

## Turn-Control Strategies in TV Talk Show

WANG Jie<sup>[a],\*</sup>; CHEN Miaomiao<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>School of Foreign Languages, Shandong Normal University, Jinan, China.

\*Corresponding author.

**Supported by** the Social Science Planning Research Project of Shandong Province (14CWYJ03); the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Planning Fund Project of Ministry of Education (15 YJA740041).

Received 9 January 2016; accepted 22 March 2016  
Published online 26 May 2016

### Abstract

Talk show is one form of daily conversations. Turn is the basic structural unit and turn-taking is usually regarded as the core research of conversational analysis. This paper selects *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *A Date With Lu Yu* as the object of study. From turn-controlling perspective, this paper compares hosts' language strategies in "turn-claiming", "turn-holding", "turn-yielding" and explores methods to improve conversation literacy of hosts by analyzing differences in styles between two shows.

**Key words:** TV talk show; Turn-control strategies; Turn-claiming; Turn-holding; Turn-yielding

Wang, J., & Chen, M. M. (2016). Turn-Control Strategies in TV Talk Show. *Canadian Social Science*, 12(5), 68-73. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/8375> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/8375>

### INTRODUCTION

Conversation analysis is originated in the 1960s through collaboration between Haverly Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson. According to Schegloff and Sacks (1973), naturally-occurring conversation is heard to be orderly by conversation participants as a result of the coordinated application of conversation-structuring rules, within which are the turn-taking principles. Schegloff put

forward the concept of the conversation repair, which has drawn many linguists' attention. Drew and Heritage (1992) observed radio talk show as institutional discourse. They described the structural organization and defined the talk show as semi-institutional between the formal institutional conversation and the informal daily talks. Studies of conversational analysis (He, 2000; Li & Fan, 2002; Liu, 2004; Liu, 2007; Yu, 2008; Yang, 2011; Chen, 2014) in China have abounded since 2000.

He (2000) explores the conversation analysis from the perspective of dynamic pragmatics. He points out that foreign researches mainly focus on the static analysis and description of communication, and ignore the study of dynamic process of communication. Li and Fan (2002) use the conversation of English learners in China as corpora, and analyze the turn-taking and its enlightenment for foreign language teaching. Liu (2004) studies the Chinese conversational structure with the conversation analysis theory and method. Liu Hong adds, modifies and perfects the problems existed in the related theory and method. Yu (2008) probes into the characteristics of public institutional conversation, research content, and analyzes the case of public institutional conversation. Yang (2011) analyzes the correct sequence of doctor-patient session. Chen (2014) presents the social action theory as a new perspective for conducting conversation analysis, with the aim of broadening the horizon of relevant researches to develop CA based on Chinese.

Literature review shows that an exploration of conversation management, conversation strategies in institutional situations has been rarely made in China. Following the turn-taking theory, this paper aims to compare two TV Talk Show programs, ie., American *Oprah Winfrey Show* and Chinese *A Date With Lu Yu*, and explore the turn-control strategies between the host and the guest from the perspective of turn-claiming, turn-holding, and turn-yielding, and then make an analysis of the turn strategies and program styles of the host.

## 1. TURN-TAKING

Turn-taking system can be divided into three components: turn-construction component (TCU for short), turn-allocation component (TAC for short) and turn-control strategy.

### 1.1 Turn-Construction Component

There are various components to construct a speaker's turn, thus these components can be roughly classified into three categories: Lexical TCU, Phrasal/Clausal TCU and Sentential TCU. Turn-construction component refers to a grammatically complete unit of language, such as sentence, clause and phrase. In talk shows, the guest is the center and takes longer time, especially the guest who speaks; his turn is made up of sentence groups. The host just plays the role of a controller and a guide of the topic, and the utterances she/he makes are more than a single sentence.

### 1.2 Turn-Allocation Component

Turn allocation methods are divided into three categories: a) the current speaker points to the next speaker, which involves calling someone's name directly, using eye contact and gestures, or asking questions; b) If the current speaker does not select the next speaker, next turn is allocated by self-allocation; c) If the current speaker does not select the next speaker and nobody makes self-selection, the current speaker needs to continue the topic.

### 1.3 Turn-Control Strategy

Turn-control strategies mainly include three strategies: turn-claiming strategy; turn-holding strategy; turn yielding strategy.

