Turn-Taking Strategies Used by Trump in Response to Journalists' Questions

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Abstract:

This study, grounded in Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology, examines the details of turn-taking strategies by Donald Trump during presidential press conferences, emphasizing how he makes use of interactional resources to index dominance and wield political power. The analysis consists of one hundred hours of solo press conference recordings from 2016 to 2025, and the aim of this study is to identify consistent patterns of strategic interruptions, overlap intrusion, turn-initial mitigators, and turn-medial self-repair. By way of these abnormal patterns, the conventional institutional talk format of question and answer is disrupted so that Trump is able to evade accountability, resist journalistic framing, and gain control of the agenda. For example, interruptions and overlaps are for the most part used to keep reporters from completing adversarial questions, while classifications, such as "fake news", work discursively to delegitimize the press and shut down dissent. On the other hand, mitigations and self-repairs tend to assist Trump in reconstructing the frame of contentious issues in a way that is favorable to him. These findings show that turn-taking in political discourse is not simply a structural feature of political talk but rather a strategic means for altering institutional relations and projecting social power. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse about language, power, and media by accounting for the ways in which very subtle violations of a conversational nature become symptomatic of greater imbalances within political communication, especially within the age of post-truth.

1. Introduction:

1.1 Background of the Study

Conversation Analysis (CA) originated in the 1970s with the work of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, among other language science, CA is an endeavor to investigate the structural organization of verbal discourse systematically. At the center of CA is turn-taking, a system of informal rules and strategies according to which speaker roles are exchanged in an orderly manner within conversation. On a formal basis, however, courts and press conferences have turn-taking conventions that predict exactly who would take a turn on stage- journalists ask questions and officials give answers (Mondémé, 2022).

From press conferences, it can be inferred that Donald Trump disregarded the accepted norms of turn-taking in political discourse. His style of communication has exhibited intentional breaches of these norms, thus contrasting with the orderly, reciprocal exchange of speaker turns that commonly characterizes institutional interaction. Trump frequently uses abrupt topic changes, monologic extended turns, and interruptive strategies meant to disrupt the normal dialogic flow and establish discursive hegemony (Strukowska, 2022). A resounding example of this was when, during the White House COVID-19 conference on April 13, 2020, in response to pointed questions concerning accountability at the federal level, he played a promotional video about what the administration considered its accomplishments. This maneuver is illustrative of evading journalistic scrutiny and instead promoting a narrative of self-praise. This behavior violates turn-taking conventions while exemplifying how the structure of conversation can be strategically manipulated to reinforce hierarchical power relations (Reyes and Ross, 2021). Ultimately, Trump's discursive practices delineate how language becomes a tool for implementing and consolidating political power, especially in high-stakes media encounters (Aryanti et al., 2024).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

While turn-taking in presidential press conferences is meant to be systematic (highly organized and expected due to the formality), Trump's style of communication often disregards formality. His interactions with reporters are typically filled with interruptions, evasions, and aggressive discourse techniques that challenge both the structure and order of conventional interactions (Lafta, 2024). Previous researches have addressed and studied the features inherent to political rhetoric in general; relatively few have proceeded to analyze how Trump manipulates these structures, particularly in terms of linguistic turn-taking. This study examines how Trump uses interactional control to assert power, evade accountability, and strategically alter public narratives.

1.3 Research Questions

- Through the turn-taking system, how does Donald Trump exert power over the journalists within press conferences?
- How is Trump's use of turn-taking strategies that act as tools to escape accountability and modify the flow of institutional discourse?

1.4 Aim of the Study

This study aims to reveal the turn-taking strategies employed by Donald Trump during press conferences, with an emphasis on how these devices assert discursive authority and manage journalistic interaction through interruption, extended turn-taking, and topic shift. Hence, the research aims to focus on how Trump utilizes the structure of political discourse to evade political scrutiny and influence the framing of political discourse. Ultimately, the study offers an additional dimension to language as a tool of power in institutional communication.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study stands to contribute much by:

- Identifying Discourse Strategies of Avoidance of Accountability.
- Highlighting the dynamics between media formations and political discourse.
- Adding to the theoretical fodder of CA on power asymmetries and institutional talk (Clayman, 2001).

By focusing on one extraordinary communicative figure, it also provides insight into how power is linguistically constituted and contested in the public domain during high-stakes interactional occasions.

1.6 Key Definitions

- Conversation Analysis (CA): The methodological approach to the study of spoken interaction in terms of the systematic organization of talk (Neumaier, 2023).
- Turn-taking: Coordinated exchanges of interlocutors directed towards one speaker or the next, undertaken via implicit or explicit rules (Sacks et al., 1974).
- Interruptions: Overlapping speech whereby the floor is seized or contested (Coates, 2004).
- Social Action: The function of utterances is to act upon or exert influence or to construct roles (Levinson, 2017).

2.Theoretical Background and Previous Studies

2.1 Conversation Analysis: An Introduction

Conversation Analysis (CA) is a methodological approach that rigorously studies social interaction, underscoring how order is produced and maintained in talk-in-interaction. CA, unlike traditional linguistic models that theorize grammatical forms or utterances, focuses on observable regularities of everyday talk (Heritage, 1984). In its basic orientation, the CA assumes that language use is sequentially organized; the meaning of any verbal utterance is subordinate to its place in an ongoing interaction (Schegloff, 2007). Such a sequential order is implemented in an adjacency pair, in which a first-pair-part utterance (e.g., a question) makes conditionally relevant the production of a second-pair-part (e.g., an answer) to maintain intersubjective line (Sacks et al., 1974).

A major inquiry of CA is the organization of turn-taking, which governs the assignment and exchange of speaker roles. Sacks et al. (1974) set up a model through which participants are said to organize transitions from one speaker to the next, with the first rule positing that the current speaker may select the next to speak; the second that if the speaker chooses no one, anyone may self-select to take the next turn; the third that if no-one self-selects, the current speaker may continue (ibid.). Attempts at smooth transitions from one speaker to the next with minimal overlap or gap not only make sense in the world but also support the collaborative production of meaning by the participants (Liddicoat, 2021). Participants employ such mechanisms to maintain both the intelligibility and progressivity of talk, making CA an essential tool for analyzing interactional orders.

