

Turn taking management techniques used by Thai TV interviewers*

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Abstract

The TV interviewer's (IR) role is central to TV talkshow programs, managing the conversational interaction among interviewees (IE) with different viewpoints. This paper shows how talk-turn time is managed exclusively by the IR in multiparty interviews in the context of a Thai TV talkshow. Allocating turns to the selected speaker, the IR used several techniques, for example, back channel support, addressing a specific question to a particular participant, making interruption and inference repair to take back the floor. In addition, intentional pause is also used to provoke turn response from the IE.

1. Introduction

The TV talkshow is a form of professional journalism. Its primary goal is broadcasting information or opinion from interviewees (IE) from different perspectives, for example, experts, public figures or individuals in the news, for the benefit of the public audience. As the catalyst providing provocative questions and turn allocation to an interviewee (IE), a TV interviewer (IR) actually does three major things. First, is to contribute the contextual situation within which the IEs can express their opinion and information relevant to the topic issue. Second, is to conduct the expression of the IEs' viewpoints relevant to the broadcasting regulations. Third, is to conduct the IEs talk within the framework of the cooperative principle (Greatbatch 1988).

The IR's role is constraining in the sense that while the talking point is anticipated by the mass audience, the on-going conversation is commonly broadcast "live" without the censorial benefit of editorial opinion. Moreover, mass audiences have diverse interests and ideological standpoints. They have some participatory interest in monitoring news program to prevent bias. As a consequence, the IR continually encounters the problem to control the talking point and to conduct the accountability of the interviewee's performance under widespread critical scrutiny (Heritage 1985).

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This paper chooses to limit itself to exploring ‘the current speaker select next’ technique (Sacks et al 1974). It focuses on the IR’s role in turn taking management: how the turn taking management techniques are used to deal with the IE’s conduct in the process of information production. It is hoped that this paper should contribute to a better understanding on how turn taking is allocated to carry on smooth conversation: how turn allocation techniques are used, for example. This knowledge can be applicable for a conversational mediator and knowledge management worker as such.

2. Data

Data for this paper are from the talk show program broadcasted on the public Thai TV channel 9. The talking floor was managed by a professional interviewer (IR). The topic of the discussion was the October 1973 political uprising in Thailand. Four interviewees with different stand points were invited to share their opinions. Two were supporters of the military leaders and two were former student activist leaders.

Beginning the talk, the IR begins by giving the audience the background to the October 1973 political uprising. The university students and people from all walks of life began the revolutionary protest against the military government which ended up with dramatic changes to Thai society. The aim of this monologue is to provide the mass audience with some background information. Then the IR introduces the discussion point by referring to an “outrageous book” written by one of the interviewees in this talk. The book advocates the innocence of the two military leaders and their associates while the student leaders are allegedly culprits. Consequently, the content of the book provokes outrage from the former ‘16th October 1973 Legacy’, the former university students and lay people who rallied in protest. From this point, the talk show program invites 4 participants to join the discussion. Following are the turn taking management techniques used by the IR.

3. Turn taking management techniques used by the IR

3.1 Using questions

Using questions is the basic technique for turn taking management in TV interviews. The IR’s role in using questions for turn allocation is to shape the basic characteristics of turn taking in the Thai TV interview as one-to-one answers to questions. The questions from the IR may be divided into two categories: explicit questions and implicit or pragmatic questions. An explicit question is a direct question with full grammatical components. For example, it has a question word marker. An implicit or pragmatic question has a non-grammatical question word marker but is pragmatically understood by the participant to whom the question is addressed.

In this example, the IR turns to IE, who is the military advocate, asking which issue, addressed by Col. Narong, he cannot believe.

