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## **‘DOING INTERRUPTING’ AS A DISCURSIVE TACTIC IN ARGUMENTATION: A POST-PRAGMATIC POLITENESS THEORY PERSPECTIVE**

### **Abstract**

Underlying every speech system is the turn-taking system which is in charge of effective distribution of participation space (turn) and is the source of participation rights and obligations, esp. participants’ right to turn. Turn boundaries often become an area of struggle for participation, with interruption becoming a means of expropriation of the current speaker’s turn as well as a resource for the exercise and display of discursive power. The paper focuses on interruption as a discursive tactic employed by participants in the public-participation mass-media genre of phone-in and approaches its status from the perspective of post-modern politeness theory.

### **Key words**

*Interruption; discursive power; post-modern politeness theory; (im)politeness as discursive struggle; argumentation; phone-in interaction*

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## **1. Introduction**

In principle, underlying any conversational activity is a system for the distribution of participation space, whereby participants monitor each other’s verbal activity and, while orienting to certain linguistic (morphosyntactic and suprasegmental) and paralinguistic clues, identify those points in talk where they can lay their claim to a portion of communication space, viz. to turn. The fact that, under normal circumstances, transfer of speakership occurs smoothly, i.e. without noticeably long pauses or simultaneous talk, is suggestive of the existence of a system of rules that guide such behaviour. Obviously, occurrences of unsmooth transfer

of speakership are far from being rare, especially in discourses marked for a high degree of participants' involvement, such as in argumentation. The media genre of phone-in represents such a case; as an instance of public participation radio programme it gives its audience an opportunity to voice their opinions in live broadcast and discuss them with the host. The participation in this specific setting is describable in terms of participants' uneven access to interactional resources, which is manifested, among other things, in patterns of turn-allocation. This imbalance is, however, open for contestation, and possible shifts in the pre-allocated patterns of participation may become a manifestation of their struggle for discursive power. The paper, which is informed by the theoretical-methodological underpinnings of Conversation Analysis and by that strand of post-modern politeness research which conceives of politeness as discursive struggle, discusses several extracts from a radio phone-in programme in which participants are involved in the deployment of interruptive discursive tactic with the objective to trace whether or not this discursive practice surfaces in participants' own evaluations as having repercussions upon the level of their relational work, or more concretely, upon their (im)politeness evaluations.

## **2. The theoretical framework**

### ***2.1. The turn-taking system***

The system of turn-taking (TT) is an organization form which underlies various types of social activities whose purpose is to allocate access to valued material or immaterial resources in an efficient way (cf. 'queuing' as a cultural phenomenon and the sensitivity to breaking the line, as discussed in Watts 2003). How TT operates in speech exchange systems was first systematically described by Sacks et al. (1974) who proposed that TT as a "prominent type of social organization" is worthy of attention in itself. Their 'simplest systematics' for the organization of TT has since been generally accepted as a description of procedures underlying the distribution of turns among participants and as the basis for claiming participants' interactional rights. TT is suggested to be constituted of an ordered set of recursively applied rules which are able to generate and distribute a wide array of turn types in any instance of mundane conversation. Turn can be seen as a kind of resource which participants attain, possess and exchange. Turn distribution is performed by means of a set of specific procedures which secure that a) one participant only speaks at a time, and b) that the speaker change happens recurrently. While the former requirement accounts for the efficient transfer of turns, the latter guarantees that the interchange does not collapse after every speaker-to-listener shift. Sacks et al. (1974) suggest that TT system has two components:

1. turn-constructive component, which describes types of unit of which turns may be constructed, viz. turn-constructive units (TCU); TCU allows for a con-

structional predictability of a turn, which enables participants to locate a place of possible turn switch, viz. a transition-relevance place (TRP). A corollary aspect of the component is the speaker's 'entitlement' to turn: "For the unit type a speaker employs in starting a construction of a turn's talk, the speaker is initially *entitled*, in having a 'turn' to one such unit." (Sacks et al. 1974: 12; my emphasis),

2. turn-allocational (distributional) component, which includes a set of rules describing how turns are allocated at TRPs. Put simply, a) if the current speaker selects a particular next speaker, then the selected next speaker has the right to begin speaking (Rule 1a), b) if the current speaker selects no particular speaker, then a self-selection by any potential next speaker may occur; in such a case the self-selected speaker has the *right* to begin a turn (Rule 1b), c) if the next speaker does not self-select, then the current speaker may, but need not, continue speaking until the next speaker self-selects (Rule 1c). If this should happen, rules 1(a)–(c) are applied recursively at each next TRP until a speaker transfer is reached (Rule 2).