2.1.1 Emergence and Development of Conversation Analysis

The roots of CA can be traced back to the foundational work of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson during the 1960s and 1970s. Their endeavors were deeply inspired by Garfinkel's ethnomethodological perspective, stressing how ordinary members produce social order (Heritage, 1984). Turning the spotlight on conversational analysis, the study of turn-taking in talk by Sacks et al. (1974) marked a seminal shift from the then-prevailing linguistic traditions, demonstrating that the spontaneous use of language is, in fact, rule-bound and orderly. Jefferson (1974) made perhaps the single most significant contribution to the development of CA by introducing transcription conventions that enable the analysis of details such as prosody, timing, overlap, and intonation (Jefferson, 1974).

Initially applied predominantly to mundane everyday interactions, CA studies subsequently broadened their analytical scope to include institutional settings where communicative practices are molded by

situational demands and constraints (Blommaert & Jie, 2020). These extensions have enabled scholars to examine how talk is shaped by, and in turn influences, institutional roles and relationships. These changes, along with the advent of digital communication technologies, constitute new interactional settings in which traditional turn-taking cues, including gaze and intonation, have been altered or are absent, resulting in changes to the focus of analysts (Brambilla et al., 2022). Hence, CA has become a very flexible and dynamic theoretical framework capable of addressing interaction within a wide array of contexts.

2.2 Turn-Taking

Turn-taking is the fundamental frame of conversational organization; it deals with the orderly and highly structured ways in which interlocutors alternate their speaking roles (Sacks et al., 1974). It is a matter of shared norms amongst speakers that set the initiation of turns, their distribution, and their paving to the next. Drew et al. (1992) see turn-taking as a dynamic and cooperative practice in which speakers collaborate in constructing and managing their participation in the interaction. Central in this is the notion of the Turn Constructional Unit (TCU), which may be a word, phrase, or clause considered syntactically, pragmatically, and intonationally complete (Liddicoat, 2021). Orderly progression in conversation presupposes a mutual orientation of these units by participants, who thus pave the way for one participant to become the next speaker. Hence, turn-taking is not simply a technical facility of speech but is one of the principal means through which interactional coherence is maintained (Sidnell, 2011).

The point in time of reaching recognizable completion of a TCU, signaled either by syntactic, prosodic, or pragmatic clues, is termed a Transition Relevance Place (TRP) and is hence a structurally relevant point for change of speaker (Sacks et al., 1974). The interactional flow maintenance is dependent on the smooth sailing of these transition points. While overlaps or interruptions might occur, there also exist repair mechanisms that are either self-initiated or other-initiated, allowing interlocutors to rectify or clarify any misunderstandings without compromising the structural integrity of the conversation. These repair procedures exemplify the resilience and adaptability of spoken interaction, thereby reinforcing turn-taking as a cooperative and normative activity(Sidnell and Stivers, 2013).

2.2.1 Turn-Taking Rules

The turn-taking model proposed by Sacks et al. (1974) theorizes a set of rules that govern the sequential order, duration, and allocation of turns at talk in conversation. The structural principles are three: first, that turns may be of variable length and content, depending upon the context; second, that participants orient to minimizing silence and overlap at transition points; and third, that there are mechanisms for repair should either of the first two principles fail. These principles are operationalized through three structural components: the Turn Constructional Unit (TCU), methods of turn allocation, and rules for applying these methods. Regarding turn allocation, it may involve speaker selection, where the current speaker chooses who speaks next, or it may include self-selection, whereby one of the participants claims the floor at a Transition Relevance Place (TRP) (Sacks et al., 1974). Thornbury (2005) elaborates further on this orientation towards avoiding very long silences by explaining that speakers contribute to talk, not only by producing their turns but also by carefully coordinating with the flow of talk produced by others, thus maintaining coherence in conversation.

2.2.2 Turn-taking Strategies

Turn-taking mastery requires speakers to develop a set of competencies that facilitate the effective management of their participatory rights and obligations. Bygate (1987) identifies five such competencies: the capacity to signal willingness to speak, the capacity to detect appropriate transition points, structuring one's contributions coherently, being sensitive to interpreting cues from interlocutors, and the desire to give up the floor when deemed appropriate. In verbal means, strategies include manipulating intonation

contours and syntactic structures to signal the closure or continuation of turns. In contrast, an additional layer of coordination through non-verbal means would involve aspects such as gaze direction, facial expression, and bodily orientation (Hayashi, 2004). While the exact form of these signals may differ across cultures, the broader functional purpose of preventing chaotic transitions and unconscious conflicts must at least be recognized as universal (Liddicoat, 2021).

2.2.3 Turn-taking Cues

Turn transitions are governed by a complex set of communicative cues that signal the speaker's intention to keep the floor, relinquish it, or acquire it. Couper-Kuhlen and Selting (2018a) mention four principal types of cues that relate to the turn-taking process: yielding cues, such as final intonation drops, tag questions, or socio-centric phrases like "you know"; maintaining cues, including filled pauses or gestural continuities that signal a speaker's intention of keeping the floor; requesting cues, which include inbreaths, interruptions, or overlapping speech that an interlocutor uses to initiate a turn; and backchanneling cues, such as "mm-hmm" or "yeah," which show attentive listening but do not compete for turns (Schegloff, 1982). They are typically applied in flexible and context-dependent combinations, serving together as a crucial mechanism that governs conversational flow and maintains interactional coherence (Robinson et al., 2024).

2.2.4 Turn-taking Organization

Turn-taking is a highly organised system of conventions governing the alternation of turns by speakers in conversational interaction. This organisation is based on two key components: Turn Constructional Units (TCUs) and Turn Allocation. TCUs are units of speech—words, phrases, or clauses—that serve as building blocks of turns that signal possible points of completion; Turn Allocation is about how the next speaker is selected, either by nomination by the current speaker, or self-selection by another participant.

