

POWER DYNAMICS IN TURN-TAKING STRATEGIES: A CONVERSATION ANALYSIS OF A PAKISTANI TV SHOW *THE OTHER SIDE*

Jawaria Ikram¹, Dr. Umara Shaheen^{*2}, Amina Bibi³

¹MS in English Linguistics Scholar, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Pakistan

²Assistant Professor, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Pakistan

³MS English, COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore Campus, Pakistan

¹jawariaikram0021@gmail.com, ²ushaheen@cuilahore.edu.pk, ³aminabibi6009@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Umara Shaheen

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ABSTRACT

The current study explores the power dynamics in the turn-taking mechanism in an entertainment show that focuses on influencing the psychology of celebrity guests. Unlike previous research that focuses on the political talk show discourse, this study examines structure and topic control within the host-guest interaction in the selected episodes of *The Other Side*, a Green Entertainment TV show, by drawing on Sacks et al.'s concepts of Turn-Constructional Unit (TCU) and Transitional Relevance Place (TRP). The findings reveal that the host uses carefully selected lexical choices, sequential cues, false alternatives, and dramatic timing to handle interactions. He uses syntactic completion points, signaling TRPs, to maintain control and a collaborative illusion by allowing the guest to respond in affirmation. The host also dominates the conversation by giving specific instructions for the tasks, thus maintaining the floor and strategically assigning turns to the guest. The guest's minimal responses tend to be supportive rather than dialogically equal, as occurs in the magician-audience or host-performer context of power asymmetry. Turn-taking is not only structural in dialogue but also concerns power, thereby indicating that turn-taking influences the notion of power in televised shows. The study is significant in revealing how institutional role, psychological authority, and entertainment framing integrate to govern transitions, interruptions, and topic control in ways that have not been extensively explored in Pakistani conversation analysis research.

Keywords: Turn-taking, entertainment talk show, psychology, topic control

Introduction

Television talk shows represent an influential discursive space where language, power, and social interaction converge under public scrutiny. Understanding how meaning is shaped and contested falls within the domain of discourse analysis, which analyzes the crucial role of language as a tool for communication and for shaping perception across various social spheres (Johnstone & Andrus, 2024; Rahman et al., 2024; Smith, 2012). Central to this is Conversation Analysis (CA), a method that focuses on the structural organization of talk-in-

interaction, particularly the techniques that control and shape spontaneity, coherence, and interpersonal dynamics (Astiyano, 2025). Turn-taking, among these mechanisms, emerges as a system that is rule-governed. The turn-taking mechanism determines who speaks, when, and for how long, thereby shaping the dialogue rhythm, topic control, and power dynamics within the conversation (Sacks et al., 2025; Ziembowicz et al., 2023). Despite its subtle operation, turn-taking serves as a powerful index of discourse dominance, making it a particularly useful lens for analyzing the

structured yet dynamic exchanges that define talk show discourse (Nawaz et al., 2021).

In media discourse, turn-taking is a crucial aspect of conversation analysis, coordinating conversations in institutional settings such as courtrooms, interviews, and talk shows. It reveals how authority, politeness, disagreement, and alignment are constructed (Wu, 2024). Turn-taking was systematically examined as a basic unit of conversational organization by Sacks et al. (1974), which focused on identifying “economy of turns” and preference related to turn-taking orders. In Pakistan, scholars have extensively examined organizing mechanisms of conversation across various contexts (Nawaz et al., 2022).. Khan et al. (2019) examined the functional role of interruptions in political news interviews, using approximately 200 minutes of recordings from the public state-owned channel PTV World, and found that the Conversation Analysis framework effectively captured how anchors used interruptions to control the flow of talk and set the agenda for discussion. Similarly, Iqbal et al. (2020) analyzed turn-taking patterns in a Pakistani talk show aired on Capital TV, revealing an unequal distribution of turns that implied unequal power relations between the host and guests, with the host asserting control over the topic of discussion throughout the program.

Despite extensive research on political talk shows, news interviews, and informal peer conversations, there is scant literature available on the turn-taking mechanism in entertainment talk shows that play with the psychology and perspectives of the celebrity guests. The current study fills this gap by analyzing the turn-taking mechanism in the entertainment talk show *The Other Side* (Green TV, 2024), hosted by mentalist Shaheer Khan and featuring celebrity guests in an interactive, psychologically oriented format, which presents a structurally distinct conversational context. The unique host-guest dynamic of this program, characterized by deliberate probing, psychological suggestion, and asymmetric information, creates turn-taking configurations that differ markedly from those of political or news-based discourse. This gap is significant because the show's conversational structure may reveal how institutional role, psychological authority, and

entertainment framing intersect to organize speaker transitions, interruptions, and topic control in ways not yet documented in Pakistani conversation analysis research. It further examined power dynamics, face-saving strategies, and communicative roles during host-guest interaction. It also explores how overlapping, pauses, and topic switch, and question-answer chain, enables one to comprehend the aspect of meanings and power relations in the interaction. It also determines the strategies associated with conversational dominance, politeness, as well as resistance and social roles negotiation on Pakistani televised media (Ramzan & Khan, 2024).

