

Turn-Taking Patterns in the Characters' Dialogue in *The Help* (2011) Movie

Rifati Hanifa, Ernie Diyahkusumaning Ayu Imperiani
English Language and Literature
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
rifati.hnf@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the turn-taking patterns and the possible factors influencing turn-taking in *The Help* (2011) movie. Particular conversations were used as the data, namely the conversations between Miss Celia and Minny (M1) as well as the conversation between Miss Hilly and Minny (M2). Using the turn-taking theory from Levinson (1983) as set out by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), this study found three turn-taking patterns that occurred in both conversations; they are *self-selection* (SS), *current speaker selects the next speaker* (CS2TNS), and *current speaker continues* (CSC). Factors influencing turn-taking were also found in the conversations; they are social status and discourse topic. Regarding the turn-taking patterns, *self-selection* (SS) is the most common pattern that emerged in M1, meanwhile *current speaker selects the next speaker* (CS2TNS) is the dominant used in M2. The use of SS in M1 indicates that the participants have a close relationship which is portrayed through the topic being discussed. On the contrary, in M2, CS2TNS which occurs mostly in the form of command shows the power of the maid's master. This suggests that the use of CS2TNS pattern is mostly influenced by social status.

Keywords: *Conversation Analysis, Turn-Taking Patterns, Factors of Turn-Taking*

INTRODUCTION

Conversation is an interaction which involves two or more participants that commonly uses verbal and nonverbal signals (Brennan, 2010). It plays a role as a means of communication to exchange information, share thoughts and feelings, and give the people the opportunity to learn new things. When people speak in conversation, they usually take and serve turns which are commonly known as turn-taking. According to Olutayo (2013) turn-taking refers to the process of shifting a turn between the speakers which involves floor, overlaps, backchannels and interrupts. In fact, turn-taking is important to be understood because it helps the participants of the conversation to comprehend the rhythm of communication or the turn exchange in particular setting.

Since turn-taking is a common occurrence in daily conversation, it seems that turn-taking has a chance to occur in the conversation between people from various backgrounds in the society. That particular phenomenon can also be observed in a number of literary works, such as a movie since it often adopts the actual issues that happen in the reality.

The Help (2011) is an American drama movie which depicts a condition of

inequality in terms of social class discrimination during the Civil Rights Movements in 1963 which took the setting in Jackson, Mississippi. The discrimination affected the way white people behave towards colored people. The portrayal of social class difference is clearly seen since the white people enact as having higher social class than the colored ones which have a role as a maid. Therefore, analysing turn taking in this movie is intriguing.

Regarding turn-taking analysis, there have been a number of studies focusing on turn-taking analysis. Olutayo (2013), for instance, who examined the natural conversation in television discourse, namely talk shows. He investigated the determinants of turn-taking patterns in Nigerian television talk shows, and his study revealed that there were seven determinants that play major roles in determining the patterns of turn-taking, such as discourse topic, social status of the participants, the composition of the guests, the personality of the hosts, gender, culture, and duration of the program.

Another study came from Brunett (2017) who explored the role of turn-taking within 3 fieldwork sessions between a linguist and native Mocho'

speaker, especially to address the occurrences of overlaps in the conversation and investigates the role of culture and ethnicity in the turn taking mechanism. The study concluded that fieldwork conversations have a specific organization of turn-taking, promoting overlap for native language consultant in order to ensure accuracy of language data and transcription. The study also found that the conversation largely depended on the sociocultural background.

Moreover, Napitupulu and Siahaan (2014) also conducted a study regarding turn-taking patterns that took place in *Marhata*, an event which is a part of *Batak Toba* traditional wedding ceremony. The results demonstrated that the current speaker selects the next speaker is the most dominantly used in *Marhata*. The turn-taking in *Marhata* of every Batak Toba traditional wedding ceremony mostly influenced by Batak Toba culture in which kinship played the dominant role in every turn-taking.

Most prior studies have focused on television discourse (e.g. Olutayo, 2013; Oyeleye & Olutayo, 2012; Azhimi, 2016; and Amanat, 2015), on fieldwork study of Mocho' speaker (e.g. Brunett, 2017), and on cultural ceremony (*Marhata*) discourse (e.g. Napitupulu & Siahaan, 2014). Little

attention has been given to turn-taking studies on movies. If any, the previous studies have left an area that has not been discussed. Tiono and Ansori (2005), for instance, investigated turn-taking irregularities by African American characters in *Why Do Fools Fall in Love* movie. This study revealed that interruption and overlap are the types of turn-taking irregularities that occurred in the conversation among the main characters in the movie.