Participants use various linguistic cues—syntactic, prosodic, and pragmatic—to anticipate when a TCU is nearing completion (Clift, 2014). Such anticipation enables listeners to identify Transition Relevance Places (TRPs) that serve as potential points of change between speakers. According to Sidnell and Stivers (2013), speakers begin their turns by slightly overlapping or interrupting the current speaker, thereby reflecting both anticipatory and cooperational aspects of turn-taking. Therefore, turn design encourages immediate transitions and keeps cohesion between turns, each turn influencing and responding to the interaction that preceded it (Hoey, 2020).

2.2.5 Interruptions

Interruptions constitute a serious violation of orderly turn-taking because they occur when the speaker attempts to claim the conversational floor before a legitimate Transition Relevance Place (TRP) has emerged. Such behavior breaks the cooperative structure of interaction, for it violates the expected sequence of speaker transitions. Jefferson (1984) observes that a speaker might raise one of two types of overlaps: the transitional overlap takes place at an appropriate point of transition, while the interruptive overlap intrudes upon the current speaker's turn. Murata (1994) refines that notion: interruptions can be cooperative, backing up and supporting their putative targets, or intrusive, seizing control of the floor. In political discourse, interruptions are strategically utilized to assert dominance over others, forestall further inquiry, or redirect the agenda, thereby creating a linguistic mechanism through which power can be exercised (West and Zimmerman, 1977).

2.3 Political News Interviews

Political news interviews form one of the most structured types of institutional talk, characterized by asymmetrical participation frameworks and pre-assigned turn types. The institution expects interviewers to initiate turns by asking questions; meanwhile, interviewees are expected to answer. However, these

interactions are marked by a much more complex set of turn-taking and interactional controls (Atkinson and Drew, 1979). This asymmetry establishes a set of rights and obligations that place topic management in the hands of the interviewer, albeit within the limits set by the need for professional conduct, namely impartiality and neutrality (Clayman and Heritage, 2002).

But turn-taking in political interviews interaction is not a straightforward. Politicians deliberately violate the normativity of questioning and answering by employing strategies of disrupting the regular turn structure, such as interruptions, strategic avoidance, preemptive topic changes, or extended turns, to weaken the directional intent of the interview (Greatbatch, 1988). More important is the design of the interview questions that ultimately shape the trajectory of the turns. Compound interrogatives, or those introduced by metacommunicative framing, create more complicated response obligations than simple direct interrogatives, affecting pacing and turn allocation (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). In other words, this kind of turn-taking goes beyond the order of turns and is deeply embedded in power relations and rhetorical maneuvering in the core of political discourse.

2.3.1 Turn-Takings in the News Interview

The classic notion of turn-taking in news interviews is roughly based on the question-and-answer sequence; however, negotiator elements are often exploited or adapted by both participants to serve their strategic purposes. Interviewers, posing complex questions ideally spanning more than one TCU, may thereby prevent interruptions or answers that could have come precisely at a TRP (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). These questions simultaneously grant epistemic authority and constrain the response trajectories the interviewee can pursue.

In turn, interviewees, through multiple TCU answers, may be choosing to occupy the floor for specific interactional acts, such as rephrasing the question, avoiding responsibility, or shifting the topical agenda (Boden and Zimmerman, 1991). This challenges the institutional power of the interviewer and reveals the calculated use of turn-taking as a resource for managing interactional control. Hence, turn-taking becomes, apart from being a structural mechanism in news interviews, an alternative site of discursive struggle in which institutional roles and power relations are actively negotiated (Clayman and Heritage, 2002).

2.4 Previous Studies on Turn-taking in Political Interaction

Political interactions have been analyzed in terms of how speakers organize the unfolding interaction and give turns, with interruptions, overlaps, and other phenomena being used to resist questions or take control of topics (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson, 1974; Clayman and Heritage, 2002). Such analyses resist imposing language with inherent power and instead stress its interactional function.

Fathimiyah (2016) examined Trump's turn-taking in town hall interviews and observed how long turns and sudden topic shifts often avoided direct responses to questions, thereby reframing the agenda in his favor.

Al-Azzawi (2022) investigated the turn-taking model used in televised political interviews, focusing on the structures and interactions that shape how turns are negotiated between interviewers and respondents. These strategies thus demonstrate active management of institutional roles through turn-taking. Aryanti et al. (2024) found that interruptions and overlaps were used strategically to assert control and direct interaction in the 2020 US presidential debates.

Yet, more detailed studies on Trump's press conferences have yet to be conducted, especially those concerning systematic and deliberate violations of conventional turn-taking rules. Besides being less formally structured than other types of events, such as debates or interviews, press conferences provide a unique environment in which the practices of turn-taking are constantly reshaped for strategic purposes. This study aims to fill that void by examining the specific mechanisms that Trump uses for managing interaction in this context.

2.5 Research Gap and Theoretical Implications

Hence, while much of the existing literature has extensively theorized the structure and functions of turn-taking in both ordinary and institutional talks, there remains a noticeable lack of research on systematic breaches of these norms within the specific context of Trump's press conferences. This study will fill that research gap by examining how such violations act as strategic resources for asserting authority, evading accountability, and shaping media narratives. In doing so, it aims to provide new theoretical insights into CA, particularly at the interface between turn-taking and power asymmetry, as well as contribute to broader discussions in political communication. Thus, the findings may extend far beyond the academic arena and be used to inform media training, as well as educate the general public about the linguistic means underpinning political discourse.

3.Methodology and Research Design

3.1 The Methodology

This study investigates the turn-taking patterns of Donald Trump during the presidential press conferences held from 2016 to 2020 and later in the first quarter of 2025. The analysis relies on the methodological paradigm of Conversation Analysis (CA), as this methodology is particularly suitable for studying how participants coordinate interactional sequences and construct meaning within institutional settings, such as political press conferences.

This section outlines and justifies the methodological framework of inquiry employed in this study. It will provide a detailed account of the data selection, transcription procedures, and analytical techniques, while also outlining the theoretical foundations on which the research is based. The primary concern is whether Trump's interactional behavior conforms to or departs from, or perhaps strategically exploits, the conventions of turn-taking commonly employed in press conferences.

