The Structural Components of the Discourse Topic in Selected Call-In Programmes of Egesa FM

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Abstract: The paper examines the structure and organization of discourse topic in call-in programmes on a selected Kenyan Vernacular FM station broadcasting purely in Ekegusii Language. Using the conversation Analysis (CA) theory as developed by Sacks *et, al* (1973, 1974 and 1976) the paper outlines the structure and organization of discourse topic. The paper postulates that the discourse topic during call-in conversations is made up of the following components: Opening sequence, closing sequence, turn taking system, conversational repair, adjacency pairs and backchannels. The paper argues that proper organization of these structural components immensely contributes to the effective organization of the discourse topic during the interactions hence successful communication is realized.
Keywords: Call-In Programmes, Egesa FM Station, Phone-Ins, Vernacular Language

INTRODUCTION

Call-in programmes have evolved in Kenya as a radio programming format as a consequence of a liberalized communication environment since the 1990_s .Various scholars have studied call-in interactions in various contexts particularly in Europe. Hutchby[1] provides a major shift in the study of call-in programmes using CA theory .Since then various scholars have adopted the same approach. Grafinger [2]) examines game show call-in programs in Australian FM Station and identifies the conversational structure and participatory roles of interlocutors who did not share the same native language. Mei-ching Ho [3] investigates strategies used by the radio hosts when giving advice to callers. All these studies draw their data from non-Kenyan contexts. Hence inadequate scholarly attention has been accorded to this rapidly expanding mode of radio programming in Kenya. In particular, studies that examine the structure and organization of call-in conversations from a vernacular FM station broadcasting in Ekegusii are hardly documented in Kenya. This paper seeks to address such inadequacy.

TELECOMMUNICATION ENVIROMENT IN KENYA

The communication environment in Kenya is highly liberalized .This has been made possible by the Kenya information and communication ACT 1998 that established the communication commission of Kenya (CCK). The establishment of this regulator marked the end of state monopoly of information communication and has had a two-fold major effect: First there has been increase in the use of mobile telephone communication .Today, Kenya has four mobile operators namely Airtel, Safaricom, Orange and Yu .Statistics indicate that by the end of December 2010,Kenya had 24.9 million subscribers. During the same period ,calling tariffs continued to decline .The average tariff on net calls declined to 2.67 shillings per minute from 3.92 per minute while off-net calls goes on average on average 3.47 shillings up from 5.1 shillings per minute .Therefore it can be said "we are the people of the phone". These words were spoken by Robert Hopper in 1992 to the American people .The same words can be said about the Kenyan people today . Our daily lives are dominated by telephone communication.

Secondly, the liberation of communication has freed Kenyan airwaves .Currently; Kenya has a relatively diverse and vibrant media. The Kenya Broadcasting Cooperation (KBC) the   government owned broadcaster, currently has lost its monopoly of information .Hence private Frequency Modulation (FM) radio stations have sprung .As such, just like in many African nations radio has become   the most   widespread   and   popular   form   of communications media. According to   the CCK (2008). Kenya has 87 FM licensed mainstream and

vernacular stations across Kenya .As of November 2008, Nairobi had over 70 applicants on the wanting list should any frequency be available.

Vernacular FM radio stations account for 27% of listenership in Kenya by 2007. Today hardly any community in Kenya lacks station broadcasting in its indigenous language. The first vernacular FM radio station Kameme FM was licensed in 2000. Egesa FM, the station of choice used in this paper to obtain data for analysis, was established in 2005 by royal media services and broadcasts purely in Ekegusii and is the most listened to vernacular FM station by the native speakers of Ekegusii.

The rapid increase in the use of mobile telephone communication coupled with vibrant media in Kenya has led to the emergence of call-in programmes as a format in FM radio programming.

A call-in or phone-in is a form of telephone interaction occurring in the radio between the host and the callers who also part of the audience listening to the programmes. They exist in four categories; open line phone -ins where callers participate for general reasons such as requesting for a song, single issue phone- ins, where members of the audience call to have their say on a topical issue. Advice giving phone-ins, callers seek advice from the host or members of the listening audience and game show phone-ins where a caller participate in a game or puzzle so as to win a prize. All these satisfy the various needs of the listeners. Running any one of these is the only way to remain relevant and attract a large listening audience.

CALL-IN CONVERSATIONS

Generally a conversation is an interactional activity between two or more participants using speech as its basis regardless of the context it occurs .With this in mind, it is possible to argue that a call-in conversation is a form of conversation that can be subjected to appropriate discourse analysis theoretical models such as the CA theory. To such extent, a call-in conversation stimulates features of ordinary face to face interactions. This argument makes it possible for the paper to examine the structure and organization of call-in programmes.

