

A Sociolinguistic Perspective on Turn-Taking—*An Analysis of Why Women Kill 2*

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Abstract: Sociolinguistics, as an important human science, focuses on the relationship between society and language at multiple levels. It is one of the key research areas of sociolinguistics to understand the hidden social meanings of language based on the inequalities that exist in its use. Turn-taking is a very important concept in discourse analysis, which can show the characters of the persons in the film and their power relations and class status in the best way. *Why Women Kill 2* was released in the U.S. on June 3, 2021, and subsequently aired in China. One of the key elements of this film is social class conflict. In summary, the author analyzes Turn-taking in *Why Women Kill 2* from the perspective of sociolinguistics and then clarifies the character traits of the typical characters in the film. Finally, the author concludes that class and power are the main factors that influence the turn length, initiation of Turn-taking, interruptions of the turn-taking, the topic change, and the controller of Turn-taking.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics; Turn-Taking; *Why Women Kill 2*; Power Relations

1. Introduction

Why Women Kill 2 is the story of Alma, an unknown housewife who joins a gardening club at any cost. A gardening club is a gathering place for rich wives with beauty, wealth, and power. Rita is the president of the gardening club and has an ugly past underneath her seemingly glamorous exterior. For various reasons, Rita tries to prevent Alma from joining the gardening club.

The film is full of class oppression, reflecting the wide gap between the rich and the poor and the obvious social phenomenon of class division in America at that time.

Many of the conversations between the women in the film are well suited for a sociolinguistic study of Turn-taking. Turn-taking is a very important concept in pragmatics for conversational analysis and has a powerful function in showing characterization and relationships. In this thesis, we study Turn-taking in *Why Women Kill 2* from a sociolinguistic perspective.

2. Functions of Turn-taking

The conversational strategies have certain linguistic significance, including five aspects: first, initiating and controlling the turn, that is, the initiator raises the topic and expects the listener's reaction; second, arranging different turn lengths for each speaker to limit the speaker's position; third, changing the topic, because the basic point of Turn-taking is the topic, which has considerable linguistic significance in the film. The fourth is to interrupt the conversation, which is generally used in films to express the character and relationship of the characters; the fifth is the use of expressions, movements or gestures, and other paralinguistic features, which can play a great role in shaping the characters, expressing the true intentions of the conversationalists and dynamically reproducing the relationship of the characters in the film.

3 Turn-taking in *Why Women Kill 2*

3.1 Turn length in *Why Women Kill 2*

Turn length is one of the most important linguistic structures in a conversation, and the length of discourse is the basis for the definition of a conversation. Turn length in the film can be defined as the sum of the words spoken by a person in a given paragraph. The Turn length can highlight the balance of each person's participation in the conversation, and it can also highlight the status and value of a person in the conversation.

Example 1:

Catherine: I am not your maid, Rita. And the nurses are here to heal my father, not to pamper his concubine.

Rita: Catherine, what a nice surprise.

Catherine: why didn't you tell me my father was ill? If his lawyer hadn't called, I would still be in Texas.

Rita: Sorry, but I've been busy.

Catherine: Oh, I'm sure spending my father's money takes up a lot of your day. Don't worry. Papa. Your dumpling is here to take care of you.

This is a conversation between Catherine and Rita. Rita married Carlo, whom she did not like, and caused Carlo to have a stroke. Catherine came to visit her father in the hospital. Catherine has always looked down on Rita. The two met in the hospital and the above conversation took place. We can see that the length of Catherine's words is longer. Because in this conversation, Catherine is full of questions and dissatisfaction with Rita. In this conversation, Catherine's power is greater.

In *Why Women Kill 2*, the author has arranged different Turn-length for the characters' dialogues. These different lengths of words cannot only reveal the power relationship between the characters in the dialogues but also show the characters' conversational strategies and better portray the characters.

3.2 Initiation of Turn-taking

There are many academic studies on the initiation of Turn-taking. The conversation initiator can be divided into two categories, one is the strong speaker, and the other is the cooperative conversation initiator. The former indicates power and dominance in the conversation, and the latter indicates cooperation and friendliness in the conversation.

Example 2:

Rita: He tries to destroy us both. This should make us allies.

Catherine: You're missing the point of my story. I wasn't confessing I hate my father. I was explaining why I hate you.