## 2. A COMPARISON OF THE TURN-CONTROL STRATEGIES BETWEEN OPRAH WINFREY SHOW AND A DATE WITH LU YU

### 2.1 The Turn-Claiming Strategy

All conversational participants have the responsibility to keep the flow of their speech smooth. However, for different reasons, the hearer may interrupt the speech of the current speaker to express his or her own opinion in a TV Talk Show program. By this time, the hearer has to adopt some pragmatic strategies to usurp the floor or claim the turn. There are three sub-strategies to claim a turn during the conversation, which includes adding a suitable end; interruption; and repetition.

#### 2.1.1 Adding a Suitable End

When the hearer realizes that the speaker will finish his utterance, namely, the TRP is upcoming; he could claim his turn by adding a suitable end for the current speaker's finished utterance.

(1) T1 Oprah: Taylor, What does this feel like, uh... in the midst of this phenomenon? I was one of those people screaming for the Beatles. And now people are screaming for you!

Audience: (shouting)

T2 Taylor: It's really unlike anything else. So, I mean... I can be more thankful.

T3 Oprah: What does the feel like being in the ...?

T4 Taylor: Yes. Different, it's almost like you live in two different worlds. You go into Twilight world, and then you completely vanish and you go back to your regular life.

T5 Oprah: Come back to your daily life. So what about you, Robert?

In the above example, Oprah realizes that Taylor's utterance has already finished, so she claims her turn by tactfully adding a complete end "come back to your daily life" to Taylor's speech and successfully starts a new turn to ask the feeling about Robert.

(2) S: //对我很=我很喜欢照镜子。

E: //而且她有时候, 跟大家在聊天。

H: //有的时候, 对. 如果我们去有一些餐厅吃饭的话, 后面会有一面镜子, 她坐我对面, 如果我们在聊天, 她眼睛会这样错开, 看后面的镜子, 然后跟你聊天。

鲁豫: 就会是这样的. 你们自己看你们6年前的样子跟现在变化大吗, 你们觉得?

In the above example, Lu Yu asks who pays more attention to her appearance. They all agree that S pays more attention to her appearance. When talking about the behavior of S, nobody can take turn from H. There is a brief pause after expressing her ideas and the host realizes that their utterances have already finished. So the host claims her turn by adding a complete end tactfully.

#### 2.1.2 Interruption

Usually it is impolite and inappropriate to interrupt the utterance of the current speaker. However, there are many occasions in which the hearer has to interrupt the current speaker if he or she has no any signs of ending his or her talking, or the hearer might have some urgent things to do.

(3) T1 Oprah: Really?

T2 Michael: And my father teased me. And I just hated this, cried everyday. Because...

T3 Oprah: Your father teased you for this?

T4 Michael: Yes! He told me ugly. Well...

T5 Oprah: Your father said that? Why?

In the above Example, Oprah and Michael are talking about the relationship between Michael and his father. Michael is immersed in the memories of the past and has not any signs to stop. Oprah as the hostess has to constantly interrupt Michael's utterance when hearing that Michael's father teased him often in order to express her disbelief for the behavior of Michael's father and she also wants Michael to illustrate the reason why his father

did so. Through interruptions, Oprah smoothly claims her floor and guides the guest to talk more so as to meet the curiosity of the audience.

(4) 鲁豫: 再也没剪过啊?

吕丽萍: 受刺激了. 不是, 因为呢, 我有一次上公共汽车吗, 一个小孩看看我, 我然后就跟他妈妈说, 这是叔叔还是阿姨. 我吓坏了, 我说, 啊, 我怎么这么像. 我一剪, 我一剪短头发, 就特别男相你知道吧?

鲁豫: 就是拍完这个戏之后吗?

吕丽萍: 因为我轮廓特别硬, 你感觉吗?

In the above example, Lu Yu and Lu Liping are talking about the experience after the hair-cut. Absolutely, Lu wants to talk a lot, but Lu Yu, as the hostess, has to interrupt her utterance. However, Lu does not want to give up her turn, and interrupts Lu Yu's utterance successfully.

### 2.1.3 Repetition

Repetition is an efficient way for the hostess to claim her turn and also successfully let the guest explain something in detail in order to meet the interest and curiosity of the audience.

(5) T1 Oprah: Ok, so you wrote that email, and then you hit send. And then... what happened?

T2 Richey: And then I felt numb.

T3 Oprah: Were you scared?

T4 Richey: I was, well, you know, I was, I felt relieved.