During a call-in conversation, callers and host occupy different location as compared to interlocutors in a face to face interaction. The host and caller respectively occupy what Scannel[4] describes as the 'completely separate…..a place from which broadcasting speaks and which it is heard.' The unknown caller from the private sphere of the home or anywhere else interacts with the host in the studio of a radio station. In this way, a call-in conversation can be viewed as a form of institutional discourse and as such

the interlocutors perform institutionalized roles[5]. Similarly, such interaction observes specific rules that guide what can be treated as allowable contributions to the business at hand. . Therefore unlike other forms of institutional discourse such as classroom discourse, doctor-patient discourse and court room discourse, the interlocutors do not occupy the same institutional discourse. As such Hutchby[1] says this makes it a special type of institutional discourse that requires adequate discourse analysis.

In discourse analysis the notion of topic is controversial. Generally conversational analysis does not agree on what exactly constitutes a topic during a conversation. This paper adopts the term discourse topic as proposed by Svennvig [6]. It is the largest sequential organizational unit of a conversation. It is a unit organizing both the actions of interlocutors and the content of a stretch of discourse. In this way it makes a call-in programme to be a topical talk revolving around a particular issue.

THE STUDY

The paper focuses on two single issue call-in programmes guided by the discourse topics *women affairs* and *education.* The listening audience call live to have *their* say on a particular issue selected based on the given discourse topic. The structure and organization of the call-in conversations is examined in the light of the two discourse topics.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the structure and organization of the discourse topic the study adopts both a quantitative and qualitative research design. Similarly, the vernacular FM radio station, Egesa FM is purposively used since it enjoys wide audience coverage and it broadcasts purely in Ekegusii Language. Although there are many topical call-in programmes run by this radio station , only two are chosen - *Chisemi* (education) and *omong'inabwe' Eges a*(the woman of Egesa) to provide data for analysis. A total of sixth four(64) Call-in conversations are tape recorded within a span of four weeks. The data is transcribed using elaborate transcription notations developed by the conversational analyst Gail Jafferson[7] to reveal the significant features of speech including sound, content and structure. The transcribed data is then studied using the conversation analysis (CA) approach to enable accomplish the aim of the study.

THE STRUCTURAL COMPONENTS OF THE DISCOURSE TOPIC

The discourse topic is identified to consist various structural components reminiscent of the CA theory. The structural elements are observed to occur in an organized way that enables the interlocutors achieve the goal of the call-in programmes .The components include the following:

Opening sequence

Schegloff [8] analyzes data of American private telephone calls and describes a typical structure of opening sequence to be made upof the following: Summon/answer sequence the telephone rings and someone answers, identification/recognition sequence the interlocutors display recognition for each other ,greeting sequence, how are you sequence and reason for call sequence. Schogloff claims that almost every telephone call corresponds to this pattern.

Data for this study reveal that the how are you sequence does not occur. Similarly, the reason for call takes form of a caller's contribution to the discourse topic that has been selected for discussion. The identification/recognition sequence consists of two parts host identification and self-identification both done by the caller. In addition this sequence occurs simultaneously with a greeting sequence. On the other hand, greeting sequence exhibits two patterns. A greeting sequence reciprocated with a greeting sequence and a greeting sequence reciprocated with a minimal response. In some rare cases, no greeting sequence occurs.

A typical opening sequence is illustrated by following example.

1. Host: Hallo Egesasummon/answer sequence
2. Caller: Hallo Egesa Tonya bababwakire? Host identification/greeting
(Tonya mum, good morning?)
3. Host: Bwakire Buya (Good morning)greeting sequence reciprocated.
4. Caller: Oyo na Irene MatagarokorwaRuiru
(This is Irene Matagarofrom Ruiru)self-identification
5. Host: Eee (Ye;es)
6. Caller: Inche Tonya naregotebaigareason for call
(I'msaying like this Tonya)

The opening sequence is shown to be made up of the summon/answer sequence, identification sequence, reason for call sequence and a reciprocated greeting sequence.

The host responds to the summon in the first turn and the caller responds to the summon before offering a greeting within the same turn. Schegloff [8] points out that in ordinary telephone conversations, the interlocutor who is called would answer to the summon in his/her first turn. This first turn makes up the summon answer sequence.

The identification/recognition sequence occurs differently compared to Schegloff model. In almost a very opening sequence in this study, callers identify the host in their first turn. This constitutes host identification and is followed subsequently with a greeting. Line two in the above example underscores this

Tonya baba bwakire (Tonya mum, good morning)
Note: Tonya is the name of the host.
This is then followed by self-identification that comprises of the name and location the call is made from as shown below-:
Caller: Oyo na Irene MatagarokorwaRuiru (This is Irene Matagarofrom Ruiru

Grafinger [2] and Hutabby (1991) in O'Keffe [9] note that it is the host who identifies the caller by name and location. However this study reveals it is the callers who identify themselves and the host by name. This implies that it is the caller who does the summoning and is the "main contributor" because is the one who has decided to call in .This is confirmed when the caller moves on to state the reason for their call by making contributions relevant to the discourse topic. Therefore call-ins revolvingaround a discourse topic do not have typical features of a phone- in opening sequence.

