Discourse markers in turn-initial positions in interruptive speech in a Malaysian radio discourse

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Abstract
Discourse markers play significant roles in any spoken interaction. This research examines the functions of the discourse markers (DMs) well, now and and used as turn-initial interruptive devices in a Malaysian radio discourse. Using Schegloff’s (2002) framework of what constitutes an interruption in turn-taking and previous studies on the functions of discourse markers (Schriffrin 1987; Stenström 1994, Jucker 1993; Aijmer 2002), the study seeks to investigate the functional nature of discourse markers in turn-initial positions in interruptive speech. It relies on a detailed analysis of transcribed recordings of four radio talk shows. The participants are observed to use these interruptive devices in turn-initial positions in interruptive speech with different pragmatic functions. The present study rests on the conviction that such discourse particles in interruptive speech have certain functions which signal coherence to a prior utterance or to earlier segments of the discourse and play interactive roles in the interaction process.

Keywords: discourse markers, interruptive turns, turn-taking, pragmatic functions, turn-initial positions

1. Introduction
This research examines the functions of the discourse markers (DMs) well, now and and that are used in turn-initial positions in interruptive speech in four Malaysian radio talk shows. Interruptive speech is the result of an intervention by one participant of the verbal interaction in the ongoing talk of another, which therefore creates communicative dysfluency. My concern in this paper is to investigate why the participants in this particular type of radio discourse respond in the way they do at turn-initial positions in interruptive turns with the use of these
discourse markers. I intend to analyse the meanings of each of the discourse markers and investigate the pragmatic purposes behind their production in the interruptive turns among the participants in the discourse. The frequency of use of these discourse markers in interruptive speech will also be investigated.

2. Literature review

2.1 Turn-taking and interruptions

The norms of the turn-taking structure in casual conversation were outlined in the influential Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974) study, which forms the basis of much Conversation Analysis (CA) research. These norms are concerned with what is systematic about the way speakers decide when to speak during a conversation, how speakers’ turns can be related to each other in sequence and may go together as adjacency pairs, e.g. a greeting + reciprocation, question + answer, summons + acknowledgement, request + compliance, and so on. Moving above the level of individual turns or adjacency turns, conversation analysts are also interested in identifying the sequential norms of interaction in particular settings. For instance, CA has proved to be a comparative tool in the analysis of institutional interactions because baseline interaction sequences from ordinary conversation can be compared with interactions in institutional or other settings, e.g. in telephone call openings (Schegloff 1986) or broadcast talk (Hutchby 2006). According to Drew (2005), CA methods attempt to document and explicate how participants arrive at understandings of one another’s action during the back-and-forth interaction between them, and how in turn they construct their turns so as to respond to prior turn(s). Thus, CA focuses on those features of talk that are salient to participants’ analyses of one another’s talk, in the progressive unfolding of interactions.

What distinguishes casual conversation from radio talk is the variability of the distribution of turns, turn size and turn content. For instance, in talk shows, there is pre-allocation of turns by the radio host and standardisation of turn size. However, in some instances, interruptions do occur when nomination of next speaker by the host does not take place or speakers want to compete for conversational floor in the ongoing interaction.

There have been several interpretations of interruption in the literature. Sacks et al. (1974: 696–673) consider an ‘interruption’ to be a ‘violation to the system of turn-taking in conversation’ and this occurs when ‘at least and not more than one speaker talks at a time during
his/her turn at talk’. In other words, if a speaker cuts into the ongoing talk of another, this will be deemed as a violation to the system of turn-taking in conversation. Fasold (1990) considers that a useful way to define ‘interruptions’ is that a participant might sometimes talk simultaneously with the current speaker in violation of the turn-taking rules. It is sometimes the case that speakers deliberately begin their turn at talk at other positions besides transition relevance places, with the intention of dislodging the current speaker from his/her turn before a natural ending point such as intonational (French & Local 1986) or lexical (Schiffrin 1987).

Other views of what constitutes an interruption include Schegloff (2002: 287–321), who affirms that ‘overlap’ and ‘interruption’ are partially overlapping sets. On the one hand, ‘overlapping talk does not necessarily involve interruption’ (Schegloff 2002: 287–321). For example, simultaneous starts by two speakers, neither of whom has special rights to the turn by virtue of preceding talk, can produce overlapping talk without it constituting an interruption, although, if one of them is the addressee of a question, interruption may be involved. On the other hand, ‘interruption’ without overlap can occur when the newly begun stream of talk is designed by its speaker to be in continuity with and complementary to the talk that is already in progress; and does not embody the conventional sense of aggression or hostility associated with the term ‘interruption’ (Schegloff 2002). Lerner (1996) calls this ‘anticipatory completion’, while Tannen (1993) calls it a ‘collaborative construction’. Therefore, interruptions may occur at speech overlaps, or they may not (Schegloff 2002). We can assume that if an interruption is to be considered successful or unsuccessful, the context in which it occurs, possibly at speech overlaps or non-speech overlaps, and the relation to prior utterance need to be taken into account.

