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Being interrupted

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ABSTRACT

The first section of this article argues for an approach to interruption as a participant's, not an analyst's, phenomenon. For analysts, interruption is best treated as a topic, not a resource. The second section examines how participants go about making interruptions OBSERVABLE events in the flow of interaction – in particular, the ways in which they claim violations of speaking rights. The third section considers some of the ways in which such claims are responded to. In the final section, it is suggested that there is a general need for a more systematic approach to the methods through which acts are constituted in terms of the responses they receive. (Interruption, conversation analysis, interaction)

In the literature on interruption, perhaps the most regularly recurring perplexity concerns the identification of actual occurrences of interruption. There is some, although not universal, agreement on the general nature of interruption as a violation of speaking rights. The difficulties arise in deciding when such violation has in fact occurred. In the first section of this article, I illustrate some of the problems involved in any attempt to locate interruption using analyst's criteria. I propose that we rely instead on displayed participant orientation to interruption. In later sections, I use a participant-oriented approach to examine how interruption is generated and responded to.

Both analysts and laypersons make a distinction between normal turn exchange and interruption. An interruption is untoward and violative, an interference with an interactant's speaking rights. Lerner (1989:172) offers the following example:

(1) [GTS]

1	Ken	My opinion of the school system, the Los Angeles
2		school district, dis– district, is the most fucked
3		over,
4	Roger	Yeah well we [all got that opinion
5	Ken	[school system WAIT is the most
6		fucked over school system in the world

Lerner comments: "Since [Ken's] Delayed Completion locates the intervening utterance as interruptive, it can also provide a warrant for the INITIATION of over-

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lap. Current speaker, in effect, has a warrant to 'violate the violater'." Interruption is thus equated with violation. Jefferson (1983:6) characterizes the nature of this violation as "starting up 'in the midst of' another's turn at talk, not letting the other finish." According to West (1984:55), "an interrupting speaker is engaged in violation of the current speaker's right to be engaged in speaking"; Octigan & Niederman (1979:52) observe, "An interruption or overlap is taken as a violation and a sign of conversational dominance" (quoted by James & Clarke 1993:232). James & Clarke conclude (237) that "the word 'interruption', both in ordinary usage and in the usage of most researchers, has negative connotations, implying violation of another's right to speak." Thus we distinguish interruption from normal turn exchange. Interruption is special; and conversationalists, it is thought, will generally avoid doing it.

At one extreme, it has been proposed that all overlapping speech is interruptive (Wiens et al. 1965, discussed by Drummond 1989). However, analysts have realized for some time that not all overlaps are to be treated as interruptive. For example, "backchannel" utterances (Yngve 1970), which are not aimed at taking the floor or disturbing the flow of the original speaker's talk, are not interruptive. Further, at least since the publication of Sacks et al. on turn-taking (1974), we have made a distinction between mid-utterance overlaps and those occurring at a point where the end of the utterance is projectable. Only the former may be interruptive:[1] " 'Interruption' is . . . reserved (roughly) for starts by a second speaker while another is speaking and is not near possible completion" (Schegloff 1987:85). Jefferson 1983, 1986 adds some distinctions which further narrow the range of what we can call (violative) interruption. She finds that there are various conditions under which the production of overlapping talk is systematic and "warranted," and therefore not violatively interruptive. (Sometimes she uses the expression " 'interruption'," i.e., she puts the word in quotes when discussing overlaps that look superficially like interruptions.) Murray 1985 suggests other exceptions.[2]

For the purposes of this essay, "interruption" implies violation of the interrupted party's speaking rights, or at least an attempt at such violation. If there is no such (attempted) violation, there is no interruption. The problem of identifying actual occurrences of interruption can be illustrated by examining data segment 2, from a call-in television show. Phil Donahue (D) and Vladimir Posner (P) are the hosts, and Debbie Brake (B) is a guest expert participating by TV feed. The subject of the discussion is sexual harassment, and they have just finished taking a call.[3]

(2) Donahue–Posner (Oct. 14, 1993)

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1  P:  You know there's one point he ((the previous
2      caller)) may be making (.5) and that is that
3      sometimes women will u:se: .hh this whole issue:
4      .hh (.) an' it– (.) like anyone will there are
5      oppor[tunities (.) among
6  D:       [It is possible to abuse this.
7  P:  Right=
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8 D: =Sit down on a park bench a woman starts crying
9 rape.
10 P: Well I=
11 D: =I don't think th[at– I think that's very rare
12 P: [Well I'll tell you what (.) I
13 (was in) (.) I was in a bu:s in New York City=I
14 got up to give my seat to a woman (.) who told me:
15 (.) I was a *male* sexist (.) *because* I (.) I was
16 taught by my mother that when a woman comes in an'
17 she's got no place to sit down=
18 D: =Yeah
19 P: you: get up as a sign of respect.=
20 D: =She thought [you were be]ing patronizing?=
21 P: [(So you know)]
22 P: =and she thought I was
23 [hitting on her or something. I don' know
24 D: [(you were *izing her) No no no she was
25 sa[ying don't treat me
26 B: [Let me just bring us back t' r:eality [here.=
27 D: [Yeah
28 B: =There's a very big difference betwee::n: .hh
29 calling someone a sexist for giving up their sea:t
30 and actually bringing a sexual harassment claim.
31 ((She goes on to discuss a case they had been
32 talking about previously.))

The first overlap comes at lines 5–6. Line 6 is clearly a mid-utterance overlap, and it brings Posner to a stop in mid-utterance. But is it a violation of Posner's speaking rights? Donahue has apparently seen Posner's point; and Posner, in line 7, validates Donahue's interpretation. It would seem arbitrary to argue that anything has gone wrong in this exchange.

The next instance, in lines 8–11, raises the question of who is "interrupting" whom. At line 9, Donahue has seemingly finished a turn at talk, and Posner begins to speak. But after he says only two words, Donahue (line 11) begins speaking again, continuing his previous turn. Has anyone been interrupted here? Have anyone's speaking rights been violated?

The same questions might be raised in regard to the overlap in lines 11–13. In line 11, Donahue apparently completes what he has to say (in overlap), although he stops and reformulates it a moment after the overlap. It is important to note, though, that we have no way of knowing whether the overlap has anything to do with the reformulation, or whether he would have said something more (or different) had he not been overlapped.

At line 21, Posner does what Ferguson (1977:297) calls a "butting-in" interruption. But it is to be noted that Donahue's talk is not in fact interrupted – he continues his utterance. Is Posner's discontinuation of his own speech to be taken as evidence that he perceives himself to be interfering with Donahue's speaking rights?[4] Not necessarily, as I will argue below.

Lines 19–23 are problematic in another way. Donahue begins line 20 immediately after Posner reaches a point of possible completion in line 19. Posner uses a grammatical continuer to begin line 22. This sort of construction, it has been

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suggested (Goodwin 1981:18–19, Sacks 1992:1.645), places the intervening speaker in the position of having spoken interruptively. This interpretation is strengthened by the fact that Posner attempted to speak in overlap with Donahue (line 21). But Posner's lines 22–23 are responsive to Donahue's line 20, using the same construction (line 20, "She thought you were ... "; line 22, "she thought I was ... "), and offer an alternative to Donahue's interpretation. Despite the conjunction with which Posner begins, this is essentially orderly turn-taking.

