Turn-Taking Mechanism in *Netflix Special Event* (*The Light We Carry: Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey*) A Conversation Analysis

Baiq Wina Aisha Kamila[1], Sudirman Wilian[2], Arafiq[3], Lalu Muhaimi[4]

[1,2,3,4] English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Mataram, Indonesia

Phone: +62 81917103797

Abstract: This study aims to identify and describe the kinds of turn-taking mechanism used in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey on *Netflix Special Event* by using conversation analysis. The data were taken from *Netflix* official apps and analyzed based on the theories proposed by Mey (2001) and Liddicoat (2007). This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach and document analysis as the data collection procedures. In the process of analyzing the data, thematic content analysis was employed. The findings revealed that turn-taking mechanism which cover Taking the Floor, Holding the Floor, and Yielding the Floor appear in some of the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey. A first step towards understanding how turn-taking works in the conversation involves understanding what turns at talk actually look like. Therefore, the findings are also related to turn constructional and turn allocation component. Turns at talk are made up of stretches of language, but these can vary a lot in terms of their structure. To sum up, it is necessary to understand how turn-taking works because it will make the conversation flows smoothly and the information could be delivered without any misunderstanding among the participants who held any kind of conversation.

Keywords: turn-taking mechanism, conversation analysis, Netflix

INTRODUCTION

It commonly happens in daily lives that conversation is inoperable without the use of language. The essence of language itself is to be used, either to express thoughts or feelings in discussion, meeting, interview, podcast, talk show, or in the context of everyday life, language is used to interact with each other. At the time when people interact, then there is bound to be a conversation, which is the basic and constitutive feature of human social life (Sidnell, 2010).

In general, communication skills such as social and cultural skills and other communication competencies are important in many aspects of life (A. Arifuddin et al., 2020). A good conversation happens when the speaker and listener have a mutual understanding on the topic and language expressions being used. At the same time, any miscommunication or misinterpretation should be avoided (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). Furthermore, in doing conversation, people talk to each other in a certain order, called as turn-taking. It is a term of how the participants of conversation get turn to speak.

According to Atika & Wilian (2020) living together in a society requires someone to interact among members of society and every time the interaction takes place, language is definitely needed. Engaging in a conversation, the speaker and listener are ought to know the proper time to take the floor and holding it in order to avoid overlapping or interruption. It is part of mannerism of how normal conversation works.

One of the famous streaming entertainment services nowadays is *Netflix*, an American subscription-based streaming media company founded in 1997 by Reed Hastings and Marc Randolph in Scotts Valley, California. It is currently based in Los Gatos, California (Wikipedia). *Netflix* become the world's biggest fans of entertainment because whatever the members taste, and no matter where they live, *Netflix* give them an access to the best-in-class TV series, documentaries, and feature films. Therefore, this kind of public web-based services have a big role to make the interaction become easier and faster around every part of the world (Putra, Muhaimi, and Wilian, 2020).

Furthermore, for those that weren't among the lucky few thousand people who witnessed Michelle Obama in conversation with Oprah Winfrey in person on December 2022, *Netflix* is offering a front row seat to soak up all the wisdom shared. The streamer announced Thursday morning that the intimate conversation has been adapted into a new special, dubbed "*The Light We Carry: Michelle Obama & Oprah Winfrey*," which streamed globally on April 25, 2023. In this enlightening conversation with Oprah Winfrey, Michelle Obama goes into the challenges and life lessons that shaped her second best-selling book, entitled *The Light We Carry*. As other conversations, turn-taking also used by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey on *Netflix Special Event*.

Naturally, everyone who interacts with other people or doing a conversation should practice turn-taking mechanism since it is a fundamental aspect of conversation analysis. Turn-taking refers to the process by which speakers take turns in a conversation. This area of study looks at the rules, practices, and strategies used by speakers to initiate, maintain, and end a conversation. Turn-taking analysis helps to explain how speakers coordinate their speaking roles and how they manage the flow of conversation. Therefore, this research has been carried out to look at a phenomenon of turn-taking mechanism used in the conversation on *Netflix Special Event*, particularly *The Light We Carry: Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey*.