The significance of TT rules rests in their ability to account for various interactional phenomena, such as overlaps, interruptions, pauses, gaps, lapses or even extended uninterrupted turns (e.g. in jokes or narratives). The model also allows for other speech exchange systems (debates, ceremonies, panel discussions, interviews, etc.) to be seen as systematic transformations of the TT practices. Sacks et al. (1974) further maintain that TT in speech exchange systems is, with respect to their turn-distributional arrangements, linearly arrayed, with the two poles being 'one-at-a-time' (viz. local) allocation (as in conversation) and pre-allocation of all turns (as in political debate or ceremony) respectively, with a medial position reserved for the combination of the two (as in official meetings). Conversation is considered "the basic form of speech-exchange system, with other systems on the array representing a variety of transformations on conversation's turntaking system" (Sacks et al. 1978: 11).

## ***2.2. Politeness theory: an overview***

Since its inception in the early 1970s, the issues treated under the keyword of politeness have been firmly established on the interface of linguistics, pragmatics, sociology and psychology. Nested within what has gradually emerged as Politeness Theory (PT) is a number of approaches with differing orientations to its central problems, including the concept of politeness itself. Following especially the republication of Brown and Levinson's (1987) groundbreaking monograph, the last two decades have seen an upsurge of interest in politeness issues, which manifested itself in a wealth of empirical research. Most recently, the launch of *Journal of Politeness Research* in 2005 testifies to the need of a specialized platform of politeness research which, along with the publication of several metatheoretical works and monographs, is symptomatic of further consolidation of this

strand of social research. PT is, however, not a monolith but rather a conglomerate of approaches loosely clustered around the notion of politeness. In spite of how vaguely or varyingly it is defined, ‘politeness’ has managed to survive as an umbrella term until today. Over the past two decades research within PT has diverged into two widely differing orientations, viz. ‘traditional’, or ‘modern’, and ‘post-modern’. However, rather than seeing them as two antagonistic endeavours, I suggest that these approaches be viewed as complementary, as we can fruitfully benefit from their perspectives of the aspect of interpersonal interaction framed as (im)politeness.

### **2.2.1. Traditional theories**

Within the approaches termed as ‘traditional’ three ‘classics’ are included, viz. Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1987[1978]) and Leech (1983). Finding their source of inspiration in the philosophy of language (Grice’s *Cooperative Principle* and Searle’s *Speech Act Theory*) and sociolinguistics (Goffman’s (1963) notion of *face*), they see politeness as a rationally-driven departure from the principles of cooperation (viz. maximum efficiency) calculated by an abstract Model Person who belongs to an internally homogeneous culture whose members assess these departures in a similar way. Motivations for the departures lie in the effort to abide by the pragmatic ‘rules’ (Lakoff) or ‘principles’ (Leech) of politeness, or to avoid committing a *face-threatening act* (Brown and Levinson). Politeness is seen to have a stable, independent, and ‘objective’ referent, the focus is on speaker’s intentions (which hearers are expected to reconstruct faithfully) built into single-function utterances. Politeness is claimed to reside in the use of particular lexico-grammatical structures and strategies, and is exemplified via the use of fabricated, decontextualized examples. The claims made by the ‘traditionalists’ were challenged, among other things, for their claim of universality, for their ethno(Anglo)centrism, but more importantly they became frowned at for the lack of match between the theoretical assumptions and the real data; empirical research provided evidence that participants’ evaluations in real-life encounters often differed from those predicted by theoreticians (for a thorough critique of the traditional theories see for example Eelen (2001), Terkourafi 2005, Watts 2003, and Locher 2004). As a result, accumulating objections to the epistemological, ontological and methodological foundations of ‘modern’ politeness research has led to the articulation of alternative standpoints.

### **2.2.2. Post-modern theories**

Loosely identified as ‘postmodern’ (Arundale’s (1999, 2006) Face Constituting Theory, Spencer-Oatey’s (2000) Rapport management, Terkourafi’s (2005) frame-based theory, Haugh’s (2007) interactionally-achieved politeness), these novel approaches look for alternative sociological and psychological foundations. Among them, the ‘discursive’ approach to politeness espoused by R. J.

Watts and M. Locher in a number of their publications (e.g. Watts et al. 1992, Watts 2003, Watts and Locher 2005, Locher and Watts 2008) has been able to articulate an alternative most cogently. The most important points of their departure from the 'mainstream' theorizing include: incorporation of a distinction between lay and technical conceptualizations of politeness (or politeness<sub>1</sub> and politeness<sub>2</sub>) along with the insistence on the necessity to focus on the former when attempting to pass judgments on politeness value of utterances, rejection of the classical speech-act theory while focusing on longer stretches of discourse, inclusion of Bourdieu's social-theoretical framework (*theory of practice, habitus*) and of the notion of behaviour seen as appropriate (*politic*) to the norms of interaction which emerge over the course of their repeated occurrence and which are internalized in and objectified by each individual's dispositions to act appropriately (viz. in one's *habitus*). Consequently, polite behaviour is seen as being in addition to what is expected as appropriate in a given situation, with a focus placed on hearer's evaluations of (im)politeness whose emergence is not dependent upon particular structures/strategies but discursively negotiated (or *struggled-over*) in situated exchanges by the participants themselves. Politeness is thus located within a broader framework of negotiation of interpersonal relations (*relational work*) as a positively marked behaviour; politeness and impoliteness are not seen as dichotomies (cf. the traditional view that impoliteness is a lack of politeness) but as two positions in the spectrum of relational work.