Finally (setting aside Brake's line 26 for later), there is the overlap at lines 23–24. Here again we have a clear mid-utterance overlap. But Posner (line 23) goes on to reach a point of grammatical completion (at "her"), continues on to another point of possible completion (at "something"), and continues on to construct another full sentence ("I don' know"), all in overlap. Meanwhile, as we can see from lines 24–25, Donahue hears and responds to what Posner has said in overlap. This seems to be a fairly efficient way of communicating.[5]

Returning to Posner's "butting-in interruption" at line 21: The fact that he quickly stops speaking does not necessarily show that he feels himself to be violating Donahue's speaking rights. It has long been noted in conversation analysis that, when conversationalists find themselves speaking simultaneously, one will typically stop in mid-utterance or complete his sentence quickly, thus minimizing the overlap. A "basic rule" of conversation in our society is "Not more than one party should speak at a time" (Sacks 1992:1.633).[6] Sacks suggests that parties "mark that they interrupted, or that they've been interrupted, by stopping" (526); and generally they do so before their utterance is grammatically complete. But note that, if there is a rule against more than one party speaking at a time, the fact that one party stops can be accounted for directly by this rule,[7] with no reference to interruption as such. The one-party-at-a-time explanation gains force when one considers that either party may stop, and that, even in the case of simultaneous start-up, when neither party has exclusive claim to the floor and there is no question of interruption, one will stop.[8]

What are we to conclude from our examination of segment 2? First, although there are several instances of what a member might call "interruption" in this fragment (particularly if that member were asked to locate interruptions in the transcript), it is hard to say that this is anything other than a normal, lively conversation.[9] The participants seem to be communicating with one another quite effectively and fluently. Second, on close inspection, it is difficult in many cases to decide who is interrupting whom, or even whether there is an interruption at all. If we take the various overlaps and cut-offs in segment 2 to be interruptions, then it seems that many accountably normal conversations proceed largely by means of violations of speaking rights. If we want to claim that these overlaps and cut-offs are NOT interruptive, we will need a proliferating array of qualifications and exceptions.

I propose that the neatest way to cut through these conceptual and analytical thickets is to abandon our notions of interruption as a feature of the turn-taking

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system, and indeed to abandon the notion that interruption is a phenomenon that is independently discoverable by analysts. Instead, we can treat interruption as a normative phenomenon solely produced AND RECOGNIZED by participants. It will not, I think, be controversial to claim that a norm specifies grounds for an objection. But I suggest that it is not the analyst's job to judge whether those grounds are present: that is the participants' job. Furthermore, in any particular situation, participants may not choose to treat a norm as salient, even if conditions might justify its invocation. That is, the norm does not indicate which acts will be taken as violative by participants. Norms are one of the resources we have for doing social life; we drag them out when we need them (Bilmes 1976). Given these considerations, I suggest that we treat as violative not those acts to which a norm CAN be applied, but those to which a norm IS applied. We may speak of a violation only when one or more of the participants gives some sign that a violation has occurred.[10] Even then, we may not say that a violation has occurred, but only that a CLAIM of violation has been made. Interruption, as a violative act, is to be treated as a participant's, not an analyst's, resource. Furthermore, the fact that an overlapped speaker cuts off in mid-utterance is not sufficient sign that a normative violation has taken place. This may merely be a matter of "one speaker at a time." There must be some "objection," "apology," or other signal of violation, though it need not be verbal or explicit.

If participants' normative judgments were made entirely on the basis of how the interaction was shaped, then we as analysts might still have a basis for independently identifying interruption. But participants' reasons for finding a piece of talk interruptive go well beyond considerations of formatting. Further, speakers overlapped in mid-utterance may not feel interrupted in any substantial way if, for example, they think that they have already gotten their point across. As Drummond suggests (1989:152): "THERE MAY BE NO STABLE MESSAGE FORM that fits the label 'interruption' "(emphasis in original). Moreover, even if interruptions were all of a certain formal type, there would be no guarantee that any specific instance of that type would be seen or treated as interruptive by participants. Interruption is based on normative judgments; and it is the participants' judgments, not the analyst's, which are of consequence for the interaction.[11]

The crucial distinction on which my argument is based is that between what a member or other observer might call an interruption, if asked to classify a certain event in conversation, and what is actually treated as a violation of speaking rights within the conversation. As observers, we are inclined to classify any occurrence of "not letting a speaker complete an utterance" (with certain exceptions) as a violation of speaking rights and thus interruptive. But many conversations have multiple occurrences of this sort, which the participants appear to tolerate quite nicely. They may give no indication that any violations have taken place. The way that observers, even competent member-observers, classify interactive events appears to be distinct from the way those events are handled/classified/experienced by participants in the flow of the actual interaction.[12] For purposes of this discussion, in

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order for an event to be an interruption, it is not enough that it meet some formal criteria; it is not enough that it be perceived as a violation of speaking rights by the analyst, by members, or even by the participants themselves. It must be DISPLAYED AND HANDLED as violative within the interaction.

Hutchby, in a very useful article, advocates a sensitivity to "the participants' own displayed orientation to the 'interruptiveness' of particular overlaps" (1992:344); he suggests that "analyzing the situated practices of doing 'interrupting', and of doing 'being interrupted' ... allows us to see interruption as something other than a simple sub-class of speech overlap" (344–45). However, like Bennett 1981, who appeared to advocate a similar participant-oriented approach, Hutchby proceeds with his analyses in a way that departs from his initial insights. First, he insists that interruptiveness in its ordinary meaning (and he proposes no other) involves starting a turn at a point which is not a transition-relevance place. Since such a place is a point of "possible completion" (Sacks et al. 1974:703), it is easy to show (see below) that talk that starts up at transition-relevance places may be treated as interruptive. Perhaps more important, in Hutchby's analyses, he does not insist on a demonstrated participant orientation to the normativity of interruption. Instead, he takes the position that, if an overlap at a non-transition-relevance place is part of an argumentative sequence, it is, by virtue of that alone, a normative (in his terms a "moral") interruption: "confrontation and interruption can become bound up together, in the sense that participants in this setting will often 'do' being confrontational precisely by aggressively invading each other's legitimate conversational floor-space, attempting to close each other down – in short, by 'interrupting' " (350).

We can see the crucial distinction clearly by returning to the talk show fragment:

(3) Donahue–Posner (Oct. 14, 1993)

20	D:	=She thought [you were be]ing patronizing?=
21	P:	[(So you know)]
22	P:	=and she thought I was
23		[hitting on her or something. I don' know
24	D:	[(you were *izing her) No no no she was
25		sa[ying don't treat me
26	B:	[Let me just bring us back t' r:eality [here.=
27	D:	[Yeah
28	B:	=There's a very big difference betwee::n: .hh
29		calling someone a sexist for giving up their sea:t
30		and actually bringing a sexual harassment claim.
31		((She goes on to discuss a case they had been
32		talking about previously.))

