An Analysis of Conversational Turn-Taking Strategies in the WSJ News Meeting Between Trump and Zelensky 2022

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Abstract
This study analyzes conversational turn-taking strategies used in the WSJ News interview between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky. The aims of this study are to identify the types of turn-taking strategies used in the interview and to explain how these strategies organize the flow of conversation during a tense political interview. This research is based on Conversation Analysis, especially the turn-taking theory proposed by Anna-Brita Stenström (1994), which focuses on how speakers take turns, hold turns, interrupt, overlap, and repair speech in spoken interaction. A descriptive qualitative method is used, and the data are taken from a WSJ News video recording of the Trump–Zelensky interview. The spoken data are analyzed by identifying and classifying turn-taking strategies such as interruption, overlap, self-selection, turn-holding, and repair, and the findings are presented in tables to make the results easier to understand. The results show that several types of turn-taking strategies appear frequently, with interruption and overlap being the most dominant, especially during moments of disagreement and tension. The speakers often take turns competitively, which causes interruptions and overlapping speech, showing that turn-taking rules are not always followed. Overall, the findings indicate that turn-taking strategies play an important role not only in managing speaking turns but also in showing power, disagreement, and control in political media discourse.

Keywords: *Turn-Taking, Conversation Analysis, Political Interview, WSJ News, Trump–Zelensky*

INTRODUCTION

Pragmatics is the field of linguistics that studies how people understand and use meaning in communication based on the situation in which language is used. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics does not only focus on the meaning of words or sentences, but also on how speakers use language to express their intentions and how listeners interpret that meaning by considering context, background knowledge, and social conditions. In pragmatics, meaning is closely related to who is speaking, who is listening, where and when the interaction happens, and why the language is used. This perspective helps explain how people manage conversations, choose certain words, and adjust their speech to achieve specific goals, such as persuading, disagreeing, or showing politeness. Therefore, pragmatics is very useful for analyzing real communication, including formal media interviews, because it shows how speakers create and control meaning in real time while responding to others and managing the flow of interaction.

Discourse analysis is an approach used to study how spoken or written language is structured and how meaning is created based on social context. It looks at language beyond single sentences and focuses on how people use language together to build meaning through interaction (Brown & Yule, 1983). One important part of discourse analysis is turn-taking, which refers to how speakers take turns and manage speaking roles during a conversation. Turn-taking strategies help make interactions organized by allowing speakers to share the opportunity to speak and respond to each other clearly. Research in conversation analysis shows that turn-taking plays a key role in keeping conversations orderly and understandable in different situations, such as daily conversations, classroom discussions, and media interviews (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Stenström, 1994).

Conversation Analysis (CA) provides a systematic way of examining how people manage spoken interaction in natural settings. Within CA, turn-taking strategies describe how speakers begin a turn, maintain control, yield to others, interrupt, or overlap with each other. Previous research using Stenström's framework has identified common turn-taking strategies such as taking the turn, holding the turn, and yielding the turn, and has shown how these strategies function in talk shows, interviews, and public discourse (e.g., studies of political debates and media interviews). These studies reveal that turn-taking strategies influence conversational control and power relations, especially when speakers assert dominance or negotiate who speaks next, as seen in political talk contexts (Natalia et al., 2020).

Political news interviews are a specific form of media discourse where turn-taking strategies are particularly visible. Speakers in political interviews often use strategies like interruption and overlap to compete for time, manage the flow of conversation, and assert authority over the discourse. These strategies shape the dynamics of question-and-answer exchanges and affect how speakers present their viewpoints to audiences. Research on turn-taking in political interaction shows that speakers who

dominate turns can influence perceptions of credibility and control in public communication. For example, analyses of presidential debates and political interviews (Putri & Akmal, 2025).

In this study, the focus is on the WSJ News interview between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky as the research subject. This study examines how conversational turn-taking strategies are used and how they affect the flow of interaction and meaning during a high-profile political media interview. Political interviews are important for turn-taking analysis because speakers often compete to speak, interrupt each other, and try to control the conversation, which can show power and authority in communication (Yao, Liu, & Li, 2025). By applying Stenström's conversational turn-taking framework, this study aims to contribute to research on turn-taking strategies in political discourse by providing a detailed analysis of this specific WSJ News interview.

METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative research is a method that produces data in the form of written or spoken words and focuses on understanding social phenomena in natural settings. This method does not use numbers or statistical analysis, but instead describes and explains data in detail. Therefore, a qualitative approach is suitable for studying spoken interaction and conversational behavior.

