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Interruption as a Tool of Cooperation in Sudanese Women's Casual Conversation

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Abstract
This paper investigates the use and function of interruption in Sudanese women's casual conversation. The main objective of the study was to uncover the way in which Sudanese used interruption in their casual conversation and examine the purpose for using it. Data was collected via recording of casual conversations among three groups of women in Sudan. The subjects were briefed about the purpose of recording and the use of the resulting data for research purposes, and their consent was taken before the recordings. A three-hour recording was made, out of which about forty minutes of the recorded data was used for analysis. Results showed that interruption was used by Sudanese women for several purposes, including gaining solo speakership, commenting on a current topic, sharing a similar experience, and eliciting talk. The analysis indicates that the participants accept interruption as a strategy of cooperation, leading to continuation of speech rather than cutting a speaker off or dominating the conversation flow. Results implicate that further investigation of Sudanese women discourse may uncover interesting ways and strategies women use to fulfill their communication demands in both casual and formal conversations.

Keywords: casual conversation, turn-taking, Interruption, women, Sudan

Introduction

Speech differences between men and women have received considerable attention from researchers since the early 1970s. Weatherall (2002) reported that males and females speak differently when communicating, leading to different speech communities. Men's speech reflects power and social advantage, while women exhibit a lack of power and social recognition (Lakoff, 1975). Research on gender differences has shown that power is evident in language use. In the study of speech style, for instance, men were found to employ interruption as a means of controlling the floor in conversation, depending on their assumed power and dominance. This confirms Coates's (1993) argument that conversation patterns between men and women reflect gender inequality. Lakoff (1975) argues that women's language is inferior to men's. Women's speech style conveys weakness, uncertainty, and unimportance, while men's language is perceived as direct and clear.

There are two approaches to gender differences in language that reflect women's status: these are the dominance and cultural approaches. The dominance approach to sex differences in speech, proposed by Lakoff (1975), is concerned with the importance of power between the two sexes, particularly the belief that women tend to occupy a marginal and powerless position in their community. In other words, the dominance approach maintains that the way women speak reflects their subordinate status. Maltz and Borker's (1982) cultural approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the idea that women and men belong to different subcultures. In linguistic terms, the differences in women's and men's speech are interpreted as reflecting and maintaining

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gender subculture. Men interrupt women more than women do during conversation (Octigan & Niederman, 1979). Some interlocutors tend to speak before other participants complete their turn denying the current speakers of their right in the floor. This tendency is perceived as being rude, which is the case in different cultural contexts. These differences are manifested by employing certain linguistic devices, such as hedges and minimal response. Hedges such as "I think," "I'm sure," "you know," "sort of," and "perhaps" show a speaker's certainty or uncertainty about a particular issue (Coates, 1993). Lakoff (1975) argues that women use more hedges than men because they lack confidence. Holmes (1987), on the other hand, believes that women use hedges (e.g. "you know") to support their point in inter-group discussion. Coates (1993) contends that men use fewer hedges than women because the former avoid speaking about personal issues. Rather, they speak about impersonal topics (e.g. current affairs, sports, travel). Women use hedges when talking about their personal experiences when they need to be more confident.

The use of tag questions intensively by women is interpreted as a sign of weakness and uncertainty. Therefore, women are thought to use tag questions in conversation because they are weak and uncertain. In contrast, Coates (1993) asserts that the function of tag questions is to draw speakers into conversation and to keep talk going, as well as to help participants to be in tune with each other. Indicating active participation and interest in conversation can be maintained by minimal responses such as "yeah" and "hmm" (Coates, 1993). Zimmerman and West (1975) add that a well-placed minimal response indicates active attention from the listener, while a delayed one signals lack of interest or understanding. Coates (1993) believes that women use well-placed minimal responses in conversations in an attempt to support each other's talk. In contrast, men use fewer minimal responses to indicate agreement with the speaker.

In fact, women's speech style that deviates from the norm can be seen as unassertive and a sign of weakness (Lakoff, 1975). However, this style is also regarded as a strategy for extending conversation and maintaining solidarity between the participants (e.g. Coates (1989, 1993, 1996); Holmes (1984); Tannen (2007)). In the Sudan, women tend to be intimate, supportive, and cooperative. This nature is reflected, more or less, in their speech behavior and use. Sudanese women use many euphemisms to show their interest in the topic under discussion and to confirm each other's opinions, even if they do not see eye to eye on some issues. In other words, they employ linguistic functions to create intimacy and socialization. This study argues that Sudanese women tend to employ interruption in their casual speech, as a cooperative device in helping a speaker complete her turn. The process goes in line with many studies indicating use of interruption as a cooperative device rather than a means of denying the right of other speakers of their right in the floor. In this sense we may argue that such a tendency violates, in a way or another, Grice (1975) rules of conversation. This is a general principle which governs conversations. It describes how people interact with one another and how they behave in normal conversations (Brown & Yule, 1983).

