
**Conversation Analysis of Turn Taking in the Political Interview
between Luara Kuenssberg and Boris Johnson**

Sattar Mutar Hasson

sat19h1020@uoanbar.edu.iq

Pro. Musleh Shweesh Ahmed, PHD

ed.musleh.shweesh@uoanbar.edu.iq

University of Anbar- College of Education for Humanities

DOI: [10.31973/aj.v2i140.3633](https://doi.org/10.31973/aj.v2i140.3633)

Abstract

The concentrate on political interview between Luara Kuenssberg and Boris Johnson. According to the researcher's knowledge a lot of interviews have been studied pragmatically, but no one has tackled them in a conversation analysis study. So, this field needs research because it is one of the scientific fields that was not previously studied.

The study aims at 1- examining the dominant of the turn taking system between the participants in the interview. 2- The analysis is focused on the utterances said by speakers of the dialogue between Luara Kuenssberg and Boris Johnson. The study hypothesizes that 1- the textual structure of interview is organized in accordance with feature of the turn-taking system. 2- turn taking system dominants the participants in their interview. To achieve the aims of the present study and to validate its hypotheses, one script of political interviews is selected. The theoretical model used as the basis for the analytical work is a synthesis of theoretical views and practical procedures proposed and used by Sacks, H, Schegloff, E, and Jefferson, G, (1978). The present study employed a descriptive qualitative approach since the findings were presented in narrative or textual descriptions. The conclusions of the analysis confirm the two hypotheses of the present study. They are as follows :1- Structures of interviews are organized in accordance with specific features operating on the turn-taking system. Turn allocation process is controlled by the interviewer who is considered the main controller of the conversation. 2- Interviewers alone can maintain their turns by continuous speech causing temporal overlap in the display of turns.

Keywords: Conversational analysis, Turn-Taking, Political interview

1- Introduction

Interviews are among the most common programmes broadcast in the world. In a normal interview, the interviewer meets one or more people and conversation goes on around a central topic. Interviews

(political, non-political, etc) usually vary according to the participants and the topic is usually selected from among the current controversial or specifically interesting ones so that the attention of a wide sector of viewers is attracted to the programs. As a text the interview is expected to be highly structured speech event. Since this text is of the spoken, conversational kind, the structure is expected to be determined by the mechanism of the turn-taking system that operate on this system which have the function of building it up. In this study, the concentrate on political interview between Luara Kuenssberg and Boris Johnson. According to the researcher's knowledge a lot of interviews have been studied pragmatically, but no one has tackled them in a conversation analysis study. So, this field needs research because it is one of the scientific fields that was not previously studied. The study aims at 1- examining the dominant of the turn taking system between the participants in the interview. 2- The analysis is focused on the utterances said by speakers of the dialogue between Luara Kuenssberg and Boris Johnson. It is hypothesized that 1- the textual structure of interview is organized in accordance with feature of the turn-taking system. 2- turn taking system dominants the participants in their interview. The procedures of analysis in this research are as follows: 1- Surveying the available literature on the analysis of conversational feature of the interview. 2- Identifying the turn taking structure of interview in the program transcript. 3- Surveying the model that is used in the analysis of the data. This includes in particular the models proposed by Sacks, H, Schegloff, E, and Jefferson, G, (1978). 4- The interview conducted in English by interviewer is recorded, transcribed and used as sample texts for the analysis. 5- Drawing a number of conclusions. The limitations of this study are as follows: 1- This study is limited to analyzing turn taking system of political interview. 2- This study is not concerned with the study of pragmatics. The significance of this study lies in discovering and identifying kinds of strategies that operate on the turn-taking system. Also, the study will be beneficial for all those who are interested in the field of discourse analysis.

2- Conversational Analysis

Conversation meanings have varied according to many linguists. Edmondson (1981) describes conversation as "referring to any interactional stretch of conversation involving at least two participants, taking place in a non-formalized context, such that it cannot be said that there are special rules or conventions"(p.6).