Explicit question and Implicit question

- 1 IR: มีตรงไหนที่พันเอกณรงค์พูดแล้วคุณไม่เชื่อไหม?
mi: tron-năy thî: phan-?è:k na-roṇ phû:t lé:w khun
mây-chuô mǎy?
- 2 IE: มีครับ
mi: khráp
- 3 IR: เช่น
chên
- 4 IE: ชีวิตส่วนตัว ซึ่งมีทั้งดีและไม่ดี
chi:-wít sùon-tua sūṇ mi: tháṇ di: lé? mây-di:

[translation]

1. IR: Are there any words said by Col. Narong which you don't believe?
2. IE: Yes there are
3. IR: Example?
4. IE: A private life, which has both good side and bad side

In this example, in line 1, the IR selects one IE to be the next speaker. By doing so, he uses an explicit question marked by sentence final particle [mâi]. Therefore, the IE, who the question is addressed to, is selected to be the next speaker. The IE answers the previous question with a short statement plus the male-formality marking particle [khráp] to signal the turn end in line 2. To have the same speaker clarify what is said, the IR makes an immediate interruption with the elliptical interrogative clause in line 3. The interrogative clause is pragmatically understood as a question by the same IE. Then the same IE gives the turn response to IR in line 4. This is an example of an explicit question in one-to-one answer to question between the IR and IE. It is the basic characteristic of speaker change in the TV interview.

3.2 Interruption

Interruption is one of the turn taking management techniques used by the IR. Interruption occurs at the relevant non-transitional place. Before the relevant point of speaker change is reached, the next speakers start their turn. Speaker change at this point is consequently recognized as an interruption. This study will examine the interruption from the IR in two respects: intrusive interruption and collaborative interruption.

Intrusive interruption is a dis-preferred interruption made by the IR. It occurs at the point right before the current speaker has completed the conversational action and the IR, the next speaker, makes the floor-taking speaker change. Intrusive interruption results in dis-affiliative transition of

speaker. In this example, the IE explains his relationship with Col. Narong and the IR makes an intrusive interruption.

Intrusive Interruption.

- 1IE: ผมคงไม่เข้าใจชีวิตท่านหรือครับ (.)
phǒm khon mây-khâw-cay chi:-wít thâ:n rò:k kh ráp (.)
2. แต่ผมคิดว่า=*
tè: phǒm khít-wâ:*=
- 3IR: ทำไมคนที่รู้จัก 4 เดือน
tham-may khon thî: rú:-càk sì: duən
4. ทำไมคุณจึงเชื่อ
tham-may khun cuŋ chuə
- 5IE: ผมคิดว่า
phǒm khít-wâ:

[translation]

1. IE1: I don't think I understand his life
2. But I think that=*
3. IR: Why the person whom you know for 4 months
4. Why do you believe him?.
5. IE1: I think that ...

In this excerpt, the IE is responding to the previous question from the IR in line 1 and line 2. The IE apparently does not even finish the well-formed complex sentence in line 2 and the IR inserts an intrusive interruption in line 3-4. Consequently, it is floor-taking speaker change after the immediate interruption. Once the IR completes the interrogative clause in line 4, the IE1 continues his utterance in line 5. It is almost the same utterance which was immediately interrupted in line 2. In this example, the IE explains how Col. Narong tells him about stopping the military plan to attack Thammasart University and the IR makes the collaborative interruption.

Collaborative Interruption

1. IE:
2. พันเอกณรงค์บอกว่า แผนนี้ผมเป็นคนรายงานให้เขายกเลิก
phan-?è:k na-roŋ bò:k-wâ: phě:n ní: pen khon ray-ŋa:n
hây khăw yók-lô:k
3. เพราะถ้าบุกรุกธรรมศาสตร์แล้ว (.) ก็จะตายกันละ
phrǒ? thâ: bùk tham-ma-sà:t lé:w kô: (.) cà? tay-kan-lé?
4. ผมเอาประวัติศาสตร์นี้ยื่นยันดีกว่า=*
phǒm ?aw prá?-wàt-sà:t ní: yu:n-yan di:-kwà:*=