RESEARCH METHOD

To provide relevant data collection, this study uses descriptive qualitative approach as the research method and case study as the research design. This method is intended to identify, describe, and analyze turn-taking mechanism used in

Netflix Special Event, particularly *The Light We Carry: Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey*. The instrument is human instrument which means this study uses a subjective experience to interpret the data. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state that human instrument is the instrument having multifunction in revealing the occurring phenomena. Therefore, the research instrument was supported by the theories proposed by Jacob L. Mey (2001) and Anthony J. Liddicoat (2007) to interpret the findings.

The source of the data obtained from *Netflix Special Event*, particularly *The Light We Carry: Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey*. The data were taken from the host and the guest's language expressions demonstrating a particular kind of turn-taking used in the interview. The data were taken from *Netflix* official apps, which streamed globally on April 25, 2023. The video is 1 hour and 21 minutes long.

Document analysis was employed as the techniques of collecting data in this study. There are 4 main steps in collecting the data: (1) Transcribing the conversation in *Netflix Special Event*, particularly *The Light We Carry: Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey*, (2) Making notation symbols in the transcript based on the system invented by Gail Jefferson that well established in Conversation Analysis, (3) Classifying specific language expressions indicating a particular kind of turn-taking from the transcript, (4) Interpreting the data based on the theory of turn-taking mechanism.

To analyze the data, thematic content analysis is perhaps one of the methods that can be used. Thematic content analysis is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data that have been collected in the form of transcript. It is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Therefore, in the process of analyzing the data, thematic content analysis as developed by Braun & Clarke (2006) were employed in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result in this study were collected through documentation from *Netflix* which were then transcribed and symbolically notified in the transcript. Then, the findings were compiled in the table below.

Table 1. The Kinds of Turn-Taking Mechanism Adopted and Modified from Mey (2001)

No.	Turn-Taking Mechanism	Frequency of Occurrence
1	**Taking the Floor**	
	a). Starting Up	5
	b). Taking Over	8
	c). Interruption	10
	d). Overlapping	10
2	**Holding the Floor**	
	a). Filled Pause and Verbal Filler	5
	b). Lexical Repetition	4
	c). Silent Pause	-
	d). New Start	2
3	**Yielding the Floor**	
	a). Prompting Strategy	7
	b). Appealing Strategy	4
	c). Giving Up Strategy	-
	TOTAL	55

Table 2. The Kinds of Turn-Taking Mechanism Adopted and Modified from Liddicoat (2007)

No.	Turn-Taking Mechanism	Frequency of Occurrence
1	**Turn-Constructional Units (TCUs)**	3
2	**Turn-Allocation Component**	
	a). Current speaker selects next speaker	4
	b). Next speaker self-selects	6
	TOTAL	13

Taking the Floor

In this mechanism, this study found four sub-categories of Taking the Floor used in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey, which consist of: (1) starting up, (2) taking over, (3) interruption, and (4) overlapping.

1). Starting Up

Starting up means the beginning of conversation. It can be done by hesitant start or clean start. A hesitant start happens if the speaker did not prepare about the utterance. Meanwhile, clean start happens if the speaker sound confident with his/her talk since a good planning is involved. The finding below shows one of the examples of starting up used in the interview.

Oprah   : I really appreciated h<u>o</u>w in *Becoming* you talked about and you use this word, the ↑ velocity ↓ of things coming at you when you were in the White House, and in *The Light We Carry*, you talk about it being surreal.
Michelle   : Yeah.