This study aims to investigate the use of interruption by Sudanese women in casual conversation. Ways and purpose of interruption will also be targeted by the investigation to uncover how linguistic devices such as hedges, minimal response and tag questions are utilized in interrupting a speaker. Thus, the main question the study tried to answer was "How do Sudanese women use interruption to meet certain communication needs"?

Literature Review

Greif (1980) studied interruption among sixteen middle-class children, aged between two and five years, in conversation with their mothers and fathers. Results showed that fathers usually interrupted the children more than mothers did, in addition, both parents interrupted the girls more than the boys. When speaking simultaneously, the parents were very keen to continue talking with the children. Moreover, the father-and-child pairs were more often engaged in simultaneous speech than the mother-and-child pairs. This means that men use interruptions to control the conversation as fathers, under the study, tried to grab the floor using interruption more than mothers did. The results also indicate that both parents employed more interruption to control the talk with the daughters than with the sons. By doing so, girls received an implicit message that they were more interruptible and that they had little right to speak compared with boys.

Zimmerman and West (1975) found out that in mixed-sex conversations, most interruptions were made by men, and that the participants who remained silent were usually women. Silence was found to be caused by two kinds of minimal responses: well-placed and delayed. The function of the former was to demonstrate active attentions and support for the speaker's topic. Delayed minimal responses, by contrast, signaled a lack of interest in and in the speaker's topic. The researchers concluded that in mixed-sex conversations, men infringe women's right to speak.

Beattie (1983) investigated the speech and conversational styles of two British political leaders, Margaret Thatcher and Jim Callaghan. The study focused on conversational turn-taking in the speech of the two politicians. Findings suggest that Margaret Thatcher was interrupted by the interviewer more than Jim Callaghan. Beattie argues that the frequent occurrence of interruptions in Mrs. Thatcher interview was due to the common belief that women are interrupted more often than men are, and that men usually dominate conversation in mixed-sex interaction. The analysis indicates that a woman is exposed to interruption in mixed conversation regardless of the power she had.

In a more interesting study, Reisman (1974) found out that people in Antigua, West Indies did not follow rules of turn-taking. That is, interruptions in this culture can happen anywhere and at any time during conversations while the interrupted persons are not offended. Reisman called this phenomenon 'contrapuntal conversations'. The same conclusion was reached by Wieland (1991), who, studied turn-taking styles of French and American advanced learners of French.

Methods

- *Research design*

The current study adopted a subjective and a qualitative approach with deductive reasoning technique. The data was mainly conversations between the participants of the study, which were set over a few premises and suitable deductions were made. By making use of the qualitative approach, it was easier to deduct a few specific inferences

- *Sampling and Instrumentation*

Urban women from Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, were chosen as subjects for this study. Forty-one women of different age groups (between 18 and 80s) and educational backgrounds were considered during the process of data collection. The subjects were organized into three groups: A, B, and C. Group A consisted of 18 participants aged 60- 80s, all of whom had a received a secondary level of education. Group B comprised 12 women with a university education (30–60 years old). The third group, C, comprised 11 university students aged between 18 and 30 years.

Audio recordings were employed as the instrument in data collection, together with participant observation. Although video recording may be useful for understanding visual aspects of conversation, such as eye gaze and gestures, we did not use this technology. This is because we believed that video recording might have made the subject feel uneasy while being filmed, resulting in unnatural data. Subjects were informed about the recording process and advised that it was to be used for purely academic purposes. We made clear to the subjects that their consent was vital to proceed with the recording. All the 41 women who participated in the process agreed that we could record them while participating in conversation and they had no problem if we used the recordings for research purposes.

- *Data analysis*

The data was transcribed, transliterated, and translated for its analysis, through coding and analytical examination. The data analysis was organized into patterns of devices such as interruptions, tag questions, and minimal responses. The data was also searched with the purpose of extracting instances of interruption such as eliciting talk, gaining solo speakership, and topic shifting.