According to Schegloff (2002) an analytical interest in interruption as an interactional event might be pursued along two lines. Firstly, starting to talk while another is already talking directs attention to overlap onset, which is the start of the talking-at-once. The second aspect of ‘interruption’, which is continuing to talk until prior speaker stops, directs attention to what happens after the simultaneous talk has already started, i.e. the conduct of persons talking simultaneously and its outcome. Schegloff (2002: 287–321) further argues that interruptions or ‘successful interruptions’, are not a matter of status, power, dominance, gender, and so forth; only that some sort of linkage in conduct but not in concept, needs to be shown. In view of this, the present study has adopted Schegloff’s (2002) interpretation of ‘interruptions’ by looking at points of interruptions that overlap with the current turn that is in progress.
2.2 Studies on interruptions in media discourse

Some related works on interruptions in media discourse include Bilmes (1997: 507–531) and Cromdal (2001: 421–451), who argue that analyses of conversational interruption must attend to both the interactants’ ways of ‘doing the interrupting’ as well as to their ways of ‘doing being interrupted’. Hutchby (2006) examines broadcast talk and how participants’ orientations to interruptions, rudeness and other impolite acts in talk-in-interaction may be produced, reported and responded to. Cromdal & Karin (2007: 103–127) study instances of interruption in disparate multiparty settings and argue that the work of ‘being interrupted’ is a defining feature of interruptions in conversation analysis (CA) studies. They consider that this may be accomplished by other parties than the interruptee, and also that participants may engage in such work to achieve local interactional goals. Thornborrow (2001: 119–143) also takes a CA perspective by showing how the mediated interactional structure of calls to a radio phone-in limits the range of possible actions available to callers in their institutional position as questioners. Thus, this produces constraints on what callers can actually achieve in the particular context for institutional talk.

Having presented related studies on interruptions in media discourse, I will move on to present the functions of the discourse markers that have been selected for the present study.

2.3 Discourse markers marking speaking turns

Discourse markers (DMs) are linguistic expressions that are used to signal the relation of an utterance to its immediate context, with the primary function of bringing to the listener’s attention a particular kind of linkage of the upcoming utterance with the immediate discourse context (Redeker 1990: 367–381). Some examples of DMs in English include well, now, actually, and, of course and ok. Since the study will only focus on the DMs well, now and and used in interruptive turns, I will provide some interactive functions for these DMs. Stenström (1994) states that well at the beginning of a turn serves as a response marker to what has gone before. For instance, the response of well tends to answer yes/no-questions and signals hesitations, reservations and indirectness. Other related studies on the DM well include Jucker (1993: 438), who proposes four uses of well: (1) as a marker of insufficiency, indicating some problems on the content level of the current or the preceding utterance; (2) as a face-threat mitigator, indicating some problems on the interpersonal level; (3) as a frame marking device indicating a topic change or introducing direct reported speech; and
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(4) as a delay device. Schiffrin (1987: 102–103) argues that well ‘is a response marker which anchors its user in an interaction when an upcoming contribution is not fully consonant with prior coherence options’.

The DM and has important interactive functions as well as forming the initiating move in a turn (Stenström 1994). According to Tannen (1993) and is used in turn-taking to start a new thought. Schiffrin (1987) considers and to have two functions: as a marker of continuation in interaction and as a coordination of idea units. The DM now at the beginning of a turn is used as a transition marker to introduce a new topic and to change the direction of the discourse (Stenström 1994). According to Aijmer (2002), now as a DM occurs at discourse unit boundaries, where it connects the two parts:

The discourse particle now functions as a connective between elements in the topic structure when there is a break in coherence, e.g. because there is a topic change or a major boundary between discourse units.

In turn-taking, it is used to initiate a turn or to hold the floor (Aijmer 2002: 62).