Naturally, the discursive approach is not without problems, among which its operationalization, viz. how to get hold of politeness<sub>1</sub> as a discursive concept and describe it, is a central one (cf. e.g. Terkourafi's (2005) critique of postmodern theories). As no stable (politeness<sub>2</sub>) referent to politeness is expected to exist, analysts are invited to search for those moments in the flow of on-going interactions in which evaluations of (im)politeness emerge. However, as participants rarely evaluate each other's behaviour overtly and analysts have no direct access to their implicit evaluations, the latter are advised to resort to minute descriptions of situated exchanges when pointing out instances in which participants *may possibly* be engaged in evaluating each other's behaviour as departing from the norms of appropriateness towards the negative (*im/overpoliteness<sub>1</sub>*) or positive (*politeness<sub>1</sub>*) end of relational work. The effort to capture the nature of politeness<sub>1</sub> becomes a search for various lexemes associated with lay conceptualization of what constitutes appropriate and deviational behaviour (*rude, aggressive, abrasive, tactful*, etc.); this virtually amounts to politeness being nearly emptied of its content and, consequently, to the opening of the question of its feasibility as a central concept of the entire politeness research within the broader field of interpersonal communication (cf. Haugh 2007). Despite the fact that postmodern modelling claims to abstain from working with a stable and independent notion of politeness (which would in fact amount to being a politeness<sub>2</sub> definition), Watts (2003: 17) nevertheless provides its 'stable' referent when maintaining that it refers to "mutually cooperative behaviour, considerateness for others, polished behaviour, etc. [which is] a locus of social struggle". Thus, as Terkourafi (2005: 243) claims, Watts actually provides

a politeness<sub>2</sub> definition of politeness<sub>1</sub> (and brings back politeness<sub>2</sub> “through the back door”), as “without such an independent yardstick a language relative (and speaker-relative) concept such as politeness<sub>1</sub> cannot be pinned down for study”. Finally, the abandonment of prediction and resignation to the effort to relate language expressive resources and their politeness potential is also problematic, since predictiveness and generalization are not only at the heart of any serious theorizing but also underlie ordinary language users’ behaviour as well.

Although the ‘traditional’ and ‘post-modern’ traditions occupy opposing stances, it is more productive to see them as being mutually complementary since they approach the problem of politeness, as Terkourafi (2005) sees it, “at different levels of granularity”: at the macro- and micro-levels respectively. I believe the two levels can also be seen as paralleling the two research paradigms in social sciences that have evolved over the past decades, viz. quantitative and qualitative research (cf. Nekvapil 2000), and as sharing their strong and weak points. Both represent valid approaches to the phenomenon, albeit with a different focus, which may be chosen depending on the research objectives.

By way of example, the structure *I’d like*, when approached from the perspective of the ‘traditional’ Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory, is a means of encoding conventional indirectness as a negative politeness strategy employed to counter a face-threat of an act of requesting (cf. “Be conventionally indirect”; Brown and Levinson 1987: 132). It may be claimed that when embedded in a larger structure, such as *I’d like to change the subject*, it is employed to perform an interpersonal act whereby the speaker signals his/her orientation to an existing norm which stipulates the use of an indirect locution in a face-threatening environment, and, accordingly, shows his/her considerateness of the addressee. This interactional dimension of communication is, however, inseparable from its transactional aspect present in the ‘content’ of the locution (viz. referential act; cf. *ideational* and *interpersonal meaning*; Halliday (1978), or *transactional* and *interactional discourse*; Kasper 1990). From the viewpoint of the traditional ‘productionist’ politeness approach this strategy should be a realization of linguistic politeness, as it shows respect of the hearer’s negative face (viz. his/her right of non-imposition). However, in the light of the discursive approach, rather than making an *a priori* judgement, researchers need to search for evidence of such an evaluation in participants’ reactions. As an example, compare the following radio phone-in openings in which the topics are negotiated:

(1) **IHS III 1**

001 M ((laughter)) to: Kevin in North-East Philadelphia. good morning Kevin.  
 002 C→ good morning Irv. if I may. I’d like to change the subject?  
 003 M you certainly? may? in Open Forum you may talk about dog doo on your  
 004 neighbour’s lawn.

