

P3 2009: Overlapping Talk in Research Interviews is Interesting

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Research Purpose: This project examines simultaneous and overlapping talk that is produced in research interviews.

Research Description: This project makes the qualitative research interview a topic of research. It does this by treating an interviewer's utterances as a topic of interest, and by treating an interviewee's answers as jointly produced by the interviewer and the interviewee.

Overlapping talk is a pervasive feature of real-life qualitative research interviews. This occurs despite recommendations to the contrary in the 'how to do it' textbooks (e.g., Rapley, 2004). Recordings of actual qualitative research interviews show that interviewers and interviewees often talk at the same time so that their speech overlaps with one another. However overlaps differ from interruptions (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000).

Several studies have been conducted on overlapping talk in qualitative research interviews (Armstrong, 2007; Henry, 2008; O'Brien, 2006). However these studies have used short extracts of talk from a single research interview and so it is difficult to generalise beyond these findings to account for the recurrent patterns and forms of organisation found in qualitative research interviews.

This project follows the recommendations of Armstrong (2007), Henry (2008), and O'Brien (2006) to replicate this research with a new larger data set. This study examines the hypothesis that Ferguson's (1977) linguistic based taxonomy misclassifies simultaneous and overlapping talk as brief interjectory remarks and various categories of interruptions.

O'Brien (2006) found instances of brief interjectory remarks and simple, overlap, butting-in, and silent interruptions in the interview transcript of New Zealand 2 (van den Berg, Wetherell, & Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2003). Armstrong (2007) found that Ferguson-classified interruptions occurred at potential transition relevant places in the conversation. However the interactional significance of these simultaneous utterances was better understood using the principles for managing turn-taking in conversations (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Henry (2008) found two apparent interruptions within a speaker's continuous turn to talk. However she argued that this instance of overlapping talk was better viewed as local actions produced by the interviewer to assist a respondent during a troubles-telling incident.

These findings suggest that moving from a top-down, linguistic approach to a bottom-up, interactional approach may strengthen our understanding of the form and function of simultaneous and overlapping talk in qualitative research interviews. Secondly, they allow us to consider how the basic organisation of turn-taking is amended by participants to accomplish institutionally-specific goals in social science interview research.

Together, these findings which are based on real-time talk-in-interaction rather than invented, static sentences with hypothesised meanings warrant adopting an evidence-based practice approach to qualitative research training in psychology.

Participants: An archival data base will be used for this project so the student will not be required to recruit research participants.

Methodology: The archival data base used for this project is from the transcript of New Zealand Interview 2 (see van den Berg et al., 2003, pp. 232-261).

This interview was originally conducted for a large-scale research project on race and race relations in New Zealand by Margaret Wetherell in the mid-1980's. Wetherell and Potter (1992) display the methods and the findings of this earlier study.

The original audiotape of this interview was recently re-transcribed in fine detail for a new project displaying different discursive approaches for analysing talk produced in research interviews. So the student will not be required to transcribe the original interview audiotape for this project.

Data and Analysis: A qualitative analysis will be used in this project. It will examine the sequential organisation of talk produced by the interviewer and a respondent in New Zealand Interview 2 (van den Berg et al., 2003, pp. 232-261). This project will focus on a new sequence of conversation about New Zealand role models (pp. 238-242). This data set includes the following overlapping talk (p. 240).

I: Far-right
R: Nn:o I don't think they've got any real [far-right
I: [So there's this sort of band of
I: [a:
R: [There's a band I mean jus
I: K- where they're all the same [basically
R: [There all the s(h)ame

The data will be analysed in three steps. Firstly, it will be screened for the serial, sequential, and adjacency organisation. Secondly, instances of overlapping talk will be identified, and Ferguson's (1977) taxonomy used to classify these as brief interjectory remarks and simple, overlap, butting-in, and silent interruptions. Thirdly, it will be examined for recurrent patterns, distributions, and forms of organisation to show how the participants themselves orient to certain sequential expectations embedded the interview context.

The student will be expected to work closely with the supervisor and other Honours students working on related discursive analysis projects during the analysis phase of this project.

The student will gain the skills and confidence in conducting the analysis by completing the conversation analysis module from the D843 Discourse Analysis course which is offered by The Open University (UK) in the Master of Social Sciences Programme (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001a, 2001b). The supervisor will be responsible for providing this training in conversation analysis.

Student Friendliness: This project is suitable for external and on-campus students. However the student must be available to meet with the supervisor before, during, or after the scheduled Honours Workshop Program so that training in conversation analysis techniques can be conducted. Weekly supervision sessions will be required during the project. These supervision sessions can be conducted by telephone and email, and will vary in length and content to reflect the student's progress.

- Further reading:** Armstrong, A. (2007). *Interviews: Interjections and Interruptions are Interesting*. Unpublished honours thesis, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia.
- Henry, K. (2008). *A discursive analysis of overlapping talk in research interviews*. Unpublished honours thesis, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia.
- Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. (2000). *Interaction and the standard survey interview: The living questionnaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ferguson, N. (1977). Simultaneous speech, interruptions and dominance. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 16, 295-302.
- O'Brien, N. (2006). *Interviews: Interview interruptions are interesting*. Unpublished honours thesis, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, Australia.
- Rapley, T. (2004). Interviews. In C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. I. Gubrium, & D. Silverman (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice* (pp. 15-33). London: Sage.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn taking for conversation. *Language*, 50, 696-735.
- van den Berg, H., Wetherell, M., & Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. (Eds.). (2003). *Analyzing race talk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the language of racism*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. J. (2001a). *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis*. London: Sage.
- Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. J. (2001b). *Discourse theory and practice: A reader*. London: Sage.

Research Outcomes Three research outcomes are expected from this project. The student is expected to: (a) submit his or her completed Honours Thesis to the USQ ePrints archive; (b) submit an abstract for a research poster to the 2010 APS Conference Scientific Committee; and (c) contribute to developing a Masters-level clinical psychology research proposal on overlapping talk in clinical interaction.

Ethics: Ethical approval will be sought by supervisor; or
 Ethics approved – number: EP2009002

Resources: Project able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit
 Project not able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit – additional funds will come from: _____

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