There have also been several studies done on DM use, e.g. Fuller (2002: 23–45), who examines the use of DMs you know, like, oh, yeah, well and I mean in two speech contexts – interviews and casual conversations. She discovers that these DMs are used in similar rates across contexts, indicating that the functions of these DMs are more universal. In her analysis of the use of DM well, she finds that it occurs more frequently in conversations than in interviews, and that well presents itself both as a presentation marker and a reception marker. Well is used less frequently in interviews because the speaker’s role as interviewee does not require as much response to the other interlocutor’s utterances (Fuller 2003: 23–45). A recent research on the use of DMs by L2 speakers include Müller’s (2005) comparative study on the use of four discourse markers (so, well, like, you know) between native speakers of English and German speakers of English. She identifies different frequencies and usages in the use of discourse markers by both groups of speakers and investigates whether the use of these DMs by non-native speakers is related to such factors as time spent in English-speaking countries, the amount of contact with native speakers and formal/informal learning context.

Most studies on DMs have presented a particular discourse marker(s) use and its (their) meaning and functions from different per-
spectives; for example Fox Tree (2006) contrasts the use of discourse markers with other discourse markers; Schourup (2001) searches for the best method to define the meaning and functions of discourse markers; Gonzales (2005) examines coherence relations of discourse markers by contrasting two languages, while Verdonik et al. (2008) focus on the impact of context on the use of discourse markers in two different conversational genres (telephone conversation and television interviews). However, none of the previous studies have focused on the kind of pragmatic functions or the preference for the use of certain discourse markers in interruptive speech in radio discourse, which may contribute to a better understanding of discourse marker use.

3. Methodology

The data are drawn from ThraxFm talk shows, one of the most popular English radio talk shows in Radio Television Malaysia (RTM), a government-owned radio and television network. For the objective of this study, a series of four radio talk shows were audio-recorded. The total length of the corpus is 180 minutes. The source data from the talk show are an instance of institutional conversation, where experts on the topic of the day in question are invited to present their views and expertise to radio listeners. The topics focus on current issues, and radio listeners are invited to call in to voice their opinions or to seek further clarification about the topics concerned from the guest speakers. In each talk show, three participants were involved, namely the radio host and two guest speakers. The talk shows were conducted in English, and all the participants, who come from various backgrounds, have different mother tongues. The guest speakers consisted of 2 Malay speakers, 2 Indian speakers, 2 Chinese speakers, 1 American and 1 German, and they were all males. These guest speakers, who consisted of 6 local speakers and 2 foreign speakers, were experts on the topics and were invited to present their views and expertise for the benefit of radio listeners. The radio hosts were 2 Indian males, 1 Indian female and 1 Malay female. Malaysia is a multi-racial country comprising of Malays, Chinese and Indians, and also other ethnic groups, with different mother tongues. The national language is Malay or Bahasa Melayu, while the second language is English. English is regarded as an important second language for instrumental purposes, to be used for social integration and with a pragmatic function for professional growth and career advancement (Lee Su Kim 2003). In a study by Lee Su Kim et al. (2010), it was found that Malaysians felt more comfortable using English in a wide range of contexts. Therefore English becomes not
just a language for communication, but also functions as equivalent to a first language.

Information about the data is summarised in table 1 below:

Table 1. A summary of the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics of Radio Talks</th>
<th>Hosts</th>
<th>Guest Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Women and Menopause</td>
<td>H1 (Indian-male)</td>
<td>L- (German-male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C- (Chinese-male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Internet and Education</td>
<td>H2 (Malay-female)</td>
<td>N- (Malay-male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A- (Indian-male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cancer Support Programme</td>
<td>H3 (Indian-female)</td>
<td>J- (Malay-male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>J- (American-male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Alzheimer’s Disease</td>
<td>H4 (Indian-male)</td>
<td>S- (Indian-male)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>T- (Chinese-male)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The spoken data from the talk shows were transcribed and points of interruption and overlapping speech, as well as the DMs under study, were identified. The study draws upon two approaches toward analysing interaction. The first approach is the interpretation of an ‘interruption’ by Schegloff (2002) as a means of starting up some intervention by one person while another’s turn is in progress. The focus of the study is to identify interruptions that occur at speech overlaps. The second approach toward the functional analysis of discourse markers involves previous studies on discourse markers (Schriffrin 1987; Jucker 1993; Stenström 1994; Aijmer 2002). These studies provided valuable background for the analysis and the categorisation of the discourse markers well, now and and in conversational interaction. In analysing interruptive speech, the study only looks at the occurrences of these discourse markers in turn-initial positions in interruptive turns. When these seem to occur at turn-initial positions marking interruptive points, samples of the speech are extracted for analysis. The analysis of the data concerned the functions of these discourse particles and the references that have been made to earlier segments of the discourse. A segment of the discourse includes the reference made to earlier speech by the current speaker by the interruptee, or before the interruption takes place.