Levinson (1983) argues that conversation is a familiar dominant type of talk in which two or more participants freely change in speaking, occurring outside formal settings such as religious services, classrooms, law courts, etc. He states that conversation is the basic

type of language usage with which nearly all-pragmatic concepts can be tied in.

Richards (1980) defines conversation as "a face-to-face oral interaction between two or more participants and states that conversation is an activity bound by norms, rules and conventions that are learned as part of the process of acquiring competence in a language"(p.414).

Sacks et al develop CA through studying ordinary conversation to discover whether organizational details can be formally described. The idea is that conversations are orderly, not only for observing analysts, but in the first place for participating members (Sacks et al. 1978: 290).

Have (2007) argues that CA is a study of "a language-as-used" (p.10). In this case CA does not focus on correct usage as in normative laws. The analysis has various interactive sources from speakers. As a consequence, oral language is the natural situation for investigating CA.

3- The Political Interviews

Political interviews differ from panel discussions, debates, audience participation programmes, and other interactions by its famous constellation of participants, subject matter, and interactional form. The interviewer must be professional journalist. Interviewees are public figures, presidents, experts, or others whose actions or opinions are newsworthy (Clayman, 2004: 32).

The evolution of political interview depends on the existence of two society institutions: journalism and politics. In the first half of the 18th century interviewing was virtually nonexistent in US. Institutions of national government gradually became publicly accessible. Journalists were granted access to make interviews with political leaders but they were not allowed to take verbatim quotations. The aloofness of government officials was matched by the disinterest of most journalists. By the last quarter of the 19th century, publishing interviews with public figures became prominent. This new form of journalism expanded rapidly in US and slowly in England and other European countries. This expansion was frequently attacked as an artificial and unduly intrusive journalistic practice (Schudson, 1994: 572).

In spite of these criticisms, interviews were increasingly accepted as normal journalistic practice in the early decades of the 20th century. This development corresponds to the growing rank and professionalization of journalism, and the shift within government from backstage intergovernmental negotiations to public relations as tolls of government. These twin institutional changes led to the normalization of political interviews, (Tulis, 1987: 67).

Now officials are subject to criticism if they fail to make themselves sufficiently accessible to journalistic interrogations just as to journalists were once criticized for questioning officials (Kernel, 1986: 23).

The growth and institutionalization of political interviews, for both journalistic and broadcast media are built on a coincidence interest between politicians and journalists. Politicians need journalists to gain access of what Margret Thatcher once called “the oxygen of publicity”, while journalists need access to politicians for their livelihood. This means that there is an informal and unspoken contract between the two parties (Clayman and Heritage, 2002: 29). In this research there is the political interview between Luara Kuenssberg and Boris Johnson.

4- Turn Taking as a Main Characteristic of Conversation

This term has been investigated by temporal studies of phone conversation, interviews and in great details by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) who have analyzed spontaneous conversations in natural settings. They argue for the existence of ' a turn taking' mechanism which function to assign turns to the participants engaged in conversational interaction.

For any conversation to continue, there must be change in the speaker and hearer roles; the two speakers exchange roles of speaking continually. This is what is meant by turn taking.

Turn taking is a term that refers to the way in which participants in conversation get their chance to speak. A speaker may change at the end of ‘turn conversational units’. That is at the end of a complete sentence structure. This called transition relevance place. If the speaker is changed, he may select the next speaker by naming, or the next speaker selects himself at a transition relevance place. Sometimes, overlapping, pausing, hesitation, and interruption may occur which is something natural in the process of taking turns.

Turn taking provides an answer to the question of who speaks which is one of the most intriguing aspects of conversational interchange.

5- Analysis of Turn Taking of the Interview

5.0- Introduction

The transcript is taken from **interviews** on BBC's radio. There is one interview in this study: the interview between Boris Johnson and Laura Kuenssberg...