(2) **IHS III 8**

001 M .h eh Garry on the car phone good morning Garry.  
 002C hi Irv how are you doing

- 003M     good. how about you.  
 004C→   all right. I guess, e:h I wanna address the car insurance? in Pennsylvania?  
 005M     yes.
- (3)   **IHS IV 4**  
 001 M     let's go to Ed? in Quakertown, good morning, Ed.  
 002 C→   good morning. sir? this is in reference to a Richard Nixon's presidential pardon?  
 003 M     yes.
- (4)   **IHS I 4**  
 001 M     .hh 5.19 on WWDB? Vito. in Quaker Town.  
 002 C     how are you doing. first time caller.  
 003 M     welcome Vito.  
 004 C→   question. ( ) everybody's talking about fifty-five mile an hour.=  
 005 M     =I'm talking about whore houses.

The extracts demonstrate the progressive decrease of “indirectness” (and, in the ‘traditional politeness’ paradigm, politeness) in the way the topic is addressed by the caller (C). In the extract 1, judging by the moderator’s (M) reaction, C’s “polite” request for a permission to change the subject is evaluated as an unnecessary deviation from the accepted norm (i.e. from the *politic* behaviour); what is more, it also seems, through the deployment of sarcasm, to be sanctioned as overpolite (and in fact impolite) in the community of practice (CoP) of the radio phone-in. However, since in extracts 2–4 where C’s requests are made directly and still remain unsanctioned by M, it may be assumed that their respective levels of (in)directness do not deviate from the accepted norm of interaction, and are then merely appropriate (or, in Watts’ terminology, politic). Thus, in evaluations of (im)politeness it is useful to orient to norms of appropriateness as constructed within a given CoP.

That the two approaches seem to give contradictory results of the evaluation of the (im)politeness potential of the act of requesting is explainable on the basis of the assumptions they adopt; these, however, may be seen as mutually corroborating, which is intuitively plausible: as language users we predict potential impact of our behaviour upon the level of relational work. While doing this, we refer to the history of our socialization (experience, upbringing, etc.; cf. Bourdieu’s *habitus*; Terkourafi’s *frame*), viz. to our lay-theoretical conceptualization of what may count as appropriate and what may depart from it. Also we monitor our partners’ assessments of our behaviour in terms of its placement on the (in)appropriateness scale and of the attribution of potential im/polite intentions to it. Hence, in a sense, in lay person’s (politeness<sub>1</sub>) approach to politeness the ‘pragmatic’ and ‘post-pragmatic’ perspectives are reconcilable. It seems that the history of politeness research follows this shift of perspective from speaker to hearer only to reinstate the complementarity of both (cf. Locher’s (2004: 91) bi-directional definition of politeness, viz. for the speaker and for the addressee).

The present study is positioned among those inspired by the post-modern paradigm within politeness research by understanding politeness as an interactional

achievement which, rather than being nested in concrete inventories of linguistic structures or aspects of non-verbal behaviour, arises from interpersonal negotiation. However, this constructivist perspective is moderated by the inclusion of the notion of CoP which encapsulates a social-cognitive baggage which exists prior to, and is independent of, any occasion of language use. I define politeness as a (perlocutionary) effect of a speaker's (non)verbal behaviour upon the hearer who evaluates it positively as going, intentionally or unintentionally, beyond the norms of behaviour appropriate to a given situation within a CoP, who sees its motivation in the speaker's effort to demonstrate positive concern for his/her face needs and who may display this evaluation in the sequential design of the unfolding interaction. Thus I propose a view of politeness as an 'emic' (viz. actual user's, or 'insider's') notion which is interactionally achieved and jointly co-constituted in the course of interaction. The ensuing fine-grained analysis of authentic interactions enables me to see (im)politeness as the most basic feature of interpersonal interaction which is being incessantly striven after by the interlocutors and which rests in their own evaluations. My attempt here is to demonstrate that interruption, along with other aspects of conversational organization (repair, or topical flow), has repercussions upon (im)politeness, as it is explainable with recourse to face-work (cf. Holtgraves 2005). Consequently, while being informed primarily by Watts' and Locher's perspective of politeness as 'discursive struggle', the most coherently articulated post-modern theorizing, the study also profits from the Conversation Analytical conceptual and methodological toolbox in the hope that the two approaches are helpful in coming to grips with the phenomenon under study. I believe that the conflation of the two perspectives will offer a more adequate picture of how participants' (im)politeness evaluations become salient as interactions sequentially unfold.

### 3. The data and methods

The data are taken from a corpus of radio *phone-ins* (*Irv Homer Show*, USA, recorded between 1995-2000), a CoP which falls within the medial category as outlined in 2.1. and which is characterizable by its following aspects being pre-set: a) the turn ordering (M produces an introductory turn), b) the length of turns (it is limited by programme length and by a one-question-per-call provision), c) the length of interaction (one hour), d) what parties say (topical organization is pre-given), and e) the number of parties (two). As the CoP involves only two participants, the main organizational problem is thus not turn-allocational but turn-constructional; in other words, it is the turn size that becomes the major resource over which the parties demonstrably compete and which is primarily manifested in the overall occurrence of overlap and interruption.