Samples of the discourse markers are highlighted and indicated according to each extract given. Each extract selected for analysis in the study is referred to as extract (N) data (N). For example, the first speech patterns selected for analysis from Radio Talk 1 is indicated by extract (1) data (1). Each speaking turn in the extract is numbered for ease of reference when the data is discussed. For instance, when a speaking turn is mentioned in the analysis, this is indicated by the number in square brackets such as [8].
4. Analysis of findings

In the data analysed, participants in the radio talk are shown to use the discourse markers *well*, *now* and *and* at points of interruptions in order to fulfil certain interactional demands in the interaction process. 100 occurrences of these discourse markers were identified in the 4 radio talks. Let us look at these interruptive markers in detail.

4.1 The use of *well* as an interruptive device

The analysis provides evidence that the discourse marker *well* exhibits differences in meaning in interruptive turns. In the first sample extract given, *well* at points of interruption in interaction serves as a response marker to what has preceded. An instance of *well* is shown in the following extract, where it displays coherence with earlier speech within the interaction. In other words, *well* marks responses at an interactional level:

Extract (1) Data (1)

[1] H1: so where do you obtain this plant, I’m sure the ladies are dying to know where you can obtain this Black Cohosh =
[2] C: = North America =
[3] H1: = ok otherwise they start dig [ing the back of ]
[4] C: [ Yah @ @ ]
[5] H1: [ their garden ]
[6] C: [ @ @ ]
[7] L: [ well of ] course if you want to buy the product you can buy here in Kay Lay =
[8] H1: = KL [right]
[9] L: [ KL ]

In the above extract, speaker L [7], a German doctor, interrupts to get his turn with the use of *well* in response to the question by H1 about where ‘Black Cohosh’ could be obtained. This is an example of interruptive speech with the use of the DM *well* in response to an earlier question by the host (H1), in which speaker C has already responded that the plant could be obtained in North America. This shows that the DM *well* is used to respond to an earlier statement in the interaction. Following Stenström’s (1994) interpretation of discourse marker *well*, its use is seen as purely cohesive in function, and it acts as a response marker to what has gone before. Note that there are speech overlaps between H1 and L (lines [5–7]) before speaker L gets a turn at talk and responds to H1’s earlier question. These also overlap with Speaker C’s [6] laughter in respond to H1 speech that ‘the ladies’ ‘might start
digging the back of their garden’ if they were not told where ‘Black Cohosh’ could be obtained. We notice here that L interrupts to indicate that it is not only found in North America, but it can also be bought in ‘Kay Lay’, referring to KL (Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia), in which he is further corrected by H1 (turn [8]).

In the second sample extract, the discourse particle *well* occurs in a disagreement sequence:

Extract (2) data (1)

[1] C: that you hate about that can start to occur as early as….ah…the age of [forty]
[2] H1: [yes ] Professor you hate the mood swings as [well ]
[3] L: [eh eh] [well ] no no actually not you know…..I just want to touch a little bit on males=
[4] H1: =ah yes that’s the one we haven’t come to yet

In the above extract, speaker L again uses *well*, but with a different function. He starts with some filled pauses *eh .. eh* before he interrupts with *well* [3] in response to H1’s earlier comment [2]. Here, turn-initial *well* is used when speaker L wishes to get a turn at talk, and there is a speech overlap with H1’s *well*, even though there is a semantic difference in meaning. The host (H1) realises that speaker L wishes to have a turn at talk and thus allows him to have a turn. The extract shows the occurrence of *well* in a disagreement sequence which is evident by the use of ‘no no actually not …’ to display a sort of discomfort on the part of speaker L. Note also the shift in topic at this interruptive turn. In other words, speaker L’s intention is not a response to the previous topic about ‘mood swing’, but indicates that he wishes to ‘touch a little bit on males’. Therefore, the use of the DM *well* here shows the speaker’s intention to hold the turn and to change the direction of the discourse. This follows Jucker’s (1993) suggestion for one of the functions of *well*, i.e. it acts as a frame marking device to indicate a topic change.

