The Use of Interventions in Media Talk:

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1. Introduction

In this paper I focus on the recipient design of turn-construction of the different categories (i.e. host, guest, expert and audience) taking part in American Tabloid Talkshows. I argue that the use of *interventions* (see section 3 below) by the participants in opening sequences of Tabloid Talkshows displays the participants' sensitivity to the construction of the discourse unit *first opening phase* of a particular Tabloid Talkshow. In building this unit, the fact that the participants use some types of interventions but refrain from using others, in comparison with other phases of the Tabloid Talkshow, indicates their orientation towards the completion of the opening phase and towards their internal status and role. I want to show that the use of different types of interventions is related to the internal status and role assigned to each participant by the Tabloid Talkshow juggernaut. In doing this type of analysis, I am doing comparative analysis, which implies realising an empirical analysis of Tabloid Talkshows as institutional talk. That is, a) analysing the conduct of the participants including their orientations to specific local identities and the underlying organisation of their activities; b) normally showing that the participants' conduct and its organisation embody orientations which are specifically institutional or which are, at least responsive to constraints which are institutional in character or origin (Drew and Heritage 1992: 20).

2. Tabloid Talkshow

In analysing talk in Tabloid Talkshows, one cannot forget that we are dealing with a television genre. As McLuhan affirmed "the medium is the message, because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and

form of human association and action" (1964:9). The American Tabloid Talkshow[1] (e.g. *Montel Williams, Geraldo, Maury Povich, Donahue*) is a variant of the type talk shows or discussion programmes in which ordinary citizens come to talk about their most intimate feelings in front of an audience of millions (cf. Munson 1993; Livingstone and Lunt 1994). Talk is the main activity of Tabloid Talkshows and confrontation and conflict are highly appreciated as a source of entertainment and as a way to attract audience. Archetypal conflict-talk involves simultaneous talk, interruptions, overlaps, etc., as verbal strategies to package classic argumentative actions such as challenges, rebuttals and ripostes (Hutchby 1996:76). That is, anything that takes us away from smooth progress of the interaction.

3. Review of literature on interruptions

A large deal has been written about interruptions and their function in conversation. Many studies coincide in classifying interruption as an incursive, intrusive, and violative act, since they violate the *principle one-person speaks at a time* (Duncan 1972; Sacks et *al.* 1974). Others, such as Ferguson (1977), found that the function of interruptions was directly linked to the concepts of power and dominance (cf. O'Donnell, 1990). Power and dominance in relation to interruptions have also been related to patterned sex-roles in studies such as those by West and Zimmerman 1983; Kollock et *al.* 1985; Orcutt 1985 and Beattie 1982.

Many studies consider that interruptions violate the other's speakership rights and tend to view interruptions as rude and disrespectful acts, indicative of indifference, hostility etc., i.e., with negative connotations. Bilmes (1997) distinguishes "normal turn exchange" from interruption; and defines the latter as a violation, or an attempt to, violate "the interrupted party's speaking rights" (Bilmes 1997:508). In his analysis, Bilmes adopts a participant-oriented approach to interruption as a phenomenon created and displayed by participants. He concludes that interruptions are "a special case of a more general set of social practices" and that we can only speak of interruptions "when one or more participants gives some sign that a violation has occurred (Bilmes 1997: 511). On the other hand, Goldberg (1990:883) points out that once content and context are considered the

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[1] Tabloid Talkshows have a dual function, they are partly talk partly entertainment, as the name indicates: *talk show*. It is this duality and the fact that in Tabloid Talkshows entertainment and talk are so intertwined, why I chose to write both words together.

interruption-power correlation begins to break down. Goldberg argues that interruptions need not be synonymous with power and that although some interruptions may signal power, others signal rapport and may be co-operative. Gallois and Markel (1975) recognise interruption as a marker of heightened involvement rather than dominance or discomfort (cf. Beattie 1982; Stainton 1987); Bennett (1978) also points out that overlap and interruption are in fact categories of logically different types. Schiffrin (1983) differentiates between overlaps and interruptions and argues that cooperative overlap is an element in a repertoire of devices used by the participants.

