whether I support [the North East Development
302 Commission bill or not.]

Excerpt 5

198 **IE :** → Is there any conflict there?
199 **IR :** You tell us. It seems as though you are for Buhari and you are also for the Senate
200 President

Types of Overlaps

Overlaps as explained earlier can either be interruptive or non-interruptive. The excerpts below show the different kinds of overlaps in the data of the study.

Interruptive overlaps

Excerpt 6

45 **IR :** Or you try to [rebuild, renovate your own house
46 **IE :** → [No no no, just wait a minute, let me out it out to you clear. You are in
47 a house, that is your own house or your own father's house, let's say and suddenly
48 for disagreement within the family and it's raining for example, and you're pushed
49 out, you go into your neighbour's house and when the rain is over probably

The overlap occurs because the interviewee thinks the interviewer does not understand his stand-point. The interviewee therefore says, "...let me put it out to you clear." The interviewee causes the overlap and holds the floor.

Excerpt 7

79 **IR** : → So, you supported the Senate President's [emergence at the time?
80 **IE** : → [Of course, I contested for his deputy and
81 I lost to Ekweremadu. So, I'm part of the Saraki group.

This interruptive overlap occurs because the interviewee already understood the question the interviewee wanted to ask and this can be seen in his response. The interviewee gives an adequate response to the question. He says "Of course...I'm part of the Saraki group"

Excerpt 8

300 **IE** : No, not from my perspective. Are you not supporting it?
301 **IR** : → =I think it is inconsequential whether I support [the North East Development
302 Commission bill or not.]
303 **IE** : → [It is. Of course, Bukky is on
304 fireworks. So, if you support and we are looking for your support, that will be great.
305 You should endorse the North East Development Commission because we need it.
306 The North East has been so devastated that you need an established institutional
307 framework that will address the problems.

This overlap occurs the moment the interviewee thinks that the interviewer is not in agreement with his thought. He expects the interviewer to accept that she is supporting the North East Development bill. He tries to convince her as to why she should support the bill.

Recursive Interruptive Overlaps

In the excerpts below (excerpts 9-11), there are several cases of recursive interruptive overlaps. Recursive interruptive overlaps are where the overlaps continued between the interactants for more than a pair of talk. To the best of our knowledge, past studies have identified interruptions but none known to these researchers have talked about recursive interruptions in political interviews.

Excerpt 9

63 **IR** : → [At that point of transition], it appears as if it's more about their interest,
64 [you didn't get the ticket
65 **IE** : → [No no [no no
66 **IR** : → [to go to the National Assembly, the upper chamber [and then you left.
67 **IE** : → [No but getting the
68 ticket is not winning the election, I contested against somebody in PDP. I contested
69 against 9 people, I contested against somebody from SDP too. So, it's not a matter
70 of interest. Even if you get interest if people don't like you, do you win? You don't

Excerpt 10

137 **IR** : → [So, from what you have said, it's clear where you stand but would I be safe to also-
138 **IE** : → =clear with [what I stand on what?
139 **IR** : → [say that you are in support, you are on the senate president's side where
140 → this trial is concerned, where his current [travail is concerned,
141 **IE** : → [I don't, I don't-]
142 **IR** : → [are you standing with the Senate President and by the Senate President?
143 **IE** : → [I don't understand that but what I know is that the Senate President is not going
144 through trial and Section 35 of our constitution or 36 clearly states that you are
145 presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt by a competent
146 court of law.

226 → [we] confirmed all the ministers.
227 **IR** : → [So, [before we lose sight of-
228 **IE** : → [We passed all the bills that are brought by the government, we passed the
229 supplementary budget with additions. Then, for the first time despite the problem
230 you people are talking about, it's more of a media thing this budget that we recently
240 passed, this is the first time we did a collective budget. This is the first time, the
250 president scrutinized and looked at each item we had to agree on it before he signed.

Excerpt 11

The IR and IE kept interrupting each other in these instances of talk. The IE always ensures that he holds the floor after the interruptions as can be seen above.

Non-Interruptive Overlaps

There's only one case of non-interruptive overlap in the interview. This interviewer repeats a word from what the interviewee had said and allowed the interviewee to continue with what he was saying. This can be seen in Excerpt 12.

Excerpt 12

16 **IE** : Well, my movement from ANPP then to PDP was really circumstantial. I had issues
17 with my former governor then, now, the controversial chairman of PDP, Ali Sheriff,
18 → on coming [to -
19 **IR** : → =[Controversial]

To our surprise, we have discovered that we have 75 instances of overlapping speech throughout the 26 minutes 37 seconds recording data. However, only 4 pairs of overlapping speech were not due to disagreement. One of the instances of overlapping speech which was not caused by disagreement was in Excerpt 12.

The rest of the overlap instances occurred because of disagreement. We could deduce from excerpts 13-15 that the IR and IE are aware of the turn-taking patterns that are supposed to be implemented during a news interview. The IR asks questions and the IE waits for her to finish before he responds. This can be seen in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 13

50 **IR** : → So, what happens to your father's house, your inheritance?
51 **IE** : No, I came back to my father's house I went to virtually I was on sabbatical leave in
52 PDP. I was just there for one term and immediately I found myself in PDP, I was
53 not even, you know I went through all sorts of harassment immediately because of
54 my nature I didn't fit in well into PDP. You know that from the°. So, I had to leave.
55 Fortunately, the formation, the merger of the three or four political parties that
56 formed the APC came on board and when it was going on, we formed the new PDP
57 → out of the PDP and merged with the APC and here I'm again by the grace of God.