To contribute to the plethora of studies on turn-taking, this study focuses on examining the patterns of turn-taking that occur in the conversations between individuals with different social classes in particular movie entitled *The Help* (2011). To analyze the turn-taking patterns, this study employs the turn-taking theory from Levinson (1983) as proposed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). Besides investigate the turn-taking patterns, this study also analyze the possible factors that influence the occurrences of turn-taking by using Olutayo's determinants of turn-taking. The selection of *The Help* (2011) movie is based upon the issue being raised which is racial discrimination that involves characters that belong to different racial categories; white Americans and African-Americans. The

reason of using movie conversations as the data are because they can represent the reality of a society through language in which its function reflects meaning.

Through the findings of this study, theoretically, it might contribute to the development of a turn-taking theory in social interaction discourse. Meanwhile, the findings are expected to give a new perspective on how people with different social class communicate in everyday interaction. Furthermore, practically, this pattern of turn-taking can be applied in social interaction to gain successful communication and contribute to give a deep understanding on how to interpret meaning embedded in the interaction.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a descriptive qualitative method supported by a simple quantification to show the frequency of turn-taking which in the form of tables. According to Berg (2001) a qualitative research method refers to non-numerical data such as description of things, meanings, metaphors, concepts definitions, symbols, and characteristics. Thus, this research design suits this study since the data of the study were in the form of conversation in which the turn-taking

patterns and the possible factors that influence the occurrences of turn-taking.

The data were taken from the movie conversations of *The Help* (2011). Certain scenes were selected that related to the turn-taking rules. There were two conversations selected; namely, the conversation between Minny and Miss Celia which was labeled using the initial code M1, and also the conversation between Minny and Miss Hilly that was labeled using the initial code M2. Then, the data were transcribed using transcript symbol as proposed by Jefferson (2004, as cited in Forrester, 2010).

After the data were compiled, they were analysed by using the turn-taking theory from Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) which involved several steps. First, identifying the utterances in terms of turn-taking. Second, categorizing the turn-taking patterns found in the data. Then, calculating the turn-taking patterns to obtain the percentage of the occurrences of turn-taking. Lastly, interpreting the results and drawing conclusions.

Furthermore, to discover the possible factors influencing turn-taking, this stage focused on investigating the social relations among the characters by

employing Olutayo’s (2013) determinants of turn-taking.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of this study revealed that there are three turn-taking patterns that occurred in this study; they are self-selection, current speaker selects the next speaker, and current speaker continues. Related to the factors influencing turn-taking, this study discovered two factors which are discourse topic and social status. The elaboration of these findings are shown and discussed as follows.

Turn-Taking Patterns

The analysis of turn-taking patterns employed the turn-taking rules

developed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). In M1, self-selection is the most dominant pattern emerged in the data which obtained 42 turns (53.16%) out of 79 turns. The second pattern that occurred quite often is current speaker selects the next speaker (CS2TNS) which gained 25 turns (31.64%). At the last, current speaker continues (CSC) appeared the least in the data which include 12 turns (15.2%). In M2, meanwhile, the most frequent to the least patterns appeared in the data are CS2TNS (81.48%), SS (14.82%), and CSC (3.7%) in which the total turns are 27. The findings are summarized in table 2 and 3 which are presented as follows.

Table 2. M1’s Turn-Taking Percentage

Turn-Taking Patterns	Occurrences (%)	Number of Turns
SS	53.16	42
CS2TNS	31.64	25
CSC	15.2	12
Total	100	79

Table 3. M2’s Turn-Taking Percentage

Turn-Taking Patterns	Occurrences (%)	Number of Turns
CS2TNS	81.48	22
SS	14.82	4

CSC	3.7	1
Total	100	27

From table 2 and 3, each pattern of turn-taking in the data has an interpretation in which in the same pattern, the utterances might show different functions. Further elaboration of each pattern of turn-taking is shown as follows.

Self-selection (SS)

Self-selection occurs when the current speaker does not allocate the next turn to other speakers, then the participants involved in the conversation have an opportunity to take the turn to be the next speaker. The analysis revealed that *self-selection* is the most frequent pattern appeared in M1 (53.16%). Whereas, it is the second most dominant pattern emerged in M2 (14.82%). The sample of the data showed self-selection pattern in M1 that is presented below.

E1.MC: *You hungry?*

M: =*No, Ma'am*

M: =*Now, hold on a minute* >we gots to talk about some things first<

MC: (*Oh*).