Schegloff (1988-89/92) addresses the role interruptions in interviews in his analysis of the Rather-Bush encounter and argues that their use of interruptions makes us understand this occasion as an interview which turns into a confrontation. Hutchby (1996:77ff) claims that a major part of the reason why interruption is bound up with the escalation (cf. Greatbatch 1992) of confrontation in disputes is that interruptions are essentially incursive actions; hence, he differentiates between cooperative and confrontational interruptions. Hutchby argues that in talk-radio hosts use interruptions to exert strategic control over the arguments with phonecallers, as well as strategies of resistance on the part of callers.

For the purposes of this essay, and in order to avoid a biased term for those cases in which there is a potential change of speakers due to the intervention of another participant in the on-going turn, I adopted the term *intervened exchanges* and *interventions* to differentiate between exchanges in which there is no "interruption" between two subsequent turns. My position here is that in order to classify interventions, it is both the interruptor and the interruptee, together with the content and context in which the interaction takes place which determines their role and function. Hence, not all interventions are treated as uncooperative or violative of the current party's speaking rights.

4. Data and Method of analysis

The data upon which the analysis is based are drawn from a larger corpus of several Tabloid Talkshows. The corpus of data subjected to statistical analysis is based on the video-tape recording and transcription of 12 opening segments or phases[2] of Tabloid Talkshows on US television,

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[2] The programmes are, usually, divided into seven phases with commercial breaks in between. Often the first opening segment coincides with phase and only the first set of guests will participate in the first opening phase. However, if there is a change of guests (e.g. Sally J. *I'm fed up with my teen*) in the same phase, I considered that to be a different segment within the phase.

randomly recorded during February-June 1995 and August 1996.

To find out the final pattern which may reveal the pragmatic structure of turn exchange, I looked at the sequencing of turns in relation to how turn-exchange was reached: that is, through *smooth exchange or intervened exchange*. The identifiable elements that served to determine if a turn is complete are transition relevance-places, the use of syntactically defined unit-types to construct a turn: sentential, clausal, phrasal, or lexical constructions (Sacks *et al*., 1974); as well as intonational contour patterns and non-verbal signals (gestures, lip movements etc.) that clearly indicate the speaker's intentions of yielding or continuing with the turn. The identification of interventions was made by looking at how transfer of speakership (Sacks et *al.* 1974:8) was accomplished. Turns were originally classified according to whether they were part of a:

a) **Smooth speaker exchange**, in which there is no simultaneous speech and the speaker's utterance seems to be complete in every way.

b) **Intervened speaker exchange,** i.e., exchanges involving simultaneous speech or incompleteness. In these turns a speaker intervenes in another speaker's turn. Four different types of interventions appeared in the data: interruptions (simple, silent and butting-in interruption)᾽ overlaps, parenthetical remarks and F2-turns.

The classification of types of interventions has been adapted, basically, from the works by Goffman 1976; Ferguson 1977; Beattie 1982; Oreström 1983; Stainton 1987 and Edelsky 1981. What follows is a working definition for each type:

(1) Simple interruption, is an exchange of turns, in which simultaneous speech is present, the first speaker's turn appears incomplete and the new speaker takes the turn.

EXAMPLE 1

<pre>
       D   No. In fact I'd seen it coming for quite a while, and I asked her
             to please stop because I knew what was gonna happen. She
             kept letting him come up there, kept being being
             [close to him—
       J   [& You asked her] to stop?
             [Why didn't you ask him] to stop going up there?
D   [Yes I did.]
       I did. But it did—it didn't matter!
</pre>

Jenny Jones. 1996. *Confronting unfaithful spouses*

(2) Butting-in interruption are interruptions or self-stopped utterances never developed into complete turns. Those interruptions are cases in which there is simultaneous speech and no exchange of turns. Butting-in interruptions are usually very brief, and the speaker does not get the floor, i.e. the initiator of the intervention breaks off before completing his/her statement. They may be cut off by other speaker's talk or stopped by their initiators. In any case, the interrupted speaker continues successfully with his/her turn.