155 **IR** : You don't believe that it's tied to somehow his emergence as Senate President,
156 → considering that your party was fielding another candidate?
157 **IE** : Well, I don't want to believe that honestly because I'm part of the leadership that
158 emerged that is not at the beginning the party's choice, so to say I'm the senate leader,
159 the party initially preferred another person to be the Senate leader but we in the
160 → senate are who are supposed to constitutionally given the privilege and the right.

Excerpt 14

Excerpt 15

186 **IR** : Ok. Interesting. So, do you see the party's influence it's demands, it's requirements
187 → on leadership positions in the senate as overbearing?
188 **IE** : No, no, no. That was in the beginning. We have gone through that. That happened
189 last year. Oh no no, in June, last year and we have passed through that, the leadership,
190 → we have settled that problem.
191 **IR** : Let's make progress, how do you... it is you know popular that you are the face of
192 government as far as the National Assembly is concerned in terms of budgetary
193 matters and all of that, you have been the face of the government. How do you
194 reconcile this key role that you're playing with your support for the Senate President
195 → in his travail?

However, we noticed that 67 overlap instances were caused by disagreements between the IR and IE. The IE at different points in time kept saying, "No no no..." and this usually overlaps with the utterance of the IR. Examples could be

seen in excerpts 16 and 17. Asides, the use of "No no no..." to show disagreement during the cases of overlap, the interviewee also uses words that show negation. He tries to negate whatever the IR says. For instance in excerpt 18, he says, "I don't...".

Excerpt 16

39	IR :	[Now, you had served for 8 years under the All Nigeria's People's Party
40		as a lawmaker and of course you benefitted from that party. Now, do you, when your
41		house is on fire do you leave and go to your [neighbour's house whose house is not
42		on fire?
43	IE : →	[No no no, it was not like your house
44		is on fire, these are different things it's like-
45	IR :	Or you try to [rebuild, renovate your own house
46	IE : →	[No no no, just wait a minute, let me out it out to you clear. You are in
47		a house, that is your own house or your own father's house, let's say and suddenly
48		for disagreement within the family and it's raining for example, and you're pushed

Excerpt 17

58	IR :	=So, what really is politics about, is it about the [politician's interest?
59	IE : →	[No, no no , not only [that politics-
60	IR :	[because when
61		politicians want to move from one party to another
62	IE :	Let me put [it this way]
63	IR :	[At that point of transition], it appears as if it's more about their interest,
64		[you didn't get the ticket
65	IE : →	[No no [no no
66	IR :	[to go to the National Assembly, the upper chamber [and then you left.
67	IE : →	[No but getting the
68		ticket is not winning the election, I contested against somebody in PDP. I contested
69		against 9 people, I contested against somebody from SDP too. So, it's not a matter

Excerpt 18

140		this trial is concerned, where his current [travail is concerned,
141	IE : →	[I don't, I don't...]
142	IR :	[are you standing with the Senate President and by the Senate President?
143	IE : →	[I don't understand that but what I know is that the Senate President is not going
144		through trial and Section 35 of our constitution or 36 clearly states that you are
145		presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt by a competent
146		court of law.

It was also observed that not all disagreements came in the form of “No no no...” or “I don’t....” utterances. In excerpt 19 and 20, the IE disagrees with the IR without saying, “no”.

Excerpt 19

301	IR	: =I think it is inconsequential whether I support [the North East Development Commission bill or not.]
302		
303	IE	: → [It is. Of course, Bukky is on
304		fireworks. So, if you support and we are looking for your support, that will be great.
305		You should endorse the North East Development Commission because we need it.
306		The North East has been so devastated that you need an established institutional
307		framework that will address the problems.

Excerpt 20

313	IR	: -a genuine need, you're going to need a [headquarters a commission, a board,
314	IE	: [No, Borno state has government house.
315	IR	: You're going to need a staff to be paid to work and all of that. Now, in this time when
316		the country is in dire straits [would you-
317	IE	: → [In this time again when the country is faced with
318		humongous high rate of unemployment and government is trying to look for
319		institution that they can employ people. Are you not seeing that that will provide
320		even an employment avenue for people that need it that have been devastated?

Conclusion

The turn-taking pattern identified in this study deviates from the question-response pattern that is expected of news interviews. The question of the interviewer is preceded by an explanation of what is to be asked. This is to ensure that the interviewee understands the background of the discussion. Also, there are three types of overlaps identified in this study. The interruptive and non-interruptive overlaps have been identified in previous studies (Beattie, 1982; Fitroh, 2016). This study's contribution is an identification of a recursive interruptive overlap. This form of overlap occurred severally in the interview. The interviewee begins the overlap and does not give up the turn even when the interviewer continues. He ensures he has the floor eventually. Finally, the study identified disagreement as the cause of overlaps in the news interview.

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