The qualitative method is chosen because this study aims to describe and analyze conversational turn-taking strategies used in a political interview. The analysis focuses on how speakers take turns, hold the floor, interrupt, overlap, and respond to each other during the interaction. This research applies Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, which explains how speakers manage their turns in conversation through strategies such as taking the turn, holding the turn, and yielding the turn. By using this method and theory, the researcher can clearly explain the types of turn-taking strategies found in the WSJ News interview and describe the quality of the conversation based on how turn-taking rules are applied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The political press meeting between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky, broadcast by The Wall Street Journal (WSJ News) on February 28, 2025, shows different types of turn-taking strategies in a tense political situation. During the meeting, both leaders often interrupted each other instead of waiting for a clear pause. There were many overlaps, where both speakers talked at the same time. The discussion also shows interrupting alerts, when a speaker cuts in to disagree or respond quickly. In several parts, speakers use linking words such as *but* and *because* to take over the turn and continue their argument. Some speakers also repeat words to hold the floor and prevent the other person from speaking. These patterns show that turn-taking in this meeting is competitive and related to power, not calm or cooperative. The WSJ News video clearly records these interruptions and overlaps, making it a strong example of how turn-taking strategies work in public political communication (Stenström, 1994).

Taking the turn – Interrupting – Alert (Example: *hey, look, listen*)
Data 16
Zelensky: "First of all, during the war, everybody has problems, even you, but you have a nice ocean and don't feel now, but you will feel it in the future. God bless–"
JD Vance: "<u>You don't know that.</u>"

In this exchange, Zelensky explains that war affects everyone and warns that countries protected by distance may feel its impact in the future. He ends his statement with "*God bless,*" which suggests an attempt to close his point calmly. However, before Zelensky clearly finishes his turn, JD Vance interrupts by saying, "*You don't know that.*" According to Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, a speaker should wait for a Transition Relevance Place (TRP) before taking a turn, but in this case the TRP has not been reached. JD Vance's short and direct interruption shows disagreement and allows him to take control of the conversation, increasing tension and showing power imbalance in the interaction.

Data 18
Zelensky: "Please, you think that if you will speak very loudly about the war, you can–"
Trump: "<u>He's not speaking loudly.</u> He's not speaking loudly. Your country is in big trouble."

This conversation happens during a serious political discussion about the war in Ukraine. Zelensky begins to explain that speaking loudly about the war does not necessarily change the situation. His sentence is not finished, which shows that he is still holding his speaking turn and has not reached a Transition Relevance Place (TRP). Before Zelensky can complete his explanation, Trump interrupts him with a strong and direct statement. According to Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, a speaker should wait until a TRP before taking a turn, but in this case Trump does not wait. The interruption stops Zelensky from continuing his point, allows Trump to take control of the conversation, and increases tension and power imbalance in the interaction.

Taking the turn – Taking over – Links (Example: *but, and, so, because*)
Data 8
Trump: "Don't tell us what we're going to feel. We're trying to solve a problem. Don't tell us what we're going to feel."

Zelensky: "I'm not telling you."
Trump: "<u>Because</u> you're in no position to dictate that…"

The conversation takes place during a tense political discussion about the war in Ukraine. Trump speaks in a strong and emotional way and repeats the same sentence to show frustration and to control the topic of discussion. Zelensky responds with a short statement, *"I'm not telling you,"* which shows disagreement and clearly completes the idea. Since the response is complete, a Transition Relevance Place (TRP) is reached. Based on Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, another speaker may take the next turn at a TRP. Trump then takes the turn again and begins with the word *"because,"* which links the statement to Zelensky's response. This shows a taking-over strategy (links), where Trump smoothly takes the turn and maintains control of the conversation.

Data 10
Trump: "…Look, if you could get a ceasefire right now, I tell you, you take it so the bullets stop flying and your men stop getting killed."
Zelensky: "Of course we want to stop the war."
Trump: "<u>But</u> you're saying you don't want a ceasefire."

The discussion is about ending the war in Ukraine, especially about a ceasefire. Trump says that a ceasefire should be accepted immediately so the fighting can stop and soldiers will not keep dying. His statement is clear and complete. Zelensky answers, *"Of course we want to stop the war,"* which shows agreement and finishes his point. Because the reply is complete, a Transition Relevance Place (TRP) is reached. According to Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, another speaker can take the turn at a TRP. Trump then takes the turn again and starts with the word *"but,"* which shows disagreement. This is an example of a taking-over strategy (links), where Trump smoothly takes the turn, challenges Zelensky's reply, and controls the conversation.

