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TURN-TAKING IN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*

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Abstract:

*Turn-taking is a process which enables interlocutors to decide who the next speaker is in a conversation. This study aims to identify the factors that affect turn-taking in conversations and state the factors that influence turn-taking such as gender, power, and the differences between overlapping and interrupting, and gap and pause. It observes these factors in Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. The study is of significance because it integrates linguistic discourse analysis with literature by analyzing a literary text. The conclusion shows how turn-taking serves to understand a literary work by employing the rate of overlapping and the effect of power to determine the points of strong conversations and strong events in a literary work and therefore determine the introduction, climax, and the end. Moreover, more overlapping entails less organization in turn-taking which will undoubtedly affect the progress of the story or flow of events in a literary work.*

Keywords: *Turn taking, Tennessee Williams, interrupting, overlapping, power, gender Preliminaries.*

Turn-taking differs according to speaker, topic, gender and power. It can be studied in any conversation or any literary work. Kathleen Ashenfelter (6) says that turn-taking is a phenomenon which takes place during conversation, when one person ends his speaking and the other person then begins his turn. "Conversations could not occur without turntaking because in order for the exchange of information to take place one speaker takes a turn at speaking and then the other person takes a turn and so forth", she adds.

Turn-taking process in speaking differs from that in writing. If we look at turn-taking in writing we notice that there are no pauses, overlaps or incomplete ideas. For example, two persons write letters to each other, every person will complete his idea then sends it. Spoken turn-taking, is heavy with overlaps, incomplete ideas, pauses, interrupting and interjecting. Spoken turn-taking has been studied by many researchers (see Sacks et al 1974).

The study is in two parts: the first part consists of a brief review of some studies related to turn-taking in linguistics focusing on interrupting, overlapping, pausing and gaping. The second part of the study derives its data from the dialogues taken from Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*. Selected dialogues are analyzed to find instances of interrupting, overlapping, pausing and gaping. The analysis uncovers functions of turn-taking of these instances and illustrates the role of gender and power.

Emiliano Padilha (20-21) sees that turn-taking is not something determined by just talking or sending questions; it depends on allocation which determines selection of the next speaker. He suggests four ways or strategies to select the next speaker

1. Basic techniques such as gazing and attaching a vocative.
2. Addressed tag questions like "aren't you?"
3. An elliptic question that follows or interrupts a turn as in "today? me? married her?"
4. social identities can also make someone immediately selectable without an explicit addressing.

This process of exchanging ideas has to be governed by rules to make it useful. The relationship between the speaker and the listener is similar to that between tennis players; the first sends the ball and the

other receives. They cannot send or receive at the same time. If two interlocutors talk simultaneously, the process of communication will reach a point of breakdown.

Gene Lerner (4) makes a relationship between turn-taking and practices or what he names it as "human conduct". People differ from one another in communication especially turn-taking according to his/her behavior. You may meet a person who listens to you carefully because he is interested in the subject, a person who just listens without any attention, a person who encourages you to keep talking, or a person who interrupts you and cuts your conversations. All of these practices make Lerner discuss turn-taking under *human conduct*. In *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, David Crystal (489) says "conversation is seen as a sequence of conversational turns, in which the contribution of each participant is seen as part of a co-ordinated and rule-governed behavioural interaction."

Turn-taking Mechanism and rules

Every person can select the next speaker by different ways. The speaker can say the name directly or other identifying term that belongs to a specific person. The speaker can gaze at a particular person to make him speak and participate in a conversation. Sometimes a gaze is not enough to specify the next speaker; so the speaker may use words like "you" with the gaze to specify the participant. Finally, the speaker may use the word "you" without a gaze in a case that the next speaker is mentioned before or is specified in the conversation (Lucas 78).

Authors like Harvey Sacks et al., Mark Maat and Emiliano Padiha talk about the rules of turn taking. They mention three rules:

1. During the conversation, the first speaker can select the next speaker by saying any word related to a specific person, or any sign to the next speaker. Here the next speaker is obliged to speak and take the turn.
2. If the speaker does not select any next speaker, then any speaker can select himself/herself to be the next speaker. That is called self-selection.
3. If the speaker does not select anyone to be the next speaker and no one started to speak, then the current speaker may continue to speak. (see Padiha 24)

These three rules are presented in order to avoid overlapping or stopping the discourse which may end the conversation.

