



## MANAGING INTERRUPTIONS AND OVERLAPS IN CONVERSATION

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**Annotation:** *This paper analyzes the phenomena of interruptions and overlaps in spoken conversation. These features are examined as natural components of human communication, influencing the flow and effectiveness of interaction. The study explores how social roles, status, cultural background, intonation, and conversational context contribute to the occurrence and interpretation of interruptions. It also highlights the differences in perception between casual and formal speech. Through practical examples, the paper emphasizes the functional roles of such speech patterns in maintaining or disrupting conversational dynamics. The findings are relevant for linguistics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and communication studies.*

**Keywords:** *Interruption, overlap, turn-taking, conversational dynamics, speech interaction, discourse analysis, social roles, pragmatics, cultural context, communication strategies, intonation, politeness theory.*

**Аннотация:** *Данная статья посвящена анализу явлений перебиваний и наложений реплик в устной речи. Эти особенности рассматриваются как естественные элементы человеческой коммуникации, влияющие на течение и эффективность взаимодействия. В исследовании анализируются такие факторы, как социальные роли, статус, культурный контекст, интонация и ситуация общения, которые способствуют возникновению и интерпретации перебиваний. Также подчёркиваются различия в восприятии этих явлений в неформальной и официальной речи. На основе практических примеров статья раскрывает функциональную роль этих речевых стратегий в поддержании или нарушении диалога. Полученные результаты имеют значение для лингвистики, прагматики, дискурсивного анализа и теории коммуникации.*





**Ключевые слова:** перебивание, наложение реплик, очередность в разговоре, динамика беседы, речевое взаимодействие, анализ дискурса, социальные роли, прагматика, культурный контекст, коммуникативные стратегии, интонация, теория вежливости.

**Keywords:** *conversation, discourse, communication norms, spoken language*

### **1. Introduction:**

**Keywords:** *conversation, discourse, communication norms, spoken language*

Conversation is a dynamic and interactive form of communication where speakers constantly negotiate meaning, turns, and roles. Unlike written language, spoken discourse happens in real time and involves quick responses, emotional engagement, and spontaneous reactions. As a result, features like interruptions and overlaps naturally emerge.

These features may be perceived differently depending on context. In some situations, they are signs of rudeness or domination; in others, they demonstrate interest, excitement, or emotional closeness. To understand them properly, we need to analyze not only their structure but also their function in discourse.

This paper aims to deeply explore interruptions and overlaps, explain how they arise, what they mean, and how they are managed in different settings.

### **2. Interruption**

**Keywords:** *interruption, floor-taking, power dynamics, speaker control*

Interruption occurs when a speaker begins speaking while another speaker is still talking, usually before that speaker has finished their turn. It is a deliberate or sometimes unintentional attempt to take over the floor and redirect the flow of conversation.

#### **2.1 Types of Interruption**

##### **a) Competitive Interruption**

This type of interruption is used to dominate the conversation or to challenge what the other speaker is saying. It is often seen in arguments or debates.

Example:

Speaker A: "I believe we should focus more on—"

Speaker B: "No, that's completely wrong. We need to act now."

Purpose: To seize control, express disagreement, or reject the current topic.

##### **b) Cooperative Interruption**







This form of interruption occurs when the listener interrupts to agree, complete a sentence, or show empathy. It helps build connection rather than block communication.

Example:

Speaker A: "I was so nervous before the exam—"

Speaker B: "—But you did great, right?"

Purpose: To express support or share emotional involvement.

### c) Neutral Interruption

These interruptions happen without specific intention. They may result from misunderstanding, excitement, or misjudging when the speaker will pause.

Example:

Two people start speaking at once and then one says, "Oh, sorry, go ahead."

Purpose: Unintentional, often followed by quick repair.

## 2.2 Signals of Interruption

Raised voice

Speaking while the other is mid-sentence

Ignoring conversational cues

Lack of pause or turn-yielding signals

## 3. Overlap

**Keywords:** *overlap, simultaneous speech, shared understanding, conversational alignment*

Overlap happens when two speakers talk at the same time, but usually in a cooperative or supportive way. Unlike interruption, overlap often occurs near natural pauses in speech and may indicate mutual engagement.

### 3.1 Types of Overlap

#### a) Affiliative Overlap

This occurs when a listener overlaps briefly to agree or show support. It is common in friendly and emotionally rich conversations.