5.1 - The analysis of the interview between Laura Kuenssberg and Boris Johnson

5.1.1 - Turn taking

The followings are the main features of the turn-taking system of interview:

5.1.1.1- Allocation of turns

In interviews, the turns are allocated by the interviewer alone, i.e; the interviewer alone takes a decision who the next speaker is going to be (if there is more than one interviewee). Below taken from the interview:

a- - **Nomination** : When the name of interviewee is mentioned, the position of the name comes either . as in the following exchanges :

(1)-Laura Kuenssberg: "So Boris Johnson what would you do on day one in Number 10 to make sure we leave the EU at Halloween?".

(19)-Laura Kuenssberg: "But Boris Johnson, everybody wants this to be sorted....."

(31)-Laura Kuenssberg: " And Boris Johnson are you, would..."

(59)-Laura Kuenssberg: " But Boris Johnson..."

(55)-Laura Kuenssberg: "Then why do you think then, Boris Johnson, people worry about your....."

(9)-Laura Kuenssberg: "It's what people want, but that's very different to want people get, Boris Johnson ".

In the examples above the names are stated in the initial, medial and final position regarding the whole utterances.

b- The second technique that is used in interviews to allocate a turn is by using a specific structure containing the exophoric referential item 'you' to indicate to the addressee (i.e; interviewee). as in the following exchanges:

(11)-Laura Kuenssberg: " But how do you do that?..."

(25)-Laura Kuenssberg: " And if you can't do that?"

In the examples above the interviewer uses the referential item 'you' to indicate to the interviewee. The referential item is used within a direct question to quick the interviewee to answer next.

The examples above the interviewer uses the exophoric referential item 'you' within a formula exclusively.

(41)-Luera Kuenssberg: "OK, well let's move on because there are plenty of things we want to talk on. So, let's move on. Can you....."

In this example the interviewer uses a pattern of 'let's move on' to refer to a request for posing a question.

6- Findings

As for turn taking, the researcher has found that there are nine turns taking in the interview. At every turn, the interviewee gets the time to make inquiries or statements. The interviewer mostly ended his turns by asking questions or making opinions to the interviewee, indicating that he had finished his turns. Then, the interviewee takes his turns by answering or making statements for those questions and opinions. Interviewers alone can maintain their turns by continuous speech causing temporal overlap in the display of turns.

7- Conclusions

1-Turn allocation process is controlled by the interviewer who is considered the main controller of the conversation.

2- Interviewers alone can maintain their turns by continuous speech causing temporal overlap in the display of turns.

References

- Clayman, S. and Heritage, J. (2002) *The News Interview*.
- Clayman, Steven E. and John Heritage. 2004. *The news interview Journalist and Public Figures on the Air*.
- Edmondson, W. (ed) (1981) *Spoken Discourse: A Model for Analysis*. Larsen: Longman Inc.
- Have, Ten P. 2007. *Doing Conversation Analysis, a Practical Guide*. London: Sage Publication Ltd.
- Kernell, Samuel (1986). *Going Public: News Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly, Inc.
- Levinson, S.C. (1983) *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Richards, J. (1980) "Conversation". In TESOL Quarterly, Language Learning and Applied Linguistics.
- Sacks et al. (1978) *A simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn Taking for Conversation*. Studies in the Elsevier – organization.
- Sacks, Harvey, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (1974) "A simplest systematic for the organization of turn-taking in conversation". *Language*, 50 (4): 696-735.
- Schudson, Michael (1994). "Question Authority: a history the news interview in American journalism," 1830s- 1930s." *Media, Culture and Society*, 16: 565- 87
- Tulis, J. (1987). *The Rhetorical Presidency*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Appendix

Interviewer: Luara Kuenssberg

Interviewee: Boris Johnson

Boris Johnson interview with BBC's Laura Kuenssberg

Published 24 June 2019

Laura Kuenssberg: So, Boris Johnson what would you do on day one in Number 10 to make sure we leave the EU at Halloween?

Boris Johnson: I would make sure that we have a plan that will convince our European friends and partners that we are absolutely serious about coming out and the key things that you got to do are to take the bits of the current withdrawal agreement, which is dead, take the bits that are serviceable and get them done. And that is number one.