As mentioned earlier, the transcribed dialogical encounters are approached from the perspective of 'discursive' politeness theory and analysed using the theoretical-methodological toolbox of Conversation Analysis. I take the two pillars

of the paper to be compatible: while the former stresses the discursive negotiability of perceptions of politeness and places them within the scope of participants' evaluations, the latter enables an analyst to get to grips with the interaction as evolving in time, with how the participants engage in the negotiation of their identities (for the discussion of membership categorization processes underlying phone-in interactions see Ferenčík 2007) and how they make sense of each other's actions; within this sense-making the attribution of (im)politeness intentions forms an inseparable part. Next, I utilize the notion of *participation framework* (Young 2008) to describe the discursive practices and to observe the norms of participation within the given type of *community of practice* (e.g. Wenger 1998). Rather than being stable, the participation framework is negotiable and is (re)produced in every instance of the call. Those forms of behaviour that stay within the framework are appropriate (*politic*), whilst those which go beyond the framework and are positively marked are open to potential interpretation as being polite. The lines of participation include: for the moderator, construction of interpersonal level of interaction (geared towards reducing distance and increasing solidarity), provision of relevant input (setting the topic), managing callers' participation (answering questions, challenging, teasing, etc.); lines of participation for the caller include: provision of relevant input (topical talk), co-management of participation (asking questions, presenting his/her opinion).

## 4.1. Analysis

### 4.1. *Politeness aspects of simultaneous talk*

While turn-taking (TT) ideally accounts for efficient redistribution of communication space, it does not preclude occurrences of both simultaneous talk (overlap and interruption) or absence of talk (gap, pause and lapse). The existence of overlap and gap is presupposed by TT – their minimization is a necessary consequence of the primary organizational requirement of TT in conversation, viz. 'no more than one' at a time; interruption, pause and lapse may be seen as by-products of the mechanism. Further, while it is in continuous talk (viz. one which continues across TRP) where overlap and gap, along with interruption, are materialized, pause and lapse are instantiated in discontinuous talk, viz. when, at some TRP, a current speaker has stopped and no speaker starts/continues (lapse), or when a current speaker has made a silence within his/her turn (pause). The TT system, however, does not account for within-turn silences (pauses), just as much as it does not for within-another's-turn-starts (interruptions).

According to Sacks (2004: 41), interruption "involves a start that is projected to occur within another's turn, [and] does not have the minimization of gaps as a basis or justification for its occurrence". Henley and Thorne (1975: 114) view interruption as a procedure which penetrates "the boundaries of a unit-type *prior* to the last lexical constituent that could define a possible terminal boundary of

a unit-type". As a violation of TT, interruption leads to the current speaker's loss of turn. A corollary feature of the disruptive nature of interruption is its repercussions on a participant's face. This was acknowledged by Sacks himself when he identified the existence of "illegality of interruption" to which parties orient by employing "rules which penalize interruptions" and who take "remedial actions which interruptions permit" (Sacks 2004: 42). Hutchby (1992) ascribes 'moral dimension' to interruption which results from that feature of turn projectability whereby the speaker is entitled to the amount of time necessary for the completion of his/her turn: "1.a. If the turn-so-far was constructed in such a way that the current speaker selected the next speaker, then the person selected had the *right* to begin to speak in next turn" (Psathas, 1995: 37; emphasis added). It follows that an incursion aimed at challenging this entitlement to turn is denying the current speaker's participatory right and may be seen as intrusive, disruptive, or even hostile.

There seems to be, however, a problem with this 'positivistic' operational conception of interruption which sees it as existing prior to acts of interaction, i.e. independently of participants' evaluation as being such. It must be admitted that only rarely do participants resort to sanctioning each other's behaviour as interruptive in a 'moral' sense; rather than that, sequentially interruptive behaviour is 'passed unnoticed'. It follows then that it is more fair to conceive of interruption as a "members' evaluative construct, a term in which participants in everyday discourse routinely and unproblematically traffic" (Hutchby 1992: 368). As a result, a more adequate treatment of interruption is it being an interactional 'deed', viz. "an accomplishable feature of given interactional environments, as a social resource by means of which one speaker does something to or else is treated as having done something to another" (Hutchby 1992: 349). Empirical evidence suggests that not all incursive acts are treated as interruptive, hence hostile (and potentially impolite). Further, mostly there is no explicit evidence of incursive behaviour being evaluated (negatively or otherwise) by the interruptees at all. Consequently, such an approach, which relies solely on the "mechanics" of TT can rule out numerous instances of interruption which are sequentially disruptive but interpersonally supportive (cf. "recognitional interruption"; Ferenčík 2006), is untenable.

