

## Turn-Taking Irregularities by African American Characters in the Movie “*Why Do Fools Fall in Love*”

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**Abstract:** This research dealt with the kinds of turn-taking irregularities in the conversation among the four main African American characters in the movie “*Why Do Fools Fall in Love*”, the reasons of those kinds of turn-taking irregularities, and which reason occurred the most frequently. This research was descriptive qualitative. The findings showed that the four African American characters in the movie tended to overlap others because they wanted to clarify, reject, or complete others’ utterance, and show annoyance.

**Key words:** turn-taking, interruption, overlap

“In a conversation, there is at least one and not more than one party talking at a time and then there will be another turn for the listeners who reply or answer the speaker. This action is called turn-taking” (Traugott & Pratt, 1980, p. 317). Turn-taking is the time when the speaker and the listener change their role whether becoming a listener or a speaker. In other words, there are ‘no gap’ and ‘no overlap’ between speakers (Coates, 2004, p. 112). However, they sometimes do not have the right turn-taking so that there are turn-taking irregularities (Wardhaugh, 1991, p. 148).

Zimmerman and West (1975) in Coates (2004) divided the types of turn-taking irregularities in a conversation into “interruption and overlap” (p. 113). Interruption happens when a speaker cuts the words of the previous speaker, and the previous speaker’s words could not be defined as the last word. Zimmerman and West (1975) in Mills (1995) also stated that “interruptions are just a violation of a current speaker’s rights to complete a turn.” (p. 20). Sometimes when the second speaker interrupts the first speaker, the first speaker will stop his/her words and he/she will let the second speaker take his/her turn to speak. Overlap happens when a

speaker's words are overlapping with the previous speaker's last words or part of it (Coates, 1986, p. 99). Sometimes overlap or interruption happens when someone misunderstands about the end of the turn and starts speaking too soon.

Wardough (1991) described interruption as an action that shows clarification or repetition, asks for help, shows rejection, and completion. Thus, it can be said that the first reason of interruption is asking for clarification or repetition as stated in Wardough (1991) that "there are times when people need to interrupt other's talk in order to seek clarification or to restate a point" (p. 151). While Schiffrin (1988) stated that "clarification is requested when the interlocutor either repeats or questions a portion of the speaker's prior utterance with rising intonation" (p. 79).

The second reason of interruption is asking for help as stated by Wardough (1991) that "asking for help or directions to the strangers when they are doing something is also to interrupt their activity" (p. 151).

The third reason is showing rejection because "the first speaker hears something with which he/she sharply disagrees with what the interlocutor is saying" (p. 152).

There are times people hear something and consider that the speaker is badly misinformed. One option that people have is to hear the speaker out and at some later point, attempt to clarify the misconception by denying or rejecting some point that the speaker made. Sometimes people use the words '*wait a minute!*', '*hold on!*', '*that's not right*' to deny or to reject some points. (p. 152)

The fourth reason is completion. If the interlocutors cannot complete the sentence, they can use the opportunity at the end of the sentence "to add a further comment on the same topic or just simply to rephrase what the speaker said" (p. 154) According to Wardough (1991), completion is a way of interrupting that is less offensive.

The other type of turn-taking irregularity, overlap, happens when people are eager to gain the floor in conversation. According to Cook (1989), "where there is overlap between turns it has some particular significance, such as signaling annoyance, urgency, a desire to correct what is being said or correction, and completion" (p. 52). This particular significance can be assumed as the reasons why people overlap others.

Wardhaugh (1991) declared that “any kind of interruption is a violation of another’s territory or rights”(p. 150); therefore, it can be concluded that both interruption and overlap are violations of other’s territory or rights and both of them might happen because of the same reasons: to show clarification or repetition, ask for help, show rejection, show completion, signal annoyance, show urgency, and correct what is being said.

The simple example to show the difference between interruption and overlap can be seen in the example below:

- A: I’m going to have a dinner with my friend and ...  
 B: | that’s nice! Where are you  
     | going?  
 A: I still don’t know about that. That’s why I’m asking your suggestion.  
 B: You’re asking me? Why don’t you decide it yourself?  
 A: That’s the problem. I don’t really know Surabaya.  
 B: Well OK, I can show you a place. It’s in ... |  
 A: | O, thank you where?  
 B: It’s in Supermall. You can go there. It’s a nice place.