3.2 Research Design and Data Selection

The study, adopts the qualitative approach of CA to examine the structure and functions of Trump's turn-taking behavior. A purposive sample of 50 video-recorded press conferences was drawn from public sites, including the Trump White House Archives, CNN, Fox News, and the official White House YouTube channels. Three main criteria governed the selection of data: First, representativeness: each press conference showcases some contentious exchanges involving strategic management of turn-taking; second, diversity: the press conferences represent a variety of political topics and cover a period to capture stylistic variation; and third, accessibility, ensuring the availability of the data in all cases in reliable and publicly available archives (Robinson et al., 2024). This sampling approach aims to provide a general view of turn-taking management in both ordinary and tension-riddled communicative situations.

3.3 Data Collection and Transcription

According to CA standards, data must consist of instances of spontaneous, unmediated interaction. Accordingly, the data consists of video recordings from official press conferences published by the YouTube channels. Moreover, the data is natural because the press conferences happen out of the hand of the researcher.

Once the data had been selected, it was time for manual transcription, following Jefferson's (2008) system, which is especially favorable for CA, as it records interactional features of importance, such as pauses, gaps, pitch variations among interlocutors, intonation, stress, overlaps, and interruptions. Transcriptions were made iteratively to secure correctness, and official textual records were examined whenever the recording was unclear. Manual transcription, therefore, is considered the best method for preserving the fine interactional details necessary for CA (Lerner, 2004; Hepburn & Bolden, 2017).

3.4 Analytical Framework

This study on the analytical framework is grounded in the talk-in-interaction model of CA. The analysis focuses on how Trump constructs his turns within TCUs and how adjacency pairs, particularly question-answer sequences, are assembled, ordered, or deliberately manipulated to deviate from institutional norms.

An important heuristic underpinning the analysis is Schegloff's "why that now?" approach, whereby the analyst attempts to describe why a given action occurs at a particular point in the sequence and how its timing and design manage the subsequent interaction (Robinson et al., 2024). The paper foregrounds phenomena such as turn-taking violations, interruptions, repair, and topic control, all of which are addressed as resources marshaled in press conferences to constitute an interactional trajectory alongside institutional positioning.

3.5 Theoretical Foundation

According to the account, the study is defined by and operates within three main CA principles. The first principle is that of naturally occurring interaction, which dictates that the CA analysis of data be obtained from naturally occurring communicative events that proceed without interference or elicitation from the analyst (Sidnell and Stivers, 2013). The second principle is interactional order, introduced by Goffman (1983) to highlight that essentially shared norms and rituals govern social interaction, enabling participants to maintain coherence and mutual intelligibility. The third is that for the local sequential organization introduced by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), whereby meaning is co-produced, with each turn being construable concerning that which went before and somehow anticipating that which follows. Together, these principles for studying the talk make it possible to consider not only the thematic content of the talk but also the interactional architecture, that is, the way the talk is structurally designed, chosen, and interpreted in real-time.

3.6 Analytical Procedures

The following analytical phase follows the microanalytic methodology inspired by CA principles. Thus, fine-grained details in turn-taking sequences were studied and examined in relation to Donald Trump's press conferences. Relevant extracts were compiled into collections of interactional features, such as interruptions, topic changes, and question refusals, and analyzed to understand how they are situated within, evolve throughout, and serve the purpose of their communicative and interactional context.

A particular emphasis has been given to the resources of turn-taking, producing or resisting interactional control, evading political accountability, or managing journalistic challenges. Apart from recurring patterns, the analysis examines opposing or outlier cases that starkly contrast with dominant patterns, not as violations of a norm but as productively deviant exceptions that fill in the gaps regarding the turn-taking system (Sidnell and Stivers, 2013). This analytical approach is aligned with Hutchby and Wooffitt's (1998) conception of institutional talk, in which routine-level structures tend to obscure strategic and asymmetrical permits of interactional power.

3.7 Methodological Issues

This section introduces key methodological considerations that bear on the study's rigor and reliability, complementing the general methodological outlook presented above. On the other hand, case selection was broad, considering both typical and atypical interactions, which allowed for generalizations to be made in relation to common expressions of patterns, as well as distinctive phenomena occurring in less common communicative settings.

Sequential boundaries were established based on the exact specification of the interactional actions that locate the sequence initiation and termination, ensuring that analyses retain precision. The transcription process preserved all prosodic subtleties, such as pauses, overlaps, and intonation shifts, because these subtleties carry analytical weight whenever phenomena of interest, like interruptions and overlapping talk, are investigated.

The interpretative process must, most importantly, abide by the participant's orientations and understandings, discounting the Conference Analysis's emic epistemology. This keeps interpretation in line with the interactional reality as apprehended by the participants themselves. By these methodological measures, this study meets the CA situational standards of reliability and replicability, which are more relevant when investigating the kind of high-stakes institutional discourse this research attends to (Greatbatch and Clark, 2017; Heritage and Clayman, 2010).

4.Data and Extract Analysis

4.1. Turn Design

Foundations were laid for understanding weather phenomena during the May 12, 2025, press conference, when ABC News questioned President Donald Trump over the alleged acceptance of a luxury jet as a personal gift. This interaction exemplifies how Trump strategically bypasses usual turn-taking norms by entering the conversation with overlaps, reframing other people's questions, and engaging in monologic responses for extended periods, thereby suppressing follow-ups from the journalists.

Extract (1)

01 JU Mr President, what du say tu the peo:ple

02   who view luxury jet (.) az a personal gift tu yih?

03   why na:t leav e't behind?

      (0.0)

04 DT yih're ABC [fake newz (.) right]

      (0.0)

05 JU   [why na:t—

      (0.0)

06 DT   [only (.) only (.) ABC

07   well (.) a few of yih wud

08   lemme tell yih (2.0) yih shud be embarrassed

09   askin thaht question (.) uh they're givin uz a free jet

10   I: kud say (.) no (.) don't give uz (.) I: wanna pay

11   a million dollerz (.) or $400 million (.) or

12   whatever it'z (.) or I: kan thank yih very much

13   yih know (.) there wz an golfer named (.) Sam Snee

14   did yih ever hear him (.) he won 82 tournaments

15   he wz a great golfer (.) a:n he ha:d a motto

16   when they give yih a putt (.) yih say (.)