Results & Findings

Research findings suggest that women use interruptions in their conversation to create and maintain good social relations (Coates, 1989, 1996; Tannen, 2007). This means that women who are engaged in private conversations adopt interruptions as a strategy to support each other's talk, which helps them to show solidarity with one another. In this sense, interruptions can be seen as a sign of active participation in conversations (Tannen, 2007). However, Zimmerman and West (1975) argue that interruption is used as a means of exerting control in conversations, resulting in the denial to the current speaker of his/her turn. In light of this discussion, we will analyze instances of interruption and their functions in Sudanese women's speech which were mainly eliciting talk, gaining solo speakership, and topic shifting.

- *Eliciting talk*

The data suggest that interruption to elicit talk is common in Sudanese women's conversations. It is a strategy that women employ to encourage participants who tend to be silent during conversation to talk. The following extracts from the three groups under investigation illustrate this use of interruption.

[Two young women speaking about a facial cream]
1-N: iḥna ga‹di:n naji:b ã:.nista‹mal EM.EM lo:s<han
1-N: We bring. We use um EM.EM lotion
2-R: ã:y EM lo:shan
2-R: Yeah EM lotion
3-N: awwal ḥ̃ãja bi.allakhdar da.…
3-N: First with the green one…
4-R: allakhdar zãtu
4-R: The green one, itself
5-R: mãjibtu fillijãza‹amaltu yo:mein bas
5-R: I bought it in the holiday. I used it for only two days.
6-N: u:

6-N: Yeah
7-R: washshi da biqa lo:nu la,'washshi da biqa aḥmar aḥmar
7-R: My face's color became, no, my face became red, red
8-N: fataḥ leik washshik?
8-N: Did it lighten your face?
9-R: Aḥmar ṭawwali waqqaftu.Aʿmal ley ḥasasiya.
9-R: Red. I stopped it immediately. It caused me an allergy…

Both N and R had the same experience of using the cream for facial treatments. When R talks, N interrupts to share her own experience or to agree with R. Contrary to West and Zimmerman (1983), the interruption here was adopted because the speaker wanted to share her experience with the product, rather than trying to dominate the conversation. So, now N (3) mentioned "green lotion," R (4) interrupted her. R (4) slowed down the pace at "zãtu" [itself], which was central to her turn. Slowing down the pace was meant to emphasize that R used the same cream.

It is obvious that elicitation of talk occurred when N (8) interrupted R to enquire about the effect of the cream. R (7)'s utterance of "washshi da biqa lo:nu" [My face's color became] occurred simultaneously with N (8)'s question: "fataḥ leik washshik?" [Did it lighten your face?]. With her question, N attempted to elicit more explanation from R, since she was eager to know the effect of the cream on the face. Because R was speaking and listening at the same time, she abruptly cut herself off to answer N, after N had finished her enquiry, saying "la'" [no] in a relatively faster pace so as to keep her turn. Then, R completed her speech, explaining the product's negative effect on her face by stressing "aḥmar" [red] and repeating it. By doing so, N succeeded at eliciting the information she needed from R about the cream.

In another conversation (Group B), encouraging inactive participants to take a turn was detected:
[Conversation about making henna]
1-S: R ṭabaʿan min elʿiris.tãni… alḥinna di mã shãfata
1-S: For sure, R, from the wedding….did not, any more see henna
2-M: ley[yã R mabtakhutiya?
2-M: Why, R, don't you put it on (henna)?
3-R: mã batḥannan illa bilmunãsabãt
3-R: I don't put it on, except on occasions
4-M: mabtaḥibiya?
4-M: Don't you like it?
5-R: mush mã baḥibba hi ḥilwa ew baḥibba lãkin
5-R: It's not that I don't like it, it's nice and I like it, but
6-M: mã ʿindik wakit
6-M: You don't have time (for it)
7-R: mã ʿindi yaʿni.iza matḥannanta[mã ʿindi mushkila
7-R: It's not, like. if I don't put it on, it's not a problem
8-H: bitkkassil. bitkkassil
8-H: She gets lazy. She gets lazy
9-M: u hu rãjlik?
9-M: And what about your husband (whether he likes it)?
10-R: ihi (sound of embarrassment)