Extract (3) below shows the use of *well* as a delay device to compete for floor space in the interaction. Here, the function is not to prevent the current speaker from continuing but simply to announce the intervener’s intention to speak later:

Extract (3) data (4)

[1] H4: in other words, would it be correct to say that um..if..lets say my father..ah..suffers from alzheimers disease..does it naturally mean that I will..the possibilities are there =
[2] S: = the possibilities are there =
Speaker T [5] intervenes by using the interruptive strategy of ‘Well if I may butt in …’ to self-select himself and to take the floor. Speaker T is a Chinese caregiver whose father suffers from Alzheimer’s disease. The interruptive speech overlaps with current speaker S’s turn [4–5] in response to speaker H4’s previous question on the possibilities of developing Alzheimer’s [1]. This is an instance where a participant wishes to respond to the current speaker by announcing his intention to speak with the use of turn-initial well as a turn-holder. The first instance of well [5] with the additional laughter indicates that speaker T is quite hesitant about taking his turn. However, in the second instance of well followed by ‘if I may’ and a repetition of the same phrase ‘if I may’, which indicates a polite request, speaker T is successful in winning the floor. Therefore, speaker S yields his turn to speaker T. In this particular turn, speaker T interrupts to clarify with speaker S that he is ‘twenty-five per cent at risk’ of getting Alzheimer’s. This is also an instance where well is used as a delaying device (Jucker 1993) before a participant gets to hold the floor. Sometimes, due to the fast pace of the discussion, it is important for other participants to compete for the floor. In other words, the discourse marker well used in a turn-initial position shows the speaker’s intention to hold the turn or to compete for the floor.

In the data, we can observe that discourse marker well is the second most frequent type of interruptive device used in the radio discourse. There are 27 occurrences of this type of DM in the data. This interruptive device seems to have different functions in the process of interaction in radio discourse: firstly, it acts as a response marker to what has preceded in the discourse; secondly, it acts as a marker of topic change; and finally, it acts as a delay device before a speaker gets to hold the floor. In analysing the use of the discourse marker well in turn-initial positions in interruptive turns, it is obvious that it serves different functions.

4.2 The use of now as an interruptive device

Another common interruptive strategy used by participants is the use of turn-initial devices such as now, now then or ok now to signal contin-
uation of the topic or to indicate a change in focus or a termination of the current topic. The following extracts show the use of such devices:

Extract (4) data (2)

[1] N: I would like to say that this the first kind of thing in Malaysia that we have done =
[2] H2: = [mm]
[3] N: [ be ]cause it is very interactive =
[4] H2: = mm mm yes we’re moving [on ]
[7] A: = ah….as I said the XXX assessment the first one

The above extract shows the use of DM now when speaker A wishes to intervene in H2’s current turn at talk. Speaker A is an Indian speaker and is an expert on ‘education and the internet’. In the interaction, this indicates that speaker A is in fact monitoring the ongoing interaction and trying to find the best possible place to interrupt the current speaker’s (H2) speech. This is evident when speaker A self-selects by uttering ‘I’ll pick up from what Nazim (N) said’ [5]. In other words, the DM now is used by speaker A to indicate that he wishes to continue with what has been mentioned by speaker N. Thus now in this instance is used as an indicator to win the floor, in which H2 later gives the ‘go ahead’ [6] for speaker A to have a turn in the interaction.

Extract (5) data (2)

[1] A: if you are given the internet connection saying that you want and I’ve given you the pass [word ]
[2] H2: [ok yes] yes you’ve got to set up and every [thing]
[3] A: →[now ] you may think that he’s doing it =
[5] A: = how do you know that he’s [doing it ]
[7] A: now the track that we’re doing will be monitoring whatever individual topic he has done..how he has done and even the test

In the above extract, when speaker H2 [2] intervenes in the current talk of speaker A, speaker A [3] uses a turn-initial signal now to indicate that he has not come to a turn completion, and thus simply chooses to ignore H2’s contribution to the interaction. This instance
shows speaker A again using the discourse marker now but with a different purpose. On this occasion, the use of now acts as a signal to show the relation to the previous activity in the interaction process. In other words, the second turn by speaker A [3] is related to his previous turn in [1]. The second turn is in fact a continuation of his earlier statement that when a student is given the ‘internet connection’ and the ‘password’, there is doubt about whether the student will access the programme. This is evident in Speaker A’s turn when he continues with ‘you may think that he’s doing it’ [3], and later with a repetition in the form of a question ‘how do you know that he’s doing it’ [5]. In this instance, it is clear that speaker A simply chooses to ignore H2’s contribution and continues with his turn at talk. In other words, Speaker A considers H2’s [2] contribution as not relevant to the interaction and thus continues with his speech [3]. So, the DM now is used to show a continuation of the topic, or it functions as a connective between elements in the topic structure when there is a break in coherence (Aijmer 2002).