The first turn in this example started by Oprah Winfrey with a clean start. She stated the issue that was related to Michelle's book, *Becoming* and *The Light We Carry*. In this case, it shows that in starting up strategy with a clean start, the speaker has the initiative to talk by knowing what to say. Then, a falling intonation at the end of Oprah's turn, was recognize as a turn completion by Michelle.

2). Taking Over

Taking over means that the listener takes his/her turn to give a respond or answer from the interlocutor towards the statement or question given. Below is the example of taking over found in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey.

Michelle   : We've gotten out of that h<u>a</u>bit. ↑ But we need people. ↓ We need (.) real contact. We need connection to keep us grounded and stable.
Oprah   : So, for the friends that didn't make the cut or couldn't – who lost oxygen…
Michelle   : Oh, yeah, we'll go back to who didn't make the cut.
Oprah   : I just want to know for the friends who didn't make it, did you actually have to tell them that, "sorry," or did somebody else tell them?

Michelle   : There were different versions for different people, right? Depending upon what the issue was.

In the example above shows that Oprah as the current speaker has finished the turn by asking Michelle a question. It was followed by an act of how Michelle gave a respond to Oprah Winfrey question. The used of expression "So," by Oprah was indicated to connect the sentence from Michelle's statement regarding her friendship. Then, Michelle quickly responds by applying the expression "Oh, yeah," which indicates she was using that kind of lexical word to show her mutual understanding on the topic that Oprah brings up.

3). Interruption

Interruption happens when the listener does not want to wait until the TRP (Transition Relevance Place) and just interfere with the current speaker. Interruption is divided into two types namely alert and meta-comment. Alert is done when the listener interrupts the current speaker by speaking louder than other participant in order to attract the attention. Meanwhile, meta comment is done when the listener gives a comment on the current speaker without offending the others. Below is the example of interruption found in the interview.

Michelle   : That was the frightening part of it for me. Watching the world not deal with this well.
Oprah   : ↑ Listen, ↓ I ate my way through the pandemic (.) and we would have Taco Tuesday–
Michelle   : ↑ We had Taco Tuesday! We l<u>o</u>ve Taco Tuesday. ↓

In the example above, it shows that Oprah used alerts by saying "Listen," that uttered louder and in a higher pitch, to attract Michelle's attention. Oprah did not want to wait until the TRP time and interrupt Michelle when she was still explaining about her fear of the pandemic. Oprah interrupts Michelle because she wanted to tell that she ate her way through the pandemic by having Taco Tuesday. In addition, Michelle also interrupts Oprah by saying "We had Taco Tuesday! We love Taco Tuesday." to show her excitement about Taco Tuesday that previously mentioned by Oprah.

4). Overlapping

Overlapping means the participants of the conversation frequently talk over one another at the same time and not listening to each other. Below is the example of overlapping found in the interview.

Oprah   : … so, you looking for the Hawaii in *Hawaii Five-O*. >Those of you who remember that show<.
Michelle   : Mai tais and sunsets on the beach. =
Oprah   : = Mai tais and honeymoon suites. ↑ But instead – ↓
Michelle   : Yeah, instead, it was a trip home to visit his family.

Overlapping occurred in some of the conversation between Michelle and Oprah about several issues. In the example above, for instance, overlapping occurred when Michelle and Oprah talked about the Hawaii in *Hawaii Five-O*. They said "Mai tais and sunsets on the beach." and "Mai tais and honeymoon suites." at the same time. But then, Oprah gave her turn to Michelle that marked with the falling intonation afterwards.

Holding the Floor

There are several ways to avoid breakdown in Holding the Floor, those are: (1) filled pause and verbal filler, (2) lexical repetition, (3) silent pause, and (4) new start. This study found 5 uses of filled pause and verbal filler, 4 uses of lexical repetition, and 2 uses of new start. However, the finding shows that not all of the strategies found in the conversation. Silent pause, for instance, did not use by Michelle and Oprah in the conversation. The analysis of the finding is presented below.