17   thank yih very much (.) pick up jur ball

18   a:n walk next tu the hole (.) a lot of peo:ple a:re stupid

19   they say (.) no (.) no (.) I: insist on (putting) it

20   then (.) they (putting) (.) a:n they miss't

21   their partnerz gets angry at them (.) yih know what?

22   remember thaht (.) Sam Sneed (.) when they give yih a putt

23   yih picked it up (.) a:n walk tu the next whole (.) a:n say

24   thank yih very much.

In lines 01–03, the journalist (JU) challenges the politically stored interactive context by posing a multiunit question containing three TCUs. The final TCU, "why not leave it behind?" invites critical responses. Hence, it is a complex question set that postpones the TRP—a common approach in news interviews.

At line 04, Trump calls out: "you're ABC, fake news," before a correctly set TRP has appeared, resulting in an interruption. This timely interruption displays a purposeful violation of the normative turn-taking rules and acts as a face-threatening move by discrediting the speaker instead of responding to the question.

From lines 06 to 13, Trump increasingly dominates the floor, refusing to give it back to the journalist, making for some un-negotiable one-sided turn. Use of particles at turn-initial position, such as "well" (line 07) and mitigators like "lemme tell yih" (line 08) indicate deliberate attempts to claim and hold the floor, in line with the self-selection mechanism in turn allocation.

Starting around line 13, Trump moves into narrative mode, introducing a personal anecdote involving golfer Sam Snead. This works as a topical shift and, hence, as an evasion strategy, effectively unraveling the possible trajectory of the interview. The closing phrase at line 24, "thank you very much," parodies golf etiquette and symbolically closes this sequence on his terms, thus circumventing the interviewer's institutional role.

No backchannels or overlaps are noticed from the journalist's end from lines 04 to 24, which is unusual and could indicate the omission or inaudibility of minimal listener responses, a problem addressed by Jefferson (2004) and taken into consideration for the transcription procedure.

4.2. Interruption

In the press conference on February 17,2017, a journalist asks a question about bomb threats sent to Jewish centers throughout the United States. The multi-TCU question is a serious and socially relevant issue. Before a TRP, Trump interrupts, thwarting the action trajectory of the journalist's turn. Thus, these instances reflect a recurrent interactional strategy by Trump, involving the inhibition of, and preemptive interruptions to, questions that may pose reputational damage.

Extract2

01 JU: there'z a report out

02   thaht 48 uh bomb threats ha:v been made against Jwish center

 03   a:ll akross the country(.) in the last couple of weeks

04   there a:re peo:ple who a:re committing anti-semitik a:kts

05   or threatening[tu-

(0.0)

06 DT   [yih see

07 DT: he'z gonna a:sk very simple eazy question

08   it'z na:t(.) it'z na:t na:t na:t

09   a:n na;t simple question(.) na:t a fair question

10   okay sit down.

11   I: understand the rest of jour question

12   so(.) here the story folks

13   number one(.) I'm the lea:st anti-smetik person

14   thaht yih ha:ve ever seen in jour entire life

15   number two(.) I'm the lea:st racist person

16   we did very wel.

17   see: he lied about.

Between lines 01 and 05, the journalist's question emerges over several TCUs within a serious report on anti-Semitic threats. The last TCU, "or threatening tu–," is cut off before the TRP. Line 06, in contrast, is a highly disruptive overlap: Trump starts in the middle of a turn with "yih see" without the journalist's yielding the floor. This is a disturbance of normal turn-taking (Jefferson, 1984), in which the next speaker self-selects prematurely.

Lines 07 to 09 include Trump's meta-comment on the very nature of the impending question: "he 'z gonna ask a straightforward, easy question. It's not. Not a... not a fair question." This is clear meta-talk (Shiffrin, 1980), and a preemptive disqualification of the journalistic action (Clayman, 1992). In other words, instead of addressing the secondary action (answering a serious factual question), Trump refuses to acknowledge the secondary relevance of the question sequence, a foundational principle within CA.

Trump's repetition and emphasis with "na:t na:t na:t," combined with "not a fair question" in line 09, clearly demonstrate affective stance-marking and a refusal of accountability, rather than confusion or misunderstanding (Sidnell, 2010). The command "sit down" serves as an enforcing act, terminating the journalist's right to speak by line 10, blatantly disregarding institutional norms.

From lines 11 through 17, the talk shifts to a personal and inward tone, abandoning the topical sequence and instead reorienting to identity defense. His statement at line 13, "I'm the least anti-Semitic person," is thus a self-repair and stance declaration, shifting attention away from the question and onto his moral persona. This serves as a reframing technique, distancing himself from the institutional issue and redirecting the question to a personal attack.

Notably, Trump enjoys the solitude of the floor from lines 06 to 17, without any visible signs of reinsertion or return from the journalist, semantically establishing the success of the interruption course in resetting floor ownership.

4.3. Overlap

It is imperative to explain the importance of overlap for conversation analysis before presenting this example. Typically, in a turn-taking sequence, only one speaker is speaking at a time, and overlaps tend to occur only at transition relevance places (TRPs) or as interruptions (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). In institutional discourse, the very nature and timing of overlaps can indicate disalignment, resistance, or strategic maneuvering. With this example, it is evident that a disruptive overlap is apparent as President Trump attempts to derail an adversarial question while deflecting the conversation's direction. So, during the press conference of president Trump and the South African president on May 22, 2025 ,the journalist asks president Trump about accepting a luxury jet from Qatar Airway Company.

Extract (3)

01 JU okay(.) Mr president the Pentagon announced
02   it wud be accepting a Qatari jet to be
03   used [az Air Force one (   )]
04   (0.0)
05 DT: [what a:re yih talking about]
06   y'know↑ (.) what↑ (.)whata:re yih talking about
05   y'know↑ (.) yih tu get out of here
07   what daz thiz ha:ve tu du↑ (.) with the Qatar a jet
08   uh↑ (.) they're givin the United States Air Force a jet
09   okay(.)a:n it'z a great thing↑ (.)