Holding the turn – Stalling – Lexical Repetition, Repeating the same word (Example: *they-they-they*)
Data 25
JD Vance: "I'm talking about the kind of diplomacy that's going to end the destruction of your country."
Zelensky: "Yes, but he…"
JD Vance: "<u>Mr. President, Mr. President,</u> with respect, I think it's disrespectful…"

The discussion is about diplomacy and the war in Ukraine. JD Vance explains that diplomacy is needed to stop the destruction of Ukraine. Zelensky begins to respond by saying *"Yes, but he…,"* which shows disagreement or a wish to add another idea, but his sentence is not complete. Because his statement is unfinished, a Transition Relevance Place (TRP) has not been reached. JD Vance then repeats the words *"Mr. President, Mr. President."* Based on Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, repetition can be used to hold a speaking turn. By repeating these words, JD Vance keeps control of the conversation, stops Zelensky from continuing, and shows authority, creating an unequal speaking situation.

Taking the turn – Starting-Up – A clean start (Example: *well, so, okay*)
Data 1
Reporter: "What's your message for them?"
Trump: "<u>Well</u>, if I didn't align myself with both of them,…"

The reporter asks Trump to give his message, and the question ends clearly, so another speaker can begin. Trump starts his answer with the word "*well,*" which helps him begin speaking in a calm and clear way. According to Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, speakers usually take turns at a Transition Relevance Place (TRP), and the reporter's question creates a clear TRP. By using "*well*" as a clean start, Trump takes the turn smoothly, does not interrupt, and prepares his ideas before continuing his explanation.

Yielding The Turn – Prompting (Example: *How are you? What do you think?*)
Data 30
Zelensky: "…We signed the exchange of prisoners, but he didn't do it. What kind of diplomacy, J.D., you are speaking about? <u>What do you mean?</u>"
JD Vance: "I'm talking about the kind of diplomacy that's going to end the destruction of your country."

The discussion focuses on diplomacy and the war in Ukraine. Zelensky explains that a prisoner exchange agreement was signed but not completed, which shows frustration with how diplomacy has failed. After explaining this, Zelensky asks direct questions to JD Vance, asking for a clear explanation. By finishing his statement and asking questions, Zelensky reaches a Transition Relevance Place (TRP). Based on Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, asking questions is a way to give the speaking turn to another person. JD Vance then takes the turn and explains his view of diplomacy. This example shows turn-yielding through prompting, where the conversation continues in a clear and organized way.

Yielding The Turn – Appealing (Example: *right? okay? you know? isn't it?*)
Data 32
Reporter: "She's asking, what if Russia breaks the ceasefire.
Trump: "What if anything? What if a bomb drops on your head right now? <u>Okay?</u>..."

Reporter: "Guys, come on."

The discussion is about what might happen if Russia breaks the ceasefire. The reporter explains a question about this situation. Trump responds with a strong example to show danger and uncertainty instead of giving a direct answer. At the end of his statement, Trump says *"okay?"*, which turns his statement into a request for a response. According to Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, words like *"okay?"* are used to invite another speaker to respond and create a Transition Relevance Place (TRP). This shows yielding the turn through appealing, because Trump opens the chance for another speaker to talk. After that, the reporter takes the turn and says, *"Guys, come on,"* which shows an effort to calm the situation and reduce tension.

Taking The Turn – Interrupting – Meta-comments (Example: *excuse me, may I say, can I just say*)
Data 23
Trump: "That wasn't with me. It doesn't matter for you what it means. That wasn't with me. That was with a guy named Biden, who was not a smart person. That was with Obama…"
Zelensky: "It was your president…"
Trump: "Excuse me. That was with Obama, who gave you sheets, and I gave you javelins."

The discussion is about who is responsible for past U.S. actions toward Ukraine. Trump says that the issue did not happen during his presidency and mentions other U.S. presidents to support his claim. While Trump is still speaking and has not finished his explanation, Zelensky interrupts by saying, *"It was your president,"* to challenge Trump's statement. This interruption happens before a Transition Relevance Place (TRP) is reached. According to Stenström's (1994) turn-taking theory, speakers are expected to wait for a TRP before taking a turn. Trump then says *"Excuse me,"* which is a polite meta-comment used to interrupt and take back the speaking turn. By using this phrase, Trump stops Zelensky from continuing, corrects the statement, and keeps control of the conversation.

CONCLUSION

In the WSJ News meeting between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky, turn-taking strategies are very important in shaping how the conversation develops. The analysis shows that the speakers often use interruptions, repetition, linking words, and question tags to control when they speak and how long they hold the floor. Trump and JD Vance often interrupt or take over the turn to disagree with or pressure Zelensky, while Zelensky usually gives the turn by asking questions or stopping his speech before finishing. These turn-taking patterns show how disagreement and tension appear in the discussion. Overall, the way the speakers take turns shows an unequal balance of power and explains how language is used to dominate the conversation, defend opinions, and control the direction of the conversation.

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