S (1)'s talk appeared to be oriented toward all participants; she did not select R as the next speaker. Then, M (2) asked R directly, saying "ley yã R mabtakhutiya?" [Why, R, don't you put it on (henna)?]. At the beginning of M's turn, R (3) interrupted her, responding to S's criticism, to clarify that she just put on henna occasionally. R (3)'s clarification resulted more from S (1)'s interruption than M(2)'s enquiry since she began to talk immediately after M started her turn, without hearing what M said. M (4) cut R off before R's speech reached its possible completion, asking "mabtaḥibiya?" [Don't you like it?] to elicit more talk from her. R (5) disagreed with M's enquiry, adding more explanation, but she dropped out at "lãkin" [but], leaving her turn incomplete. In order to encourage R to speak, M (6) self-selected, inferring what suited R (5)'s utterance of "ḥilwa u baḥibba" [It's nice and I like it], proposing "mã ʿindik wakit" [You don't have time] as a possible completion of R's turn. At this point, R (7) started her next turn by repeating M's utterance of "mã ʿindi" [I don't have] and then explaining her point. H (8) interrupted R for more elicitation when R (7) said "iza ma it ḥannanta" [if I don't put on henna], inferring "bitkkassil(.)bitkkassil" [She gets lazy(.)she gets lazy], which she produced simultaneously with R's utterance "mãʿindi mushkila" [I have no problem]. Another use of interruptions for eliciting talk is to complete a story being told. This is obvious in the following extract.

[A conversation between women friends about magic work]
1-B: shufti. ayyãm Y…….
1-B: You see.since Y….
2-F: [yalla elãyãt(.)qãl leik ghurãn ella da
2-F: It's the Quranic verses(.) God's Quran

3-B: zam[ã:n
3-B: A long time ago
4-F: wallãy yã M(.)wallãy alghurãn biʿãlij
4-F: Really, M(.)really, Quran heals (from magic deeds)
5-B: yalla ḍara [baṭ leio bitabki
5-B: Then she (a woman) called him (the sheikh, a religious man), crying
6-M: [biʿãlij
6-M: It (Quran) heals
7-B: mã
7-B: She
8-F: [alghurãn biʿãlij
8-F: Quran heals
9-B: qa[ʿid tashu:f elkaʿba.su:dãniya
9-B: Couldn't see the ka'ba (God's house), she's Sudanese
10-A: [biʿãlij…
10-A: It heals…
11-M: qãlat shinu
11-M: What did she say?
12-B: qat le ebqi:t mã qaʿdashu:f elkaʿba…
12-B: She told him that she couldn't see the kaba…

In this extract, although F, M, and A ignored B's story at the beginning by supporting each other's turns, B did not stop talking. F(2) initiated the interruption, then M(6) and A(10) supported F's view as B tried to continue speaking. At the point when B (9) uttered "su:dãniya" [Sudanese], M(11) became attracted by her story and interrupted A, asking B "qãlat shinu?" [What did she say?]. M's utterance emerged at a fast pace, trying to stop the other participants and to elicit further information from B since she was interested in the topic. The interruption used here has nothing to do with claiming dominance over the conversation. Rather, it is a means of women competing to try to contribute to the conversation. Generally, in such a situation, Sudanese women adopt interruptions as a means of holding the floor until they complete their stories. This was apparent when B continued telling her story despite the frequent attempts by the other women to stop her.

- *Gaining solo speakership*

Interruptions are not always a miscue in the turn-taking system, but they can be placed inappropriately in a speaker's turn where a change does not occur at the possible completions (Liddicoat, 2007). The following extract shows how participant try to gain solo speakership through interruption.

[Female university students discussing a facial treatment]
1-N: da qãl leim mã ṣanbilok illa lamman.lamman ʿamalu
1-N: He (a doctor) said it's not sun block, when.when they made
2-N: elkiu:ti:n da ʿãrfa taʿmali eshnu?.tablaʿiya ewtanu:mi.
2-N: The cutin you know what to do?(.)just take it (the pill) then sleep.
3-S: da mã khaṭar
3-S: It's dangerous
4-N: bitllabbisum kida nighãb kida.nighãb lo:nu labani ewbuni
4-N: She (a doctor) let them put on a veil.a blue and brown veil
5-N: bas kida
5-N: Just like that
6-S: da eshnu? da eshnu?
6-S: What is this? What is this?
7-N: u ṭarbuṭ washsha ew kida u mabtalãqi eshshamis li muddat
7-N: And covers her (the girl) face, and the like, and must not expose to the sun for
8-N: shahrei::n.nihã'i[.le muddat talãta yo:m taqʿud filbeit
8-N: Two months. never. stay at home for three days
9-R: di ṭaḥṣṣal keif?
9-R: How come?
10-N: khãliṣ juwa [filwãṭa emḍallima
10-N: Never, inside in dark
11-R: asmaʿi.
11-R: Listen.
12-N: lãkin matshu:fi washsha biqa keif
12-N: But, see her face, how it became