Closing sequence

The paper reveals, unlike openings of telephone calls that begin at specific point, the closing sequence has to be negotiated between the interlocutors. As the participants move towards the closing of a discourse topic, they produce adjacency pair utterances made up of the exchange to initiate closing (pre-closing) and the actual terminal exchange that closes the conversion[10]. Typical, pre-closing pattern is shown to be made up of summing up, followed by name and or location of the caller. In some cases, it is made up of summing up only. This is the most occurring form of pre-closing pattern. The final/terminal closing sequence consists of "thank you". The following two examples exemplify this structure of closing sequence.

Caller: Nakionaregoteba (.) naboebointiyaneeng'anaigo(.)Omochokorobwo'omwan sakorwa South B
(That is what I was saying, that is my point, Omwansa's grandson from south B
Host: Mbuya mono (Thank you)

The caller indicates the intention to close the conversation by producing the first pre-closing adjacency pair consisting of summing up followed by the name and calling location. The host recognizes the pre-closing strategy and reacts appropriately by producing the terminal closing sequence.

The study reveals that the caller initiates the first part of the closing sequence hence signals the intention to close the conversation. Although

asymmetrical relationship exists between the interlocutors the host does not always demonstrate his/her power and allows the caller to influence the structure of the talk. However, this does not suggest that the host plays no role in determining the closing of a call-in conversion. There are cases when the host initiates the first fair part and in extreme cases when the caller is not relevant, ends the conversation without the participation of the caller. This underscores the institutional nature of the interaction.

Turn-taking

The host and the caller exchange the speaking and listening role among each other hence negotiating the floor. This is what constitutes turn-taking. The end of a turn is indicated so that at this point another person can start talking.

Sacks *et al* [11] argue that turns are built out of Turn Constitution Units (TCUs). Data examined, show TCUs to be made up of single words, phrases and clauses. They are also noted to be context sensitive in that a decision about what constitutes as a TCU can only be made in context.

Consider the following example:
Caller: Naregoetaritukoerimoesabatogete
(I was passing one Saturday)
Host: Eee (Yes)
Caller: Eye yaeta
(The last one)
Host: Ee (yes)
Caller: Indeegariime (.)
inkarorabunanomontonaroraobweikaine aye
(I was in a matatu and I saw somebody like you)
Host: Arariaa?
(Where?)
Caller: Bosongo (Kisii)

The caller in the third utterance produces a turn made up of a phrasal Turn construction unit –eye yaeta (The last one). Similarly the host's sixth utterance has a lexical turn construction unit-Arariaa? (Where?)

The lexical and phrasal TCUs as shown above are grammatically continuous with the previous talk and provide an opportunity for the recipient to produce a unit of talk which is grammatically continuous with them. Hence such TCUs are said to be sequence-specific and in positions which are symbiotic with their proceeding constituents. The TCUs 'where' and" the last one" gain their interactional status as a consequence of them being second elements after the turns which precede them. For example "where" is interpretable as a meaningful and complete contribution only in reference to the caller's prior talk shown below:-

Caller: Indeegariime   (.)
inkarorabunanomontonaroraobweikane aye

(I was in a matatu and I saw somebody like you)
Similarly the phrase TCU- The last one-is interpretable in reference to the preceding utterance.
Caller: naregoetaritukoerimoesabatogete
(I was passing one Saturday)

This underscores the contextual nature of TCUs. In ordinary situations, it is not possible for the lexical 'where' and phrasal "the last one" to be TCUs. However, within context, they are interpreted as so because they are seen as being possibly complete when interpreted in reference to their preceding talk.

The paper shows that TCUs are projectable- a recipient can roughly project what it will take to complete the unit of talk currently under way. This implies that interlocutors are able to project where a TCU under way will be possibly completed and a change of turn is possible. Liddicoat[11] identifies various types of TCUs projections. In this study, completion of a speaker's turn occurs.

Consider this example
Caller: nereomonyeneenyomba=
(He is the household head)
Host: nomong'inanereomokonyi
(And the woman is the assistant)
Caller: omong'inanereomokonyi
(The woman is the assistant)

In the above example a single TCU is spread over two turn at talk. This is called Multi TCU-where a single turn construction unit is distributed over more than one turn at a talk .For this to be possible, the host in the second utterance needs to be able to tell roughly what it could take to complete the TCU that has been initiated by the caller in the first turn. This multi TCU is achieved by adding increments to the talk of the preceding speaker (projecting) so that the talk produced becomes effectively part of a single grammatical unit. The host's second utterance: *and the woman is the assistant* is an increment (projection) to the caller's first utterance*: he is the household head* .The caller's turn at this point is possibly complete without projecting additional talk. The increment of the host and the prior caller's turn both form a single grammatical unit that will appear as shown below:--

He is the household head and the woman is the assistant.