#### ***4.2. Interruption in argumentation***

In the following section I argue that, in the argumentative environment of the given CoP, participants utilize interruption as a resource to control both space and content of talk. One such type of interruption is 'relationally loaded power interruption' (Goldberg 1990) and is employed especially by the moderator. In the following extract (5) this TT tactic is used as a means of undermining C's credibility and rendering his position unfounded. Examined within the framework of the Brown-and-Levinsonian paradigm, this procedure constitutes a potential FTA to the C's negative face (as well as to M's positive face, as face-threats are

bi-directional). In the extended extract of talk taken from a series of calls on the issue of legalization of houses of prostitution, M exerts persistent effort to undermine the credibility of C’s claim (viz. that, for males, their mistresses are more trustworthy than anybody else).

(5) **IHS IV 2**

- 001 M .h to eh John in Wilmington good morning John welcome to the Irv Homer  
002 show.  
003 C eh good morning. Irv I have to disagree with you on e:h this one .h but e:h I  
004 you know but I’ll make eh three quick points ‘cause it’s a hot day and we don’t  
005 want to argue. .hh number one, you know there has there have been  
006 arrests in the White Water. so it’s not it’s not a completely ridiculous  
007 investigation. .h number two, people do tell their mis men do tell their  
008 mistresses things they do not tell // anybody else? +number three  
009 M→ // well ha ha John John John John John have  
010 you ever had a mistress?  
011 C no I haven’t.=  
012 M = well then how do you know what men tell their mistresses.=  
013 C =it’s a legitimate? no. the police know it so it’s a // legitimate ( )  
014 M→ // now wait a minute. Jo are you  
015 saying .h are you saying that priests have mistresses?  
016 C no no. the // ( )  
017 M→ // well then how how do you? know? how do you know //  
018 C // ((laughter))  
019 → now let me say // that just one more point Irv and then you can talk. okay?  
020 M→ // no no no no no John John John John I’m not gonna argue  
021 with you I just want you to clarify .h some of your statements now. .h you said  
022 mistresses know a lot? and you don’t have a mistress? so there’s no way I can  
023 find out whether you revealed anything to mistress or not .h then you said  
024 priests know that mistresses? and do you know any priests who have mistresses?  
025 .h and you don’t know of any priest .h who has revealed to you. John? // .h the  
026 C // no I  
027 M sanctity of the confessional? .h where the priest so you know what? .h I heard?  
028 .h that this guy? I I I eh eh // ( )  
029 C→ // wait a minute. I said police // not priest.  
030 M // oh police. oh well do  
031 you know any police officers .h who have revealed anything .h eh p people who  
032 have arrested anyone where they revealed that the mistress or something? that  
033 they .h that they have credibility?  
034 C well they they have gotten clues from mistresses. yes. that I know. police  
035 officers have told me that. // .h a lot of them say. if you want to know don’t ask  
036 M // oh poli ok.  
037 C the wife. ask the mistress.  
038 M okay.  
039 C okay? number three though. ...

To challenge the C’s “epistemological disposition” (He 2004), M uses the first interruption (line 9) to check whether C belongs to the membership category of ‘a man who has had a mistress’ so as to claim authenticity for his position. When the C admits that this is not his personal experience (11), M repudiates his position

(12) on the grounds that he is not being able to “authenticate” it (cf. Thornborrow 2001). This move appears to be a FTA to the C’s negative face and is thereby open to potential interpretation as impolite. In what could be his attempt to save his negative face, C quotes the “police”, which M mishears as “priests”, as a reliable source of the given information (13). The ensuing talk brings further threat to C’s negative face: while building his argumentation on a misheard word, M formulates the proposition “priests have mistresses” and invites C to make an explicit commitment to it (15). In order to do so, M resorts to an interruptive tactic launched by a formulaic gambit (*wait a minute*), whereby he underscores the incursive nature of his move. As a response, C issues a denial token (16) which becomes a sufficient cue for M to draw the conclusion that C negates the content of the proposition “priests have mistresses” and, as a result, to identify a fault in C’s argumentation (17); this procedure only further aggravates threat to C’s negative face.