Brake's overlap in line 26 would perhaps, for Hutchby, be an example of interruption in the normative sense – a violation of Donahue's speaking rights. It overlaps Donahue in mid-utterance; it stops him in mid-utterance; and it is in some real sense confrontational. Indeed, it is a particularly nice example because the "interruption" is so consistent with the explicit purpose of Brake's talk, which

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is to terminate the current line of discussion. Nevertheless, I would not label this a normative interruption, because there is no evidence that the participants treat it as a violation of someone's speaking rights. (In fact, Donahue, in line 27, seems to treat it as legitimate.) Since the participants do not treat the overlapping talk as out of order, I as analyst have no independent warrant for doing so.

In the next section of this article, I propose to follow through on a participant-oriented approach to normative interruptions. What this will involve is an examination of the ways that interactants do interruption, and especially the ways they do being interrupted.

HOW INTERRUPTIONS HAPPEN

We say that one party interrupts, and that the other party has been interrupted. To interrupt is active, whereas to be interrupted is passive. The grammatical construction reflects and sustains the common understanding: interrupting is something we do, whereas being interrupted is something that is done to us. We say "Don't interrupt," but not (normally) "Don't be interrupted." We speculate on an interrupting party's reasons for interrupting, but not on an interrupted party's reasons for being interrupted. Furthermore, interruptions are felt to have a certain objectivity. Talk, it seems, can be interruptive simply by virtue of being produced at a certain point in the conversation; the fact of the talk occurring at this point is sufficient to make it interruptive.

This way of looking at interruption may be commonsensical, but it is not enlightening. I begin from the question "What are the ways in which interactants make observable to one another that an interruption, in the sense of a breach of speaking rights, has (allegedly) occurred?" This work can be done by either (or both) parties to the interruption. What is crucial is not simply that the occurrence could be seen as a breach, but that it is in fact demonstrably taken as such by at least one of the parties.

This perspective is most immediately derived from the associated traditions of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. Ethnomethodology is particularly concerned with the "work" that goes into producing the recognizable and orderly and palpably factual – the "observable-and-reportable" social world in which we live (Garfinkel 1967:1). Conversation analysts pursue this concern specifically with regard to talk-in-interaction. Harvey Sacks would sometimes precede a verbal noun with *do* or *doing*; thus we find such expressions in his lectures as "doing promising" (1992:2.426), "do understandings" (2:426), "doing formulating" (1:515), "doing provings" (2:251). This emphasized the nature of the action as an organized set of practices, as a practical accomplishment. A related form was "doing being," as in "doing being ordinary" (2:215), "doing 'being a phony' " (1:329), and "doing being in that setting" (Schegloff 1991:61). In this way Sachs emphasized that both actions and states are interactants' achievements. "Doing interruption" is directly analogous to, say, "doing promising"; but "doing being

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interrupted" is rather different from "doing being ordinary" or "doing being casual," because being interrupted is not a state. It is what we might call an "action reciprocal"; it is one aspect of the act of interruption.

The work of the ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts on this matter has some precedent in earlier work. Erving Goffman repeatedly showed us that being who we are, and producing the interactional environments of everyday life, takes a lot of effort and vigilance. Other precedents are in the work of students of communication, such as Ray Birdwhistell, Albert Scheflen, and Adam Kendon, who came to realize that spoken interaction is not organized as an alternation of active speaker and passive listener. Rather, the listener is an active participant in the speaking turn – sending a stream of signals in the form of facial expressions, gestures, postural variations, eye movements, and small vocalizations. In short, if one seeks to understand what is going on in a social scene by reference to the behavior of any one particular participant, one is probably on the wrong track.

Doing interrupting

I consider only very briefly some of the ways in which one can "do interrupting." By this expression I mean not only that a speaker is performing an act that can be construed as interruptive, but that the act incorporates some special work which constitutes a display of interruptiveness; i.e., the act shows an orientation to interrupting as such. It is possible to obstruct another's flow of speech, and to show an orientation to doing so, without suggesting that one is violating the other's speaking rights. We see this in the following extract from a discussion between attorneys at the Federal Trade Commission:

(4) (FTC – L 7/13)

1	P	D'we know how many people there are in each age
2		( ) uh uh ( ) of [each different age? (6) [C'z=
3	C	[mm [(**)
4	P	=if that's gonna be necessary f'r the mortality
5		estimates, (8)
6	C	How many people total (1) number of loans
7		outstanding, (1 7) uh (1)
8	P	For example number of loans outstanding ( ) ar–
9		ar– is– there than [one loan per customer? (1 2)=
10	C	[(*)
11	P	=A nd are we satisfied w'th (7)
12	C	Okay wait you're asking do we know how many people
13		we're talkin' about here we know how many loans
14		're outstanding (1)
15	P	Right

In line 12, C cuts into P's turn. Although C's line 12 is preceded by a 0.7-second pause, P is grammatically and intonationally in the midst of an utterance; and C explicitly recognizes this with her "wait." Although this is an explicitly displayed cut-off of P's turn, there is no indication from either party that a violation of speaking rights has occurred.

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Another way that one can display oneself as obstructing completion of an utterance is by overlapping in a voice much louder than the current speaker, thus indicating an intention to prevent that speaker from completing the utterance. Again, this does not in itself point to a violation of speaking rights. The very aggressiveness of such moves suggests that the interrupter is asserting a right to speak.

There are occasions, however, where interactants display that they recognize themselves to be interfering with the other's utterance, and also that they may be committing a violation in so doing. An example from Hutchby (1992:348) will serve. C is the caller to a radio talk show, and H is the host:

(5) [G:26. 11.88:7.1]

1 C: I'm actually phoning in: support of the
2 stu:dents, .hh and also be[cus I::–
3 H: [Wuh e–ca– can I just
4 interrupt you, wu– [were] w– were=
5 C: [Yes]
6 H: =you actually on the demonstration yesterday?

Requesting permission to interrupt (lines 3–4) is one way of displaying an orientation to the other's speaking rights. Another way is by incorporating an apology into the interruption ("I hate to interrupt, but . . . ") In these ways, and perhaps others, interactants do interruptions.

Doing being interrupted

I have found three major ways in which interactants display that their turn at talk has been improperly interrupted. As already suggested, simply cutting off one's speech is not, in itself, one of those ways. One might feel that one has been properly cut off; or, finding oneself speaking in overlap, one might simply stop, making no normative judgment at all. The three types of doing being interrupted that I propose – direct claims, interruption displays, and ignoring – are not mutually exclusive, and there are some ways of doing being interrupted that seem to fit more than one type. The categorization is for organizational and heuristic purposes.

Before proceeding, something needs to be said about the source of the data used in the following pages. Most of the examples are from two televised political debates. A political debate is a special sort of speech event; it is not ordinary conversation. I believe that interruption, as the term is used here, is more frequently and readily observable in debates with a high degree of interaction than in ordinary casual conversation. The closest analogy in everyday talk is probably argument. Some of the determinants of what can be treated as interruptive are inherent in the debate format, and I note where that is the case. Nevertheless, the debaters have to produce coherent discussions, and so are subject to the ordinary conversational constraints. Debaters' resources for displaying interruptive violations are greater than those available in ordinary conversation,[13] but otherwise

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not different. Of course, further research may prove otherwise, but this is a qualification that applies to all data sets.