Literature Review

Turn-taking is a fundamental mechanism in TV talk show discourse, which regulates how participants manage conversational transitions and maintain the flow of interaction. Drawing on the concept of Transition Relevance Places (TRPs), which are moments when a speaker points at the completion of their turn and enables the other participants to navigate a well-structured yet dynamic exchange between host and guest (Ramzan et al., 2021).

Naz and Farukh (2024) examined the dynamics of turn-taking and exercise of power in a talk show by Anwar Masood. The study focused on the influence of the guests' education, class, and profession in shaping their conversation style and turn-taking dynamics. The findings revealed that despite the fact that guests occupied 54 percent of the speaking time, the host controlled the structure and flow of the conversation. Moerman (2025) and Van Zant et al., (2025) highlighted the importance of the tone, pauses, and the context of communication in conversation analysis. Building on this framework, Astyanto (2025) compared two talk shows,, *The Tonight Show* by Jimmy Fallon and *Jimmy Kimmel Live!*, examining turn-taking feedback and interruption in each show.

Both TV shows employ similar strategies which function differently in shaping tone and style. The researcher examined two interviews featuring Tom Holland as a guest, and analyzed the turn-taking and feedback mechanisms, along with interruptions and overlap. The viewer's overall experience was shaped by the

variation in the use of conversational techniques that constructed stylistic identities. Tabassum et al. (2019) have focused on the use of the turn-taking strategy by male and female TV shows. This study focused on turn-taking, interpretations, and overlapping. Moreover, it has been found that males use more strategies, whereas female hosts use all except hesitant start, lexical repetition, new start, and giving up. It is important for understanding media influence, reinforcing traditional gender roles, and improving communication in the media. Tabassum et al. (2019) also found that male hosts interrupt female guests more than female hosts do, which shows power or dominance. Conversation is a multidimensional concept involving sequential, participatory, and quantitative dominance. Males dominate in conversation and use overlapping with females. Uddin et al.'s (2019) research highlights the role of gender in TV talk shows discourse in Bangladesh, focusing on interactions between males and females. The study uses conversational analysis to examine four episodes of a talk show. Findings reveal that female hosts use supportive overlaps and soft transitions, while male hosts display a mix of interruptive styles. The research is grounded in ethno-methodology, employing Holmes' six universals concerning language and gender and contrasting with the Lakoff model. Hence, males and females differ in their turn-taking strategies to manage interactions. Hence, males and females differ in their turn-taking strategies to manage interactions. Tanzila Abbas et al. (2024) investigate how politicians in Pakistan use hedging techniques during political talk shows.

The study attempts to understand the rationales behind using these conversational maxims in political discourse. It examines twelve educational and socio-political talk shows which featured Pakistani politicians. The analysis, focusing on the use of discourse markers and hedges, revealed that participants flouted conversational maxims by giving vague or irrelevant responses. The results provided a comprehensive understanding of communication strategies in the political sphere and underscored the need for further investigation of gender dynamics and conversational principles in political talk shows.

The current study is significant as it examines the turn-taking strategies used in an entertainment show, a less-explored area of research in the Pakistani context. This study focuses on understanding the impact of turn-taking patterns on the flow of conversation, its dynamics, and power negotiation between host and guest. Despite a large viewership of the selected TV show, there is scant research on how these patterns contribute to maintaining a smooth flow of conversation. The findings provide valuable insights into communication practices in an entertainment setting that can benefit social interaction researchers and media professionals. The study aims to identify turn-taking strategies that shape turn-constructive and transitional patterns in the selected episodes of the TV show. It also attempts to examine how power dynamics are regulated through turn-taking mechanisms in *The Other Side*. To address these objectives, the study answers the following research questions:

Q1: What turn-taking strategies are employed to shape turn-constructive and transitional mechanisms in *The Other Side*?

Q2: How do the turn-taking strategies used in the selected TV show contribute to regulating power dynamics during the host-guest interaction?