Turn-taking and related issues

Turn-taking is affected by many factors according to situation or aspect. Two related issues that affect turn-taking namely power and gender will be discussed below:

Power

Conversation, like any other way of communication, is affected by participants. Power is one of the things that affect the conversation. Robin Wooffitt (186) maintains that power controls the turn. The priority of taking the turn is for the person who has the power. A student can't cut off his instructor's talk, but the instructor can do so. Position is what power depends on. A broadcaster is a very good example of the relationship between turn-taking and power. It is necessary to give the broadcaster the power to cut off any guest, because he is governed by time and the program rules. The second situation is when the turn controls power. Sometimes, the conversation looks like fighting. Everyone wants to talk and to support his idea or introduce his opinion about something. This is especially seen in talk shows. An interlocutor needs two things to take the turn: speak quickly and loudly in addition to having good information or evidence. This makes him able to persuade the others, and then he takes the power through his words not his position.

Gender

Ashenfelter (20) introduces some differences between men and women. The results are that women talk in a close posture, while men do so in an expansive posture. Women use facial expressions more than men. Women do a lot of gazing, while men stare away. Moreover, women have expectations of

positivity (optimistic), while men are more accurate at sending positive information to others.

Overlap

Going back to turn-taking rules, the second one is self-selection which states that the listener can select himself to be the next speaker if the current speaker does not choose one to speak. In some conversations, there is violation of the second rule. Both the speaker and the listener or the next speaker all speak at the same time. Antoine Raux (2008) explains that some listeners do not wait and add something while the first speaker is still talking. This is what is called overlap which is linked with the time between turns. There is an unnoticeable limited distance between turns. If both the speaker and listener stop talking, there will be a gap, but if they speak together, there will be an overlap. To take the turn in an appropriate way, the next speaker should go to the middle point in between (Lerner 39). The more one avoids overlapping the more organization he achieves.

Jefferson (12) is among the prominent scholars who wrote on overlap. He distinguishes three types: *transitional overlap* which takes place when more than one listener waits for the Transition Relevance Place (TRP) to speak. Once the current speaker stops, two or more people start to speak and make the overlap. *Recognitional overlap* happens when the speaker tries to finish his sentence because he wants to remember something. This situation pushes the listener to talk about the same subject, to show that he/she understands what the current speaker is talking about. The third type is *progressional overlap* where the listener talks during the pauses in a turn. The speaker may stop or retrieve a word and the listener exploits this stop (pause) to make it like a gap.

There are stops between sentences within the turn, and stops between turns. The former is called pause, while the latter is called gap. As mentioned above, in progressional overlap the next speaker or the listener talks during pauses not gaps, and that is the essence of the third type of overlapping (Lerner 40). When two or more speakers talk at the same time, the gap or the pause is called overlapping. But when the listener talks while the current speaker is talking or within the sentence, this is called interrupting.

To reduce gaps and overlaps, it is necessary to study them using the rules of turn taking, because the turn has no specific limits of size "There is, then, no general specification of turn size for conversation. Actual turn sizes depend on the use of the allocative techniques to occasion transition." (Lerner 39)

Rule one stipulates that during the conversation the first speaker can select the next speaker by saying any word belonging to a specific person, or any sign to the next speaker. Here, the next speaker is obliged to speak and take the turn. Sometimes the next speaker is not motivated to speak or hesitates; in this case, the current speaker can repeat the last words and choose other speakers.

Rule two says that if the speaker does not select any next speaker, then any speaker can select himself/herself to be the next speaker. This is called self-selection. Some speakers extend the duration of the last word as a sign to the next speaker to start. So the next speaker will select himself smoothly. This technique helps to reduce the gaps. But sometimes more than one speakers start to speak, and then overlapping occurs. To avoid this overlap, one speaker uses a technique like ["uh" + pause + sentence], then follows this with a sequence of sentences and takes his turn. This technique also helps to minimize overlaps.

Rule three says that if the speaker does not select anyone to be the next speaker and no one started to speak, then the current speaker may continue to speak. Because the next speaker does not speak and the current speaker continues speaking the gap will be a pause. In this case, the current speaker may utter an incomplete sentence that is known to the speaker, so the next speaker completes it and finds himself taking the turn. For example:

A: after that we went to the clothing shop to buy

B: trousers.