However, in the following extract the DM now is used to indicate a shift in topic and this is prefaced by the discourse marker ok:

Extract (6) data (2)

[1] A: even three months before the exams it’s every parent’s concern, it doesn’t matter where he is,. if he’s working in the office…he’s sitting late in the office but he can still look at it and see how the child does =

[2] H2: = so parents who want you know…who are very busy who are all over the world, travelling all over the [place ]

[3] A: → [ok now] we have the teacher comes into it, for example if a teacher has a particular student who takes interest in…

Here, speaker A [3] uses the strategy of ok now to indicate to H2 that he wishes to continue with his talk and to signal that he wishes to move on to a different topic. Note that the earlier focus on how ‘parents’ could check on ‘how the child does’ [1] has now shifted to the role of the ‘teacher’ [3]. This is evident in speaker A’s [3] turn with ‘ok now we have the teacher comes into it’. Again, on this occasion speaker A chooses to ignore H2’s contribution to the interaction but interrupts with the device ok now to show that he wishes to continue with his turn. This is an example of a topic shift with the use of the interruptive device now prefaced by ok.

The use of now as an interruptive strategy occurs very infrequently. There are only 8 occurrences of this type of discourse marker in the participants’ interruptive turns. In the few instances where they do occur, now acts as a device to show a relation to an earlier segment of
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the discourse or a previous activity in the interaction process. Another function of this discourse marker is as a device to indicate a topic shift or a shift in focus and this always precedes by ok. In other words, the device is used to indicate that the speaker wishes to move on to a different topic or in saying ‘ok now, let’s move on to the next topic’. Therefore, in the data the DM now prefaced by ok is used as a topic extension marker to show the relation to an earlier segment of the discourse and to indicate a change in topic.

4.3 The use of and as an interruptive device

A topic extension marker, or a marker of continuation in discourse with the use of and, is another turn-initial device used by participants in the discourse during their interruptive turns. This device is seen as functional in that it signals the organisation and structure of the discourse. The following extracts show instances when a turn-initial and occurs at an interruptive turn:

Extract (7) data (3)

[1] I: you have to know that it is within its er..limits if you exceed and you just say that these herbs, then you go on eating, it can become to [xic ]
[2] H3: / and if you don’t I guess you have to ask the experts

In the above extract, H3, an Indian female host, uses a turn-initial DM and which overlaps with speaker I’s utterance. In anticipatory turns at talk, speakers have to anticipate and monitor the current speaker’s ongoing talk in order to find the best possible completion point. The function of this turn-initial device serves as a collaboration in developing the topic of the interaction. Speaker I explains that ‘herbs’ can become ‘toxic’ if one exceeds the limit in taking them, and speaker H3 then adds to this by saying that if one does not know the toxic level of herbs, then one will ‘have to ask the experts’. This is an instance where the DM and is used as an interruptive device to show a collaboration in topic development or a coordination of ideas. We note here that the purpose of speaker H3 in using the DM and is not to expand on the topic but to further develop speaker I’s warning that ‘you have to know that it is within..limits if you exceed’, which speaker H further develops by uttering ‘and if you don’t I guess you have to ask the experts’.

The following extract shows how a speaker interrupts an on-going interaction using the DM and to signal an expansion of the topic:
Extract (8) data (2)

[1] H2: so how...how...would you work through the inter [ net way ]
N: [you know] it's [it's]
[2] A: [ah ] I'll explain that....you know the internet they call it course on [ line ] so the teacher will announce on the net that
[5] H2: [ok ] =
[6] A: = from 9am to 11am on the net =
[7] H2: = I see I see =
[8] A: =
now you have on the internet chat mode or you have some soft [wares] the teacher can go on explaining
[9] H2: [ah ah]
[10] A: what he wants and the student...any amount of students can shoot the course things...and they all be depending on this thing also =
[11] H2: = I see so there still is the element on the internet as [well]
[12] N: [yes] that's right definite[ly ]
you can interact
[14] H2: [but ] personal =
[16] N: [so ] you don’t need to worry whether the teacher is strict or you are scared of the teacher or things like that or another way of actually is...not definitely the teacher must be there all the time...you know...interacting with the teacher...another way we can do is actually like emai [ling]
[17] H2: [mm]
[18] N: = we can email to them any problems that we have so we will get the response as soon as possible =
[19] H2: = yes,yes I see =
[20] N: = that’s another mode also =
[21] H2: [ ok ]
[22] A: [and] secondly in a school in a classroom when they're tea[ching]
[23] H2: [ahah]
[24] A: = normally they will prepare something and the moment the student misses the class he cannot take it [ on ]
[25] H2: [ahah]
[26] A: = so you know now he prepares it and leaves it on the net....and even if he prepares some materials so any day he can look at...you can look back =
[27] H2: = I see it's [ it's all ]
[28] A: [ it's on ] the net