- 5IR: คือเพราะเหตุการณ์ประวัติศาสตร์นี้ยืนยันโดยเจ้าตัว
 khu: phró? hət-kan prà?-wət-sà:t ní: yu:n-yan do:y
 câw-tuə
6. คือมีแผนจะเข้าตีธรรมศาสตร์
 khu: mi: phǎ:n cà? khâw ti: tham-ma-sà:t
7. พันเอก ณรงค์ได้ไปประสานบอกว่า=
 phan-?è:k na-roŋ dâ:y pay prà?-sǎ:n bò:k-wâ: =
8. ว่าผมขึ้นไปดู อย่าเข้าตีเลย
 wâ: phǎm khu:n pay du: yà: khâw ti: lə:y
- 9IE: อย่าเข้าตีเลย
 yà: khâw ti: lə:y
- 10IR: เพราะฉะนั้น
 phró? cha-nán
- 11IE: พันเอกณรงค์มีบุญคุณอย่างล้นเหลือ
 phan-?è:k na-roŋ mi: bun-khun yà:ŋ lón-luǎ
12. ต่อนักศึกษาโดยไม่เข้าตีธรรมศาสตร์
 tò: nák-suək-sǎ: do:y mây khâw ti: tham-ma-sà:t

[translation]

- 1IE:
2. Col.Narong said that he had pushed to cancel this mission
 plan
3. because if they attacked Thammasart, a lot of people would
 die
4. I should better refer to this historical event=*
- 5IR: It is a historical event confirmed by himself
6. that is he had a mission plan to attack Thammasart
- 7IE: Col.Narong has communicated that=
- 8IR: =that I have flown and looked over, absolutely do not attack
- 9IE: absolutely do not attack, otherwise a lot of people will die
- 10IR: therefore
- 11IE: Col.Narong has a lot of merit (.)
12. for students by not attacking Thammsart

This example is a conversational interaction between the IE and the IR. They are talking about the political uprising on 14 October 1973. One IE talks about the military plan to attack Thammasart University where the students and protestors were gathered. The IE satirically talked about the merit claimed by Col.Narong, the military leader, as if he had played an important role in the back stage command to stop this mission plan. The IR makes the collaborative interruption in line 5-6. It is to help the IE make the inference on what was said. The IE continues to give more information in line 7 and does not even finish the well-formed clause. The IR makes another collaborative interruption in line 8 to help the IE add more information. This example also

shows that the IR uses a collaborative interruption as one of the techniques to select next speaker. Collaborative interruption results in smooth turn transition.

3.3 Back channel support

Back channel support is the IR's technique to demonstrate attention to the IE's talk. It may be considered a supportive strategy to signal the current speaker to continue to talk. In other words, it is to defer the other IE from interrupting while the current IE is talking. From this example, the IE who is the representative of the October 1973 Legacy, is allowed to explain the situation at Thammasart University from his stand point. Because of the long explanation, the IR gives him a back channel support allowing him to complete the story.

Back Channel Support

- 1IE:ส่วนข้อเท็จจริงที่เกิดขึ้นที่เป็นที่รับรู้กันโดยทั่วไปคือ
.....sùan khô:-thét-cing thî: kè:t-khûn thî: pen thî:
ráp-rú:-kan do:y thûə pay khu:
- 2IR: อืม
ในม
- 3IE: ประชาชนนั้นถูกยิง
prà?-cha:-chon nán thù:k ying
4. จนมาถึงบัดนี้จะมีการฟ้องปิดข่าวใครหรืออย่างไหนนั้นนะ
con ma: thuŋ bat-ní: cà mi: ka:n-pôŋ-pàt-sát-khray
ruŋ: yà:ŋ-ray nán nàh
- 5IR: อืม
ในม
- 6IE: พวกกระผมอยู่ข้างล่าง
phûək kra-phôm yù: khâ:ŋ-lâ:ŋ
- 7IR: อืม
ในม
- 8IE: ไม่ได้อยู่บนเครื่องบิน
mây-dây yù: bon khruəŋ-bin
- 9IR: อืม
ในม
- 10IE: แต่ที่แน่ๆ พ.อ ณรงค์ยอมรับว่าผมนั้นนะ (.5)
tè: thî: nê:-nê: phan-?è:k na-roŋ yw:m-ráp wâ: phôm
nán nàh (.5)
- 11IR: อืม
ในม
- 12IE: เอา สอขึ้นไปสำรวจ
?aw hɔ: khûn pay sǎm-rùət