Direct claims. The most obvious and straightforward way to do being interrupted is to claim, more or less explicitly, that one has been interrupted. Here is a clear example,[14] from the 1992 vice-presidential debate.[15] Senator Gore (G) is speaking about the Republican Party platform (Q is Vice-President Quayle):

(6) 1992 VP debate

1	G	E.ven in ca.ses ( ) of rape –and incest ( )
2		th eir platform ( ) requi.res ( ) that a woman be
3		penalized ( ) that she not be allow.ed to make –a
4		choice ( ) if she believes ( ) in consultation
5		with her family, hh or her doctor, ( ) ah –and
6		others whoever she chooses (5) that (8) sh e
7		wants to have –an abortion after ra pe or incest
8		They make [it completely illegal under any of=
9	Q	[Do you support a twenty four hour
10		waiting period
11	G	=those –circumstances Now they wanna ( )
12		[waffle around on it=
13	Q	[Do you support a twenty four hour waiting period
14	G	=Let me finish this briefly=Now ( ) now you wanna
15		waffle around on it and give the impre.ssion that
16		maybe you don't really mean what ya say but again
17		you can clear it up by simply repeating hh I
18		suppor t the ri ght of a woman to choose

Quayle, at lines 9–10 and 13, speaks in overlap with Gore's ongoing turn. Gore reacts in line 14, asking Quayle to let him finish. Quayle's interjections cannot be treated as backchannel utterances. They are longer than utterances that we would usually call backchannel; but this is perhaps not decisive, since backchannels do not seem to have any specific length requirements. Like backchannels, Quayle's interjections do not seek to take the floor away from the current speaker. In fact, since they are questions, they specifically offer the floor to Gore; but unlike backchannel utterances, they seek to change the course of Gore's talk. Quayle's remarks are not a bid for a turn at speaking. Gore's complaint, then, does not necessarily refer to the fact that Quayle is interfering with his utterance by speaking in overlap; it could refer to another aspect of Quayle's utterance, namely that it is a question, and that responding to it would constitute a diversion from a line of talk. However, since Quayle's talk occurs in the midst of Gore's, it could be claimed to be interruptive on that score alone. In fact, it is only when Quayle asks his question a second time that Gore objects, which suggests that the problem may be PERSISTENT overlap. Perhaps all we can say here is that the sequentially disruptive nature of Quayle's overlapping talk seems to make it more interruptive.

We might contrast this with an exchange between Vice-President Gore (G) and Ross Perot (P) in their 1993 NAFTA debate, moderated by Larry King (K):

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(7) NAFTA debate

1	P	Yu ess ((U S)) companies ( ) because it is so
2		difficult to do business in this country (5)
3		can't wait to get out of this country and go
4		somewhere el se (5) a nd –if possible (8) to get
5		labor that costs one seventh of what it cost
6		in the Un[ited States
7	G	[How would you change it (1) How would
8		you change it
9	P	Very simply I would go back n– uh study (5) first
10		( ) we sh' look at this –it doesn't work
11	G	Well what spe[cific changes would you make in it
12	P	[(*)
13		(2)
14	P	I can't (5) unless you let me finish (5) I can't
15		answer your question now ( ) you asked me ( ) and
16		I'm tryin' to [to (tell you)
17	G	[awright –well you brought your
18		char ge t– t'night so I wanna know what specific
19		[changes you would like to make in the( )in the treaty
20	K	[(***) you're [against it ( ) let 'im respo[nd (*)
21	P	[(*) [How can
22		I answer if ( ) you keep interrupt[ing
23	G	[Go ahead (*) go
24		ahead (1)

In line 11 and again in line 17, Gore speaks at what are claimably transition-relevance places. Both times, Perot claims to have been interrupted, and he gets some support from King in line 20. The problem for Perot is not that answering Gore's questions would change the line of his talk – since Perot, by his own account, is trying to answer those very questions. The problem is simply the "noise" that Gore is making, which both Perot and King find disruptive. Note also that what is at issue is neither overlap nor grammatical/intonational completion, but whether the speaker has completed his utterance.[16] This point is made even clearer in the continuation:

(8) NAFTA debate

25	P	Okay (5) no w (1) first (2) study thee ( ) things
26		that work the European community (4) trade
27		agreement we enter into (5) must ( ) r equire he–
28		ah– a social tariff I would say (5) that (5)
29		m akes it an even playing field ( ) then gives
30		Mexico an incentive to raise the standard of
31		living of its people which it does not have now
32	G	Okay can I [respond now?
33	P	[(*) standard of living (*)
34	G	Okay=
35	K	=Okay [(*)
36	G	[now –so ( ) your basic response is –you
37		would change it by raising tariffs
38	P	I just started but you interrupted

In line 32, Gore begins at what might seem, on most counts, to be a reasonable speaker-transition point. Perot has completed a sentence, and seemingly a thought;

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he does not attempt to rush through into another sentence. Yet in line 38 he claims that Gore has interrupted him. This is not entirely unreasonable, since he presented his point in lines 25–31 as the first in a list.[17]

Extract 6 provided us with an example of talk that was objectionable in two senses: (a) Quayle's questions were "noise" in Gore's speaking turn; (b) the questions were an attempt to disrupt Gore's line of talk. Extract 7 demonstrated that the first type of disruption could occur without the second, and still be found objectionable. But do we also find the second type of disruption without the first? The answer is yes, but we do not call it interruption. (M is the moderator in the following exchange.)

(9) 1992 VP debate

1	G	Yeah I– I– I wanna ( ) I wanna talk about this
2		because hhh the question ( ) was not about free
3		tra de (5) or education hh the
4		[question was about lemme– now I let you talk
5	Q	[Talk about waffling you're the one that brought up
6		the issue of waffling (5)
7	G	Dda[n let ( ) n I let you talk l– lemme talk=
8	Q	[And he's waffled on the abortion issue
9	G	=now ='s gonna be a long evening if ya– if y'r
10		like this now because=
11	Q	=No i– no it's [not (*)
12	M	[(*[**)
13	G	[Don't change the subject ( )
14		don't change the subject (8) because what
15		[you have– what you have done
16	Q	[(*) answer my questions (then) (5) answer my
17		questions =on the twenny four hour waiting period
18		do you support that?
19	G	I have had [the same position on abortion in=
20	Q	[Do you support that?
21	G	=favor of a woman's right to choose =Do you
22		support a woman's [right to choose
23	Q	[D'you– d'you support a twenny
24		four hour [waiting period (to ha ve reflection)
25	G	[You're still avoiding
26		( )
27	G	[you're still avoiding the question
28	Q	[Talk about avoiding the question

Although there is an accusation of interruption in lines 4, 7, and 9–10, something else is going on here. In lines 1–4, and again in lines 13–14, Gore suggests that Quayle has "changed the subject"; and in the lines that follow, each accuses the other of "avoiding the question." These are ways of formulating talk that, although it may not be out of turn, is "out of sequence" and therefore disruptive. It is apparent that such characterizations as "changing the subject" or "avoiding the question" are, in many contexts at least, objections to violations of proper conversational procedure.

To return to the major point of this section: one way to display another's talk as interruptive, the most direct way, is simply to explicitly claim that one has been

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interrupted, has not been allowed to finish, or the like. If such purported interruptions were apparent to all, simply by the fact of their occurrence – if we noted every claimable interruption as an actual interruption – there would be much less point to this display procedure. When, for example, someone is punched in the face, the recipient rarely says, "You hit me." Whereas some obstructions of another's talk may be objectively observable, it is up to the participants to decide and display whether such an obstruction (or indeed, a piece of talk which is not obviously an obstruction) is, for them, a violation of speaking rights.