Example:

Speaker A: "And then she finally said—"

Speaker B: "—Yes! I knew it!"

Purpose: To show empathy, agreement, and shared emotion.

#### b) Turn-Transition Overlap

This happens when two speakers speak at the same moment while one speaker is finishing a turn. It is usually resolved quickly by one speaker stopping.





Example:

Speaker A: “So, I think we should—”

Speaker B: “Maybe take a break?”

Speaker A: “—Yeah, exactly.”

Purpose: Normal timing overlap, resolved by mutual understanding.

c) Interruptive Overlap

In some cases, overlap can resemble interruption if one speaker does not yield. However, it often begins cooperatively and becomes competitive only if speakers persist.

### 3.2 Features of Overlap

Occurs near turn transition points

Often short and cooperative

Used to affirm, echo, or complete thoughts

Reflects listener involvement

### 4. Turn-Taking in Conversation

**Keywords:** *turn-taking, transition relevance place (TRP), speaker cues*

In any conversation, speakers follow certain unwritten rules to take turns. This system helps avoid chaos and ensures everyone has a chance to speak. However, managing turns can be challenging, especially in fast-paced or emotionally charged settings.

#### 4.1 Turn Construction Units (TCUs)

A turn may consist of a word, phrase, or full sentence that can stand alone. When a speaker reaches the end of a TCU, it becomes possible for another speaker to take the floor.

#### 4.2 Transition Relevance Place (TRP)

TRP is the point where it is appropriate for another speaker to talk. Overlaps often happen here.

Signs of TRP:

Falling intonation

Pauses

Gestures like leaning back or looking away

If these signals are missed or misinterpreted, interruptions or overlaps may occur.

### 5. Sociolinguistic Perspectives





**Keywords:** *gender differences, cultural norms, social power, conversational style*

Interruptions and overlaps are not only structural features—they are shaped by social factors like gender, culture, and power relationships.

### 5.1 Gender and Power

Research by Zimmerman and West (1975) showed that in male-female conversations, men interrupted more frequently, indicating dominance. Later scholars like Deborah Tannen explained that men and women may have different conversational styles:

Men tend to use conversation to assert status or deliver information.

Women often use it to build connection and rapport.

Thus, an interruption may be seen as supportive in a female-female interaction but as controlling in a male-female exchange.

### 5.2 Cultural Differences

In some cultures, especially high-involvement cultures (e.g., Latin American, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern), overlapping and interrupting are seen as signs of engagement and enthusiasm.

In low-involvement cultures (e.g., Scandinavian, East Asian), speakers wait longer pauses and take turns carefully.

Understanding these norms helps avoid misinterpretation in intercultural communication.

## 6. Pragmatic Functions of Interruptions and Overlaps

**Keywords:** *pragmatic function, conversational intention, speaker strategy*

Every interruption or overlap serves a pragmatic function—that is, it reflects the speaker's intent.

### 6.1 Functions of Interruptions

To disagree: Challenging the other speaker's point

To clarify: Seeking explanation

To redirect: Changing the topic

To express urgency: Signaling emotional or time pressure

### 6.2 Functions of Overlaps

To support: Showing agreement or shared feeling

To predict: Completing the speaker's idea

To show interest: Engaged listening

To affirm: Confirming understanding or truth







The key to understanding the function lies in the tone, timing, and relationship between speakers.

### **7. Managing Interruptions and Overlaps**

**Keywords:** *conversational repair, floor management, listening skills*

#### **7.1 How to Manage Interruptions**

Use polite control phrases: “Let me finish,” “If I may just continue...”

Signal intent nonverbally: hand gesture, leaning forward

Acknowledge but maintain turn: “I hear you, but let me just complete this thought...”

#### **7.2 How to Handle Overlaps**

Pause and yield: “Sorry, go ahead.”

Repair the overlap: “We both spoke—please continue.”

Use cooperative cues: nodding, short affirmations

Effective management involves sensitivity, active listening, and knowing when to speak and when to wait.

### **8. Conclusion**

**Keywords:** *interactional competence, discourse management, communicative awareness*

Interruptions and overlaps are natural features of spoken communication. They reflect not only how people speak, but also how they relate to each other. While sometimes disruptive, they can also create warmth, connection, and understanding.

To become a skilled communicator, one must learn to recognize, interpret, and manage these features appropriately. By understanding their types, functions, and social implications, speakers can engage in more respectful, fluent, and effective conversations.

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