13. และผมเนี่ยมีบุญคุณต่อนักศึกษาและประชาชนอย่างมหาศาล
lé? phǎm nîə mi: bun–khun tò: nák–suək–sǎ: lé? prà?–
cha:–chon yà:ŋ ma–hǎ:–sǎ:n
- 14IR: อืม
 ʔu:m
- 15IE: ว่าผมเนี่ย
 wâ: phǎm nîə
- 16IR: อืม
 ʔu:m
- 17IE: ได้ระงับการเข้ายึดธรรมศาสตร์
 dâ:y ra–ŋáp ka:n–khâw yuít tham–ma–sà:t
18. และผมได้รายงานต่อสวนรีนหลังจากที่ผมได้บินหอสำรวจธรรมศาสตร์แล้ว
 เนี่ย
 lé? phǎm dâ:y ra:y–ŋa:n tò: sǎn ruî:n làn cà:k thî: phǎm
 dâ:y bin–hɔ: sǎm–rùət tham–ma–sà:t lé:w nîə
- 19IR: อืม
 ʔu:m
- 20IE ขอให้ระงับการเข้ายึดธรรมศาสตร์
 khǎ: hây ra–ŋáp ka:n–khâw yuít tham–ma–sà:t
21. มีฉะนั้นจะตายกันละ
 mí? cha–nán cà? ta:y–kan–lé?
- 22IR อืม
 ʔu:m
- 23IE: นี่ พันเอกณรงค์พูนะฮะ
 nî: phan–ʔè:k na–roŋ phu:t na–há?

[translation]

- 1IE The fact that is generally known is
- 2IR Ummm
- 3IE The people were shot
- 4 Up to now there is a culprit or not, or how they do
- 5IR Ummm
- 6IE We were on the ground
- 7IR Ummm
- 8IE not on the aircraft
- 9IR Ummm
- 10IE But for sure Col.Narong claimed that
- 11IR Ummm
- 12IE He flew the helicopter to look over
- 13 and claimed that he had made a huge merit for the protesting
 students
- 14IR Ummm
- 15IE and claimed that

- 16IR Uhmm
- 17IE he stopped the military seizing Thammasart University
- 18 and he reported to the Supreme Commander after the mission
- 19IR Uhmm
- 20IE to suspend seizing Thammasart University
- 21 otherwise there would be a lot of dead
- 22IR Uhmm
- 23IE This was what Col.Narong said

In this example, while the IE, who was one of protesting students, is talking about the situation at Thammasart University from his point of view, the IR gives back channel support [Uhmm] after the possible completion points to show his attention. Using back channel support prevents interruption from the other interviewees who stand on the opposite side. In this example, back channel is the IR’s technique used to manage the turn taking in conversational interaction. It has both supportive and preventive functions.

3.4 Inference repair

Inference repair is one of the major turn taking management techniques used by the IR. It is used when what is said by the current speaker is not clear enough for the mass audience’s understanding, or when the current speaker uses jargon or technical terms unfamiliar to the public. To help clarify it, the IR selects himself to speak. By doing so, the IR makes a collaborative interruption to infer or to repair what was said by the previous speaker. In other words, inference repair is a turn taking management technique to bring the speaking turn back to the IR. After the inference repair, the IR may select the same speaker or may select the other IE to be the next speaker. From this example, the IE who is the representative of the October 1973 Legacy argues the reliability of the IE who is the military advocate. The IR uses inference repair technique to clarify what is said and thus takes back the floor.