Interruption displays. By this term I mean the various verbal and non-verbal displays – of annoyance, of determination to hold the floor, of being obstructed – that one may use to indicate that the other's talk impinges on one's speaking rights. (Technically, then, we are speaking of "being-interrupted displays.") While cut-offs are themselves not necessarily displays of having been interrupted, they are often accompanied by other interruption signals. The Gore–Perot debate is replete with interruption displays in which Perot stops in mid-utterance and casts an annoyed glance at Gore. The glance indicates that he has taken offense, and the cut-off signals the nature of the delict. The Gore–Quayle debate contains a rather interesting example of an interruption display, which occurs during Gore's opening statement at the beginning of the debate:

(10) 1992 VP debate

1 G: ... I'll make you a deal this evening. If you
2 don't try to compare George Bush to Harry Truman,
3 I won't compare you to Jack Kennedy.
4 ((laughter from audience and from Quayle))
5 G: Harry [Truman
6 Q: [You remember the last time someone compared
7 themself to Jack Kennedy? You remember what they
8 said? (2)
9 G: Harry Truman is worth remembering ...

Quayle's talk in line 6–8 occurs during Gore's opening statement, and for that reason could be said to be out of place. But it could also be argued that Quayle has some limited speaking rights at this point, because Gore has just addressed him and in fact taunted him. Even taken literally, Gore's lines 1–3 is a first pair-part, an offer of a "deal," and thus calls for a response from Quayle. However, an opening statement in a debate is a privileged monolog, and should not be subject to competing talk. Quayle, like Gore, waits for the laughter to die down and then begins to speak, only a fraction of a second after Gore restarts. Gore yields to Quayle almost immediately. He allows Quayle to complete two sentences, and even leaves two seconds of silence after Quayle has finished (line 8). Gore does, however, make what I take to be a non-verbal show of being interrupted. When Quayle begins speaking, Gore stops talking and, after a moment, turns his head and glances briefly toward Quayle. Then he resumes his straight-ahead orientation and looks down, opening his mouth slightly and then closing it. He then

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looks up and opens his mouth again, but says nothing [18] Only when it is clear that Quayle's utterance is done does Gore speak again That is, Gore extends his cut-off two seconds beyond Quayle's actual talk, as though underlining the disruptive effect of Quayle's interruption (Perot repeatedly used such "extended cut-offs" in his debate with Gore) Thus Gore, without any display of ill-temper, makes it evident that Quayle's talk constitutes an interruption This sequence has further interest, and I return to it in the next section

If cutting off one's speech can be part of an interruption display, so can the contrasting act of continuing to talk in overlap But just as a cut-off is not in itself sufficient as an interruption display, it is also the case that mere continuance is not a sufficient display there must be a show of insistence and/or annoyance Facial expressions, gestures, grammatical devices, repetition, and raised voice may be involved The following example is not ideal data It was not transcribed from a recording but from memory, immediately after the occurrence of the event I am confident, however, that the crucial details are accurate The setting is an academic conference, and A is criticizing a paper that B has just presented

(11) conference (remembered)

1	A	and it might be possible to argue that this is
2		an invitation
3	B	As a matter of [fact I
4	A	[BUT ( ) BUT
5	B	Sor[ry
6	A	[BUT this would not really affect anything

A uses a number of techniques to demonstrate that he considers B's line 3 an interruption He overlaps B's line 3 with "but," thus making line 4 a grammatical continuation of lines 1–2 He raises his voice and repeats the word "but" until it is clear that B is no longer competing for the floor I do not recall his gestures, if any, but his facial expression could be characterized as one of exasperation A responds to this display by acknowledging, with an apology (line 5), that he has violated B's speaking rights

Ignoring The final technique that I consider here for doing being interrupted is ignoring what the interrupter has said, thereby treating the interruptive utterance as illegitimate, null, and void Ignoring someone is perhaps the sincerest form of insult – and, in the realm of manners, the deepest cut of all – but it can be used to express disapprobation as well as contempt [19] In one sense, you can ignore anything that is perceptible to you You can ignore a stranger passing in the street But interactional ignoring occurs only when the ignoree has some possible claim on your attention Ordinarily, we are said to ignore only the things to which we could be expected to attend Ignoring is a positive act of not-doing it is an act produced through an absence, and so related to conversational silence (see Bilmes 1994) [20] Most significantly, for our present purposes, ignoring is a way of sanctioning out-of-place talk For our first example, we return to an exchange quoted in the previous section

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(12) 1992 VP debate

1 G I'll make you a deal this evening If you
2 don't try to compare George Bush to Harry Truman,
3 I won't compare you to Jack Kennedy
4 ((laughter from audience and from Quayle))
5 G Harry [Truman
6 Q [You remember the last time someone compared
7 themself to Jack Kennedy? You remember what they
8 said? (2)
9 G Harry Truman is worth remembering

Quayle, in lines 6–8, asks two questions. A question is a first pair-part, and therefore provides the resources for its own ignoring. All that one need do (with certain exceptions), to show that one is ignoring a first pair-part, is to not provide an appropriate second. This is in contrast to cases where the to-be-ignored utterance is not a first pair-part; there one needs to do some special work to show that the utterance is being ignored. Gore yields the floor to Quayle, giving him an uncontested space in which to ask his questions. Then Gore proceeds to ignore those questions, clearly indicating that he considers Quayle's talk to be out of order. (The fact that he restarts, in line 9, what he had begun in line 5 also suggests that he has been unaffected by Quayle's intervening turn.) By allowing Quayle to speak in the clear rather than contesting the floor, Gore makes it evident that he has heard Quayle's questions and is ignoring them.

In another previously cited exchange, Quayle raises questions in full overlap with Gore:

(13) 1992 VP debate

1 G E.ven in ca.ses ( ) of rape –and incest ( )
2 th eir platform ( ) requi.res ( ) that a woman be
3 penalized ( ) that she not be allow.ed to make – a
4 choice ( ) if she believes ( ) in consultation
5 with her family, hh or her doctor, ( ) ah –and
6 others whoever she chooses (5) that (8) sh e
7 wants to have –an abortion after ra pe or incest
8 They make [it completely illegal under any of=
9 Q [Do you support a twenty four hour
10 waiting period
11 G =those –circumstances Now they wanna ( )
12 [waffle around on it=
13 Q [Do you support a twenty four hour waiting period
14 G =Let me finish this briefly=Now ( ) now you wanna
15 waffle around on it and give the impre.ssion that
16 maybe you don't really mean what ya say but again
17 you can clear it up by simply repeating hh I
18 suppor t the ri ght of a woman to choose

Gore completes his utterance without addressing Quayle's question For Quayle to get his question replied to, he will have to place it legitimately (non-interruptively) in the conversation. In this exchange though, in contrast to excerpt 12, Gore is not as openly ignoring Quayle's question, or not ignoring it in as aggravated a fashion. "Let me finish this" treats Quayle's talk as interrup-

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tive, and thereby accounts for Gore's ignoring the content of the talk.[21] To ignore someone's talk without giving an account, even when the ignoring itself implies interruptiveness, is generally more deeply offensive or contemptuous.