In the conversation above, B’s first utterance is overlapping A’s first utterance. It can be seen when A is still speaking, B is giving an expression before A is finishing his/her words. A’s words (*friend and*) are overlapped with B’s words (*that’s nice*) and those words are heard at the same time. A’s fourth utterance, which cuts B’s third utterance is called interruption. It is because A’s utterance (*O, thank you where?*) cuts B’s utterance right before B continues his/her words without overlapping. Interruption is something that cannot be avoided and appears frequently in people’s daily conversation and so does overlap.

Turn-taking irregularities which happen in direct conversations in real daily life could also happen in a conversation among actors in a movie since the conversation in the movie must be as lively as possible. Therefore, the object of investigation in this research was taken from a movie entitled “*Why Do Fools Fall in Love*” of which actors were African American people. This movie was about a singer, Frankie Lymon who married three women, Zola, Elizabeth, and Emira separately in different years. The conflict arose when Frankie died because the three widows came to one town to get Frankie’s money but they had to prove who married him first.

This research analyzed the conversation among African American people since it seemed that most of them did not do turn-taking properly. Miller (1999) showed that there was much overlapping and simultaneous talk among certain African and African-American groups ([http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~emiller/conversation\\_paper.html](http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~emiller/conversation_paper.html)). The characters in the movie “*Why Do Fools Fall in Love*” can represent the general characteristics of African American in daily life since all of the characters in this movie are African Americans and the conversation consists of turn-taking irregularities that most African American do. Based on this background, the focus of this study is on the types of turn-taking irregularities produced by the main African American characters in the movie, the reason why the interruption and or overlap happened as seen in the movie and which reasons of interruption and of overlap produced by the main characters occurred the most frequently.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was descriptive qualitative in which the data were the utterances containing the types of turn-taking irregularities, that is, interruption and overlap, which were uttered by four main African American characters in the movie. A tape recorder was used to record the utterances produced by the four African American characters - Frankie, Elizabeth, Zola, and Emira in the movie “*Why Do Fools Fall in Love*”. Then a transcription of the utterances was made as data. The mark (|) was used to indicate the interruption, and (:) to indicate the overlap. The analysis on the reasons why the interruptions and overlaps happened was done after marking the interruption and overlap,

The analysis to answer the first question began with the searching of the types of turn-taking irregularities, that is, interruption and overlap. The searching of interruption and overlap was done based on the definitions in the theory used. Then the frequency of each interruption and overlap was calculated and the numbers were tabulated into a table.

The second question was answered by analyzing the reasons of interruption and or overlap in the conversation produced by the four main African American characters based on the context of the conversation in the movie and on Wardhaugh’s and Cook’s theories. Then the frequency of each reasons happened in the conversation was calculated and the reasons of interruption and overlap were classified in different tables.

Finally, the reasons of interruption and or overlap produced by four African American main characters that occurred the most frequently were determined based on the frequency.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the data analysis, the findings showed that there were two types of turn-taking irregularities in the conversation by most African American main characters in the movie, that is, interruption and overlap, with overlap as a kind of turn-taking irregularity that occurred the most frequently. The findings were put into tables that showed the types of turn-taking irregularities, that is, interruption and overlap, and the reasons of interruption and overlap.

### The Types of Turn-taking Irregularities

From the analysis of the movie “*Why Do Fools Fall in Love*”, it was found that most of the four African American main characters did not make a good turn-taking which was considered as turn-taking irregularities, that is, interruption and overlap. The finding of the two types of turn-taking irregularities was shown in table 1.

**Table 1. Turn-taking Irregularities that Occured in the Conversation**

Types of Turn-taking Irregularities	Total of occurrences
interruption	15
overlap	20
Total	35

Table 1 showed that in the conversation, most of the African American main characters tended to interrupt or overlap the other speaker. Interruption happened in fifteen occurrences and overlap happened in twenty occurrences.