Inference Repair

- 1IE คุณมนตรีอะ
khun mon-tri: há?
- 2 บอกไว้แล้วเอกสารอย่างที่คุณสมพงษ์บอกไว้แล้วนะ
bò:k wáy lé:w ?è:k-kà-sǎ:n yà:ŋ thî: khun sǎm-phoŋ bò:k wáy lé:w nàh
- 3 ว่ามันมีน้ำหนักความน่าเชื่อถือไหม
wâ: man mi: nám-nàk khwa:m nâ:-chuô-thuǎ: mǎy
- 4 ผมเริ่มตั้งแต่ต้นนะ
phǎm rêm tâŋ-tè: tôn nàh
- 5 ไม่ได้เกี่ยวข้องกับเหตุการณ์หตุลา
mây-dâ:y kìaw-khôn kàp hèt-ka:n hòk tù?-la:

- 6 ผมไม่ได้เกี่ยวนะฮะ
phǒm mây-dâ:y kîəw ná-há?
- 7 แต่ตำรวจตั้งข้อหาผมเป็นคอมมิวนิสต์
tè: tam-rùat tân khô:-hă: phǒm pen khom-miw-nít
- 8 ไปค้นบ้านผม
pay khón bâ:n phǒm
- 9 พากันไปเยอะ หลังหกตุลา
pha: kan pay yó? làn hòk tù?-la:
- 10 หมายความว่าตีวงได้เลยนักเคลื่อนไหว นักกิจกรรม
mă:y-khwa:m wâ: ti:-wonj dâ:y lə:y nák khluôn-wăy
nák-kít-ça-kam
- 11IR อาจารย์กำลังจะบอกว่าสำเนาของสน.ชนะสงครามไม่น่าเชื่อถือ
ʔa:-ca:n kam-lanj cà? bò:k wâ: sǎm-naw khǎ:ŋ
sǎ:-nə: cha-ná?-sǎŋ-khra:m mây nâ: chuə thǔ:
- 12 ถ้าพูดแบบชาวบ้านๆก็คือ เผด็จการกลับมา
thâ: phû:t bə:p cha:w-bâ:n cha:w-bâ:n kô: khu: pha-dèt-
ka:n klàp-ma:
- 13 สน.ชนะสงครามเป็นเครื่องมือ
sǎ:-nə: cha-ná?-sǎŋ-khra:m pen khruəŋ mu:

[translation]

- 1IE3 Mr. Montri
- 2 (I) have said that the document that Mr. Somphong told you...
- 3 Is it reliable enough?
- 4 I started from the beginning
- 5 (I) had nothing to do with the 6th October event
- 6 I did not get involved
- 7 but I was accused of being a Communist
- 8 (the police) inspected my house
- 9 a lot of them were there after the 6th October
- 10 It meant to enclave the activists
- 11 IR You are saying that the suit filed by the police was unreliable?
- 12 In plain language, the dictator was coming back
- 13 by using Chanasonkram police station as a tool

This excerpt is an example of inference repair. In lines 1-10, the IE talks about his hardships after the 6th October event. He believed he was innocent but was strongly suspected by the police detective. A number of police came and inspected his residence and accused him of being a radical activist. The talking point is not clear enough. Then the IR selects himself to speak to infer what is said by the IE by using the inference repair technique in lines 11-13. This is an example of inference repair, the self-selection technique to bring the floor back to the IR.