The journalist in line 01 begins with a polite preface ("okay (.) Mr President") and proceeds to report that the Pentagon has accepted a Qatari aircraft for use as Air Force One. This multiunit turn expands at line 03 with the increment "az Air Force one," in anticipation of a challenge or a confirmation request. Nevertheless, before a Transition Relevance Place (TRP) could be reached, Trump enters in line 05 with a sharp disaligning question: "what a:re yih talking about?" This early entry, or "interruptive overlap," would be categorized by Jefferson (1986) as onset-at-non-TRP, violating the one-at-a-time principle and eroding the interviewer's interactional rights.

Trump's overlap is thus not only in violation of the sequential organization of talk, but it also disaffiliates from the projected action. By line 06, the repetition "what↑ (.) what are yih talking about" coupled with rising intonation indicated stance-taking and derailment of the topic; the repeated interrogatives are interactionally disruptive and form a type of meta-discursive resistance, for instead of engaging with the content, Trump questions that content's relevance outright.

At line 07, Trump escalates the interactional disalignment with "yih tu get out of here," which repositions the frame of the interaction from a press conference to confrontation. This rejection of conditional relevance (Sidnell, 2010) essentially amounts to a refusal to treat the question as valid. From lines 08 to 10, he does a full reframing: The plane, he says, is a gift to the US military. This reasserts doctrinal control over the issue, shifting the focus away from accountability and toward national interest.

The extract thus demonstrates the use of Trump's overlapping speech not merely as a timing error but as a deliberate rhetorical strategy to regain control of the floor, redefine the subject matter in question, and avoid communicative obligations. This is consistent with institutional dispreferred patterning discussed by Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), whereby the subject matter of institutional scrutiny is resisted through interruption and reframing.

4.4 Turn initial

Before analyzing this extract, it is essential to clarify the interactional significance that turn-initial particles have in Conversation Analysis. Words that occur at the beginning of turns, like (well, you know, and I guess), are not merely filler words-they perform key functions that organize talk and project the kind of response that will follow (Heritage, 2015; Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007). For instance, 'well' could involve dispreferred answers, a change in footing, or a delay in agreement, while 'you know' could be a repair preface or a resource to appeal to shared knowledge (Schegloff & Lerner, 2009; Fox Tree & Schrock, 1999). The present extract shows an example of such elements used by President Trump to frame his response strategically during a press conference on April 29,2025 and the journalist asks Trump about the low rate of travelers to the USA.

Extract 4

01 JU: on tourism there'z been a steep drop off

02   international travel to the USA

03   wz down 12 % la:st moth

04   wz down even more from western Europe

05   why du yih think(.) that there a:re fewer peo:ple suddenly

06   who wanna tu travel tu the [USA?

07   (0.0)

08 DT: [wel(.) there kud be little (.)

 10   y'know (.) there'z a little nationalism there

11   I: guess(.) perhaps(.) it'z nat a big deal

12   our dollarz iz a little bit on the low outside

13   thaht a lat of tourism come in

14   but I kud see a little bit nationalism at work

15   I: kud see likewise with uz not wantin to go certain countries

16   buh that wul work out very esily

Lines 01 to 06 present a multiunit question with multiple factual premises leading to the wh-question: "Why do you think...?" Following Clayman and Heritage (2002), this positioning of a question imposes an attributive action on the recipient to explain or assign causality.

At line 08, Trump begins with a well-ending phrase, thus he slightly overlaps with the tail end of the journalist's utterance. Here, the particle well serves as a response preface, meaning the response will not be direct or fully aligned. More importantly, Lerner and Kitzinger (2007), along with Heritage (2015), effectively highlight the need to mark a response of a partially dispreferred or contingent kind—that is, accepting part of the premise while modifying or reframing the terms.

Then Trump states at line 09, "you know," which is a kind of self-repair move and an epistemic softener. This has the effect of delaying the response while simultaneously preparing the listener for a possible departure from the expected answer (Clayman & Raymond, 2021). It also fosters a shared understanding, creating an indirect alignment between the speaker and the audience and thereby softening confrontation.

In line 10, the hedges "I guess" and "perhaps" carry on in their downgraded epistemic stance, which implies that the reason to be put forth is not presented as an accepted, unqualified fact. Pomerantz (1984) notes that this usually accompanies attempts at explanation: when the speaker anticipates that what they are about to say might not be fully acceptable, or when they try to mitigate the responsibility attached to their claims.

Line 11 sees a shift in explanation on Trump's part, which changes the cause of the depreciation from political causes (such as nationalism) to economic ones: "our dollarz iz a little bit on the low outside." This reversed the frame being projected by the journalist's question, which insinuated a reputational or political decline. Trump shifts the blame to market conditions, an interactional means of deflecting responsibility.

Lines 13–15 pursue a similar strategy in, "I could see a little bit nationalism at work… likewise with uz not wantin to go certain countries." This is another form of account-sharing—he compares the actions of international tourists to those of Americans, thereby bleeding the issue of its exclusivity. These modal verbs ("could," "would") keep his accountability very low once more.

4.5 Turn Medial

Before examining this extract closely, however, this study provides a definition of turn-medial features within the framework of Conversation Analysis. Turn-medial practices are so-called interactional devices— examples include self-repair, hesitation markers, or epistemic hedges—that appear within the body of a speaker's turn, rather than at the beginning or the end of such turns. Such devices reshape the utterance at hand, address potential interactional trouble, and enable the speaker to maintain control of the turn while making subtle adjustments to its trajectory (Schegloff, 1987; Lerner, 1991; Clayman & Raymond, 2021). For example, president Trump during a press conference with the South African president on May 22, 2025, the journalist asks president Trump about "what you wish for the African people in African day".