EXAMPLE 2

    W   Thirty. And you lived with him for about three years off and on, correct?
    B   Yeah, I'd stay with him every now and then =
    W   [*** And i—**
    B   = [I] didn't actually move in with him. I'd just stay with him quite a bit.
                  Montel Williams. 1996. *Men who con women into relationships.*

(3) Silent interruptions are cases in which there is no simultaneous speech, however, the first speaker's utterance appears incomplete and there is an exchange of turns. In silent interruptions I also included those cases in which turn-keeping signals such as intonation contour, lip-movement, posture, non-verbal language etc. were displayed by the speaker, signalling his/her intention of continuing with the turn at which point they find themselves interrupted.

EXAMPLE 3

    D   OK. Well, about three years ago, I met David. I was coming out of an abusive relationship, so:: he started telling me things that he knew that I would—I wanted to hear. He told me he loved me, he wasn't gonna do me wrong. He told me he wanted me to have his baby—
    W   ∑ He' s came right out and said I wanna have children with you

    Montel Williams. 1996. *Men who con women into relationships.*

4) Overlaps are interruptions involving simultaneous speech, in which although the interrupted person manages, apparently, to complete his or her turn, there is an exchange of turns. Simultaneous speech is present and the first speaker's turn reaches completion. Overlaps imply a partial sharing of the floor, between the new and the current speaker, the new speaker is the one that keeps the floor.

EXAMPLE 4

W   He messed around and then you let him
     [back into your bed again?
BR   [Then he—he—no, no, no, no, no, no.] Then he went go kiss me and I
     told him to get out.
                    Montel Williams. 1996. *Men who con women into relationships.*

(5) Parenthetical remarks. In my data, a new type of simultaneous speech category, that may well be considered as cooperative, seemed to be clearly distinguishable, and not infrequent. Adopting Goffman's (1976:275) terminology I refer to these as *parenthetical remarks*.

Parenthetical remarks include brief supportive exclamations, background or brief comments on aspects of the current speaker's discourse , etc., whose primary motive is "the efficiency of the interaction rather than to make [a] contribution ... a sign of support and interest" (cf. Stainton 1987: 88); and signal no wish on the part of the new speaker to take the floor (see also Beattie 1982; Oreström 1983). They cause no visible reaction from the current speaker; that is, they are felt as not giving any apparent sequence space in the flow of events (Goffman 1976:275). The floor is not taken over by the new speaker but briefly shared by the two participants. It causes neither increased loudness nor speech disruptions on the part of the ongoing speaker (Oreström 1983:161). So both speaker's utterances appear complete. As illustrated in example 5:

EXAMPLE 5

V   Sure. There is a pressure just like there is er— from heterosexuals. There
     is a pressure within the community I think to conform and be mainstream
     and be androgynous and not be overtly butch
     [and don't be a femme =
N   [Exactly.
JO   [(XXX)
V   = and not be a fairy drag queen becau]se we don't want to offend the
     moral majority and we don't want them to dislike us and we wanna show
     that we are normal. And I say why can we not be diverse and be
     accepted[for our diversity.
          Donahue. 1996. The problem of being an effeminate man or a masculine
                                                                            woman.

(6) F2-turns. These are, I believe one of the main generic features of Tabloid Talkshows and of some other types of mediated discourse which have conflict talk as their main aim. In all the data analysed I encountered cases in which I was incapable of

attributing the floor to any participant in particular. *F2-turns* occurred in *F2-segments* (for detail, see Gregori, in preparation); that is, stretches of highly confrontational talk in which

several participants occupy the floor at the same time (talking simultaneously, interrupting each other; there are long overlaps, fights for the floor, parallel remarks, etc. all interwoven together). Following Edelsky's (1981) definition of floor F1 vs. F2, I call these F2-segments and classify them as a type of intervention; since, somehow, they disrupt the main flow of the argument at the same time that they are an essential part of it.

