

Overlaps in Conversations by Speakers of Bahasa Indonesian

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Topan Rahmatul Iman

Sumbawa University of Technology
topan.rahmatul.iman@uts.ac.id

Efan Yudha Winata

Sumbawa University of Technology
efan.yudha.winata@uts.ac.id

Abstract: *According to Hedlner and Edlund (2010) there are three possible ways of organizing a speaker change in speaking. One of the ways is overlapping. Overlapping means two persons speaking at the same time. This essay aims to look at the overlaps used in conversation by speakers of Bahasa Indonesian. There were 20 Indonesian speakers participated in the study. The authors grouped them into 10 groups which 2 persons each group, and they were asked to have a conversation with a free topic. The conversations were recorded using a phone, and it was analysed in three stages. The first stage was listening to the recording in order to get the idea of the conversation. The second stage was relistening to three minutes of each recording while transcribing the overlaps. In this part, the conversational Analysis approach was applied in order to detect the occurrence of overlaps. Finally, the last stage was checking the data to make sure the data is valid. The result of the study shows that the purposes of overlaps produced by Indonesian speakers are confirming, floor taking, continuing, and objecting.*

Keywords: *Overlaps, Conversation, Bahasa Indonesian speakers.*

INTRODUCTION

Fillmore (1981) points out to be “the basic and primary use of language”, namely face-to-face conversation. In verbal conversation one important ingredient is turn-taking. As little as we think about this fact, we are accustomed at arranging this in a certain way, in order to make speaking with each other and having productive information exchange work well. Several speakers are involved in a conversation, and usually each of them has something to say. So how can this be done without both parts speaking at the same time, which would be counterproductive, since it would result in that none of the conversations partners would get their message mediated to the other conversation partners. There needs to be a system for who speaks when. Heldner and Edlund (2010:556) write that “theoretically, there are three possible ways of organizing a speaker change: there may be a silence in-between; there may be overlap; or there may be neither silence nor overlap”. Of these three ways the study is focused on overlaps.

The research in the field of overlaps have been conducted, for example, Heldner and Lund (2010). It was about pauses, gaps and overlaps in three different conversations (Dutch, Swedish, and Scottish English), and they investigated the durational aspect of these three linguistics behaviors. Also, research done by Kajikawa, Amano, and Kondo (2004), they looked at the frequency of the overlap in Japanese Conversation between the mother and son with focusing on *ne* and *uh-huh*. Navaretta (2021) also examined the frequency of overlaps under the title of his study, Predicting Speech Overlaps from Speech Tokens and Co-occurring Body Behaviours in Dyadic Conversations. Elizabeth et al (2017) in Assessing the impact of conversational overlap in content on child language growth, looked at whether overlap contributed to the child language development. Furthermore, the authors chose to study about overlaps since we are from Indonesia and from our personal experience had the view that overlapping in Indonesian is very impolite and is very uncommon. The authors find it important to study this issue, to get a better understanding of communication practices in different cultures. Hence, the author decides to investigate the following research question, “What is the purpose of overlaps when they are used in Indonesian?”.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This section presents the literature review of the essay. Initially, in the first part of the essay, the authors will explain the definition of overlaps. Here the authors will provide some definition from several sources. Also, the authors will give the conclusion of what overlaps is. Finally, in the second part of the essay, the authors will provide the information about the functions of the overlaps.

Fillmore (1981:152) points out to be “the basic and primary use of language”, namely face-to-face conversation. In verbal conversation one important ingredient is turn-taking in order to make speaking with each others and having productive information exchange work well. Therefore, there needs to be a system for who speaks when. Heldner and Edlund (2010:556) write that:

Theoretically, there are three possible ways of organizing a speaker change: there may be a silence in-between; there may be overlap; or there may be neither silence nor overlap.

Of these three the authors choose to focus on overlaps. These are defined by Heldner and Edlund (2010:556) as:

Overlap will be used for portions of speech delivered simultaneously with speech from another speaker in a speaker change.

Or in Tannen’s (1990:78) words:

Overlap is an act of interruption without leaving any pauses. This will make the second speaker’s words and the first speaker’s words heard together at the same time in the conversation.

Wardhaugh (1985:148) explains:

The most general principle governing turn-taking in a conversation is that one and only one person speaks at a time.

And also Dor et al. (2014:193) describe, the ideal turn-taking event:

Casual language usage is characterized by rapid turn-taking, with very short gaps of 100-200 ms.