Extract 5

01 JU: Mr president↑ (.) so May 25 wul be the

02   celebration of Africa day↑ (.)what is your message

03   tu the entire African continent African people

04   in thiz important occasion↓=

05   (0.2)

06 DT: =wel(.) I: wanna see peace↑ (.) a:n I wanna see happiness

07   I: wanna see health↑ (.)a:n y'know

08   yih ha:ve incredible land iz tremendous value

09   a lot of countries don't ha:ve that value in the land

10   the value yih ha:ve ↑ (.)y'know we have a situation

10   I:think(.) yih probably heard about't we've↑ (.)uh (.)done through

11   some very talented peo:ple help settle a war

The question posed by the journalist in lines 01–04 comprises a multiunit interrogative that starts with a mitigating prefatory clause involving a mention of Africa Day, followed by a main wh-question concerning Trump's message to the African continent. Such a structure invites an attributive act, in this case, a public diplomatic statement.

Trump again interrupts the question, and in a minimal delay-response of 0.2 seconds, utters the turn-initial particle "well," which usually signals that a marked or qualified response is forthcoming (Heritage, 2015). Still, the concern of this extract is not the initial turn management but the turn-medial practices that co-occur with and follow the turn-initial particle.

In lines 07–11, Trump uses various turn-medial devices that influence the momentum of the utterance while reframing the message-aspect:

Line 07: "you know" can be used to hold the floor as Trump shows he has more to say, essentially pausing him momentarily while he formulates what to say (Fox Tree & Schrock, 1999). It also appeals to shared understanding to lessen potential face threats.

Lines 08–09: Mid-turn self-repair is used here by lexical repetition and rewording ("value in the land… the value you have"), wherein Trump attempts to make more precise his attribution without surrendering the floor to anyone else. As explained by Schegloff et al. (1977), these moments allow the speaker to gain in precision, alignment, or difference without interruptive feedback from others.

In line 10, phrases such as "we have a situation… I think… probably you heard about it…" show that Trump is softening the forcefulness and managing his stance. Hedging knowledge claims enables president Trump to maintain his authority without fully committing to what he says, a trait characteristic of institutional speech.

The reference to "help settle a war" in line 12 is avoided at first, only later to instigate a drift in topic while remaining within the bounds of the same turn, thus shifting from a question about Africa Day to a self-promoting allegation of conflict resolution. This change in footing also marks an attempt to control framing of the conversation as laid out in Trump's broad-brush agenda-setting strategy (Clayman, 2010).

5. Discussion

The outcomes reveal the methodical application of strategic turn-taking behaviors by Donald Trump, through which he exercises dominance, evades accountability, and diverts the course of institutional discourse during presidential press conferences. Arranged under the significant factors of turn-taking — turn design and turn allocation — the researcher finds that president Trump manipulates interactional resources to maintain control in adversarial settings. Such practices reveal that power can be exercised not only through what one says, but also in the moment one speaks, in how one takes the floor, denies it to others, or holds it.

5.1 Strategic Turn Design and Control

As seen in Extract 1 (lines 04–24), the researcher finds out that the turn design of Trump acts as an instrument viewed as an intentional device to reframe the journalist's agenda. The journalist attempts to maintain the normative question sequence; meanwhile, president Trump interrupts with a lengthy monologue that begins at line 06. Building extended multiunit turns full of anecdotes, digressions, and humorous analogies prevented the journalist from re-entering the turn space. In Schegloff's terms (1996), this is a dispreferred turn expansion used to deflect questions of institutional accountability to absorb time.

The turn is constructed with several components to resist the presupposition contained in the journalist's question. For example, in line 04, he labels the media outlet as "ABC" and "fake news," a statement that is not grammatically interruptive but is interactionally disaligning (Heritage, 2015a). By positioning this at the initial position of his response, Trump performs a discursive act of invalidation that renders the journalist's question unworthy of response. This exemplifies resistance projected through a strategic use of turn beginnings, preempting a reframe of the ongoing interaction (Lerner, 1991).

Further marking turn-initial elements of his turns as a display of resistance to the question are the markers "well," "look," and "let me" heard in several extracts, including Extract 4 (line 08). These markers do not simply signal hesitation or planning by the speaker, but serve as a contextualization cue indicating that their contribution will be non-straightforward, indicating either resistance or repair (Heritage & Sorjonen, 1994). In this way, the turn to design becomes a micro-political act, based on which Trump asserts his epistemic authority and dismisses the relevance of the journalist's question from the outset, before addressing the substance of that question.

The overproduction of turns, as seen in Extract 1 (lines 06–24), where Trump continues to speak without any pauses, prevents the journalist from regaining interactional access. It is an example of what Clayman (2002) calls floor-holding saturation, where the speaker prevents TRPs using a lengthy discourse to avoid interruption or any further challenge.

In pronoun use, a shift to "you" in line 04 may seem most obviously relevant to facework or even interpersonal aggression. Still, it can only be included in this analysis to the extent that it indexes the turn recipient. In other words, this was recipient design with a high degree of individualization, whereby Trump began allocating blame personally and began shifting alignments in turn-taking from institutional to adversarial (Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007). It should be emphasized, however, that this effect is a byproduct of turn-taking design rather than its primary focus.

At first, anecdotal narratives, such as the Sam Snead story in lines 13–24, may seem disruptive. Seen through the CA lens, however, such narratives serve to prolong turns (Jefferson, 1978), permitting Trump to maintain control over the floor while sidestepping a direct response to the initial question. Therefore, narrative insertions may stand as turn design strategies that work for reshaping sequence and undermining the conditional relevance of journalist queries (Schegloff, 2007).

5.2 Interruptions as Meta-Communicative

Extract 2 illustrates Donald Trump deliberately interrupting the turn-taking system to obstruct journalistic control and evade accountability. The journalist attempts to raise a serious topic—bomb threats against Jewish centers—by enacting a multiunit approach to impart important information. However, before the journalist finishes his turn and a Transition Relevance Place (TRP) is reached, Trump intervenes, disrupting the expected one-speaker-at-a-time pattern. The interruption was not merely a grab for the floor; it preemptively disqualified the question before it could be fully formulated. By anticipating the question as "not a simple" or "not a fair question," Trump, in effect, undermined its legitimacy and refused to treat the journalistic turn as conditionally relevant. This move disrupts the typical sequence of question and answer, imposing an alternative agenda.