Rita: What?

Catherine: He married his fortune hunter. How do you think I felt? How do you think I'll feel if he dies and you take all his money to marry that young man you have stashed away in that apartment? Is that fair, Rita? He gets his gold digger. His gold digger gets her ... And what do I get?...

Rita: Are you finished?

Catherine: Not quite. I also think you...

This is also a conversation between Catherine and Rita. Rita is Catherine's stepmother. We learn from the film that there is a conflict between Catherine and her father, Carlo. And Rita hates Carlo, too. For the sake of common interests, Rita tries to convince Catherine to stand with her on the same side against Carlo. But Catherine remains calm, knowing that Rita's true purpose is to sow discord between herself and her father and ultimately to get her father's property. Through these dialogues, we can see that Catherine is the strong initiator of the round of words. For example: How do you think I felt? Is that fair? And what do I get?

These conversations also bring the plot to a climax and make the audience marvel at the skillfulness of these two women fighting for money and power.

3.3 Interruptions of Turn-taking

There is also a lot of academic research on the interruption of Turn-taking. While some argue that speakers interrupt Turn-taking mainly to accentuate their rights, others argue that interruptions of Turn-taking can be divided into two categories, the first is a disruptive interruption of conversations, and the second is a supportive interruption.

Example 3:

Alma: Hello, ladies. Am I the last one to arrive? How rude to be late to my own induction. I couldn't decide what to wear. I knew there would be photos taken, so...What is the protocol? Do I make a little speech, like at the Oscars?

Grace: Alma, what are you...?

Alma: All I really want to say is how happy and how proud you've made me.

Grace: Alma. Stop.

Alma: What's wrong?

Interruptions of Turn-taking can be divided into disruptive interruptions and non-disruptive interruptions. In *Why Women Kill 2*, we've seen many examples of disruptive interruptions, so here's an example of non-disruptive interruptions.

When everyone gathers at the gardening club, talking and laughing, Alma walks in and thinks that she is the chosen new member of the gardening club. Alma couldn't help expressing thanks to the club and then gives her acceptance speech. But in fact, it is all a set-up by Rita for Alma, who tries to get back at Alma and Alma's daughter, Dee. Rita has already chosen a new member of the gardening club but still sent a telegram to Alma so that Alma could attend the event as scheduled.

Everyone is watching Alma's joke. Only Grace, who is still on good terms with Alma, interrupts Alma's words, in order not to let Alma continue to be embarrassed. Through these statements, we can easily find that Grace tries to interrupt Alma's conversation twice. But the first interruption is unsuccessful, and only the second one is successful in stopping it. So, this example is a friendly interruption.

This is also one of the famous scenes that takes place in the gardening club, and it is here that Alma's self-esteem is so insulted that she determines to fight Lisa back. All these contribute to the continued depth and development of the plot, which ultimately leads to the subsequent story that is so ridiculous.

3.4 Change of topic In *Why Women Kill 2*

Change of topic is the basic point of Turn-taking. The conversation can proceed smoothly without external interference, but when the content of the topic is in conflict, there is also competition within the topic, resulting in a topic shift.

Example 4:

Grace: It's Alma, right?

Alma: Yes, that's me.

Grace: Grace Burk. I'm glad you could make it.

Alma: Oh, me, too. Everything is just lovely...

Grace: I was just looking at that cameo you're wearing.

Alma It's pretty, isn't it?

Grace: My aunt Enid had one ... Oh my god, I don't believe it. Besty is here. Excuse me, Alma.

Even though both of them are relatively kind, Grace has more power than Alma because she is already a full member of the Garden Club.

Through this conversation, it is easy to see that Grace directs each topic change. These belong to self-directed topic change. The first topic is Grace's greeting to Alma, the second is the mention of the gem on Alma's chest, and finally the topic of parting.

4. Conclusion

As mentioned above, Turn-taking is a very important conversational concept, and this conversational strategy is used in

the film to highlight the image of the characters as well as the complex power relations and status between them.

Therefore, in *Why Women Kill 2*, the screenwriter arranges several such conversational strategies, including the turn length, initiation of Turn-taking, interruptions of Turn-taking, the topic change, and the controller of Turn-taking. Various factors influence Turn-taking, but in *Why Women Kill 2*, it is mainly the power and status that determine Turn-taking.

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