Until now, C has been made to comply with the trajectory of the talk as delineated by M. As a self-defensive tactic, however, C himself resorts to the utilization of interruption (18) to claim his participatory right for the unfinished turn and to openly sanction M’s interruptive behaviour by calling to attention a TT rule (19: *let me say just one point and then you can talk*). C’s explicit orientation to the TT rule is interpretable as a display of his evaluation of M’s incursive behaviour (who has methodically denied him a chance to exercise his right to a fair access to conversational floor) as stepping out of line and, consequently, as impolite. However, his request for the partner’s adherence to the “rules of the game” is blatantly ignored (20) by M’s production of a “deep incursion” into C’s turn. This demonstration of a total control over the discourse space is followed by a display of a total control over the content of the talk (21-27): M offers an extensive summary of his version of C’s position. The displays of control over the space and content of the talk are prime manifestations of M’s utilization of his power which he has managed to negotiate for himself. The extract concludes with a resolution of the misunderstanding: C initiates an other-repair (29) in which he implicitly accuses M of being responsible for the mishearing (a potential FTA); M, however, passes this implicit accusation unnoticed when offering no facework to compensate for C’s potential face loss – the move is again opened to evaluation as an impolite act (viz. withholding apology where expected; cf. Bousfield 2008). On the contrary, in line with his persistent effort to subvert C’s credibility, M challenges C once again (30). This time, however he accepts C’s subsequent authentication (38), whereupon the talk shifts to another topic.

In the given extract, both participants are engaged in ‘doing being in control’ over the discursive resources of floor and content, whereby they discursively negotiate the lines of participation, and (re)construct the participation framework of the CoP. M, with whom the institutional power is invested, demonstrates his monopoly a) over the floor, by utilizing interruption as a principal control device and reinforcing it by an extensive (and effective) use of reduplication of linguistic structures, and b) over the content, by employing the strategy of formulation of



(7) **IHS III 9**

- 081 M do you really believe? you really believe? that the that that if Dole? gets elected  
 082 that the budget will be balanced in seven years  
 083 C + I certainly? do. I think there's a lot of fraud // and waste, too many special  
 084 programs  
 085 M→ // well I've got a thousand  
 086 M well I've got a thousand I've got a thousand // dollar bet with wha do you do  
 087 C // right.  
 088 M realize right now Fran .h that we still don't have a budget? + you know there's  
 089 no budget in the United States right now,+ and by law we were supposed to  
 090 have a budget .h last September, // you know that as we speak as we speak  
 091 C // all right well I personally I think ( )  
 092 M right now .h neither the Democrats or Republicans have a budget // in place?  
 093 C // we have had  
 094 the democratic congress for twenty some years. // .h (  
 095 M→ // that has got nothing to do with  
 096 what we're saying today.  
 097 C ) they're the ones that spend the money.  
 098 M I am saying? that they right now as we speak there is no budget with the  
 099 Democrats or the Republicans in office. .h no budget what so ever. it is  
 100 constantly? .h getting more money for spending they keep the government from  
 101 sh shutting down? as the did before? .h the Republicans? vote with it the  
 102 Democrats? vote with it .h that's a more? and more .h more? and more  
 103 spending more? and more spending they keep upping the rate .h we have no  
 104 budget. .h and you wanna vote for Democrats? or Republicans?  
 105 C .h I am voting for yes. I am?  
 106 M good for you? then // thanks for calling. ten fifty on WWDB. we'll be back.  
 107 C // not like

Throughout the discussion of the extracts it could also have been noticed that, contrary to expectations, in argumentative encounters interruptions are rarely made noticeable, let alone subject to negative evaluation. The reason may be that they generally do not cause disruptions inasmuch as the parties are trying to maintain the topical talk and sustain coherence of their talk. Among the techniques used to this end are repetitions and recycled structures, starting off at the point of interruption and retrieving the overlapped turn parts.

However, there are instances in which interruption is employed as a control device imposing limits upon co-participant's range of options. In these instances, interruptions, true to their name, are violative both constructionally and topically. There are two reasons for which interruption as a control device is used: pressing for a favourable (extract (7)) or particular (extract (8)) answer, or even cutting off C from the air (extract (9)).

(8) **IHS I 3**

- 001 M .h // let's go to John in Chester.  
 002 C // eh  
 003 C hi.  
 004 M yes John. you are on WWDB.  
 005 C oh. hello.

006 M hello.  
 007 C I wasn't expecting that.  
 008 M well what. did you call?  
 009 C→ yes? I did. // I just + e:hm  
 010 M // well did you di  
 011 M did you expect me to push your button?  
 012 C yeah I did.  
 013 M ok.

In the first lines of this call we find C being admitted to the air, with his initial hesitancy and uncertainty (*I wasn't expecting that*) being treated as unfounded by means of a series of two confirmation requests. By casting his request as confirmation-seeking M constrains C's option but to confirm it. This procedure is open to interpretation as potentially impolite, as it puts a particular aspect of C's negative face, viz. his competence to act appropriately in this interactional arena, at stake.

Interruption as a control resource is used in the following extracts to push forward M's point in which he either elaborates on C's position ('the secret ballot' in America is not secret, extract (9), line 96), or denies it altogether (extract (10), line 62). These procedures are employed in line with the preference for argumentation being a part of the CoP's format, since it fuels controversy and incites confrontation.