Methodology

This section explains the research methodology for examining turn-taking strategies in selected episodes of *The Other Side*, during host-guest interaction with a focus on conversational features and organizational structure. The study employs a qualitative approach drawing on Conversation Analysis (CA) to examine micro-level features, such as pauses, overlaps, and turn allocation. The turn-taking strategies in talk-show discourse focus on Turn-Constructive Unit (TCU) and Transition Relevance Place (TRP) (Sacks et al., 1974). Turns at talk are constituted of unit-types, which encompass lexical, phrasal, causal, and sentential constructions. The property of projectability is central to TCU, which shows that a recipient can anticipate the trajectory of the turn completion based on its structural features. The TRP refers to the point at which TCU reaches its first possible completion, as Sacks et al. (1974) state, "the first possible completion of a

first such unit constitutes an initial transition-relevance place,” and by reference to these places the coordination of speakership transfer is systematically organized. It aims to explore language use, power relations, and speaker roles within a specific genre, the entertainment talk show. The study is exploratory and interpretative, examining turn-taking strategies in Pakistani televised talk shows from a discourse-analytic perspective, aiming to document linguistic features and implications.

It also uses Politeness Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis for interpretation. The data collection process involved collecting videos of a talk show from the official Pakistani channel, Green Entertainment, then transcribing and analyzing them using conversational analysis. Three full-length episodes were purposively selected. Conversational analysis has been proven to be an effective method. The present study utilizes CA to analyze TV shows and provide a comprehensive understanding of talk shows. The study, which uses publicly broadcast episodes, adheres to ethical research practices, respecting participants' original context, avoiding misrepresentation, and acknowledging sources, while ensuring privacy without violating it. The study's scope is limited to the spoken discourse of only three episodes which does not examine nonverbal cues and cultural nuances.

Analysis

This section examines turn-taking strategies along with self-selection by the speaker, overlaps, pauses, and interruptions in selected episodes of *The Other Side* to understand how power dynamics are negotiated in an entertainment show that focuses on influencing the minds of the celebrities. In the episodes, the host introduces a magic trick to the guest with the audience and co-guests largely silent. The turn-taking pattern encompasses a high-speed cue-response structure, allowing the host to dominate the conversation through rapid guesswork and leaving the guest to confirm the host's assumptions. The turn-taking sequence creates a rhythmic call-and-response flow, with minimal interruptions and no actively meaningful involvement by the guest.

In episodes, the host initiates the conversation with a rhetorical question, establishes the topic and controls the conversation with a Yes/No question, a common institutional talk strategy that maintains control while appearing conversational. In a segment, the host asks the question:

“People always say that life is a gamble... do you think that is possible?”

A guest responds with a brief agreement, self-selecting when the host pauses, using a transition relevance place (TRP). Repeating yeah yeah, “Interesting,” “Okay” reinforces agreement and confirms alignment.

The host controls the floor and allocates turns to the guest through direct questions and imperatives, a hallmark of institutional talk. The guest rarely initiates turns, responding to the host's sequential cues.

“Is it okay if you can like take it off?”

“I want you to put your other hand on top...”

“I want you to channel that energy...”

The host uses syntactic completion points, signaling TRPs, to maintain control and maintain a collaborative illusion by allowing the guest to respond with “I think so.”

The host initiates a conversational magic act, with guests confirming or reacting cooperatively. Laughter and astonishment serve as tools, demonstrating strong cooperation and guest alignment.

In all episodes, the host dominates the conversation by saying (I want you to come over there with me... I want you to draw something...), maintaining the floor and strategically assigning turns to the guest. The guest's minimal responses (okay, yes, I do), following asymmetrical turn-taking, indicate her subordinate role in the interaction, and demonstrate the host's dominance in the conversation.

The host uses question-answer adjacency pairs to invite a guest to respond, ensuring restricted yet guided responses, maintaining control in a polar question format by saying that:

There is one thing that makes the difference between winning and losing...

Do you know what that one thing is?”

Managing overlaps and pauses in a conversation is crucial for maintaining a collaborative tone. Overlaps occur when the host asks a question, while pauses soften the

tone and transition from serious cultural beliefs to humorous comments, such as jokes about bad luck in poker.

The host controls the interaction structure through imperatives and controlled-response questions, such as “Hold out your hand; think of a name; and put your hands on top,” which allows celebrity guests to occupy limited speaking time within minimal turns when prompted.

The guests respond through backchanneling and using short utterances with each turn serving

The host uses suspense, narrative progression, and hypothetical high-stakes bet to increase tension and anchor attention. Humor and irony are used to shift the emotional tone from suspense to amusement, creating rapport while maintaining control (I didn’t write the check)

The host uses suggestion, repetition, and command sequences (Look at my hand... Sleep... Try to remember your name...) to simulate performance discourse and hypnotic discourse structures, while guests' loss of speech and name recall reflects extreme power asymmetry, removing their ability to take a turn.