### Reasons of Interruption

Based on the theory, there were seven types of reasons of interruption but the result of the analysis showed that there were only four reasons of interruption. The fifteen occurrences of interruption happened to show clarification, rejection, completion, and showing annoyance.

While the other reasons: asking for help, correction, and urgency could not be seen in the fifteen interruptions such as seen in table 2.

**Table 2. Reasons of Interruption**

Reasons of Interruption	Total of occurrences
1. clarification	4
2. asking for help	0
3. rejection	3
4. correction	0
5. completion	4
6. showing annoyance	4
7. urgency	0

Based on table 2, the reasons of interruption that got the same number were clarification, completion, and showing annoyance in which each of the reasons could be seen in four dialogs in the movie. One of the reasons of interruption in the movie was clarification that happened because the interrupter wanted to “seek clarification or restate a point” (Wardough, 1991, p. 151). If something is not clear in a conversation, usually a person would interrupt and ask to seek clarification, but sometimes an interrupter would restate a point to clarify what he/she means. It happened in the dialog between Zola and Frankie, the characters in the movie:

Zola : He’s a really nice man. He is stable | ...  
 Frankie : | Did you love him?

In this dialog, Frankie interrupted Zola because Frankie was jealous and angry. Zola had married and that was why Frankie could not control himself and cut her statement to ask her whether she loved her husband or not.

The next example:

Zola : I told you Frankie, he is a nice good man | ...  
 Fankie : | I didn’t ask that. I ask  
 did you love him?

In this dialog, Frankie still wanted clarification since Zola hadn’t answered his previous question. He restated his point whether Zola loved her husband or not.

Rejection was the reason of interruption that happened the least. Interruption because of rejection could be seen in the conversation below:

Frankie : That's beautiful, I appreciate it. Wait! How does your husband feel about if I'm staying |....  
 Zola : a ... Frankie look! When you call I said I might be would have to get you a few gigs, that's it, OK. Don't expect nothing else.

In the conversation, Zola tried to interrupt Frankie because Zola objected to Frankie's words. She let him stay in her house because he wanted to get a job and he did not have any relative in that city. She let him stay with the condition that there would be nothing between them. If Frankie spoke about Zola's husband's feeling, Zola suspected that Frankie would expect her back or expect something from Zola; therefore, she objected to his words by interrupting him. Zola's word 'a ...' shows that rejection was the reason of her interruption. As Wardhaugh (1991) stated that to reject or to deny people, the words "wait a minute!" could be used (p. 152); here the word 'a ...' could be considered similar to 'wait a minute'. The other reason of interruption found in the movie was completion.

Frankie : Oh, you thought because I'm a singer, I should have a maid and service |...  
 Elizabeth : Well, like you know

Elizabeth just came to Frankie's house which was messy. Frankie was afraid that Elizabeth would feel surprised so that he tried to explain his condition. Since he couldn't finish his words, Elizabeth tried to finish his words by giving the completion.

The last reason of interruption that could be found was showing annoyance which could be seen in the conversation between Elizabeth and Frankie.

Elizabeth : You know, I saw in the show "What's my line?" where this guy Nietzsche said "I am the master of my faith, the captain of my soul".  
 Do you know what that mean? Something |...  
 Frankie : Look mam, I don't need want to hear your bullshit about the gig.

In the conversation, Frankie who was drunk and addicted to drugs, asked Elizabeth for some money to buy drugs and pay his bills. Elizabeth

knew that he would force her to give the money; that was why she kept it somewhere without being noticed by him. She tried to distract him by talking about a television show. However, Frankie did not want to listen to anything except money so that he interrupted Elizabeth's words. His words 'Look mam, ...' show his annoyance to Elizabeth's words.

### Reasons of Overlap

In overlap, people also have reasons just like in interruption. The reasons of interruption and of overlap are the same. However, in the findings, the numbers of the reasons of overlap and of interruption are different. From the seven types of reasons of overlap in the theory, only three types could be found in the analysis of the twenty overlaps, that is, clarification with the most occurrences, asking for help and rejection. As seen in table 3, the reasons of overlap that could not be found in the movie were correction, completion, showing annoyance, and urgency.