1). Filled Pause and Verbal Filler

Filled pause and verbal filler used when the speaker is trying to think about what s/he wants to say. The forms of filled pause and verbal filler is like 'umm' 'errr' 'ahh' etc. The finding below shows the example of filled pause and verbal filler used in the conversation between Michelle and Oprah.

Oprah   : So, this is March 2020.
Michelle   : This is March – **umm** and there was still buzz about COVID in the air, but **you know**, it's sort of back and forth, "What is this?" So, we're in Las Vegas, and that's when there was a slow wave of cancellations.

In the example above, Michelle used the expression like "umm," "you know?" to hold her turn in a few seconds while to think what she wanted to talk about. It means that Michelle was unable to control or hold the turns all of the time, which making it difficult for her to keep talking and planning what to say at the same time. Therefore, by using filled pause and verbal filler, Michelle could hold the turn in a conversation.

2). Lexical Repetition

Lexical or word repetition occurs when the speaker attempts to hold the turn by repeating at least one word for several times. Below is the example of lexical repetition used in the conversation between Michelle and Oprah.

Oprah   : How is the Big M? How is menopause treating you?
Michelle   : ↑ You know, ↓ **It's going all right**. **It's going all right**. I mean, I think I'm doing okay.

As shown in the example above, it indicates that Michelle attempts to hold the turn by repeating at least one word for several times. She spontaneously repeats the expressions "It's going all right." twice while thinking what she wanted to say. She took a few seconds to find a word to complete the whole sentence.

3). New Start

New start means that in order to avoid getting completely lost, the best solution is to start over, or it could be mean that the speaker changes the topic. Below shows the example of new start expression used in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey.

Oprah	: I love how you end that piece where you're talking about Malia and Sasha. You ended the whole section saying, <"I hope they find home.">
Michelle	: Yes.
Oprah	: "I hope they find home." ((*applause*))
→	You know, every time there's a discussion about politics and who should run for president, your name comes up.
Michelle	: So, why you bring it up? ((*both laugh*)) So, why are you bringing it up, Oprah? What are you trying to do?

Example above shows that after Oprah talked about Michelle's children, she changed the topic of the discussion. She used this strategy because she thought that the topic was enough of discussion. By starting a new discussion, indicated by the arrow, Oprah was applying a new start strategy to help her keep the conversation tedious and worth of discussing. This utterance was used by Oprah to hold the turn and keep her turn in the conversation.

Yielding the Floor

Yielding the Floor is divided into three strategies, those are: (1) prompting strategy, (2) appealing strategy, and (3) giving up strategy. However, there was no giving up strategy found in the interview as none of the participants gave up to take the turn. The analysis of the finding is presented below.

1). Prompting Strategy

In prompting strategy, the speaker make prompting in order to encourage another speaker to respond. The speaker could make prompting whether to invite, offer, greeting, question, and apologize. Below shows the example of prompting strategy found in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey.

| Oprah | : So, can you tell us more about that dream is for your daughters? |
| Michelle | : Yeah. I want my girls to make choices based on who they are and not who society says they should be. |

From the example above, it shows that Oprah as the current speaker tried to invite Michelle which was the listener, to respond about the issue that she brings up. This also show that Oprah clearly gave the turn to Michelle, which helps the conversation turn out well and makes the conversation smooth. Thus, here Oprah was applying prompting strategy. It is because when she asked a question that refer to Michelle, it means that she needs a direct answer from Michelle. In this case, the listener changes the role become the current speaker.

2). Appealing Strategy

In appealing strategy, the speaker intended to get a kind of feedback from the listener, such as question tags in the form of 'all right' 'okay' 'you know' and so on. The finding below shows the example of appealing strategy found in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey.

Oprah	: I did not. I bought 24 copies.
Michelle	: You should double that number. ((*crowd cheers*)) See? Oprah's like never satisfied.
Oprah	: I sent them all to my girls.
Michelle	: Yeah.