Discussion and Conclusion

The turn-taking process in televised talk shows like *The Other Side* is semi-structured, with the host controlling interaction through strategic questioning, topic initiation, and humor. The existence of a dominant conversational system was evident in the episode: the host controlled the conversational cues for names and pauses, but the guests mostly did the same, although there were interruptions and non-solicited answers. The segments feature asymmetrical, collaborative turn-taking with a semi-structured format in which the need to perform is prioritized over equality. They also ensured transitions and took control during unpredictable moments, thereby proving that they are a discourse manager. Conversations were frequently interrupted, but the interruptions were usually cooperative, as shown by showing enthusiasm or surprise. These findings align with Hu and Degand (2023) and Umer et al. (2025) which also highlight how these strategies help control the flow of conversation. They escalated during

magic or psychological games, and there was tension in structured and spontaneous talk. The host cleverly took advantage of moments of silence, creating suspense and excitement among the guests and emotional anticipation in order to support the entertainment value and attract the attention of the audience, as Heritage claims. Pragmatic communication through the use of eye contact, body focus, and gestures plays a fundamental role in turn-taking in interactions, which aligns with the results provided by Goodwin’s findings on the importance of embodied communication. It contained mentalism and hypnosis, in which the control of speech and turn-taking was disrupted, breaking the symmetry and emphasising power and altered state in everyday conversation rules, causing the agency and control to be questioned. The segment presents a hypnotic performance where the guest has no conversational control, whereas the host is the one controlling the conversation, performance procedure, and ritual termination, which place a strong emphasis on the power, language, and authority in entertainment. A sequence of ritual elements is used by the host to transition between the performance and wrap-up phase, including hypnosis release, memory talk, artwork by guests, and memento presentation. The performance of the guest also distorts the expectations of conversation due to indecisive turns that release questions, which shows the state of being uncomfortable. Music enhances drama and speed through overlaps to consume the cognitive space, as well as enhancing the realm of the theatre. The fact that Zara is performing by asking hesitant questions, which translates to not feeling comfortable, and the music used to enhance drama and determination of pacing, fills up the cognitive space to back up theatrical dominance.

The segment of *The Other Side* analysis showed the dominance of a host-guest relationship, where the host took the most crucial role, initiating, ordering, and controlling the process of turn-taking by creating leading questions, prolonged narratives, and fantasy-generating patterns of speech representation, which is a characteristic of institutional discourse. The host applied topic-setting questions, posed long turns, and restricted the guests' input. The turn-taking of the guests was responsive and

supportive, with shorter turns being directed by the host. She used her values and beliefs in her responses and indicated her wish to make a meaningful contribution to the discourse, even though she could hardly shape the interaction form. The visitor took advantage of back-channeling and affirmations so as to keep herself engaged, and the host was applying visualization techniques to guide the answers. Joking and light communication made the hierarchical aspect of the communication flow less intense, keeping collusion and authoritarianism at an equal level in their turn quality. In the study, we find a host-controlled, cooperative communication in which the anchor takes turns on behalf of others, and guests find alternatives to talk about their personalities, representing a hybrid approach to media discourse.

The present study is an analysis of turn-taking behaviors in the Pakistani television show *Other Side*, which is hosted by Shaheer Khan on Green Entertainment, and through CA, it is possible to identify the instances of institutionally regulated interactions, politeness strategies, as well as the conversational norms. They are performance-oriented segments in which the task of turn-taking is highly controlled to serve entertainment and illusion purposes. The host uses a combination of prescriptive language, false alternatives, and dramatic timing to handle interactions. The guest-giver contributions tend to be supportive instead of being dialogically equal, as happens in the magician-audience or host-performer context of power asymmetry. Turn-taking is not only structural in a dialogue but also concerns power, indicating that it influences the notion of power in televised shows. These dynamics are important in the quest to have balanced media discourse. Even in instances when spontaneity seems to be genuine (such as phone calls or card picks), they fit within the description lines of pre-structured sequences specifically crafted to impress. *Other Side* interactions consist of strategic turn-taking with the host leading through the orders and narratives, and the guest is discursively marginalized as the actions are carried out since the show is performative. As shown through the segment, there exists a hypnotic moment where the guest, who has conversational agency,

loses the ability to talk, but the host, who still has agency, manages to retain power through discourse, performance routines, and ritualized closures to stress the concepts of power, language, and control in entertainment.

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