The stuff about European Union citizens, the 3.2 million, they need to be properly protected. I wanted that done the day after the referendum, you may remember. Their rights should be enshrined in an unconditional way in UK law, number one.

Number two, you should look at the various other things that you could do to make progress with the bits of the withdrawal agreement

that we have. I think the money is more difficult. I think the £39bn is at the upper end of the EU's expectations, but there is it, it's a considerable sum. I think there should be creative ambiguity about when and how that gets paid over.

The important thing is that there should be an agreement that the solution of the border questions, the Irish border, the Northern Irish border questions, and all the facilitation that we want to produce, to get that done. All those issues need to be tackled on the other side of 31 October during what's called the implementation period.

LK: But the implementation period, as it stands, is part of the withdrawal agreement and you've said that you wouldn't sign up to the withdrawal agreement and it's dead. Those two things can't both be true.

BJ: No, because you're going to need some kind of agreement and that's certainly what I'm aiming for in order, as you rightly say Laura, to get an implementation period. And I think, actually, that politics has changed so much since 29 March. I think on both sides of the Channel there's a really different understanding of what is needed. And on our side of the Channel, we've got MPs in both the major parties who recognise that their parties face real danger of extinction at the polls and - you know - Labour went backwards in the recent council elections - unless we get Brexit over the line. And so I think there's going to be a willingness to move this thing forward.

LK: But what is it...?

BJ: On the other side of the Channel, obviously, where you know they're watching this very carefully and we need obviously for both sides to come together, they've not got 29 Brexit MEPs in Strasbourg. They have the £39bn that they're keen to get. And, frankly, they also want Brexit to be done.

LK: They want it done in the EU, but they do not want it done at any cost. And time and again whether it is Jean-Claude Juncker, President Macron, any EU leaders, they have been crystal clear. There is no kind of deal without the backstop, an insurance policy for Northern Ireland. So what evidence do you have you can get around that?

BJ: Because I think that it is what the gentlemen have also said and what people have also said in all European capitals - and of course, in the [European] Commission - is that nobody wants a hard border in Northern Ireland and indeed nobody believes that it will be necessary. And so what we need is to hold that thought, which is true, which is agreed amongst all.

LK: It's what people want, but that's very different to what people get, Boris Johnson.

BJ: And make sure that we reach the solutions they are achievable as both sides have said, as the Commission has said. The facilitations that can be reached, make sure that we deal with the solutions to the Irish border question and any other border questions because the Irish border question in microcosm stands for all the other facilitations that we'll around the EU.

LK: But how do you do that? Because you're right - everybody wants a solution to this. But if you want to be prime minister you have to tell people how, you can't just wish it to be true.

BJ: Let me tell you, there are abundant, abundant technical fixes that can be introduced to make sure that you don't have to have checks at the border. That's the crucial thing. And everybody accepts that there are ways you can check for the rules of origin, there are ways you can check for compliance with EU goods and standards, of our goods standards.

LK: But they don't exist yet.

BJ: Well, they do actually, in very large measure they do. You have trusted trader schemes, all sorts of schemes that you could put in to place.

LK: But as one big solution to the Irish border question which as you suggest is absolutely at the root of this, there is no solution ready right now.

BJ: You're right, Laura, that there's no single magic bullet. But there is a wealth of experience, a wealth of solutions. And what's changed now is that there is a real positive energy about getting it done.

LK: Where's your evidence for that?

BJ: Well, because I think on both sides of the Channel there's an understanding that we have to come out, but clearly Parliament has voted three times against the backstop arrangements that you rightly describe. And at present the UK, and any UK government, with this appalling choice of either being run by the EU whilst being outside the EU, which is plainly unacceptable, or else giving up control of the government in Northern Ireland. There is a way forward which I think, actually, to be fair all the candidates in the Conservative Party leadership contest broadly endorsed, which was to change the backstop, get rid of the backstop, in order to allow us to come out without this withdrawal agreement, and as far as I understand the matter, that is also the position of my remaining opponent.