There are several kinds of overlaps. According to Jorfi and Dowlatabadi (2016), they can have four functions: floor taking, objecting, confirming, and continuing. Regarding floor taking, it refers to the situation when one speaker tries to take a turn in the conversation. For the objecting function, it means when a speaker is being imposed on and s/he is understood wrongly, or even s/he is not satisfied with what is being said and may have an opposite idea. Thus, the interlocutor(s) will object to what is being said. Another function is confirming, which refers to the speaker showing agreement and interest in what the other is saying, which can be verbal (uh huh) and non-verbal (head nods). According to Clark (1996:278): Speakers are perfectly happy for secondary presentations such as “uh huh” to overlap with a primary spoken presentation. He seems to suggest that these are not so interesting, but the author still decided that the author wants them to be part of the study and to have a look at whether and when they are used in Bahasa Indonesian. The last function

of overlaps mentioned by Jorfi and Dowlatabadi (2016) is continuing, which is identified when one speaker is speaking and the other speaker starts speaking simultaneously in order, for example, to fill in a word if speaker one is hesitating. Also Wardhaugh (1985) explains that there are several important reasons for overlaps: The listener might for example need clarification of something that is said, information s/he needs in order to understand the information given to him/her by the speaker. If this information is given after the speaker has finished, it may be too late, or a complicating factor. The speaker may have to start over telling what has already been told. So, in certain instances overlaps may be positive and useful. At any time, if the speaker is not ready to give away his turn to speak, one way for him/ her to resist to interruptions, is to raise his/her voice.

Finally, most definitions of overlaps can simply be summarised as: two persons speaking at the same time. This is why, for my essay I have chosen to define overlaps according to the following: By overlaps I mean times in conversation at which two speakers speak at the same time. I will look at the four functions mentioned by Jorfi and Dowlatabadi (2016), but only focus on the verbal expressions.

METHOD

This study is categorized as qualitative research. According to Kumar (2011), the main focus of qualitative research is understanding, explaining, exploring, discovering, and clarifying situations, feelings, perceptions, values, beliefs, and experiences of a group of people. In this study, the authors work with the non-numerical data and interpreted the meaning of the data.

This study consisted of twenty native speakers of Bahasa Indonesian. The authors had grouped them with two persons each group. All of the participants were adults ranging from 18 to over 55 years old, and they knew each other from before, which has the effect that the discussion will be easier going, than if they had been strangers to each other. Also, they had the same level of education.

The participants were asked to have conversation about a topic of their choice. Torrance et al. (2015) provided a short film to their participants before starting the discussion, as a prompt and motivation for the task. Hence, the authors followed their procedure when conducting our experiment about overlaps. The recordings were made in a closed room in order to attain a quiet surrounding without distractions and interruptions. Before starting with the recording, the authors made the participants aware of that the data will be used anonymized and only for this specific study. The authors also informed them, that their specific opinions an utterance would not be analyzed. The recording was made using a mobile phone.

The data collected was analysed in three stages: listening to the recording, relistening to three minutes of each recording while transcribing the overlaps, and finally checking the data. In the first stage, the authors listened to the recordings as a whole to make sure that they are successful and that the authors could hear the conversations clearly. Also, through this first step the authors got a general idea of the conversation and of the occurrence of overlaps in the conversations. In the second stage, while listening to three minutes of each recording, the authors created the transcriptions of the overlaps in the conversations. The authors chose to listen at three minutes of each conversation, since this gave the author a good picture of the overlaps in the conversations while allowing the author to remain within the scope of this paper. The authors chose to start listening to the recordings from minute three to minute ten in both conversations. During the two first minutes the author expected the participants to be thinking about being recorded, while they after a few minutes would be less conscious of the recording process and speak more freely. The authors recorded 10 minutes of conversation from the beginning in order to be sure to have enough data, in case the beginning or end of the conversation would be very ponderous. In this part, the Conversational Analysis Approach was applied in order to detect the occurrence of overlaps and analyzed the purpose of the participants' overlapping. Have (2007:4) said that Conversation analysis is "involved in the study of the orders of talk-in-interaction, whatever its characteristic or setting. According to Sidnell (2016) the Conversational Analysis is useful amongst others in research on turn-taking. Finally, to ensure the data is valid the authors listened to the chosen three minutes of conversations of both discussions several more times, especially focusing again on the overlaps and when they specifically occur. Whenever needed, the author completed our earlier transcription. The transcriptions were made based on conventions mentioned by Sacks et al. (1974), but using different codes, since the authors found it clearer to colour code the overlaps, that is the words of both speakers that overlapped will be written in red color.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In this part, the authors present the result of the study that obtained from the data gathered with a conversation. The data show that overlapping occurs in conversation by Bahasa Indonesian speakers. According to the data the purposes of overlap when they are used in Bahasa Indonesian are confirming, floor taking, continuing, and objecting.

The main reason for the Bahasa Indonesian speakers to produce the overlaps was showing that the conversation partner was listening or that he was agreeing (confirming). The examples of this purpose of overlaps can be seen in the following examples.

Example 1

Speaker 1: 03.00-03.02 : [.....] takutnya beda mutunya *si*

Speaker 2: 03.02 -03.05 : *Betul [confirming]* karena dia sudah beku, kalau ada yang masih yang masih sehat, eh masih segar mo....

Example 2

Speaker 2: 04.17 : Boleh ngak untuk *pengovenan*

Speaker 1: 04.17 : *Boleh.boleh [confirming]*

Overlaps, in the form of floor taking, occurred in the conversation of Bahasa Indonesian. It means the speaker tries to get turn in the conversation. It can be seen in the following examples.