M: *I worked Sunday to Friday.*

MC: <*No, you can't work at all on weekends*>

(The Help, 2011)

The instance above showed that self-selection pattern has various intentions or functions in delivering utterances. The response '*Oh*' uttered by Miss Celia (MC), in this case, showed the expression of surprise as the reaction of what has been said by Minny (M). In accordance with Merriam-Webster's dictionary, *Oh* is an exclamation which is used to express emotion such as desire or surprise or to express acknowledgement or understanding of a statement. In response to Miss Celia, Minny gave her work schedule as the thing to be discussed. Here, she used SS due to the previous turn does not involve the use of CS2TNS (Sacks et al., 1974). Furthermore, another function of SS is denoted by Miss Celia's utterance, "*No, you can't works at all on weekends.*" which indicates to clarify or emphasize the statement.

Current speaker selects the next speaker (CS2TNS)

M2 used this pattern as the most frequent pattern shown in the data (81.48%). Meanwhile, M1 used this

pattern far less than SS which was 31.64%. *Current speaker selects the next speaker* occurs when the first speaker allocates a turn to the next speaker usually by delivering a question, addressing the next speaker's name, or asking the next speaker to do something (Levinson, 1983). The use of CS2TNS in the conversation can show the interpretation of the utterances as can be seen in the following excerpt as follows.

E3. *M: Okay. (.)Well, what time you want me here?*

MC: After nine (.) and you gotta leave before four.

M: Okay Now what your husband say you can pay? ↑

MC: Johnny doesn't know I'm bringing in help.

(The Help, 2011)

Here, Minny allocates turns to Miss Celia by using the personal pronoun *you* to ask two questions about her work hour as well as her salary. As stated by Amanat (2015), the setting of the conversation which involve only two people, the word *you* in addressing the next speaker is directly refer to another speaker, which in this case is Miss Celia. Regarding the function of CS2TNS, the instance above indicates that CS2TNS can

be used to assure something through direct questions (Oyeleye & Olutayo, 2012).

In addition to ensure something, CS2TNS was also used to get response, the example is as follows.

E4. *M: Don't be taking those woman any more pies, you understand?*
(7.0)

MC: <They made me stand there like I was the vacuum salesman>

(.)Why↑ Minny?

M: = 'Cause they know about you getting (.) knocked up by Mr. Johnny (.) Mad you married one a they mens. (.) Especially since Miss Hilly and Mr. Johnny had just broke up, too.

(The Help, 2011)

The words '*Why, Minny?*' uttered by Miss Celia denote that she needs a response from Minny which was selected as the the next speaker. Here, the use of CS2TNS indicates that Miss Celia positioned herself as not having more authority than Minny. Unlike in M2, Miss Celia showed power inequality regarding the use of CS2TNS as the following example below.

E4. *MH : What do you put in here that makes it taste so goo::d?*

*M: =That good vanilla from Mexico (.)
and. something else re:::al special.*

MH: Mmm:::

(Minnie talks to Miss Hilly's mom)

*M: >No no no< Missus Walters, that's
Miss Hilly's special pie.*

(2.0)

MH: Momma can have a piece.

(3.0)

MH: Take her one! Go get a plate!

(The Help, 2011)

In this context, Minny was no longer Miss Hilly's helper since Minny was fired unilaterally. Here, Minny came to Miss Hilly's house and brought her pie which was known as the best pie in town. Though she came as a visitor, Miss Hilly's command was rude as if she still work for her. Moreover, other utterances in M2 were interpreted as a prevalent pattern which is to ask and answer questions.

Current speaker continues (CSC)

This pattern appeared the least in both conversations; M1 (15.2%) and M2 (3.7%). *Current speaker continues* occurs when there is no pre-selection or self-selection after a slight or long pause (Oyeleye & Olutayo, 2012). The example of CSC pattern in the data is shown below.

*E5. MC: >Johnny's grandma left him this
house when she died< (.) and then
Johnny's momma wouldn't let me
change a thing (.) But if I had my
way, this place would have wall to
wall whi::te carpet with go:ld
trim(h) (.) None of this old stuff.*

(1.0)

***MC: Main house has five bedrooms
and baths (.) Then the pool
house has two more beds and
baths.***

*M: When y'all gone have some
chillin' (.) start fillin' up [↑]all those
beds?*

(The Help, 2011)

The excerpt exemplify above indicates CSC pattern as it is shown by Miss Celia who continued her speak after doing self-selection and a slightly pause. In regard to the function of CSC pattern, it is mostly used to express an explanation in detail. It was evident in Miss Celia's utterances, at first, she did *self-selection* in talking about parts of her house, as she narrated that her house was the inheritance of Johnny's grandmother. Then, CSC pattern occurred to explain the house in detail, as Miss Celia said, "*Main house has five bedrooms and baths. Then the pool house has two more beds and baths.*"

Another function found in M1 is CSC used to express gratitude. It is evident in the following instance as follows.