The example above shows appealing strategy that used in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey. In this example, Michelle used the expression "See?" as question tag to get a feedback and make Oprah directly takes the turn. Therefore, Oprah's direct answer indicates that the use of the question tag or appealing strategy by Michelle was successful because the strategy is aims to give signals to the listeners and to demand the listener to give a response.

Turn-Constructional Units (TCUs)

Oprah	: "The fifties are everything you've been meaning to be."
Michelle	: It is amazing!
Oprah	: Do you feel that?
→ Michelle	: This is the best time I feel most clearly me.

TCUs are context-sensitive and a decision about what constitutes a TCU can only be made in context. Importantly, it must be acknowledged that people do not just talk in sentences, but can use a range of different structures to construct their talk. This can be seen in the above example. It contains TCUs which are also sentences: for example, "The fifties are everything you've been meaning to be." and "Do you feel that?", also a TCU, indicated by the arrow, which was recognized as a sufficient unit by Michelle, who produces a response. This response in turn was recognized as appropriate and sufficient by Oprah.

Michelle	: … and what we need is somebody who respects and loves their family and is going to show up for them–
Oprah	: And showing you that.
Michelle	: … again and again.
Oprah	: That's what they're showing you.

According to Liddicoat (2007), TCUs are also projectable: that is, a recipient can know roughly what it will take to complete the unit of talk currently under way. This means that speakers are able to project where a TCU under way will be possibly complete and this projection is important for the organization of turn-taking. The sentence structure of the turn so far provide information which aids in projecting the trajectory and assists in the precision timing of Michelle's talk.

Turn-Allocation Component

Turn-Allocation is the way in which the speaker gives the listener the next turn to speak in a conversation. There are two basic ways in which a next speaker can come to have a turn at talk: either the current speaker can select the next speaker or a next speaker may self-select. The analysis of the finding is presented below.

1). Current Speaker Selects Next Speaker

When current speaker selects next speaker, it means that the current speaker decides who is going to talk next. It can be done by asking question to the selected speaker by using address terms such as name or pronoun *you*. In addition, gaze may also be deployed in indicating to whom turn at talk is addressed and so select a next speaker. Below is the example of current speaker selects next speaker found in the interview.

| Oprah | : I want to know where were you and what was going on when you first realized this here is serious, and we not going nowhere? |
| Michelle | : You know, interestingly enough, I was (.) on the road. |

The example above contains an address term, the pronoun *you*. Oprah's s turn is explicitly tied to Michelle's prior turn and the use of pronoun *you* tie the turn grammatically. At the same time, Oprah initiates an action, in this case a question, which makes further talk relevant as a next action, that is, an answer. In this context, the pronoun *you* can be seen as selecting Michelle as the relevant next speaker from the result of the sequential position of the turn containing the reference.

2). Next Speaker Self-Selects

Self-selection occurs when a participant becomes next speaker, but nothing in the previous talk has selected this person to be next speaker. Self-selection can also occur where the prior talk is designed to require that someone speak next, but does not constrain who that person should be. Below shows the example of self-selection used in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey.

Oprah	: Now, go home and see if you can ask yourself that questions.
Michelle	: ((*chuckles*))
Oprah	: About the person you with.
Michelle	: You so silly.

For some cases where a next speaker self-selects, this speaker may be the person who produced the immediately prior turn, as we can see in the example above. Here, Oprah's first turn is possibly complete. However, Michelle does not speak after her turn and there is quite silence, because she only chuckles which ends when Oprah again becomes the speaker. In doing so, Oprah self-selects herself as a next speaker.