EXAMPLE 6
    T   That was part of the
           Δ [problem, communication.] They didn't have it.
    D   Δ [You never came to me.
    K   Δ [You were always arguing.
    D   Δ You didn't live there!
           Δ [You don't know Theresa.
    T   Δ [No. But I cared about you guys Dori.
    D   Δ Oh [I'm sure.
    T   Δ   [I cared about you.
    D   Δ Yeah. Right.
    T   Δ Believe what you want to.
           Δ [Believe what you want to.
    D   Δ [And this is how (XXX)

                                        Jenny Jones. 1996. Confronting unfaithful spouses.

5. Results of the analysis

    The results of the analysis, as illustrated in table 1 below, show that different categories use different types of interventions in opening phases.

5.1. Types of interventions for each category.

Table 1. Types of interventions by the different categories.

	audience-individual	audience-group	Guest	Host	Total
butting-in interruption	0.0%	0.0%	49.1%	50.9%	55
F2-turns	3.2%	6.4%	73.2%	17.2%	157
silent interruption	1.8%	0.0%	30.9%	67.3%	55
overlap	2.0%	4.3%	41.2%	52.5%	255
simple interruption	3.5%	10.5%	29.1%	57.0%	86
parenthetical remarks	2.3%	0.0%	93.2%	4.5%	44

Chi square =   123.14   Degrees of freedom =15   p value = 0.00000000

As illustrated in table 1 above, butting-in interruptions are produced, in first opening phases, only by guests and hosts. Guests's butting-in interruptions account for 49.1% of all butting-in interruptions (55) and hosts's amount to 50.9%. With regard to F2-turns: 3.2% are by individual members of audience, 6.4% by the audience-group and 17.2% by the host. The highest participation in F2-segments comes from guests, who perform 73.2% of all F2-turns.

The use of overlaps is mainly by hosts (52.5%) and guests (14.2%) with the balance slightly tipped towards hosts. In the case of overlaps, audience-group's percentage of overlaps (4.3%) is more than double the number produced by individual members of the audience (2%).

On the other hand, 67.3% of all silent interruptions are by hosts. The rest of those silent interruptions are primarily by guests (30.9%) since audience-group produces zero and audience-individual only 1.8%. Simple interruptions are largely produced by hosts: 57% of all cases; and by guests, who produce 29.1%. The audience-group performs 10.5% of these simple interruptions and individual members of the audience only 3.5%. Finally, parenthetical remarks are almost exclusively used by guests who produce 93.2% of all cases.

In order to find out the possible function of the types of interventions, I carried out a stratified analysis of the different types of interventions by guests and hosts (audience participation is minimum in the opening phases analysed). The analysis cross-compared interventions with question-answer and with the category involved in the exchange in which the intervention appeared.

5.2. Types of interventions by Guests

Table 2 illustrates the percentages for each type of intervention used by the guests.

Table 2. Types interventions by guests

	butting-in interrup.	F2	silent interrup.	overlap	simple interrup.	parenthetical remarks
answer to host	14.8%	3.5%	29.4%	40.0%	16.0%	9.8%
answer to guest	0.0%	3.5%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%
answer to audience	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	2.4%
question by guest	0.0%	3.5%	17.6%	6.7%	32.0%	4.9%
comment by guest	85.2%	88.7%	52.9%	48.6%	52.0%	82.9%
Total	27	115	17	105	25	41

Out of the total number of interventions by guests (330), the results show that guests intervene more frequently in the current speaker's turn in F2-segments: 115 of the total number of interventions by guests are F2-turns, that is, 34.8% of all guests's interventions. Overlaps add up to 31.8% of all interventions and the other types of interruptions, silent and simple, together, add up to 13.8% of all interventions, while parenthetical remarks add up to 12.4%.

In F2-segments the most common type of utterance is the comment by guests: 88.7% of F2-turns are comments rather than part of question-answer phases. This is because F2-segments are, usually, highly emotional and give guests the chance of expressing their own point of view, to save face by "accusing" others for their wrongdoing. Hence, they do not engage in phases of question-answer but take advantage of the situation to express statements which they could not say before.