This rather lengthy extract shows an instance of a blatant negative intervention with the use of turn-initial and by speaker A [22], with the
intention that he wishes to pick up on the topic that he has introduced earlier on ‘course online’ on the internet at the beginning of the interaction [2]. In the turn-taking exchanges between speaker A and H2 [2–11], speaker A explains how a student can work through the Net and the availability of the ‘teacher’, in response to H2’s [1] question ‘how would you work through the internet way’. Speaker N gets his turn to speak [16] and continues with the remark that another mode of ‘interacting with the teacher’ is to ‘email to them any problems’. In our discussion earlier, it was noted that speaker A uses the DM now quite frequently at interruptive turns (Section 4.2). Turn [16] indicates the point where speaker A is interrupted by speaker N. Speaker A is able to resume his position after 6 speaking turns [22]. Here, the DM and is used as a turn-initial device to inform the participants that speaker A wishes to continue with his second point by uttering ‘and secondly ...’, giving the idea that his earlier turn is not complete. Speaker A further explains that lessons are planned by the teacher on the net, so there is no problem if the student misses the lesson; s/he can always ‘look back on the net’ in contrast to ‘in a classroom’. We can see that the purpose of speaker A using and as a strategy in this interruptive turn is to indicate that he demands his speaking rights, which he had to give up at the beginning of the sequence. In turn-taking exchanges, participants have to monitor the interaction closely and find the best possible place to interrupt. Even though a speaker is interrupted earlier during his/her turn, he/she tries to find the best possible place to compete for the conversational floor, especially when his/her discussion or explanation is not complete. The use of ‘and secondly’ by the interruptee (A) clearly indicates that the current speaker (N) will have to give up the turn for the interruptee (A) to continue with his speech. So we find here that when there is overlapping speech, the turn-initial word/phrase serves as a marker or indication that gives the interruptee a chance for him/her to continue with his/her turn. In other words, DMs in turn-initial interruptive positions are important because they serve as cues for participants to take a turn at talk.

The topic extension marker and seems to be the most frequent discourse marker used by participants in all four data sets. There are 65 occurrences of this type of discourse marker. This suggests that in radio interaction, participants in the discourse are involved in a certain topic of discussion and are aware of the turn-taking strategies to adopt in order for smooth interaction to take place. It is obvious that when a speaker interrupts a turn with the discourse marker and to indicate that he/she is expanding the topic being discussed, other participants seem to yield the floor to allow him/her to take the floor. In almost all cases the speaker is successful. Such occurrences of and as an interrupt-
ive device are seen as functional, in that they signal the organisation and structure of the discourse. In most instances, this particular discourse marker overlaps with the prior speaker’s utterance. It is obvious here that the participants in this type of radio discourse have to anticipate and monitor the current speaker’s ongoing talk in order to find the best possible completion point to interrupt and to take the floor.

The analysis clearly illustrates that the participants use DM and in turn-initial interruptive turns as a topic expansion marker and also as a collaboration of topic development or coordination of idea units (Schiffrin 1987). In the analysis, it is evident that the use of the discourse marker and in interruptive turns has an interactive function, as well as being a device to form an initiating move in a turn.

4.4 Summary of findings

In this section, I will provide a summary of the findings based on the frequency of occurrence of the DMs under study used by the participants in the corpus. Table 2 gives a summary of the pragmatic functions of these DMs and the frequency of use by the participants.

In analysing the functions of the DMs, we can see that certain DMs serve similar functions. For instance, the DMs now and and are used by speakers in interruptive speech as a topic expansion marker, while DMs now and well are used as topic shift markers. Although these markers are not frequently used, with the exception of a high frequency of and as an expansion marker (55 occurrences), we can conclude that participants are aware of the pragmatic use of these DMs at points of interruption. One interesting finding from the analysis of the data is that although participants come from different backgrounds, they use common interruptive strategies to participate in the interaction process. For instance, speaker A (data 2) uses a lot of and (18 occurrences) in interruptive turns, either by expanding the current topic or collaborating in the development of the topic. The data also record the highest number of occurrences of and as an interruptive device. It might also be possible that certain speakers have preferences for using certain discourse markers at interruptive turns rather than others. For instance, speakers N and I, who are both Malay speakers, frequently use the DM and in 9 and 8 occurrences respectively in their interruptive turns. Another interesting finding is the fact that even though there were 10 local participants (Indians, Chinese, Malays) and 2 foreign speakers (German, American), there is no marked difference in the use of DMs in their interruptive speech. This could explain the universal use of DMs in oral interaction. Since a talk show requires a discussion of the topics in question, it is obvious that participants know their roles in the
Table 2. *The frequency of use of DMs and, now and well in turn-initial interruptive speech and their functions in the discourse.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Frequency of use</th>
<th>Data 1</th>
<th>Data 2</th>
<th>Data 3</th>
<th>Data 4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DM and:</td>
<td></td>
<td>H1</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>H2</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Topic extension Marker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Collaboration of topic development/Coordination of ideas</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM now:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Topic extension marker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Topic shift marker</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DM well:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Response marker</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Topic shift marker</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Delay device</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Description of Participants:

**Data 1**
- H1 Host – Indian male
- L Guest speaker (GS) – German male
- C GS – Chinese male

**Data 2**
- H2 Host – Malay female
- N GS – Malay male
- A GS – Indian male

**Data 3**
- H3 Host – Indian female
- I GS – Malay male
- J GS – American male

**Data 4**
- H4 Host – Indian male
- S GS – Indian male
- T GS – Chinese male
discourse. For instance, the radio hosts do not interrupt that frequently and this explains the low frequency of occurrence of DMs among them. However, guest speakers, who are aware of their roles as informants with their expertise, are also aware that they need to interrupt in the ongoing interaction in order to contribute to the topic in question. The Malaysian participants in the study are also aware of the functions of the DMs used in English, even though English is the second language spoken in Malaysia. The use of such communication styles, in which DMs such as and, well and now are used at points of interruption, show discourse coherence rather than being interpretable as speakers competing for conversational space or a disregard for other participants’ speaking rights. This nature of interruptions could be culturally related in an Asian society in which politeness is highly observed. According to Asmah Hj Omar (1992) the rules of speaking in a society are always related to the cultural value of that society. In other words, speakers in a communicative setting try to maintain a good relationship among the interlocutors and the society as a whole.

5. Conclusion

The various uses of turn-initial interruptive devices seem to show that during interruptive turns speakers use different strategies to mark the relation between immediately adjacent utterances. In the analysis, it is clear that there are certain types of discourse markers used in turn-initial interruptive speech. Such discourse markers have a positive impact on the smooth flow of conversation, in that they help the participants in the interaction to take or hold their speaking turns. In interruptive turns, discourse markers also serve functional roles in displaying the relation between adjacent utterances, between segments of earlier discourse which are further apart; and they also mark the discourse structure for the benefit of the listeners’ understanding as well as for the speaker’s cognitive orientation.

From the analysis, it has also been shown that discourse markers are recognised as fulfilling important functions on the interpersonal levels of spoken discourse. The various DMs that have been selected for the study indicate various features of spoken structure, as well as serving different functions in the interaction process. They reflect sequential characteristics that are related to the functions and performances of such DMs in interruptive turns. These DMs also help to signal the organisation and structure of spoken discourse. In other words, these DMs contribute to the coherent and pragmatic flow of the discourse generated in talk radio.
I have presented arguments to demonstrate that turn-initial devices like well, now and and show significantly different pragmatic functions in interruptive turns. The analysis shows that the discourse marker well functions as a response marker to what has preceded, as a marker of topic shift and as a delay device before an interruption. The discourse marker and functions as a topic extension marker as well as a marker of collaboration in topic development. Now is used as a topic extension marker as well as a signal to indicate a shift in topic. Since a talk show deals with a certain topic of interest in a particular show, it is interesting to note that participants are aware of the functions of these DMs when they are used in the discourse.

*University of Malaya*

**Appendix: Transcription conventions**

Symbols for discourse transcriptions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Notations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speakers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Speaker identity / turn start</td>
<td>:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Speech overlap</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transitional continuity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Final</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Continuing</td>
<td>,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Appeal</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pause</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Long</td>
<td>.....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Medium</td>
<td>....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. Short</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocal noises</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Laughter</td>
<td>@@@@</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Indecipherable syllable</td>
<td>XXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contiguous utterances</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. When there is no interval between adjacent utterances, the second being latched immediately to the first (without overlapping it).</td>
<td>=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. When overlapping utterances end simultaneously and are latched onto by a subsequent utterance.</td>
<td>] =</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other transcript symbols

i. The left-hand margin of the transcript is used to point to a feature of interest to the analyst at the time the fragment is introduced. Lines in the transcript where the phenomenon of interruptions occur are indicated by arrows in the left-hand margin.

ii. Bold print highlights key words and phrases.

References


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