LK: But Boris Johnson, everybody wants this to be sorted. Of course they do. Not least the public. But what you're basically saying is 'we'll cross our fingers because I think the situation is different so we could get a deal done.' You're not giving us anything concrete that actually suggests it's possible.

BJ: No that's not true at all, actually Laura.

LK: Well, where's your evidence?

BJ: There was a very good report just today by Shanker Singham and many others looking at the modalities of how to do this. This is something that had been worked on extensively for the last three years. There are plenty of checks that you can do away from the border if you had to do them without any kind of hard infrastructure at the Northern Ireland frontier.

LK: But do you accept that your plan would require agreement from the European Union, political goodwill, and why do you think they would do that when if the UK had just walked away from a deal that has taken them three years to put together?

BJ: Several reasons. First of all, don't forget, that as I say they got the Brexit MEPs they don't particularly want. They want us out, they've got the incentive of the money. They've also got to understand, Laura, is what has changed and what will be so different is that the intellectual capital that had been invested in the whole backstop had really come from the UK side. We were committed to it. We actually helped to invent it. We were the authors of our own incarceration. Take that away. Change the approach of the UK negotiators and you have a very different outcome.

LK: And if you can't do that?

BJ: And simultaneously of course, and you know what I'm going to say, the other tool, the other tool of negotiation that you should use, not only the incentives of getting this thing done, moving it over the line, getting the money across and all the rest, but you have the extra incentive of course that the UK will be ready to come out as you know on WTO terms.

LK: And if you cannot get the agreement that sounds like you're crossing your fingers, you are clear we would leave you would take us out at Halloween without a deal an absolute guarantee?

BJ: You have to be, of course, my pledge is to come out of the EU at Halloween on 31 October. And the way to get our friends and partners to understand how serious we are is finally, I'm afraid, to abandon the defeatism and negativity that has enfolded us in a great cloud for so long and to prepare confidently and seriously for a WTO or no deal outcome.

You've got to understand, Laura, listening to what I just said, that is not where I want us to end up. It is not where I believe for a moment we will end up. But in order to get the result that we want, in order to get the deal we need, the commonsensical protraction of the existing arrangements until such time as we have completed the free trade deal between us and the EU that will be so beneficial to both sides. The commonsensical thing to do is to prepare for a WTO exit.

LK: But unless you can get that deal...

BJ: Now as it happens, by 29 March, a huge amount of work had been done and we had made great progress. There is still as you know some areas that need to be completed some things actually where the kind of level of preparedness is slightly sunk back again.

LK: And Boris Johnson are you, would you really be willing as prime minister to face the consequences of no deal which could mean crippling tariffs on some businesses? It could mean huge uncertainty over what on earth happens at the Northern Irish border. It could mean huge uncertainty for people's livelihoods and people's real lives. Now in the real world, as prime minister and I know you dispute how bad it would be, but are you willing to face the consequences of what a no deal might mean for the people of this country?

BJ: In the real world, the UK government is never going to impose checks or a hard border of any kind in Northern Ireland. That's just number one. Number two in the real world the UK government is not going to want to impose tariffs on goods coming into the UK.

LK: But it's not just up to the UK...

BJ: Hang on, I'm coming to that point...

LK: ... not just up to the UK?

BJ: Of course, that's right Laura. It's not just up to us, it's up to the other side as well. And there is an element of course, a very important element of mutuality and co-operation in this. And we will be working with our friends and partners to make sure that we have an outcome that is manifestly in the interests of people, of businesses, communities on both sides of the channel.

LK: And you think you could get that through Parliament?

BJ: I do

LK: You think you could get a no deal through Parliament?

BJ: Well, I do. I mean you've got to be very clear. I think Parliament now understands. That the British people want us to come out and to honour the mandate that they gave us. And I think that MPs on both sides of the House also understand that they will face mortal retribution from the electorate unless we get on and do it. Again, what has changed since 29 March is that my beloved party is down at 17 points in the polls. Labour isn't doing much better as I say with superhuman incompetence Corbyn managed to go backwards in the recent council elections.