E6. *M: What's this?*

MC: I cooked it a:ll by myself.

MC: I wanted to do something special.

(2.0)

*MC: I wanted to say **thank you**.*

M: So:: I ain't losing my job?

(The Help, 2011)

By saying *thank you*, Miss Celia was beyond grateful to have Minny as her helper because she made contribution to Miss Celia's daily life so that Miss Celia could do the stuff that she never do before, like cooking.

Possible Factors that influence Turn-Taking

Among the determinants of turn-taking suggested by Olutayo, only two factors are relevant to this study, namely social status and discourse topic. Further elaborated of possible factors influencing turn-taking are shown as follows.

Social Status

Social status was portrayed vividly in *The Help* (2011) movie which involved maids and masters. Minny who was working for Miss Hilly was dishonourably fired. Shortly after, fortunately, she got Miss Celia as her new master. Miss Hilly and Miss Celia had the same social status in which they were equal in terms of wealth, race as well as their role as masters in the movie, whereas Minny is a maid which belongs to lower social status in the society. Both masters treated her in different ways in which it determined the number of turns amongst them. The number of their turns are presented in the following table 4 below.

Table 4. The participants' number of turns

Participants	Number of Turns
(M1) Miss Celia – Minny	38
(M1) Minny - Miss Celia	41
(M2) Miss Hilly – Minny	18
(M2) Minny - Miss Hilly	9

The table 4 above shows different number of turns occurred in the conversations. Miss Celia had 38 turns in which she had less frequent turns than Minny who had 41 turns. On the other hand, Miss Hilly who was Minny's first master had 18 turns which occurred more frequent than Minny.

The study revealed that social status might influence the turn-taking occurrences. This conforms Olutayo's (2013) statement, the higher status of someone in society, the more turns are taken. In other words, the conversation is dominated by those who occupy the higher rank in society. In terms of the number of turns, M1 indicates that social status does not influence the occurrences of turn-taking in talk-in-interaction since Miss Celia, whose belongs to higher status, had less turns than Minny. On the contrary, social status was applicable in determining the number of turn-taking in M2. It is proved that someone with higher status, which is Miss Hilly, dominate the conversation by taking more turns than Minny who occupied the lower status.

Social status is not the only one that determines the occurrences of turn-taking. Another factor which will be discussed is discourse topic. Further elaborated factor influencing turn-taking is shown in the section below.

Discourse Topic

Besides social status, this study also revealed that both conversations have different topics discussed in their interaction. This issue determines to a large extent the turn-taking patterns shaped in the data.

The conversation between Miss Celia and Minny mostly discussed about personal life. In contrast, the conversation between Miss Hilly and Minny was merely between a master and a maid. What makes M1 conversation more interactive because Miss Celia might not positioned herself as more powerful than Minny. In addition, the way Miss Celia treated Minny built a closeness relationship between them which reflected in the example presented below.

E7. MC: *There you a::re*

MC: *I'm sta::rved. It (the chicken) looks so goo::d!*

M: *>We done been over this, Miss Celia< You supposed to eat in the dinin' room (.) that how it work.*

M: *Here, let me take you[r plate back-*

MC: *No!*
I'm fine right here Minny.
(7.0)

MC: *Mmm(h)*

M: *What!*
(.)

MC: *I just want you to know... I'm real grateful you're here.*

(The Help, 2011)

The setting took place in the kitchen where the fried chicken already served in the dining room. The common rule was, the maid must eating in the kitchen in which table and chairs were provided, whereas the master eating in the dining room. However, Miss Celia neglect the rule. She preferred to have lunch with Minny in the kitchen area. It indicates that Miss Celia disregard the rules that commonly applied in society that

aimed to differentiate white and coloured people.

On the contrary, the topic discussed in M2 reflected the social relation between Miss Hilly and Minny was professionally between master and maid, as can be seen in the example below.

E8. MH *Minny* *Go get Momma*

M: *Missus Walters?! You need help coming down?*

(The Help, 2011)

The excerpt 8 portrayed the way Miss Hilly treated Minny was different from Miss Celia's way. As Miss Hilly narrated in the excerpt 8 that she gave command to Minny to do something which mean that the topic that being discussed indicate that both of them had social relationship inequality which affect to their number of turns.