Discussion

This subchapter discusses further to elaborate the result of analysis regarding the kinds of turn-taking mechanism used in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey on *Netflix Special Event* that based on the theories proposed by Jacob L. Mey (2001) and Anthony J. Liddicoat (2007). One of the most noticeable features of conversation is that speakers change. Speaker change is a normative process which must be achieved by participants in the conversation. That is to say, turn-taking behavior is socially constructed behavior, not the result of an inevitable process. Furthermore, if people are asked how they know when it is their turn to speak, their intuitive responses often suggest that there is such a set of rules. They will often say that they already know when they can start speaking because the previous speaker has paused to show s/he has stopped speaking. However, in looking at actual conversation, it becomes clear that pausing is not very useful in determining speaker change.

Based on the result, Taking the Floor is the most used mechanism in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey. One of the widely held assumptions about turn-taking is that, it is a matter of politeness and good manners. Those that have good manners dutifully await the completion of whatever their interlocutor is saying before offering their own contribution. Less mannered types are, in contrast, prone to jump in whenever it suits them. However, the result shows that interruption and overlapping occurred in some of the conversation between Michelle and Oprah, not because they were less mannered types of persons, but rather because they already have known each other for such a long time. Also, the listener took the speaker's turn because she thought there was something important to be informed.

In addition, based on the theory proposed by Liddicoat (2007), turns were made up of units which called as Turn-Constructional Units (TCU) and that the composition of TCU is highly context dependent. A variety of grammatical units may function as TCUs: words, phrases, clauses and sentences. As shown in the result, there are 3 examples that were made up of phrases and sentences, served as a whole complete turn. TCU needs to be complete as an action: it must count as having done what needs to have been done at this point in the conversation. Therefore, at any TRP (Transition Relevance Place), there are two basic ways in which a next speaker can come to have a turn at talk: either the current speaker can select the next speaker or a next speaker may self-select. These two possibilities, however, are not equally present at the end of every TCU and only one of these may be the appropriate way for speaker change to occur.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing and discussing the result, this research comes to a conclusion that turn-taking mechanism provides a basis for the nature and organization of conversation. It is strongly linked the construction and the allocation of talk so that these two aspects of talk can be integrated into a single set of procedures. This study revealed that the most frequent turn-taking mechanism used in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey was Taking the Floor that found in the interview on *Netflix Special Event*. Additionally, the results of the analysis show that the turn in Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey's conversation were made up of various kinds of Turn-Constructional and the Turn-Allocation Components.

It is suggested that the next study of turn-taking mechanism is expected to find other phenomena to be analyzed using conversation analysis, for instance, debates, casual conversation, class discussion, formal speech, meeting, etc. In addition, since the data of conversation taken in this research was from female figures only, it is then suggested to obtain gender-based analysis on the use of turn-taking mechanism from male figures as well. It is also necessary to study how turn-taking mechanisms are used by multi-ethnic groups of language users, for example, the Asians, Africans, Latin Americans, Arabs, and many others. Lastly, this research is expected to contribute in the development of conversation analysis especially in the term of turn-taking mechanism and become an additional reference as a basis for conducting further research for those who are interested in the study of language phenomena in social life.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

Arifuddin, A., Arafiq, A., Sujana, I. M., & Apgriyanto, K. (2020). The mastery of and strategies for understanding the idiomatic expressions applied by the students of hospitality and tourism. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*. 32(3): 167–177.

Atika, I., Wilian, S. (2020). Greeting and leave taking among native sasak in Lombok. *Linguistik Indonesia*. 38(1), 57–69.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3, 77–101.

Goodwin, C., & Heritage, J. (1990). Conversation analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 19, 283–307.

Liddicoat, A. J. (2007). *An introduction to conversation analysis*. Continuum. London.

Maykut, P., & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophical and practical guide*. Routledge: London.

Mey, J. L. (2001). *Pragmatics: An introduction*. Second Edition. Edited by Wiley-Blackwell Publication: Oxford.

Putra, A., Muhaimi, L., & Wilian, S. (2020). Code switching and representation of elite character in social media. *1st Annual Conference on Education and Social Sciences*. 194–198.

Sidnell, J. (2010). *Conversation analysis: An introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell Publication: Oxford.