Trump's repetition and self-repair during the interruption serve to heighten the emotional intensity and display his resistance to the journalist's attempt at conversational control. Instead of addressing the substance of the question, Trump reframes the interaction as a personal defense, claiming to be "the least anti-Semitic person" and "the least racist person." That is, the sequence shifts from a societal issue to a personalized stance, thereby moving away from the agenda and allowing Trump to avoid addressing the sensitive topic posed by the journalist. From a conversation analysis perspective, this language strategy of interruption and topical pivoting is a case of Trump exercising power within the turn-taking system:

overruling journalistic turns, redirecting the flow of interaction, and escaping accountability. Therefore, this exemplar of Trump's turn-taking relates to the research questions by indicating his control over journalists and manipulation of institutional discourse to his political advantage.

5.3 Overlapping Talk and Topic Control

Extract 3 thus aims to demonstrate how Trump employs overlapping talk as a strategic device within the turn-taking system to assume control of the interaction and direct the topic to his account. On this occasion, Trump starts his utterance slightly before the journalist's turn has reached a Transition Relevance Place (TRP), producing what Jefferson (1986) has called a post-continuing onset overlap. This move interrupts the one-speaker-at-a-time sequence expected in such settings, preventing the journalist from completing their question and thus resisting journalistic scrutiny. The overlap enables Trump not to be a passive recipient of the floor but to reframe the topic in favorable, patriotic terms, therefore moving away from the original track of the journalist's inquiry.

Furthermore, ad hominem remarks by Trump directed at the reporter and the media outlet serve to delegitimize the interlocutors, thereby muting opposition and undermining the very credibility of critical questioning. From a Conversation Analysis perspective, the overlapping talk is not just a violation of turn-taking protocols but a deliberate discursive operation that rearranges the power relations within the interaction. These instances of overlapping talk illustrate a clear example of Trump using the mechanisms of turn-taking to seize control over institutional discourse and lay out a conceptual frame, which places him directly under the respective research interests of how he exercises power over journalists and manipulates press interactions to his advantage, thereby escaping accountability.

5.4 Turn-Initial Particles and Mitigation of Disagreement

Extract 4 illustrates Trump's penchant for employing turn-initial particles, such as "well," and mitigations like "there could be," which function as discourse markers that mitigate overt disagreement in a qualitatively sensitive manner. Such markers, instead of overtly opposing the journalist's framing of a detriment to tourism, afford a momentary suspension of direct dissent, while also reducing the face threat of rejection concerning the interviewer's stance (Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; Schegloff, 2007). This thus allows Trump a degree of control over the conversation, wherein resistance is softened, and conversational flow is maintained within the turn-taking system.

Self-repair and smoothing expressions, such as "you know," act as conversational lubricants, enhancing interaction, offering means toward coherence and politeness, as well as managing potentially affronting talk (Clayman & Raymond, 2021a). In conjunction with these interactional strategies, Trump can, albeit subtly, rebalance the issue by laying blame on nationalism and currency fluctuation techniques for the observed tourism decline, rather than acceding to the journalist's implicit reproach. Thus, in the broader turn-taking arsenal, such turn-initial particles and mitigation constitute some of the strategies employed by Trump in conferences to refocus accountability and mold the institutional discourse, this study undertakes to track in studying how he exerts power and controls the flow of press conferences.

5.5 Turn-Medial Self-Repair as Image Maintenance

Extract five instances where Donald Trump strategically employs turn-medial self-repair to assert control over both the interaction and his public image within the turn-taking structure. Unlike turn-initial devices, which seem to frame the stance or trajectory of the response, turn-medial self-repair targets the body of the turn to recalibrate or fine-tune meaning as the talk unfolds. Trump's turn-medial repairs, hesitations such as "you know," restarts, and reformulations all reveal the extent to which he considers how his message is supposed to be delivered, especially during a diplomatic question about Africa Day. Throughout the real-time monitoring of the talk, Trump cultivates goodwill and optimism through subtle control of the interaction. Instead of outrightly opposing the journalist, Trump occupies the turn-taking space to steer the

discussion toward non-contentious themes—peace, prosperity, and health—thereby blocking any possible criticism or controversial interpretation.

This mid-turn strategy exemplifies conversational dexterity and constitutes a manner of shaping institutional discourse: by precisely managing the sequential unfolding of his response, Trump changes that problematic question into an occasion for projecting benevolence and authority. Such instances only reinforce the notion of take-turns not only as a technique for managing who speaks when, but also as an incremental way of politically shaping talk. Hence, in supporting the larger strategic function of Trump's interactional conduct, turn-medial self-repair also facilitates his top-down control over press conference and his subsequent positive positioning, which addresses the secondary research foci about power and accountability management.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study observes Donald Trump's turn-taking operations during presidential press conferences and thus, providing how he exploits the sequential norms of institutional talk to assert power and deflect accountability: Conversation Analysis (CA) is used to interpret interference with journalistic scrutiny and reorient questions on his terms, through four major practices: interruptions, overlaps, turn-initial mitigators, and self-repair.

In all excerpts, Trump frequently interrupted either before transition relevance places or overlapped at crucial junctures to prevent reporters from finishing their critical inquiries. These strategies help him take control over the interaction, changing topics of conversation and applying his narrative structure. Turn initial markers, such as "well" or "let me," mitigate disagreement while maintaining dominance, whereas mid-turn self-repair provides a means of adjusting the interpretation of threatening topics towards one's favor. In manipulating the expected question-answer format of press conferences, Trump thereby appropriates interactional resources not to respond to questions but to deflect, delay, or challenge their legitimacy.

The findings, then, suggest that turn-taking in politically high-stakes settings is far from a neutral operation but rather a set of strategic contestations. Frequent breaches of the normative sequencing by Trump, coupled with terms like "fake news," effectively transform the press conference into another means of managing his self-image, rather than promoting public accountability. Concomitant with this study, future work can extend this analysis to other political players or explore interactional strategies further to understand how public trust and media credibility are shaped. Hence, this study contributes to the larger inquiry into the interrelations of language, power, and media in present-day political discourse.

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