This way encourages the next speaker to speak especially if he is hesitated or not motivated to add something. (Lerner 39-42)

Data Analysis

This section is the practical part of the study which analyzes turn-taking in Tennessee Williams's play *The Glass Menageries*. All instances of turn-taking in the text have been surveyed. Nevertheless, including all instances in the analysis will make it too long for a research paper. That's why out of practicality, the researchers have been selective of the most prominent instances in the text taking into account covering all aspects and strategies discussed in the previous pages.

Characters of the play

Four characters participate in *The Glass Menagerie*: Amanda Wingfield is the mother who speaks continuously and rarely gives a chance to the next speaker to speak, so she is expected to fall in overlapping with the other characters; Laura Wingfield is Amanda's daughter. Because she is shy and does not talk much, there is no overlapping expected when other characters speak to her; Tom Wingfield is Amanda's son and Laura's younger brother who is often in dispute with his mother. While they talk many overlaps occur. Sometimes they struggle to take the turn from each other; the fourth character is Jim O'Connor who is an old acquaintance of Tom and Laura. He represents the power in the play, so no one can cut his talk or overlap with him.

Characters of a play keep turn-taking organized. They manage it when they speak and "That's how various numbers of turns are distributed in order to fulfill the participant's rights to speak and take turns"(Brojen Singh 77). They also manage turn-taking to mitigate the threats of speech chaos when numerous interactions take place in the play.

Turn-taking mechanism and rules

The strategies to choose the next speaker as a side conversation are suggested by Padilha. The speaker can say the name directly or any other identifying term that belongs to a specific person. In scene 1, page 11, line 28 Laura says to her mother: "*Mother, let me clear the table.*" Here the speaker identifies a specific person. Sometimes a gaze is not enough to specify the next speaker, so the speaker may use words like "you" with the gaze to specify the participant. In scene 7, page 89, line 13 [there is a pause and the music rises slowly. Laura looks up slowly, with wonder, and shakes her hands]. She says: "*Well, you are! In a very different way from anyone else. And all the nicer because of different too.*" Laura is so shy that she looks up to Jim and says this sentence that includes the pronoun 'you'. Here the speaker feels that the gaze is not enough so she uses 'you'. Finally, the speaker may use a word like 'you' without a gaze where the next speaker is mentioned before or is specified in the conversation. In scene 6, page 65, the last three lines:

Tom: "*Moth...*"

Amanda: "*Yes, honey?*"

Tom: "*How about ... supper?*"

Here Tom asks his mother about the supper. Amanda has mentioned before that she wanted to prepare supper so he wanted to remind her. The speaker here uses a word and a piece of information: *supper* and *mother*.

There are three rules that are not put to control the conversation but to illustrate how it is done, and how the turn is transferred between speakers.

Rule one: here the next speaker is obliged to speak and take the turn.

Scene 7, page 70, line 10

Jim: "*Ha-ha! Where is the fuse-box?*"

In this line Jim asks a question among more than a listener but Amanda answers and takes the turn. Jim selects the next speaker using a related sign to the next speaker. Amanda knows the place of fuse-box. So this piece of information belongs to Amanda and she started to talk

Amanda: "*Right here next to the stove. Can you see anything?*"

On the same page line 20

Amanda: "Tom!"

Tom: "Yes, Mother?"

Amanda selects the next speaker by saying his name directly, and he responds with "Yes, Mother?"

Rule two: self-selection.

Scene 1, page 10, line 6

Tom [remaining at the portieres]: "*How did you entertain those gentlemen callers?*"

This line comes after a very long paragraph of Amanda boring style in talking about gentlemen callers, and once she stops talking Tom asks that question above. Here the current speaker does not select the next but he selects himself to be the next by asking that question.

The next page in the same scene again

Rule three: the current speaker may continue to speak.

Scene 4, page 38, lines 17-21

Amanda: *Will you?*

[He opens the door. She says, imploringly]

Will you?

[He starts down the fire escape]

Will you? Will you dear?