The next most frequent type of intervention in guests is overlap. Notice that overlaps are used 40% of the times, by guests, to answer a question by the host; hence being in my opinion an example of a cooperative intervention rather than an intention to take the floor. In these cases I noticed that: a) these overlaps were sometimes involuntarily produced because of miscalculation of the end of the host's turn: for example, due to the machine-gun-question style, or to repetition and rephrasing of questions on the part of the host, which fostered these cases. Overlaps seemed to be a product of the eagerness of guests to answer the questions rather than an intention to take the floor.

Simple interruptions by guests are largely produced to make comments: 52% of all simple interruptions. Additionally, 32% of those simple interruptions are performed in order to ask questions, and 16% to answer a question by the host. Silent interruptions are used similarly: 52.9% are to make a comment, while 29.4% of the cases are to answer a question by the host and 17.6% to ask a question.

Butting-in interruptions appear in answers to the host, which means that someone would interrupt the guest talking while s/he is answering the host in 14.8% of the occasions and the guest would give up his/her turn. Other cases (85.2% of the butting-in interruptions) in which guests would give up their turn when interrupted have been classified as a comment since the analyst was not sure about the nature of the turn itself.

5.3. Types of interventions by Hosts

Table 3. Functions of interventions by hosts.

	butting-in interrup.	F2	silent interrup.	overlap	simple interrup.	parenthetical remarks
answer to guest	0.0%	3.7%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%
question by host	3.6%	25.9%	86.5%	69.4%	83.7%	0.0%
comment by host	96.4%	70.4%	13.5%	28.4%	16.3%	100.0%
Total	28	27	37	134	49	2
	(10.1%)	(9.7%)	(13.4%)	(48.4%)	(17.7%)	(0.7%)

Overlaps are the most common type of intervention in hosts: 134 turns (48.4%) out of the 277 interventions are overlaps. The next most frequent is simple interruption which accounts for 17.7% of all interventions by hosts, and silent interruption, 13.% of all interventions. Participation in F2 segments adds up to 9.7% of all interventions and parenthetical remarks merely account for 0.7% of all cases.

Overlaps, the most common type of intervention for hosts, are mainly used in order to ask questions (62.8% of all host's interventions). The rest of the overlaps are to introduce a comment (28.4%) or to answer a question by guests, the latter only being 2.2% of all hosts's interventions. Simple and silent interruptions are also principally produced to ask questions: 83.7% of all simple interruptions and 86.5% of all silent interruptions are effectuated with the purpose of asking a question. In F2-segments, however, hosts's participation is primarily effectuated in terms of comments: 70.4% of all hosts's turns in F2 are comments, while only 25.9% are questions.

6. Conclusions

The principal aim of this paper has been to make a contribution to the understanding of the use and function of interventions in opening phases in Tabloid Talkshows. The results display Tabloid Talkshows as an interactionally managed construction, as they constitute a specific type of recipient reaction in a typical sequential position (Houtkoop and Mazeland 1985:607). That is, the guests and the host cannot produce an example of an opening phase of Tabloid Talkshows unless it is continuously negotiated by the interactants themselves. In the process of negotiation (cf. Dolón 1998), a pattern of recipient reaction emerges that reflects and reproduces the

institutional framework and the turn-taking system that allows the identification of the Tabloid Talkshow genre. One of the elements that helps account for such an institutional framework is the presence and use of interventions.

The analysis above seems to indicate that turn-completion (e.g. with or without interruption) and recipiency are revealing features of Tabloid Talkshow turn-organisation since they give information about power relationships (e.g. who has the right to interrupt), and compliance or not with the identities and rules imposed by the genre itself (e.g. acting as advice-receiver, and not interrupting the host when s/he is talking or giving advice). We may posit that, regarding types of exchange, all categories feel equally comfortable in producing interventions, which implies that all categories feel equally free to intervene in the current speaker's turn. Nevertheless, some differences have been observed concerning number and type of interventions. First, it is the host who produces the highest number of interventions compared to the other categories (the mean number of interventions by the host is three times the amount displayed by guests) and all types. Second, guests use certain types of interventions with different categories (e.g. they overlap with the host but hardly ever use simple interruptions with the host). Third, audience and individual audience members refrain more from using interruptions in opening phases.