In the above extract, N acted as a solo speaker in the conversation despite four attempted interruptions. The first two attempted interruptions were made by S (comment 3 and question 6), while the others were

made by R (question 9 and comment 11). N produced a complex utterance, which itself represented a single turn. She employed a Multi-TCU (Turn Constructional Unit) turn. This led S(3,6) and R(9,11) to interrupt by asking "ta‹mali eshnu?" [What will you do?] (N(2)). The purpose of the question is to participate in the conversation rather than to request information. This suggests that S's and R's interruptions aimed at completing N's turn rather than cutting it off. This kind of interruption is generally evident in Sudanese women's casual conversation, especially when discussing an important topic. Further evidence of this claim can be observed in the following extract.

[Discussion about S's sister-in-law]
1-A: ḥassi yã S.ya‹ni.law inti.itti
1-A: Now, S.like.if you.you.
2-H: [hu law yã ustãza A.min
2-H: If it was, teacher A.from
3-H: elawwal kãn ghalaṭ[.min elawwal kãn ghalaṭ
3-H: The beginning, was wrongfrom the beginning, was wrong.
4-M: [itti ‹ãrfa. alḥamawãt bizzãt biku:nu
4-M: You know.sisters-in-law are
5-H: kãn imshi ishtari inshãlla shaqqa tamli:k.ba‹i:d
5-H: He should buy a flat, far (from S's sister-in-law)
6-M: fi ḥasãda ew ghi:ra shadi:da.ã:y
6-M: Envious and jealous, so much(.)yeah

When A (1) began to speak, H (2) interrupted her by criticizing S for living next to her sister-in-law's house from the beginning. Then M (4) entered H (3)'s turns at a possible completion, "kãn ghalaṭ" [was wrong], by describing sisters-in-law as envious and jealous. At this point, both H and M spoke simultaneously in a solo mode. Although the topic was related to S, H (2) took the turn by interrupting A, saying "hu law yã ustãza A" [If it was, teacher A]. M (4), on the other hand, cut H(3) off, directing the talk to S. H repeated her previous words of "kãn ghalaṭ" [was wrong] as a device to emphasize her role and to seize the turn as a solo speaker, but M did not stop. This situation can be described as a case of two solo speakers, since both M and H were speaking at the same time. A similar tendency can be detected in the following extract.

[Three women talking about losing weight]
1-S: itti ‹ãrfa deilãk.ṣubḥãn ellã.bidu:hum tamãri:n ana baqu:l
1-S: You know, they (fat people). they do exercises, I believe that
2-S: elwãḥid fi:hum bimu:t
2-S: They would die (because of hard exercises)
3-M: ã:y=
3-M: Yeah
4-S: = ijru.wi[shi:lu.biku:nu shãyli:n ḥãjãt
4-S: They run.and carry.the carry things (as they run)
5-M: [wãḥdi:n bijjari-[biddu:m ḥãjãt
5-M: Some of them run-they carry heavy things
6-R: [lamman kutta]
6-R: When I was
7-R: fishshughul. mush kãn bitji:ni khãlti? .aṣlu mã kutta sami:na…
7-R: Working. didn't my aunt use to drive me? I had never been fat (because she used to go to a weight loss center)

In the above conversation, S (4) talked about overweight people who wanted to lose weight at centers where they had to do tough exercises, such as running while holding heavy objects. Then M (5) interrupted S at the beginning of her turn, when S said "ijru (.) wa" [They run and], to confirm S's view by adding "wãḥdi:n bijjari…" [Some of them run…]. R (6) cut M off to show her experience. In this situation, three women spoke simultaneously in a solo-speaker mode. Each woman was very keen to talk about her own experience with the exercises. It is obvious that the three women did not hear each other when they all spoke at the same time; when interruption occurs, speakers cannot hear each other. However, they were still able to communicate in the speech event. This is because they were familiar with each other and with the way the talk was organized. In fact, solo speakership is a characterizing feature of Sudanese women's casual conversation, where interruption is adopted as a tool for taking turns.

- *Topic shifting*

According to Coates (1996), women's conversation can be developed randomly from topic to topic. Interruption is adopted by women in this process of topic shifting without any consideration for turn completion on the part of the current speaker. The following extract demonstrates this phenomenon.