T5 Oprah: You felt relieved?

T6 Richey: I felt relieved. Well, when I realized that, ok, I just press send. Wow...and I also know, I was in my studio alone for a minute, my assistant walked in, and I just started crying like a little baby. He grabbed my arms, said "let it go, let it go, and finally, you are free."

In the above example, Oprah and Richey are talking about his feelings when he announces that he is a homosexual man in public. In the third turn, Oprah asks Richey that "were you scared?" and Richey's answer is "I felt relieved". So Oprah repeats the words of Richey "You felt relieved?" to convey her puzzle and query so as to make Richey explain it in detail.

(6) 金星: 我们家有个惩罚的角落, 我们家那个客厅门后边是个角落, 孩子都特别怕那个地方, 只要一犯错误了面壁五分钟.

鲁豫: 他们就去面壁五分钟?

金星: 对呀. 我呢坐那看着啊.

The interruption generally will not affect the thoughts of the guest. On the contrary, it can help guests have a coherent idea and relieve tension.

Oprah's interruption includes questioning, inducing, and supplement. In the program, Oprah listens and responds to the guest; on the other hand, she puts forward new questions constantly, and helps the guest make deep

conversation from various aspects so as to attract the audience. Oprah's turn is to ask questions and express their strong emotions. She shows care, compassion, and appreciation, and creates the atmosphere of relaxation and no violation. It is easier for the guest to tell the bitter and sweet in their life, rather than review their success. Oprah is better at claiming turns. Nevertheless Lu Yu's turn is generally shorter in length and clearness. Lu Yu does not hold the turn for a long time and she will give the floor to the guest once again. It is known that Jin Xing loves children very much. When Lu Yu heard that Jin Xing would punish her children by facing the wall, she feels surprised and uncertain. By repeating the words of the guest, Lu Yu makes the guest to explain it further.

From above analysis, we can see that Oprah's attitude is more active in conversation, and she always participates in the conversation actively. Lu Yu's control for the turn is more of a soft control. She is good at being a listener, and guides the guest to continue the conversation by echoing and inquiring.

## 2.2 The Turn-Holding Strategy

If the current speaker has no intention to give up his or her turn, then the self-selected speaker has to take some pragmatic actions to hold the turn. That is, those self-selected speakers who intend to take the floor have to wait for the appearance of TRP. Naturally, those holding the floor in a competitive situation will avoid providing TRP to hold his floor.

There are two sub-strategies for the current speaker to hold the turn: hesitation filler and incomplete marker.

### 2.2.1 Hesitation Filler

In order to keep their turn, hesitation fillers such as "Er", "Well", "Um", "You know", "let me see", "Uh", "How can I put it", "It is like I put it", "Sort of", "The thing is" are used by the current speaker to fill the gap caused by possible TRP or to obtain more time to think about the topic or how to express his or her thoughts.

(7) T1 Oprah: OK! I just want to get the district. You were not taking anything to change the color of your skin?

T2 Michael: God! No! We are trying to control it by using make up. Even make up on the skin. But you know, the funny, why it's so appointed? You know, that is not appointed to me. You know, I am a great fan of art, I love Michael Angelo. If I....

T3 Oprah: How much plastic surgery you have done?

T4 Michael: Very, very little, two fingers. You know, if you want to know about those things, know people in the world...

In the above example, Oprah and Michael are talking about the rumor of changing his skin. When asked if

he has taken anything to change the color of his skin, Michael is very angry and denies it firmly. Meanwhile he needs much time to consider what he should say next so as to clear all about this rumor. During this process, Michael employs four “you know” as hesitation filler to indicate that he has not completed his turn in order to fill the pause and avoid the current floor taken by the self-selected speaker. By using “you know” repeatedly, Michael holds his floor successfully when he is thinking.

(8) 珞丹: 因为那会儿我在练琴, 我只要一吃完饭就特别有感觉, (hhhh) 我就一定要坐在钢琴那儿弹。

端端: 对, 然后她。

鲁豫: 真够会找借口的。

珞丹: 对, 然后我突然发现第一次我弹的时候, 然后我妈就没管我, 让我姐收拾。对, 第二次我还弹, 然后呢她还不用我收拾。然后我姐姐就抱怨, 我姐就说为什么。

鲁豫: 你也学啊!