The existence of multi turn construction units goes against a basic organizational pattern of one TCU mostly noticed in ordinary non-institutional discourse[13]. The multi TCUs provide evidence for the interlocutors' orientation to this pattern as a tool for constructing participation in topical talk that greatly contributes to structural organization of the conversation. During turn taking process, instances of

simultaneous talk are observed which results when the listener (host) claims the turn at the time when the caller's turn has not reached a possible completion point. The ability of interlocutors to remedy simultaneous speech and return to a situation of one speaker at a time contributes to the overall organization and development of the discourse topic.

Adjacency pairs

An adjacency pair consists of two speaker turns in which the first selects the second speaker and action. The occurrence of the first part of the pair predicts the occurrence of the second part of the pair. The study reveals the following categories of adjacenary pairs.

First pair part   second pair part utterance
Summon   answer
Thank you   thank you
Greeting   greeting
Question   answer

The summon/answer and greeting adjacenary pairs are noted to be basic structure units in the opening of the call-in conversation.

Example
1. Host: Hallo Egesa
2. Caller: Hallo Egesa. Tonya baba bwakire?
   (Tonya mum, good morning?)
3. Host: Bwakirebuya
   (Good morning)

The host responds to the summon in the first turn and the caller rightly interprets it and offers a greeting which is reciprocated by the host.

Similarly, as interlocutors move to the closing of the discourse topic, they produce adjacenary pair utterances. This consist summing up and 'thank you' (See examples on closing sequence)

Conversational repair

In the process of participating in the discourse topic interlocutors encounter various challenges such as mishearing, speaking factual errors, term specifications and misunderstanding. To resolve such challenges, the mechanism of conversational repair is utilized or employed. Episodes of repair are made up of repair initiation and repair outcome. Sack et al [14] identify four varieties of repair. In this study two varieties are noted namely: other-initiated; self-repair and other initiated; other repair.
In other-initiated; self-repair

In this repair the operations of locating the repairable (Trouble source –Ts) and supplying a candidate repair are separated. Consider the following example:

1. Caller: Airerechiombe   chia, abarimuasebakamenyete
   (To take for the teachers' cows at their homes)
2. Host: Chiombe chia abarimutarichiesukuru?
   (The teachers' cows but not for the school?)
3. Caller: Eee (Yes)
4. Host: Tarichiesukuru (.) echiabarimu?
   (Not for the school but for the teachers?)
5. Caller: Ee(.) chiabarimuinkasobo
   (Yes for the teachers in their homes)

In the extract, there is trouble of understanding which results when the hearer does not recognize a particular word used or does not know what is being talked about. The caller is talking about the teachers' cows at their homes. However, the hearer (host) does not seem to understand that this is what the caller is talking about. Therefore it can be said that the caller is the trouble source (Ts) because is not audible while the host is the next turn repair initiator. The host uses a question (twice) to indicate part of the speech that needs repair in the previous turn. (As shown in turn 2 and 4).

The caller then self-repairs the trouble by providing an answer to the host's question (as shown in turn 5). This information facilitates proper understanding.

This self-repair by the caller is executed by what strives calls modified repeat with extra emphasis or stress placed on: for the teachers in their homes[15]. (Shown by underlining) Strives argues that modified repeat involving stress appears to be a practice of confirming what the previous speaker has just said thus claiming the privilege to access knowledge of what is being talked about.

The mechanism of repair operates as a kind of self-righting mechanism that enables interlocutors display shared understanding of the discourse topic and this effectively contributes to the structural organization of the turn taking mechanism.

Back channeling

Carter and McCarthy [16] define backchannels as noises (which are not full words) and short response made by listeners which acknowledge the incoming talk and react to it, without wishing to take over the speaking turn. In this study, typical backchannels include short utterance category (Umm and Ee- yes) that occur in almost every recorded call-in conversation. The backchannels are mainly constituted at clausal level. They primarily serve to display understanding and act as a form of continuer (encourage the current speaker to continue holding the turn).

CONCLUSIONS

It is observed that the discourse topic of call-in programmes has an identifiable structure made up of

components or elements that occur in a pattern that is systematically organized and can be described. The institutional setting in which the call-in conversations occurs has a bearing on their structural organization hence making them deviate from the ordinary telephone conversation that are not grounded on a selected discourse topic.

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