Amanda asks Tom but he does not answer, then again and again she repeats the sentence. Here the current speaker finishes her turn in talking but no one started to speak, so she has to continue in the turn by repeating. The next example the current speaker continues speaking by giving aspects to the subject he is talking about not repeating:

Scene 1, pages 8-9

Tom: "*I haven't enjoyed one bite of this dinner because of your constant directions on how to eat it. It's you that make me rush through meals with your hawk like attention to every bite I take. Sickening---spoils my appetite----all this direction of---animals' secretion--- salivary glands----mastication!*"

Amanda [lightly]: "*Temperament like a Metropolitan star*"

[Tom rises and walks toward the living room]

"You're not excused from the table"

Amanda says the two sentences because Tom does not want to add anything so she as a current speaker is obliged to continue speaking and be in the same turn.

Turn-taking and power

As mentioned before power affects the conversation. In *The Glass Menagerie* the most powerful character is Amanda, since she speaks continuously and is rarely cut off by any other character.

Scene 3, page 23, line 9

Tom: "*look! I've got nothing, no single thing...*"

Amanda: "*lower your voice*"

Tom's sentence is incomplete and the line after it shows that Amanda cuts his talking by saying "*lower your voice*". Here it is observable that power affects turn-taking.

Laura is characterized by shyness and weakness because she is crippled. So there is no power in her talking or taking the turn. Tennessee Williams does not write any single line (a line that shows that there is a cut or interrupting) after the sentences said to Laura.

Turn-taking and gender

The character of Amanda is a very good example of the effect of gender on turn-taking. Women speak continuously and give directions. In scene 1, page 8, last paragraph. Tom describes his mother's talk as a 'constant direction', and that is a good evidence to show that she talks continuously. He is sitting on the

table then he stands up to talk. The changing in position while conversing reveals that he struggles to take the turn from his mother.

The same scene page 9 and 10, last nine lines

"Amanda: [crossing out to the kitchenette, airily]: *sometimes they come when they are last expected! Why, I remember one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain...*

[she enters the kitchen]

Tom: *I know what's coming!*

Laura: *Yes. But let her tell it.*

Tom: *Again?*

Laura: *She loves to tell it.*

[Amanda returns with a bowl of dessert]

Amanda: *One Saturday afternoon in Blue Mountain your mother received --- seventeen!... gentlemen callers!"*

These lines show that Amanda, as a woman, repeats what she tells many times in a boring way. Amanda repeats the sentence "One Saturday afternoon in Blue Mountain" to show that Tom and Laura whisper while Amanda is talking, so she does not give them a chance to speak and take the turn.

Page 10, line 6 Tom asks her

"Tom [remaining at the portieres]: *How did you entertain those gentlemen callers?*

Amanda: *I understood the art of conversation!"*

She exaggerates in every piece of information she tells, seventeen gentlemen callers in a day, and she claims that she knows the art of conversation, but she does not give them a chance to talk and take the turn. The next two pages are her talking about gentlemen callers.

Overlap

In *The Glass Menagerie* most of the overlapping occurs in Amanda's and Tom's conversations. They believe in their ideas, so they are in an endless conflict. Amanda is a selfish mother; she wants to marry her daughter in any way to get rid of her responsibilities.

Scene 2, last paragraph page 17 the beginning of page 18

"Amanda [hopelessly fingering the huge pocketbook]: *So what are we going to do the rest of our lives?... Of course... some girls do marry.*

Haven't you ever liked some boy?

Tom seems logical and knows about his family more than his mother.

Scene 5, lines 21, page 49 to line 13 page 50

"Tom: *Mother, you mustn't expect too much of Laura.*

Amanda: *What do you mean?*

Tom: *Laura seems all those things to you and me because she's ours and we love her. We don't even notice she's crippled anymore.*

Amanda: *Don't say crippled! You know that I never allow that word to be used!*

Tom: *But face the fact, Mother. She is and ---that's not all---*

Amanda: *What do you mean "not all"?*

Tom: *Laura is different from other girls.*

Amanda: *I think the difference is all to her advantage.*

Tom: *Not quite all in the eyes of others --- strangers she's terrible shy and lives in a world of her own and those things make her seem a little peculiar to people outside the house.*

Amanda: *Don't say peculiar.*

Tom: *face the fact. She is.*

Amanda: *in what way is she peculiar may I ask?*

Tom: *She lives in a world of her own --- a world of little glass ornaments, Mother ...*

She plays old phonograph records and --- that's about all"

In scene three there is too many overlapping and interrupting because the nature of the relationship between Tom and Amanda and the nature of events in scene three.