(9) **IHS III 10**

086 C + a:nd also there's one other thing that gives me a clue this is a little more  
 087 vague? but if you're there it'd seem real to you .h when I came out of the  
 088 booth. I voted for third parties when Perrot was running and third and fourth  
 089 parties. .hh and when I came out both Republican and Democratic comm~~it~~tee  
 090 men were looking down at the ground, they looked up at me they looked? real  
 091 sad and dejected .hh and I I could tell. it's like as I was saying well how do you  
 092 know who I voted for why're you looking at me in this dejected way.  
 093 M maybe was that little smirk you had on your face that helped the two of the men  
 094 can tell  
 095 C ((laugh)) .hh you don't think there's any way that //  
 096 M→ // I don't think under this so  
 097 called guise of privacy that we have in America today? .h if anything is private.  
 098 including your vote. that is how that is how cynical I have become.  
 099 C yeah. and I wouldn't be I wouldn't be a bit surprised that they mess with the  
 100 vote. I mean who's to keep //  
 101 M→ // well listen to this. many men to Libertarian Party?  
 102 in my district had a file in court .h to get a true reading of how many  
 103 Libertarians voted in the last elections. thanks. for calling? we'll be back?

(10) **IHS III 2**

060 C + + and what do you think the chances are Irv that if you know. that if any of  
 061 this is gonna happen at all. I need anything //  
 062 M→ // there is nothing going to happen  
 063 different with Bob Dole or Bill Clinton .h // four years from now .h you're still?  
 064 C // ( )  
 065 M going to have the IRS doing profile audits .h you're still? going to have .h taxes

066 coming out of your wazoo and you're still? going to have Alan Green spend  
 067 ahead of the fed .h telling you .h that the growth of this country will not be  
 068 more than two and a half to three pre cent.

Interruption as a call termination device is available unilaterally to M as a means of exercising his institutionally granted entitlement to control the extent of talk. However, as a rule, calls are typically terminated collaboratively, with M issuing an acknowledgement of C's participation (*thank you for calling* + address term) and C preferably accepting the termination bid (extract (11)):

(11) **IHS II 4**

043 C yeah. but then why does the federal government then play the tap dance, the  
 044 song and dance? .hh all the stuff we have to do something to improve our  
 045 economy? we have to create jobs et cetera et cetera. .hh  
 046 M you just you just you in the opening statement .hh you spelled that out .hh why  
 047 do they dance and song and dance and play games. and the question ( ) the  
 049 answer is .hh because nobody puts their behind? to the fire? .h in any of these  
 050 senate hearings .h and I don't know why. .h thanks for calling my friend.  
 051 C thank you Irv.

Locations of closing bids are noticeably not haphazard; rather, they are placed after M has presented his opinion on the issue in question. This may become a convenient way for the M to withdraw from further dispute and to unilaterally bring a call to an end. By way of illustration I quote extract (12): after presenting his opinion (20–24) on the matter of houses of prostitution (viz. that they should be legalized) M attempts to halt further C's elaboration of the point – by acknowledging C's participation injected into C's turn (26) he manages to attain C's cut-off. The two participants have evidently access to the overlapped verbal material, since they manage to maintain the coherence of the exchange and, after M's reissuance of the closing bid (27), collaboratively bring the call to a close.

(12) **IHS I 7**

020 M + .hh it's not? facilitating? a healthy? relationship? it's better? when he goes?  
 021 and suffers? in silence? he has no communication? with females? all together?  
 022 .hh you think? prostitutes don't talk? you think they're dumb? you think they're  
 023 stupid? .h some of these girls have college degrees. and can't make the living. as  
 024 a secretary.  
 025 C + I understand what you're you're being // ( )  
 026 M→ // thanks?  
 027 M I know I am Natali? I intend to be. thanks for calling.  
 028 C ok.  
 029 M take care love.

## 5. Conclusion

The system of turn-taking in phone-in interactions, as in any other type of verbal interchange, manages the participants' access to turn – it both describes places

where a switch of speakers is legitimately done but also sets the basic participatory rights, viz. the “right” to current turns. The paper discusses the phenomenon of interruption, which is a by-product of the turn-taking system, whereby interruptees claim participatory right at places outside of transitionally relevant areas. As an expropriation of the current speaker’s right to bring the turn to an end interruption is generally seen as stepping out of the agreed upon norms of acceptable behaviour and, accordingly, may be evaluated negatively as impolite. In the present CoP, however, they are utilized as discursive resources and as such they form a part of the participants’ habitus for this type of social organization. In a predominantly confrontational communication setting marked, among other things, by the floor being often captured at “illegal” places in order to constrain the other participant’s options, to control the content and size of the talk, and ultimately to exercise power, interruption falls within the politic framework of interaction and as such its “intrinsic” impoliteness is neutralized.

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## Abbreviations

C	caller	CoP	Community of Practice
FTA	face-threatening act	M	moderator
PT	Politeness Theory	TT	turn taking
TCU	turn-constructional unit	TRP	transition relevance place

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