The upshot is that by allowing the host to intervene at his will in the ongoing talk, guests are enacting their roles of providers of information rather than elicitors of information (cf. Houtkoop and Mazeland 1985) orienting themselves toward particular patterns of conduct and using interventions in such a way as to make their verbal behaviour coherent with the status they have been assigned at the beginning of the programme (cf. Calsamiglia 1996:331). At the same time, the audience is enacting their role as passive listeners rather than participants of the interaction. Hence, out of the three categories taking part in the interaction [3], two of them allow the third, the host, to fulfill his/her organising function derived from his/her contract (cf. Calsamiglia et *al*. 1996) with the institution: that is, to make sure that guests and audience remain on task and within the bounds of what programme makers and viewers expect.

Underlying the analysis of interventions was the intention to show that although opening phases are more likely to be highly formulaic (McCarthy 1998)- since they include the presentation of the topic, introducing the participants, etc.- the Tabloid Talkshow is not a highly formalised genre but one which displays a *quasi-conversational* nature (cf. Gregori 1998) even in one of its more formulaic parts. Observation of the turn-taking functioning in other phases confirms the results illustrated in the analysis and suggest that the pattern emerging from the use of interventions is the result of the participant's orientation in the completion of the opening phase. The presence of interventions indicates a certain degree

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[3] Audience and individual members of the audience are considered Audience.

of conversationalization (cf. Fairclough 1995), which sometimes makes turn-taking system in opening phases more similar to a turn-by-turn allocation system where there are strong pressures from other participants wanting to speak (cf. Coulthard 1977) rather than an example of a pre-allocated system guided by the institutional representative (cf. Calsamiglia et *al*. 1996).

Generally speaking, however, one has to accept that opening phases are more formulaic and that their turn-taking system is more restricted, since institutionalised elements certainly exercise considerable centripetal force on participants' behaviour. Restrictions apply to the system itself as well as to the type of contribution speakers and recipients produce. So, the participants' choice with regard to different types of interventions not only constitutes an illustration of local distribution of interactional identities imposed by the Tabloid Talkshow, but also a negotiation and continuation of the local social identities of host, guests and audience in opening phases. Their attitude and behaviour regarding their choice of conversational devices is essential in constructing the discourse unit *first opening phase.*

Nevertheless, if it were the case that hosts and guests always adhered to institutional/conversational norms, then we would expect (a) a monotonous consistency in the statistical distribution of elements in our data, and (b) no evidence of diachronic change in the talkshow genre. Neither of these possibilities is supported by the data or by diachronic evidence. It is the flexibility of the genre (cf. Gregori 1998) which makes it a unique speech event capable of continuously fluctuating between the realms of conversational and institutional practices.

Appendix

=	when lack of space prevents continuous speech from A from being presented on a single line of text; then '=' at the end of the box and '=' at the beginning of the other shows that it is the same turn
bold type	is used in the examples to highlight the feature being discussed
::	extended sound; lengthened syllables
(XXX)	unintelligible segment.
[	overlap. A bracket connecting the talk of different speakers shows that overlapping talk begins at that point.
]	overlap finishes at this point.
—	Cut-off speech. Voluntarily: hanging discourse, speaker interrupts his/her own discourse in order to produce a repair and paraphrase; s/he leaves it grammatically incomplete. Or involuntarily when interrupted, placed at the end of an incomplete utterance.
&	Single interruption: exchange of turns; simultaneous speech; 1st speaker turn incomplete.
*	butting-in interruption (no exchange of turns).

∑   silent interruption (exchange of turns; no simultaneous speech; 1st speaker turn
           incomplete).
∏   intonation contour shows that speaker wants to yield the turn. Only used in
           cases where it may appear confusing because the speaker's utterance is
           incomplete.
.   sentence final falling intonation
,   clause-final intonation ("more to come").
Δ   Highly confrontational moments characterised by a total disruption of the turn-
           taking. It is perceived by the speaker as chaotic, verbal fighting, confrontational,
           aggressive etc. The transcription of these moments is sometimes merely
           representative since most of the discourse cannot be understood because of
           complex overlaps, shouting, censoring on the part of the programme itself, etc.

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