[A conversation about gold mining]
1-R: yã bit qa‹d eṭla‹u.qa‹d eṭla‹u bi: dahab kimmiyãt

1-R: You see, they get(.) they get (the miners) a lot of gold
2-S: lãkin fiya fiya fiya ḥayãtum(.) yatmu:ti yã tamshi
2-S: But it costs, it costs, it costs (mining) their lives(.) death or life
3-R: ḥassi [rãfʿi:n qaḍḍiya fi: wãḥid
3-R: Now there is an accusation case of somebody
4-S: [fiya ḥayãtik yã kida yã kida(.)yã[mutti yã
4-S: It costs your life, either this or that (.)either death or
5-R: rãfʿi:n fi
5-R: An accusation
6-R: elqaḍḍiya. wãḥid bãʿ lei[.hinãy
6-R: Of someone who sold them like
7-S: leih?…
7-S: For what? (this risk)…
8-N: yãkhi
8-N: You see
9-N: aṣḥãb nãs D deil ṭalaʿu leim bei dahab khurãfi.kimmiya khurãfiya
9-N: D's friends got a lot of gold, a huge amount
10-N: jo rãjʿi:n sãlmi:n…
10-N: They got back safe…
11-R: hu aljjirãm bei tisʿi:n milyo:n
11-R: The gram (of gold) is 90 million
12-S: [qari:b el…
12-S: It's about…

In this conversation, a topic shift occurred three times. R (1) started with one topic, then shifted to another story, R (3), then N (8) told a related story, and finally R (11) mentioned gold prices. As R talked about gold mining, S (2) took the turn as the next speaker. She started with the contrasting conjunction of "lãkin" [But], then repeated "fiya" [it costs] twice, searching for the right word which was "ḥayãtum" [their lives]. Then, R (3) spoke before being interrupted by S (4). She stressed "ḥayãtik" [your life] to emphasize her opinion. At this point, R (5) cut S off by telling an incomplete story about someone who had been accused of gold mining illegally. R (6) slowed down the pace with "elqaḍḍiya" [the case] to grab the others' attention. S (7), in turn, interrupted R talking about mining risk, which left the story incomplete. N (8) entered S's turn to shift to a new story about people who had obtained a significant quantity of gold from mining. N (10)'s words of "jo rajʿi:n sãlmi:n" [They got back safe] was a result of S(2,4)'s previous discussion about the assumed risk of mining. As N continued, R (11) interrupted her, talking about the dramatic increase in gold prices. This occurred as a reaction to N (8,9)'s prior story about the people with a large amount of gold.

[A conversation about old women and pregnancy]
1-N: alla[idiya.wallãy saʿba…
1-N: Hope god gives her (a baby), It's really hard (not having children) …
2-M: ummahãtna deil mã biwlidu lilkhamsi:n
2-M: Our mothers had babies till their 50s
3-M: lamman yeqṭaʿu[biwlidu ṣãḥ? wallãy W di
3-M: Till they got unfertilized they could have babies, right?
4-N: ã:y. hay yã yumma
4-N: Yeah. it's
5-M: banat akhwata akbbar minna
5-M: Her nieces are older than her
6-N: Hu yaʿni sãkit…
6-N: It's, like, just…
7-R: awwal ṭifil.ʿashãn elawwal…
7-R: The first baby. for it's the first one…
8-N: alawwal.
8-N: The first one.
9-N: wãḥda. [ʿumura tamãni:n sana jãbuwa fi:
9-N: A woman(.)there is a woman in her 80s, she was seen in …
10-R: [ʿashãn hi mã wildat qabul kida
10-R: For she has never had a baby
11-N: ghanãt eljazi:ra.tamãni:n sana qãlu ṭallaʿu minna jani:n-nãshif
11-N: Jazira channel. 80 years, she had a dead baby- It was dry
12-R: [sajamik qu:l leya
12-R: (an expression of pity)
13-N: aẓin min kam ew talãti:n sana…
13-N: I think the baby stayed inside her more than 30 years(.)…

As shown in the above conversation, interruptions occurred four times for the purpose of shifting topic. First, M (2) interrupted N (1) who was talking about a woman who could not have a baby. M (2,3) gave examples to support her view that older women can still have babies. M used different strategies (slowing down the pace of the talk, stressing words, speeding up, and volume) successively to attract attention to her turn. In so doing, she slowed down the pace of "lilkhamsi:n" [till their 50s] and stressed "lamman" [Till]. After N (4) interrupted M (3), M speeded up "wallõy Wa di" [really, this and] in order to stop N. When N did not drop out, M (5) raised her voice at "BANAT AKHWATA" [Her nieces] to take the floor, but N(6) still completed her turn. Second, R (7) cut N off by referring to the latter's story, saying "awwal ṭifil(.)ʿashõn alawwal" [The first baby(.)for it's the first one]. Here, R intended her speech to be understood by the others. That is, she wanted to reemphasize what she meant by the words "awwal ṭifil" [The first baby] by saying "ʿashõn elawwal" [for it's the first one]. Third, N (8) interrupted R to stress her opinion by saying "alawwal" [The first one], then shifted abruptly to tell the case of an old woman who, it is claimed, had a dead baby in her womb for 30 years. She introduced a new topic at a relatively slow pace to attract the attention of the others. Fourth, R (10) cut N off from shifting to her previous story by saying "ʿashõn hi mõ wildat qabul kida" [For she has never had a baby].