Lu Yu interviews Wang Luodan and her sister Duanduan. They talk about Wang Luodan's reluctance to do housework because she needs to practice the piano. During the process of memory, in order to avoid the turn to be claimed, she uses “然后” four times and completes her turn successfully.

### 2.2.2 Incomplete Marker

The speaker usually uses incomplete markers “first”, “first of all”, “on the one hand”, “now from a practical point of view”, “I'd like to”, “for example” and so on to show that the current speaker has a bigger turn construction and he has at least several clauses before the appearance of the TRP.

(9) T1 Oprah: There are so many...I normally don't write questions down. But there are so many and I did not want to forget. First of all, I have being the entire house looking for oxygen chamber. I can not find oxygen chamber any where in the house.

T2 Michael: That story is so crazy! I mean, it's one of the... It completely made up.

In the above example, Oprah employs “there are so many...” and “first of all” as incomplete marker to state clearly that she has to write down all the rumors about Michael Jackson in case of forgetting any one. Oprah uses incomplete markers to show that before she completes the current turn, she has a long turn to state in order to avoid the listener claiming the floor. Meanwhile, she successfully arouses the interest of the audience.

(10) 鲁豫: 现在家里面孩子是中心, 你们俩的生活工作是围绕着孩子来做的?

金星: 早晨六点半孩子会给我弄醒的, 我就穿上睡衣蓬头垢面的给孩子弄早餐, 阿姨也帮着弄早餐。吃完早餐后, 他爸爸带着三个孩子开着车上幼儿园。送到幼儿园后他

就直接上学学中文去了, 然后我再回去睡个回笼觉。十点钟我就梳洗打扮, 我就该练功去了。中午呢...

When Lu Yu interviews Jin Xing, she talks about her daily life from morning till night, and her turn is inevitably too long. Jin Xing holds her turn by using time marker phrases.

According to the corpus, Oprah is very good at mobilizing the audiences' emotions, making them to express their ideas. Active participation of the audience makes the program more authentic and attractive. The relatively weak voice of the audience in *A Date With Lu Yu* apparently does not achieve the same effect. In addition, from the layout of the studio, the physical distance between the host and guest in Lu Yu is farther than that of Oprah. This makes the conversation distance increasing. In most cases, Lu Yu holds turns in order to fill in guest's information, supplement information, and respond to the conversation. Lu Yu's turn mainly focuses on the existing information to hold the topic. Lu Yu takes less initiative to activate the atmosphere but leaves most of the space to the guest, which foregrounds Lu Yu's distinctive hosting style. Oprah holds turn with the purpose of supplementing information, and actively expressing her ideas in the process of supplementation. She enlarges some of the details of the guest's talk, and encourages the guest to conduct a deep conversation. Finally, she can not only control the topic, but also promote the topic, inspire the expressive desire of the guest.

### 2.3 The Turn-Yielding Strategy

The current speaker may actively allocate his turn on some occasions. The current speaker must know some turn-yielding strategies to allocate his turn to other participants, which includes three sub-strategies: nomination, public the floor, and gazing.

#### 2.3.1 Nomination

The current speaker could use the sub-strategy of nomination to select the next speaker. Naturally, the next speaker has the right to speak. Also, next conversation topic is limited by the speaker

(11) T1 Oprah: So, at the end of that interview. Richey, did you feel embarrassed, did you feel ashamed or were you mad with Barbara?

T2 Richey: I felt anger afterwards. Because I felt invaded, I felt violated in many ways. But once again, it's not the first time I was asked this question on the interview but this was on a mass TV show.

In the first turn, Oprah asks Richey whether he is angry with Barbara who is a famous journalist because she once asked if he is a homosexual or not during an important interview in public. In the second turn, Richey

takes the floor by answering the question Oprah asks and gives a full explanation about his own idea. So, by the way of nomination, Oprah successfully yields her turn and encourages Richey to talk more which the audience is interested in.

(12) 鲁豫: 你们自己看你们六年前的样子跟现在变化大吗, 你们觉得?

E: 我太大了.

H: 大.

S: 其实三个都有很大的变化, 可是她是.

H: 我太明显了

鲁豫: 嗯, 你觉得你是最大的

H: 我觉得我变好多哦.

鲁豫: Ella呢?

E: 我没怎么变哎.

Lu Yu interviews SHE, when she asks who has a great change over the years, everyone expresses her own ideas. But E talks less. Using nomination can help her express more ideas.