People want to get this thing done. They want to get it done sensibly. They want to get it done in a way that is generous to European Union citizens in our country and I stress that is the first thing to do. And they want to get it done in a way that allows us to move on which is why I think people are yearning, their yearning for this great Incubus to be pitchforked off the back of British politics.

They want us to get on with some fantastic things for this country. And that is what we want to do.

LK: OK, well let's move on because there are plenty of things we want to talk on. So let's move on. Can you just tell us what happened at your partner's home a couple of nights ago?

BJ: I... would love to tell you about all sorts of things Laura, but I've made it a rule over many, many years and I think you've interviewed me loads of times, I do not talk about stuff involving my family, my loved ones. And there's a very good reason for that. That is that, if you do, you drag them into things that, really, is, in a way that is not fair on them.

LK: But now you hope to be in Number 10, things are changing. Does your privacy mean more to you than the public's ability to trust you? Because part of trust is being open, it's being accountable, it's being transparent.

BJ: Yes, I get that, I totally get that. But my key point though is that the minute you start talking about your family or your loved ones, you involve them in a debate that is it is simply unfair on them.

LK: But you seem to care about privacy, but you seem to care about your privacy so much that yesterday a photographer, or someone with a phone, just happened to stumble upon you in the middle of the Sussex countryside. I mean are you just trying to have this both ways?

BJ: Look, I repeat my key point too which is that over many, many years, and you can look back at innumerable statements I gave when I was mayor, I just do not go into this stuff, and there's a good reason for it. But it's actually I think what people want to know is what is going on with this guy? Does he, does he, when it comes to trust, when it comes to character, all those things, does he deliver what he says he's going to deliver? And that is the key thing.

LK: Well let's look at your record then, let's look at that then. Because there are plenty of people even in the Conservative Party who worry that you do not stick to what you promise.

BJ: Well I think they're talking absolute nonsense. When I was mayor, when I became Mayor of London, when we said we would do something, we, I may say delivered not just x, but x plus 10.

LK: But you said you would keep all ticket offices; you closed every single one. You said that you would build more affordable houses - yes, you built more houses...

BJ: We did

LK: ... but the definition of affordable housing changed.

BJ: Oh, nonsense.

LK: You said you've done rough sleeping and the number went up.

BJ: We built more affordable homes than under Labour. When you talk about the Tube we increased capacity on the Tube by about 30%. The biggest investment in infrastructure that I think the city has seen. I pledged to reduce crime. We reduced crime by about 20%. We reduced the murder rate which is a statistic that is very difficult to fudge, we reduced it by 50%.

LK: Then why do you think then, Boris Johnson, people worry about your character? Why do so many Conservatives worry about you sticking to your word or being careless with the truth? I mean you said only a few weeks ago, you would raise tax for the wealthiest in society then that became an ambition.

BJ: Hang on...

LK: You said you'd lie down in front of bulldozers at Heathrow and now you're wobbling. Most importantly, when it came to the British citizen Nazanin Zaghari-Radcliffe you put her in danger by being careless with the facts. Your words were used in evidence against her in an Iranian court. I think you've sometimes been careless with facts, careless with the truth.

BJ: No, look. Take Nazanin Zaghari-Radcliffe and the other very difficult consular cases that we have with Iran. I think, of course, people will want to point the finger of blame at me if they possibly can, but actually all that does is serve to exculpate, lift the blame of the people who are really responsible, who are the Iranian Revolutionary Guard. And if you look, talk about overachieving in the Foreign Office, we were told that we had to orchestrate, and we did, an international response to the poisonings by Russia in Salisbury, and we thought we would be lucky to get 30 Russian spies expelled around the world in support of the UK by other countries. We actually got 153 spies expelled around the world, I don't think there's ever been a diplomatic coup like.