Despite their use of interruptions for shifting from one topic to another, the women in this conversation were able to understand each other through active participation. This confirms Coates' (1996) claim that women sometimes use interruptions as a tool of topic shifting in casual conversation.

- *Telling a similar story*

According to Coates (1996), women mirror each other in their casual conversations. Mirroring, Coates (1996) argues, occurs when one participant tells a story while another reacts by telling a similar story from her/his own experience. In the Sudanese context, however, a storyteller normally controls the speech event. In such situations, the narrator may be interrupted by another who would like to share a similar story. The following extract shows a clear set of examples of this kind of mirroring interruption.

[A conversation about losing weight]
1-S: qõlu ley aqʿudi filwãṭa.wadʿaki kida
1-S: They told me to sit on the floor.and press the ground
2-N: la la la[wallõy
2-N: No, no, no, really (not like this)
3-M: [ḥa[rrikiya
3-M: Move it
4-S: [arriyãḍa
4-S: The exercise (that she explains)
5-N: zamõ:nik õ:y.fi.fi wãḥda.
5-N: Earlier, yeah there's.there's someone.
6-N: shuf[ti.iqu:l leik aʿmali kida
6-N: You see.they say do like this (shows them the move)
7-M: [waḍrabi bilḥeiṭa]
7-M: And hit the wall (with the hips)
8-M: barḍu ebqu:l leik.ṭaḍrabi
8-M: .also, they say.hit (with the hips)
9-S: õ:y-a:
9-S: Yeah-um
10-M: etqi:[fi bilḥeiṭa barḍu
10-M: Stand at the wall, too
11-N: ʿõy.ʿõyni yõ yõ yõ S
11-N: Yes.look, S
12-S: õ:[…
12-S: Um…
13-N: [zamõnik ana lamman masheit elmmaḥḥad (.)ana kutta//
13-N: Earlier, when I went to the losing weight center.I was
14-N: ḍakhma shadi:d…
14-N: Too fat…

In the above extract, the topic under discussion was of interest to all of the participants: exchanging information about how to lose weight. S (1) began by telling of her experience about how she lost weight, then N and M added new information to the topic. N (5) started her turn, saying "zamõ:nik" [Earlier], then M(7) interrupted her adding "waḍrabi bilḥeiṭa" [for get it]. On the other hand, the comment by N (11), who had had a similar experience, was an attempt to get S's attention. N(13) finally took the turn to tell her story after cutting S off. The use of "zamõnik õ:y" [Earlier, yeah] by N(5) worked as a means to introduce the new topic. This was repeated in N (13) with the intention of taking the turn in the conversation. The following extract shows more examples of mirroring stories.

[Mirroring story with a similar anecdote]
1-S: kãn shufti ẓabaṭṭa[elmunabbih….ʿãd qumta eṣṣabãḥ alqa leik
1-S: You see I set the alarm….when I got in the morning
2-M: [ʿaleik ella?-maṣḥi:ti?
2-M: Really? -didn't you wake up?
3-S: yã yumma elmo:[ya di:k.
3-S: I found the water.
4-M: [alazzãn azzan.wassãʿa kam itti ebtaqu:mi?
4-M: The morning calling.when do you get up?
5-S: [bã::rda]
5-S: Very cold
6-H: [itti mã shufti.ana bit ux[ti qãmat.
6-H: You see.my niece got up
7-S: numta.aẓin waḥda
7-S: I slept. I think at 1 a.m.
8-H: ṭaḍḥak fi:ni
8-H: She laughed at me
9-M: ab mã tãkli ew tanu:mi.illa ṭaṣḥi tãni?
9-M: Eat then sleep.should you get up again?
10-S: la ã:. kutta mitʿashshiya…
10-S: No, um. I ate…
11-H: shufti yalla ã: umbãriḥ bit ukhti….
11-H: You see, um, yesterday my niece….