The following extract is of special interest, in that it shows that interruption may apply not only to sentences or utterances, but also to conversational exchanges. The setting is a conversation among Federal Trade Commission attorneys. Paula (P) is explaining why she wants to pursue a certain charge against a loan company. The charge is that the company is illegally asking female loan applicants about their marital status. The charge, as currently stated in the draft memo under discussion, does not include a penalty, merely a cease-and-desist order. Ben (B) has questioned the need for the charge, and Paula is arguing for its importance. Mary (M) has participated in the writing of the memo.

(14) FTC (SP – 10/7)

1	P	U h (3) for the deterrence value of having
2		this in an order (5) If creditors don't ask (1)
3		and don't have the information (1) then they can't
4		intentionally discriminate on the basis of marital
5		status hh If they have the information (1) then
6		we have to con– then– we are put to a much
7		greater burden as an enforcement agency in
8		determining whether or not they've used it
9		illegally =
10	B	=(It will happen) if the deterrence if you
11		charged them ten thousand dollars for each time we
12		were able to ((prove a violation)) and no
13		deterrence if it's issued in (a consent order)
14		((without a penalty)) (1) Nothing (1)
15	M	So why don't we charge 'em (1) I don't
16		have any prob[lem with not charging
17	B	((to P)) [You know that I mean it's just
18		another piece of paper (4 5)
19	P	I have to believe that my work is meaningful
20		because (*)

In line 17, Ben may appear to be speaking interruptively, in that he begins to speak at a point where Mary is in mid-utterance. She has not reached a transition-relevance place, nor a point at which the rest of her utterance is projectable. (Mary does, however, continue to speak in overlap to a point of possible completion, as does Ben; and aside from the placement of the talk, there is no actual display of interruptiveness.) I suggest that the placement of Ben's talk in overlap is in fact part of his display that MARY is speaking interruptively. Mary, it is true, has waited for a TRP to begin her utterance; in fact, a full second of silence precedes her start-up. As we have already seen, one technique available to a first speaker, to put a second speaker in a possibly interruptive position, is to re-start the talk with a grammatical connector, thereby indicating that the first speaker was not finished talking. This is not what Ben does. Ben is not claiming that Mary has interrupted his turn: Rather, Mary has interrupted an exchange-in-progress.

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In lines 10–14, Ben is visibly pursuing a response from Paula. He makes his point and pauses for a second. Getting no response, he drives his point home with one emphatic word ("Nothing") and again pauses. When Mary speaks, Ben shows that he considers her talk out of place in a number of ways. He begins to speak again, without waiting for her to finish. He addresses himself not to Mary but to Paula; and he ignores what Mary has said. This is especially noticeable because Mary has produced a suggestion, a first pair-part calling for an assessment. In effect, he tells Mary that we're doing something here, so don't interrupt. This interpretation is supported by the very long pause (4.5 seconds) that follows Ben's lines 17–18. This is a space in which Mary might repeat her suggestion, which has not yet been responded to. But she does not speak. She appears to recognize that any talk on her part would be received as interruptive of the event currently in progress. (It seems relevant that Ben is her organizational superior.)[22]

To claim that a bit of talk is interruptive is to claim that it is out of place, and therefore illegitimate. Since it is illegitimate, it may be treated (in the technical jargon) as sequentially non-implicative. That is, one need not respond to it; it may be ignored. Thus we may take the fact that an utterance is ignored as possibly signaling that it is considered by the ignorer to be interruptive or otherwise illegitimate. It follows that a participant may USE ignoring as a way of indicating that he or she finds an utterance to be illegitimate.

RESPONDING TO CLAIMS OF INTERRUPTION

I consider in this section two major modes of response to a claim of interruption: acceptance and rejection. The treatment will be brief and non-exhaustive, just enough to give some notion of the range of possibilities. A simple and direct way of accepting a claim of interruption is to apologize, as in ex. 11. An apology presupposes a delict. The failure to respond to a claim of interruption may also be taken as acceptance of the claim. It has been noted in the literature (Atkinson & Drew 1979) that, if one fails to deny an accusation, the absence of denial may implicate admission of guilt. However, in the face of indirect claims of interruption, this implication may be absent, perhaps because the purported interrupter can be taken to be unaware of the claim.

Claims of interruption may be difficult to contest, because speakers are thought to have definitive knowledge of whether they have finished their utterances. Perot repeatedly complained of Gore's interruptions. Gore could not be certain that his attempts to take a turn would not be received as interruptive, and he began to ask for permission to speak, as in ex. 8: "Okay can I respond now?"[23] Gore resorted also to another practice, which I call "placemarking":

(15) NAFTA debate

1 G: Okay now I'd like to respond to that (.) o[kay
2 K: [(*[*)

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3 P [(**)
4 G W– ah ( ) but I– ( ) all right go ahead [I– I– I=
5 K [(*) (5)
6 (*) both of you our time is equal
7 G =do wanna respond

In line 1, Gore asks permission to respond. Apparently, Perot objects. Then Gore, in line 4, tells Perot to continue; but he mentions that he would like, eventually, to respond. Sometimes in conversation a participant will want to respond immediately to a point being made by a current speaker. As Jefferson (1986:160) writes,

> if what has been – adequately and syntactically possibly completely – said so far is something to which a recipient wants to respond, and now it looks like the speaker is at least continuing and perhaps moving on to other matters, then one might want to get in now, while the initial matter is still relevant, even if it means interrupting.

Since Perot is insistent on finishing his utterances and intolerant of competing talk, Gore "placemarks" in lines 4 and 7 with "I do wanna respond." By doing so, he provides for the future relevance of the point to which he wants to respond. He suggests that the listener withhold judgment because the point is controversial; and he lets it be known that when his turn comes, rather than responding to the last point made by the previous speaker, he may return to the point which he has "marked." In addition, and this is important in a debate format, he tries to reserve a space to speak immediately after Perot concludes his turn. If he did not do this, the moderator might change the topic.

There are also various methods by which a participant may contest a claim of interruption and maintain that his or her talk is not out of place:

(16) NAFTA debate

1 P It is a matter of record how much Mexaccord
2 spent it is a matter of record how much yu ess ay
3 ((U S A)) nafta has spent (5) you take
4 G Why isn't it a [matter of record how much you all=
5 P [I– (*)
6 G =spent (1) Can that be a matter of public
7 record Can you release those numbers? (1)
8 P I'd really appreciate bein' able to speak (*)
9 K Well (*) it was a que[stion (*)
10 P [I really (*[*) speak
11 G [It's a fair
12 question isn't it? I– I raised it earl[ier
13 P [I (*) ( ) my
14 understanding tonight we had a format where you
15 would ask the questions
16 K Okay ( ) [(*)
17 P [I would (*) I– I [(*)
18 K [Well if he makes a
19 statement he uh just tryin' to [balance so that=
20 P [(*)

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21	K	=the answers [(**)
22	P	[I would like
23	G	Okay [go ahead
24	P	[I would like to finish ( ) [a sentence (1)=
25	K	[awright
26	P	=just once (5) (before the program's over)

Although Gore does eventually yield to Perot, in lines 11–12 he contests Perot's claim of interruption. The crucial matter here, I suppose, is not merely that the question is "fair," but that Gore has raised it earlier and not received an answer. Apparently, in Gore's view at least, if a question has been raised and gone unanswered, it is permissible to re-raise it even in the midst of Perot's utterance, given that Perot has provided for its relevance. Perot, by raising the topic, has reactivated his unfulfilled obligation to answer – an obligation which, as far as Gore is concerned, takes precedence over Perot's right to complete his utterance. It appears from lines 9 and 18–19/21 that King is in agreement with Gore on this point.