Olutayo (2013) who investigated discourse topic in television talk shows, revealed that the controversial topics gained more involvement from the participants as

well as the overlaps and interruptions were found more in those episodes. They tend to have the floor in the interaction to deliver their points. Unlike in Olutayo's (2013) study, this study found that the social relation between a master and a maid can be determined through discourse topic in which the topic related to personal life obtains more turns and involvement, though neither overlaps nor interruptions include.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed the turn-taking patterns occurred in *The Help* (2011) movie as well as the possible factors influencing turn-taking shown in the conversation between two masters and a maid; namely, the conversation between Miss Celia and Minny (M1) and the conversation between Miss Hilly and Minny (M2). The analysis has shown that both conversations indicate different number of turn-taking patterns. It is evident that M1 gained 79 turns in which *self-selection* is the most dominant pattern occurred, whereas M2 gained 23 turns in which the most prevalent pattern

used is *current speaker selects the next speaker* (CS2TNS). These findings affected by two factors which are found in the data; they are social status and discourse topic.

Self-selection occurred in M1 denote that the participants have a close relationship since both participants enact as not having more authoritative role to each other. This may be due to discourse topic that plays a major role in determining their social relation. Meanwhile, CS2TNS occurred in M2 mostly dominant by one participant which is Miss Hilly. In M2, the use of CS2TNS is mostly in the form of command which indicate the authority of the master towards the maid. This turn-taking pattern in M2 is influenced by social status.

In conclusion, it can be inferred that even though the participants in the conversation belong to different social status, the turn-taking will be intense if the discourse topic involves both of the participants. Moreover, to gain more understanding about turn-taking, future study could conduct turn-taking analysis using another genre of

literary work or another conversation setting. In addition, it is possible for future study to discover other factors

influencing turn-taking in movies since the latest findings only obtain two factors.

REFERENCES

- Amanat, L. R. (2015). *Turn-taking patterns and the functions of overlaps in conversations* (Unpublished bachelor's research paper). Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung.
- Antaki, C. (2011). Six kinds of Applied Conversation Analysis. In Antaki (Ed.), *Applied conversation analysis: Intervention and change in institutional talk* (pp. 1-14). United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Azhimi, F. (2016). *An analysis of turn-taking rules in a TV program "Ini Talk Show"* (Unpublished bachelor's research paper). Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung.
- Berg, B. L. (1989). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Needham: Allyn & Bacon.
- Brennan, S. E. (2010). Conversation and dialogue. In H. Pashler (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of the mind* (n.p.). Retrieved from http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/sbrennan/papers/ency_2010.pdf
- Brunett, A. (2017). *The organization of turn-taking in fieldwork study: A case study* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from Digital Commons @EMU.
- Columbus, C., Bernathan, M., Green, B. (Producer), & Taylor, T. (Director). (2011). *The help* (Motion Picture). United States: Walt Disney Studios Motion Picture
- Gibson, S. (2010). Introducing the data set. In M. A. Forrester (Ed.), *Doing qualitative research in Psychology: A practical guide* (pp. 131-132). California: SAGE Publications.
- Goodwin, C., & Heritage, J. (1990). Conversation analysis. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 19: 283-307.
- Hoey, E. M., & Kendrick, K. H. (2017). Conversation analysis. In A. M. B. de Groot & P. Hagoort (Eds.), *Research methods in Psycholinguistics: A practical guide* (n.p.). Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/306037543_Conversation_Analysis
- Hutchby, I., & Wooffitt, R. (2008). *Conversation analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Jeon, HJ. (2003). *Use of film dialogues as a model of natural conversation for developing conversational*

- proficiency* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from Edinburg Research Archive
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Napitupulu, S., & Siahaan, S. (2014). Turn-taking of conversation (A case study of Marhata in Traditional Wedding Ceremony of Batak Toba). *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(5), 36-43.
- Oh. (n.d.). In *Merriam-Webster's online dictionary*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/oh>
- Olutayo, O.G. (2013). Determinants of turn-taking in Nigerian television talk shows. *World Journal of English Language*, 3, 67-77. doi: 10.5430/wjel.v3n3p67
- Oyeleye, A.L., & Olutayo, O.G. (2012). Interaction management in Nigerian television talk shows. *The Canadian Center of Science and Education*, 2, 149-161. doi:10.5539/ijel.v2n1p149
- Tiono, N. I., & Ansori, J. (2005). Turn-taking irregularities by African American characters in the movie *Why Do Fools Fall in Love*. *K@ta by Petra Christian University*, 7(2), 104-115. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.9744/kata.7.2.104-115>
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E.A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematic for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *JSTOR*, 50, 696-735. doi: 10.2307/412243
- Sedikides, C., & Guinote, A. (2018). How status shape social cognition: Introduction to social issue "The status of status: Vistas from social cognition". *The Official Journal of the International Social Cognition Network*, 36(1), 1-3