In the above extract, S (1) is talking about setting her alarm at midnight so that she could drink water before the morning prayer calling. H (6), on the other hand, tried to take the turn for telling a similar story. She started her turn by saying "itti mã shufti" [You see], but none of the participants paid her any attention. Rather, both S and M continued talking simultaneously. H (8) seized the floor, telling her own story. At this point, M (9) interrupted H by selecting S as the next speaker and suggesting that S should eat before going to sleep. Then, H stopped what she was saying because nobody seemed to be listening to her story. Eventually, H (11) gained speakership after interrupting S.

It seems that the women in the above conversation employed interruptions as a means of creating solidarity among themselves. They broke turn-taking rules to help each other with topic completion, which indicates a cultural aspect of Sudanese women. This means that interruption is determined by cultural conventions. Ulijn and Xiangling (1995) study on interruptions in intercultural multimember business negotiations between Chinese and Dutch provides evidence for this tendency. The Chinese negotiators were found to have used interruption because it was part of their culture, not a means of turn taking. Deng (1998) argues that Chinese speakers display relatively high rates of interruptions in conversations in comparison to speakers from other cultures.

Discussion

Sudanese women in this study used interrupting comments intensively as a means of securing active participation in interactions, rather than controlling the floor. This tendency is consistent with Coates' (1996) claim that comments function as a sign of active participation posing no threat to the current speaker's turn. We argue that Sudanese women use interruption as a cooperative tool in helping the current speaker complete her turn. That is, interruption is used when a woman is talking about an issue based on her own experience, other women participants interrupt her sharing their experience with the same issue in an attempt to enrich the conversation and help the speaker go on the conversation.

Interruption in this context is by no means intended to cut off the current speaker and deny her right in the floor. However, Sudanese women also use interruption as a means of taking turn in hot discussion over a disputed issue where each participant would like to convince others with her point of view. In both cases interruption is accepted as a means of contributing significantly to the completion of turn in women's conversations. The results go in line with the norms in the French culture where interruption is viewed as a sign of active participation in a conversation.

In the Sudanese culture interruption is generally viewed as a means of asserting dominance of a conversation particularly among male adults and in mixed conversation (i.e. involving male and female participants). In these contexts, interruption is regarded as impolite especially when practiced by young people at the presence of adults or by a woman in mixed conversations. The situation becomes even worse when a child interrupts his/her parents. This is the case in most communities in the Arab world as well as Africa. This confirms Tannen (2002) finding that communities interruption can be used as a strategy for taking the floor, but in some occasions it is used to indicate active listening or enthusiasm (Tannen, 2002). In Sudanese women's discourse, then, violation of turn-taking rules in conversation via interruption is perceived positively. Women do not see interruptions or overlaps as impolite phenomena. Instead, interruption can be a way for creating co-operation in women's interaction.

Acceptance of this kind of interruption is evident in various cultures such as East European, Italian, Greek, Spanish, South American, Slavic, Arab, African, etc. (Tannen, 2007). Reisman (1974) argues that turn-taking rules are not followed faithfully in Antigua, West Indies. Interruptions in this culture can happen anywhere and anytime, and the person who interrupts is not viewed negatively by the participants. Therefore, breaking the rules of conversation is viewed differently in different cultures, which may create misunderstanding in cross-cultural conversation. French people, for instance, regard breaking turn-taking rules as a sign of active participation in a conversation, while Germans perceive it as being aggressive. Wieland (1991), on the other hand, investigated turn-taking rules in conversation among French and American advanced learners of the French language during dinner-table talk. Wieland (1991) found that French speakers employed more interruptions than their Americans counterparts.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that interruption is a characterizing feature of Sudanese women's interaction. Sudanese women were found to have used interruption for different purposes in casual conversation. Eliciting talk, shifting topic, gaining solo speakership, and commenting are among the reasons for using interruption in their conversations. In addition, interruption for purposes such as telling a similar story, gaining solo speakership, and topic shifting were used predominantly by the Sudanese women in the study. Some of the participants wanted to simply take part in the conversation, whereas others wanted to either dominate the floor or introduce a new topic. The latter purpose appeared to be prevalent as women friends normally talk about different topics to secure the flow of conversation, with little focus on the topic itself.

Hence, the study concludes that interruption is culturally accepted and widely used as a sign of active participation, as well as a tool for maintaining the flow of casual conversation among Sudanese women. The findings indicate a clear need for further research in use of interruption in a variety of Sudanese contexts including, rural uneducated women, mixed conversation (at home and the workplace), and political discourse.

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