3.5 *Intentional pause*

Intentional pause is also a technique used by the interviewer to select the next speaker. Before talking about intentional pause I would like to discuss the idea about pause in general first. A pause is a vocal gap naturally occurring for a particular reason. Firstly, it is caused by the physiological requirement of breathing. This kind of pause is a short pause or natural pause because it occurs briefly in between vocal groups. Secondly, it reflects the intention of the current speaker. This kind of pause is an intentional pause. Thirdly, it is caused by the psychological difficulty of speakers during spontaneous speech production. To fill the gap caused by their language incompetence, speakers send out small vocal devices in order to signal that they want to hold the floor. Filled pauses in Thai conversation include single vocal devices, for example, hm, ʔa, ʔə, khâ: (female), khráp (male) and mixed ones, for example, khàʔ.hm, hm.ʔó: (Chaimanee 1996). It is noted that these small vocal devices are identical to those which function as back channel responses as mentioned earlier. Filled pauses caused by the psychological difficulty of the speaker seldom occur on the side of TV interviewers because of their speech competency and fluency in dyadic communication.

There is a distinction between natural pauses and intentional pauses in the data set. To prove this, two natural pauses and two intentional pauses from the IR's utterances have been randomly selected and analyzed by a computer program for phonetic analysis down loaded from internet (Boersma & Weenink 2004). It was found that the onsets of the sampled natural pauses and intentional pauses are measured at 0.496648, 0.517047 msc and 0.969463, 1.076070 msc respectively. The mean values of the sampled natural pauses and intentional pauses are 0.5068475 msc and 1.0227665 msc. Therefore the onset of natural pauses and the intentional pauses made by the IR from the data set are different in ratio, 1.0:2.03. The onset of intentional pauses is longer than the natural pauses. This difference indicates that the IR intentionally makes long pauses for some specific purpose. In this case the IR uses it to signal the turn allocation for the next speaker.

For example:

Intentional Pause

1. IR: มีตรงไหนที่ พ.อ ณรงค์ พูดแล้วคุณไม่เชื่อไหม
mi: tron-năy thî: phan-ʔè:k na-roŋ phû:t lé:w khun mây
chuô mǎy
2. IE: มีครับ
mi: khráp
3. IR: เช่น (*)
chên
4. IE1: ชีวิตส่วนตัว ซึ่งมีทั้งดี และไม่ดี ...
chi:-wít sùen-tuə sūŋ mi: thán di: lé? mây-di:

[translation]

1. IR: Are there any words said by Col.Narong which you don't believe?
2. IE1: Yes there are
3. IR: Examples?
4. IEI: A private life which has both a good side and a bad side

This is an example of an intentional pause used by the IR. In line 3, the IR uses the elliptical clause [chên] 'for example?' excerpted from the well-formed clause [chên ?à-rai bâ:ŋ] '(Can you) give an example?' and followed by an immediate pause (.). This means that the IR intentionally gives the turn signal to the IE. Consequent upon this, the IE selects himself to speak in line 4 to verify the information about Col. Narong. This is an example of an intentional pause used by the professional TV mediator as a signal for turn allocation.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The IR's role is central to the TV talkshow production program. It is used to manage the conversational interaction among the interlocutors to meet the expectations of the audience. This paper shows that the allocation of turn of talk is managed exclusively by the IR in multiparty interviews. The IR plays the major role of allocating turns to the selected speaker. Using the 'current speaker select next' technique, the IR used several strategies to direct the talk, for example, addressing a specific question to a particular participant. The IE to whom the question is directed is obliged to speak while the co-participants are expected to be silent. When the previous speaker has completed his turn to answer, the next speaker's turn is given back to the IR. The right and the obligation of speakership is transferred to the selected speaker and is turned back to the IR soon after the completion of the selected speaker's turn. The IE who is the current speaker does not select the next speaker at the end of his turn. The responses from the IEs are not fixed. They range from a single word utterance to multi-unit turns passing through several possible completion points. Aside from using the answer to question format, the IR allocates back channel supports for the current speaker at the possible completion of turn to signal the current speaker to continue to talk. In addition, the IR uses the immediate interruption, collaborative interruption and inference repair at the relevant non-transitional points to bring the current speaker back to the topic. Intentional pauses are also used to signal the turn allocation for the next speaker.

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