Page 23 lines 9, 11 and 13

Tom: *Look! --- I've got n thing, no single thing ---*

Amanda: *Lower your voice*

Tom: *In my life here that I can call my own! Everything is ---*

Amanda: *Stop that shouting!*

Tom: *yesterday you confiscated my books! You had the nerve to...*

Amanda: *I took that horrible novel back to the library---yes! That hideous book by that insane Mr. Lawrence."*

These lines show incomplete sentences that indicate overlapping during the conversation.

7 Pause and gap

The pause is between sentences within the turn, while the gap is the period between turns. In *The Glass Menagerie*, the author puts the word pause between brackets to show that it is a pause and no one will take the turn.

Scene 2, page 14, line 25

[Amanda closes her eyes and lowers her head. There is a ten-second pause.]

Scene 2, page 17, line 24

[There is a pause]

While the gaps appears in the whole play between turns and this is a prominent example

Scene 4, page 38, lines 18-23

Amanda: *Will you?*

[He opens the door. She says imploringly:]

Will you?

[He starts down the fire escape.]

Will you? Will you, dear?

Tom [calling back]: *yes!*

The gaps between turn is obvious. Amanda gives Tom a chance to talk. She puts gaps to make him take the turn, but he does not take the turn. Finally, he changes the pause to a gap and takes the turn responding with the word 'Yes'

Avoiding interrupting and overlapping

Many strategies are used in the play to minimize interrupting or overlapping. To avoid interrupting some interlocutors use meaningful or meaningless words such as 'oh' to tell the listener that he/she wants to complete. In this way the current speaker prevents the listener from talking between sentences and interrupts the conversation.

Scene 2, page 16, line 11 Amanda talks uninterruptedly:

"Oh! I felt so weak....."

Another strategy to avoid overlapping in this play is using words such as 'shhh' to stop the current speaker and then the next speaker can talk smoothly.

Tom to Jim *"Shhh! Here comes Mother!..."*

Here Tom wants to stop Jim talking to start his turn, so he uses the word 'Shhh' to make him listen and stop talking, and then he takes the turn. It is important in this study to present statistical information about the fields of turn-taking and *The Glass Menageries*. Table (1) illustrates these points:

	Overlapping	Avoiding overlapping	Effect of gender	Effect of power	Rule three	Rule two	Rule one	total
Scene 1	1	5	7	14	6	9	10	52
Scene 2	6	9	6	11	9	3	20	64
Scene 3	17	0	5	7	2	11	4	46
Scene 4	4	20	18	10	11	4	35	102
Scene 5	5	21	25	6	7	6	54	124
Scene 6	5	26	11	9	10	8	68	137
Scene 7	26	75	25	6	32	3	126	303
total	64	156	97	63	77	44	317	818

Table 1

Concluding remarks

Overlapping and the *effect of power* work in a contradictory way because overlapping appears when the powers commensurate and the distance between powers prevent overlapping. These two fields appear in the play as the following:

Scene one shows that all figures are normal, that means there is a kind of reconciliation between characters. In scene two, it is noticeable that there is a high percentage of *overlapping* and low percentage in *the effect of power*. This means that there is a problem. In scene three, the *effect of power* is still going low and the *overlapping* high which means the problem goes to a higher stage. Scene four shows some stability because the characters are trying to solve the problem. Scene five shows some increase in *overlapping* and decrease in the *effect of power*, and this is attributed to the characters discussing solutions such as marrying Laura to Jim. There is some harmony in scene six because of the presence of Jim to solve the problem. In this scene it is noticeable that there is an increase in the *effect of power* and decrease in *overlapping*. Finally, in scene seven there is a leap in *overlapping* and the *effect of power*; a strong rise in *overlapping* and a drop in *the effect of power*. Increasing the index of *overlapping* in the final scene means that the literary work has an open-ended style, and that is what really happens in this play. The problem is still unsolved and Laura has not married.

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