The normative structure of questioning is fundamental to my other examples as well:

(17) 1992 VP debate

1	G	How can you talk about family values, Dan, ( )
2		and twice (5) veto ( ) the family medical leave
3		act
4	Q	A– as our (5) family leave act ( ) an– because
5		it goes to small businesses where the major
6		problem is hh your proposal hh excluded small
7		business that's th– that's the problem =Now let me
8		talk about health care (*[*)
9	G	[Did you require it? (8)
10	Q	(*) my– [my tur– my– my tur n (1)
11	G	[Did you require it? (8)
12	Q	(*)=
13	G	Did you requi[re=
14	M	[(**)
15	G	=[(**)
16	Q	[Lighten up Al ( ) my turn
17	G	It's a free discussion
18	Q	Take a breath Al Inhale
19		((audience laughter, then applause for 7 seconds –
20		G cuts in after 2 second))
21	G	It's a free discussion
22		((laughter continues – G cuts in again))
23	G	Did you require (1 5) did you require family
24		leave in that legislation yes or no

Quayle objects to Gore's line 9 on the basis that it is his (Quayle's) turn. This type of objection is especially common in debates, where there is concern for the fair distribution of speaking turns and speaking time. Although Quayle is clearly in the midst of an utterance when Gore speaks, Quayle is not basing his objection on a right to finish as such. Rather, since Gore has just taken an extended turn, Quayle is claiming a similar right. The claim is not merely that he is in the midst

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of an extended utterance, but that he has an occasioned right to produce such an utterance. Gore defends his action by correctly invoking the fact that they are in a "free discussion" section of the debate (lines 17, 21). But Gore's justification does not deal with the issue of fair distribution of talk; nor does it recognize that, even in "free" conversation, a speaker may properly object to interruption. It is rather too all-purpose a defense to deal with the current situation.

Gore's "It's a free discussion" may be seen as a simple invocation of a complex normative situation. In lines 1–3, Gore finishes his statement by addressing a question to Quayle. Quayle replies to the question briefly in lines 4–7, and then attempts a "rush-through" to a new topic (lines 7–8). But speakers do not have an unlimited right to change topics. Questioners who find an answer inadequate or incomplete seem to have a right to pursue the question further. They do not have an unlimited right to cut in on an answer-in-progress, but they may preserve the relevance of the topic-at-hand. Gore cuts in (line 9) only when it becomes apparent that Quayle has completed his answer, and means to change the topic. Gore's defense of his "interruption" is well-grounded, and he does not back down.

My final example of the rejection of a claim of interruption is once again grounded in the norms related to questioning:

(18) 1992 VP debate

1	Q	=( ) the question is 'n' which you have f ailed
2		to address and that is why is Bill Clinton (5)
3		qualified to be president of the United States
4		hh You've talked abo[ut Jimmy ( ) you've=
5	G	[Oh I'll be happy to answer
6		(that question)
7	Q	=talked about Jim Baker ( ) you've talked about
8		trickle down [economics ( ) you've talked about=
9	M	[(Now wait a minute) The question was
10		about
11	Q	=the worst economy in fifty years you [haven't=
12	G	[I'll be
13		happy to answer (*) ( ) May I answer (*)?
14	Q	=told us one [reason why Bill=
15	M	[(*) ( ) The question ( ) was your
16		qualifications
17	Q	=Clinton ( ) is qualified to be president
18		[of the United States
19	G	[I'll be happy– I'll be happy [(*)
20	Q	[w– I– I wanna go
21		back and make a point ( ) [(*)
22	G	[Well you've asked me a
23		question =Let me [(*) won't answer my question=
24	Q	[I (*) I have not asked you a
25		question I've made a statement
26	G	=I will answer yours
27		((audience laughter Q cuts in after about one
28		second))
29	Q	I have not asked a question I've made a statement
30		that you have not told us why Bill Clinton is
31		qualified (5) to be president of the United

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32 States =I pointed out what he said
33 about the Persian Gulf war hh But lemme repeat
34 it for ya =Here's what he said senator =You know
35 full [well (he said)
36 G [Want me to answer your question?
37 Q I'm makin' a statement then you can answer it

If a question has been asked, a more-or-less immediate answer is called for Ordinarily, this is a resource for questioners seeking to control the content of the next turn But it is also the case that participants, having found that they have been asked a question, can demand the right of immediate reply, as Gore does in this exchange The ensuing controversy is not about whether a prospective answerer has such a right, but rather about whether Quayle has in fact asked a question He claims to be in the course of making a statement – which is here to be understood not as producing a one-sentence assertion, but as laying out a position Once again, we find that the nature of the claimed interruption is not that it interferes with a "turn-constructional unit," but that it interferes with an extended turn-in-progress

Although my examples of resistance to claims of interruption have all been grounded in the normative structure of questioning, it is clear that there are other bases for such resistance, e g that the other party has been "hogging the floor" It should be evident from the preceding discussion that interruption is a negotiated phenomenon, and that frequently the negotiations do not lead to a definitive outcome

CONCLUSION

I have suggested that, as analysts, we treat interruption (in the sense of violating another's speaking rights) as a topic, not a resource Interruption is not objectively available, it is a category that participants can use to "make something of" another's talk What the analyst can discover is not interruption but claims of interruption The observable phenomena are not interruptions, but "doing interrupting" and "doing being interrupted" Even for (non-analyst) members, who are free to see interruptions as actual phenomena, the visibility (i e the noticeability) and accountability of interruptions is largely achieved by participant practices of doing interruption, and especially of doing being interrupted Given the fact that normal conversation is shot through with overlaps, and that perhaps most utterances could be made out to be interruptive, there is a potential problem as to when to notice a bit of talk as actually interruptive Under these circumstances, the practices relating to claiming and acknowledging interruption are crucial to making interruption a noticeable event in the flow of interaction

In the first section of this article, I attempted to lay out my reasons for adopting a participant-oriented approach to interruption Having made the decision to treat interruption as a phenomenon created and displayed by participants, the inevitable next step was to examine how participants produce this phenomenon Further, once we see interruption as the product of participant claims, explicit or other-

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wise, we will want to attend to how such claims are received. I have made a first pass at these topics in the second and third sections. Clearly, much remains to be done.

But there are implications that go beyond the subject of interruption. Interruption can be seen as a special case of a more general set of social practices – namely anything that is commonly thought of as being done by one party to another. These actions range from interpersonal violations, such as abuse and various forms of rudeness, to neutral and positive actions such as cajoling, consoling, congratulating, and complimenting. These acts may be recognizable in large part by virtue of the way they are received. We need to attend to the variety and mechanics of uptake – not as something that occurs after a speech act (or any act) is performed, but as something that in part analyzes, defines, and displays the act itself. Of course, this is a central point, perhaps THE central point, of the conversation analytic approach (Moerman & Sacks 1988). I have merely, as I see it, applied this conversation analytic logic in one area, interruption, where it has not heretofore been fully implemented.