### 2.3.2 Public the Floor

Let the conversation participants self-select who will become the next speaker according to the topic or questions.

(13) Oprah: Oh, that's so nice! Since you spent some time together, some fans want to know... "who is the lively party?"

(Pointing at Jake)

Oprah: Ok. Who is the most seriously?

(Pointing at Heath)

Oprah: Yeah. And most shy?

(Point at Michelle)

Oprah: Ok. The funniest?

Heath: Uh... Anne.

Anne: I am not funny.

In the above example, Oprah is chatting with the characters of Brokeback Mountain. Oprah does not call the name of them to answer her questions one by one, but through self-selecting to decide who will become the next speaker. Because the four actors spent much time together during shooting of the film, they are very familiar to each other.

### 2.3.3 Gazing

Gazing is one important way for the hostess to abstain her turn to let the involved speakers to answer her questions or talk much more.

(14) T1 Oprah: I think it's fantastic; this is what I want to know. If I am looking into your windows in the house on Saturday at night, what would I see?

(Looking at Richard)

T2 Richard: I was saying to somebody else.

Probably deathly recalling everyone and seeing if anyone has time to do something with me, because no man calls me.

T3 Oprah: So, if we look into your windows, what would we see?

(Looking at Kristine)

T6 Kristine: I am such a boring people. I am probably living with my cat.

T7 Oprah: If we looking from the window, first of all, are you home?

(Looking at Taylor)

T8 Taylor: I wish it was Tuesday because I was watching "American Idol". Saturday is a little difficult for me. I am bored on Saturday.

In the above example, Oprah and three actors of Twilight are chatting about one question "What are the actors doing on Saturday at night?" Oprah does not ask them to answer her question by nomination but by gazing. In Turn 1, when Oprah asks the question "If I am looking into your windows in the house on Saturday at night, what would I see?" She directs her eyes to Richard and then naturally he needs to answer this question. In Turn 5 and Turn 7, Oprah also uses this strategy to ask Kristine and Taylor. By doing this, Oprah successfully yields her turn to the next speaker to talk and also lets the viewers know more about the personal life of the actors they loved.

Lu Yu has more single interview, even when many people are interviewed together, she generally adopts the strategy of nomination or public the floor because of Chinese culture, the way of gazing is not so polite.

## CONCLUSION

Turn-taking patterns proposed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson are of great significance to study verbal communication. However, most of studies in China still pay more attention to theoretical dimensions without taking naturally-occurring language into consideration. The current thesis mainly focuses on turn-control strategies in two different cultural backgrounds. The research demonstrates that both Oprah and Lu Yu can yield the turn in conversation timely, and guide the guest to continue the conversation. But the yielding strategies they adopt are different. After claiming turns, Oprah usually states a supplementary material, and then leads to new problems, and then yields the turns to the guest, leading them to make more deep narration. Compared with Lu Yu, Oprah's questions have small relevance to the previous conversation content. The host needs to have better communication skills in order to complete questions. Lu Yu yields turn by questioning directly, especially questioning closely. When it comes to a question, Lu Yu will follow the guest's narration to question the details so that the guest can talk more. It is essential to conduct studies of the verbal language with different backgrounds, and also to study turns together

with body languages like laugh, applause and gestures in future studies.

---

## REFERENCES

---

- Chang, H. (2006). *Conversation analysis of Oprah Winfrey show*. In P. Drew & J. Heritage (Ed.), *Conversation analysis*. London: SAGE.
- He, Z. R. (2000). *A new coursebook in pragmatics*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Huang, G. W. (1988). *Essentials of text analysis*. Changsha, China: Hunan Education Press.
- Levinson S. C. (2001). *Pragmatics*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- Liu, H. (2004). *Analysis of conversational structure*. China: Peking University Press.
- Liu, Y. T. (2002). Methodological characteristic and theoretical foundation of the conversation analysis school. *Tongji University Journal*, (4), 111-117.
- Liu, Y. T. (2007). *The rudiments of conversation analysis*. Academic Press.
- Sacks, H. (1995). *Lectures on conversation (volume II)*. Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.
- Sun, Q. N. (2003). Discourse analysis of TV talk shows. Teaching of spoken English. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, (10), 19-22.
- Zhao, G., & Jia, Q. (2013). *Conversational analysis*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.
- Zhong, X. (2000). The analysis of characteristics of American television host. *The Journal of China Youth University of Political Studies*, (4), 107-111.