ABSTRACT

This study seeks to redefine the nature and functional aspects of conversational interruption and to investigate the relationship between interruption and gender influence.

Interruption and overlap are two linguistic features that have often been closely associated. As such, there is an utmost need to examine the relationship between these two linguistic features and to further establish a clear distinction of interruption from overlap. This study proposes an objective definition for interruption and concludes overlap as a subset form of interruption. This study has also reassessed Rosenstein and McLaughlin’s three categories of interruption and has further proposed an improved categorization of interruption nature. Based on interruption intentions, this new classification comprises of (1) Unintentional Interruption and (2) Intentional Interruption (which can be further categorized as (a) Intact Intentional Interruption and (b) Un-intact Intentional Interruption).

Previous studies have also termed interruption as a mere act of dominance and have often affixed it with a clearly negative and power-laden connotation. The cooperative function of interruption has inevitably been neglected, and this study seeks to bring light to the multifunctional aspects of interruption and attempts to shed away the narrow and negative connotation of interruption which is present in most previous studies. Based on interruption functions, this study proposes another nine categories of interruption, namely: (a) Collaborative (b) Clarificative
(c) Humour (d) Conclusive (e) Inspirative (f) Defensive (g) Corrective 
(h) Spontaneous and (i) Assertive. This study further incorporates Brown 
and Levinson Face Politeness Theory and proposes yet another new 
categorization based on the politeness aspects of interruption, which 
consist of (1) Face-Saving Interruption (FSI) and (2) Face-threatening 
Interruption (FTI). Face-saving Interruption comprises of functions (a) –(e) 
while Face-threatening Interruption includes functions (f)–(i).

Gender differences often attribute to the existing differences in 
communication styles. This study thus aims to investigate the salient 
influence of gender upon interruption through comparison study across 
and within gender pairs. Besides a general gender comparison, this study 
also performs a gender comparison study based on similar personality in 
order to achieve a more justifiable investigative finding. From the 
obtained results, this study then derives patterns of gender influence upon 
interruption and thus establishes the conclusion that gender does exert 
influence on interruption pattern. Last but not least, this study proposes a 
model to illustrate and explain the process of gender influence upon 
interruption.