**Table 3: Reasons of Overlap**

Reasons of Overlap	Total of occurrences
1. clarification	10
2. asking for help	2
3. rejection	8
4. correction	0
5. completion	0
6. showing annoyance	0
7. urgency	0

One of the reasons of the overlap was clarification that occurred ten times in the movie. The example of this clarification could be seen in this conversation between Frankie and Elizabeth:

Frankie : I told you not to invite any couple here.  
 Elizabeth : Why don't you tell me that you and Zola Taylor are married?

The conversation happened in Zola's house at the swimming pool. At that time, Elizabeth and another man were swimming together without Zola's agreement. When Zola found out, she was mad and very angry. At the same time, Frankie came and was confused about what had been



wanted to look for clarification or clear statement from the speakers. The interrupters wanted to stress some points that they had made. The other reason of interruption, completion, could occur because sometimes the characters could not finish their own words because they did not know what to say, or perhaps the speakers wanted to let the interlocutors correspond their fast speech using their own words and let them continue the floor. Another reason of interruption, showing annoyance, could also happen in the conversation in the movie because the interrupters felt annoyed with the speakers. The interrupters might feel that they did not get the right answer of their questions and their words deviate from what they had said. While rejection happened in the conversation because the interrupters wanted to reject some points or words from the interlocutors or to deny the meaning of the statements implied.

The findings showed that the reasons of interruption that occurred the most frequently were clarification, completion, and showing annoyance which had the same number of occurrences. It could be interpreted that they all appeared with the same number of occurrences because they would make the plot of the movie livelier for the audience to watch as if it was in the daily conversation. It could make the African American characters perform lively as if they were talking spontaneously such as in a real conversation, even though they had to use the script.

Besides the reasons of interruption, the findings also showed that there were 20 reasons of overlap that happened in the conversation. The highest frequency of occurrence for the reasons of overlap was clarification (10). It was followed by rejection (8) and asking for help (2). The same as clarification in the interruption, it could be concluded that clarification in the overlap happened because the characters in the movie wanted to have a clear statement, and to give a clear statement. From the findings it could be interpreted that the characters' clarifying statements are rather important because the interrupters wanted to know the meaning of the speaker's statements so that there would not be misunderstanding. In this case, the interrupters would make the story clearer so that the audience really understood the plot in the movie. The clarification in the conversation happened when the characters were repeating some points, rephrasing or restating some points, and when they were clarifying something. Rejection that got the second highest frequency of occurrence happened in the conversation because the interrupters tried to reject the other speaker's words because they felt that either the other speaker's

words were wrong or not suitable with his/her wish/expectations. The last reason of overlap that got the lowest frequency of occurrence was asking for help. It happened in the conversation in the movie because the interrupter begged the speaker not to do the unwanted thing.

The reasons of interruption, that were not found were asking for help, correction and urgency while for the reasons of overlap that were not found were correction, completion, showing annoyance, and urgency. The context of the movie did not support the four African American characters in the movie to do interruption or overlap with those reasons because the context in the movie had been planned or settled by the director.

## CONCLUSION

From the findings and analysis, it could be figured out that the African American characters tended to do interruption and overlap in their conversation. The reasons of interruption are clarification, rejection, completion and showing annoyance while the reasons of overlap are clarification, asking for help and rejection. The reasons of interruption occurred the most frequently in the conversation in the movie were clarification, completion, and showing annoyance and the reason of overlap occurred the most frequently in the conversation in the movie was clarification.

Based on what has been done in this research, it is suggested that other similar researches with different subjects such as turn-taking irregularities made by African American characters based on gender could be conducted as a comparison for this study. So there would be a finding about which gender is more dominant in doing the interruption and or overlap, or in other words, there would be a finding on which gender that likes to talk fast and does not like to wait for other speakers to finish their words.

Besides, another research could also deal with the analysis on the use of interruption and of overlap of the African American characters that have different status. By conducting this research, probably it could be figured out whether one's status can also determine the use of interruption and of overlap.

Hopefully, this research would give another contribution in understanding the kinds of turn-taking irregularities, especially interruption and overlap in the conversation between African American

characters. It is also expected that this research would be useful for further research concerning the kinds of turn-taking irregularities, that is, interruption and overlap in different contexts and situations.

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