If uptake is in fact of crucial importance, then we should treat it in a more systematic fashion than has so far been the general practice. We are accustomed to looking for the various forms and formats that particular acts may take. Conversation analysts have become adept at discovering how particular behaviors become constituted as acts with particular meanings through the responses they receive. But there is as yet little systematic study of the types of responses that may be used to constitute behaviors as particular acts. If acts are constituted as much by how they are received as by how they are presented, then we should study varieties of uptake with the same thoroughness that we study varieties of presentation.[24] For example, we may want to ask how utterances can be produced as promises, but it is equally worthwhile to investigate the ways in which utterances are received as promises. That is, for any act, *X*, we need to ask not only "How does one do *X*?" but also "How does one do being *X*ed?"

NOTES

[1] West & Zimmerman 1983 (cf. Zimmerman & West 1975) have made a much criticized attempt to formalize this distinction. For critiques, see Murray & Covelli 1988, Drummond 1989, and Hopper (1992:120–37), among others.

[2] See also Bennett 1981, Edelsky 1981, Tannen 1983, Coates 1989, Goldberg 1990.

[3] I am using standard conversation-analytic transcription conventions, with two additions. Each asterisk (*) in parenthesis represents approximately one-half second of speech that the analyst has been unable to transcribe. Also, a short dash immediately preceding a word indicates a "disconnected articulation," produced as though it were at the beginning of an utterance.

[4] The situation is further complicated by the fact that Posner formats line 22 as a continuation of line 19. It could therefore be argued that his "interruption" is actually an attempt to display Donahue's line 20 as interruptive.

[5] The fact that people can hear and process talk-in-overlap has been noted before in both the psychological and discourse/conversation-analytic literature (Spelke et al. 1976, Edelsky 1981, Schegloff 1989).

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[6] It should be noted, though, that the degree to which overlapping talk is acceptable varies by culture and occasion (Reisman 1974, Tannen 1984)

[7] There is, it seems to me, no reason even to posit a "one at a time" rule "One at a time" is a matter of conversational efficiency it is difficult to process extended stretches of overlapping talk (although, as I have suggested, short overlaps may actually contribute to conversational efficiency) If I find myself speaking in overlap with you, I have at least two reasons to stop (as do you) First, I need to stop so that I can achieve a clear hearing of what you are saying Second, if I want you to hear and consider what I have to say, I have reason to stop and wait until you stop speaking, so I can make my contribution "in the clear" Moreover, even if participants could understand speech-in-overlap perfectly, it would be impossible to maintain mutual responsiveness over extended stretches of simultaneous talk But again, this would become apparent to participants in the course of their talk, and would be another reason to minimize simultaneous talk We do not require a rule of any sort to explain why Posner stops in line 21 before completing his full utterance

[8] It is easy enough to see why Posner might stop his overlapping utterance But why would one START speaking in the midst of another's talk, only to stop without completing what one has to say? Here are a few possibilities

(a) A "mistake" may result from over-enthusiasm

(b) An aborted start-up can "reserve" the next speaking turn in a multi-party conversation (Allison 1978) or can be an attempt to let the interlocutor know that one has something to say Such aborted start-ups may encourage the current speaker to make his or her turn short

(c) The start-up may be a bid for the floor which is abandoned when it is perceived that the original speaker intends to continue Such a start-up may result from a perception that the other is nearing the end of the utterance or has already made the point This could occur even when the end of the utterance is not projectable

[9] Sacks (1992 1 642–43) notes that interruption can be used to show strong emotion and that overlapping talk is a criterion of a lively conversation

[10] This approach is related to that taken by Bennett, who writes (1981 176) "the notion of 'interruption' is basically an interpretive category which participants can make use of to deal with currently prevailing rights and obligations in actual situations" But Bennett appears to want to account for participants' and observers' feelings about interactions, rather than participants' displayed reactions in interaction Hutchby (1992 344), citing Bennett, also notes that "'interruption' is a members' evaluative construct"

[11] It is true that participants may judge that their speaking rights have been violated without displaying that judgment In this case, the judgment is a private event Not only do we, as observers, not see it, but the other participants do not see it So it cannot be consequential for them, it cannot be a publicly available interactional resource, although it may affect the way the individual making the judgment constructs further actions Insofar as we are interested in the systemics of interaction, rather than the psychology of individual behavior, private judgments are not relevant

There are, of course, purposes for which an analyst may want to note the presence of some speech phenomenon, regardless of whether it is visibly noted by the participants Sometimes we can see that an utterance is, say, a question or a compliment simply because any competent member would have to take it as such In this regard, I would argue that interruptions are a special case I doubt if there are many, if any, events in normal conversation that would HAVE to be taken by participants as violations of speaking rights

[12] Perhaps there is an analogy here to Wittgenstein's distinction between what we think words mean and how we actually use them

[13] The debater has, for example, the option of complaining of interruption to the moderator, or even to the audience

[14] See Talbot (1992 463) for another example, from a non-debate setting

[15] See Bilmes 1997 for more detailed analyses of the debate segments quoted in this article

[16] One strategic use of such interruption claims A, having heard what B has to say, can claim that he would have addressed that point if he hadn't been interrupted Thus A makes it seem that he has already taken into consideration the point or question raised by B

[17] It seems that the Gore–Perot debate displays a clash of dialogic styles, which may have subcultural as well as idiosyncratic components Perot expects to be able to take long turns, incorporating

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substantial pauses and several distinct thoughts Gore is used to a style of talk with only short intra-utterance pauses, and engagement on a point-by-point basis As it turned out, if media accounts are to be believed, Perot was generally perceived as overly irritable, perhaps in part because he was intolerant of what most felt to be normal conversational rhythms

[18] Yngve notes (1970 575) "one signal [that one wants to interrupt or say something] appears to be a slight opening of the mouth and intake of breath accompanied by a slight tilting of the head "

[19] Like interruption, ignoring is not necessarily a one-sided act, with an active ignorer and a passive ignoree One can "do being ignored" or "do not being ignored "

[20] Although ignoring is fairly common and highly communicative, it has received little attention in the literature

[21] It is true that, since Quayle's questions are done in overlap, Gore may not have understood them – or he could behave as though he had not understood them I do not think that is crucial in this case Even if he had stopped speaking, and allowed Quayle free space in which to ask his question, "Let me finish" would still serve as an account for not dealing with the question

[22] See Bilmes 1995 for further analysis of this exchange

[23] Of course, this is itself a turn at talk However, it will not ordinarily be received as interruptive, since it is explicitly an attempt not to interrupt, and is not in itself topical talk

[24] There are systematic studies of response, e g in the literature on preference (e g Pomerantz 1978) However, the approach and objective of these studies are quite different from what I am suggesting The question they ask is "What sort of responses do acts of a certain type (e g compliments) typically elicit?" In contrast, my major concern with responses is precisely in how they constitute the behaviors to which they respond as acts of a certain type

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