Example 3

Speaker 2: 08.29-08.47 : [.....] nah ketika dia memang minat, oh kamu betul-betul minat kalau misalnya kamu kesini, ke psikologi, minat kea pa, ya udah kamu langsung teruskan. Tapi kalau memang tidak ya sudah jangan diambil, kita beri kebebasan untuk menuntut ilmu gitu lo, gk usah dibatas-batasin *kamu*

Speaker 1: 08.47-08.53 : *Lo gini [floor taking after pause]* kalau ngak dibatasin, gimana orang nampung....

Example 4

Speaker 2: 08.04-08.07 : Jadi kita pukul rata semua, jadi mereka kalau mau sekolah-sekolah *silahkan*

Speaker 1: 08.07-08.11 : *ya minat [floor taking after pause]*, tapi dia juga harus diuji minatnya benarnya gk?

Overlapping for the purpose of continuing also occurred in the conversations produced by Bahasa Indonesian speakers. The examples are as follow.

Example 5

Speaker 1: 05.40-05.44 : [.....] masa simpan ee.Bearti nanti pas yang beli kemasan *kak Lana iya*

Speaker 2: 05.44-05.51 : *iya saya dah [continuing]* sama food killer belum ada di lab, mas lukman belum ada tabung killer di lab iya?....

Example 6

Speaker 1: 07.50 - 07.59: Kalau dendeng khas Sumbawa itu kita ambil saja riset mahasiswa kita yang kemarin yang waktu kak Lana jadi pengujinya yang nangis waktu itu suruh *ngulang itu lo*

Speaker 2: 07.59 : *oh Diman Saputra itu [continuing]*

Another purpose of Bahasa Indonesian speakers does the overlapping is objecting. This can be seen in the following examples.

Example 7

Speaker 2: 04.28 -04.33 : [...] kesibukkan kita susah sekali untuk itu, sehingga dengan menghire apa dan mereka harus stay disini lah, *nanti nah*

Speaker 1: 04.33-04.37 : *ya ngak bisa lah [objecting] ya tergantung...*

Example 8:

Speaker 1: 07.18 – 07.22: Lo iya makanya, makanya di target itu kan sudah ada jelas *gitu kan?*

Speaker 2: 07.22: *apa? [objecting]*

Discussion

Now the authors will get back to the research question; what is the purpose of overlaps when they are used in Indonesian?

The authors found that the purposes of overlapping in the conversation of Bahasa Indonesian are confirming, floor taking, continuing, and objecting. Regarding the first purpose, it can be seen in the example 1 and 2 above. Confirming means one speaker shows his/her agreement and interest in what the other speaker said (Jorfi and Dowlatabadi, 2016). In this study, confirming is one of the most prominent one occurred as the purpose of overlapping in Bahasa Indonesian conversation. As can be seen in the example 1 dan 2 above, the responses of the confirming are *betul* (that's true) and *boleh-boleh* (It's OK). The expressions of *that's true* and *it's OK* indicates that the second speaker agreed of what the first speaker said. Furthermore, according to Fillmore (1981) and Tzanne (2001) the existence of these responses indicates the occurrence of effective communication between individuals. It should be mentioned that our participants were from the different region in Indonesia. It is therefore possible that there are differences within Indonesia on the occurrence of overlaps in conversation, which could not be grasped in this study. This question was outside the scope of this project, but would be interesting to investigate in future research. The second purpose of overlapping found in the data is floor taking. This can be found in the example 3 and 4 above. Floor taking refers to the condition when one speaker tries to take a turn in the conversation (Jorfi and Dowlatabadi, 2016). It is the same as confirming, floor taking also became the main reason of Bahasa Indonesian speakers to do the overlapping. It is not the same as confirming that there are some expressions indicating that overlapping in the purpose of confirming occurred. The authors knew that the function of overlapping as floor taking through the intonation curve

made by the speakers. This function occurs after a pause in the conversation. The authors expect to be due to the fact, that both speakers had been thinking during the pauses which had resulted in them wanting to express to their thought. Because of the silence they thought that the turn in conversation was not taken. If both members in conversation had this same perception of the situation, they started speaking at the same moment. It gives further evidence to Sacks et al. (1974), who explain that overlaps are usual in transitional relevant places. In the future study, it would be interesting to see why Bahasa Indonesian speakers produced the overlapping for floor taking a lot. In the above examples, continuing occurred. The third purpose of overlapping is continuing. It means that the speaker tried to filling the information that the other speakers hesitate to say. As can be seen in the example 5 above the first speaker hesitated to say the word *iya* (yes) and then the second speaker continued of what the first speaker wanted to say. The frequency of the occurrence of this purpose is rare, so it would be very interesting to see in the future study why this purpose is somewhat rare comparing to confirming and floor taking. It is the same as floor taking that there is no certain words or phrases indicating the production of this purpose. The authors conclude that this is continuing through the intonation curve of the speaker. Finally, the last purpose of the overlapping is objecting. This happened when a speaker is being imposed on and s/he is understood wrongly, or even s/he is not satisfied with what is being said and may have an opposite idea. It is the same as continuing that the production of objecting is not common. The typical response for this function is a negative sentence as can be seen in the example 7 "*ya gak bisa lah*". It indicates that the other speaker has difference idea of what another speaker said. Instead of a negative one, the response can be a question like in the example 8 "*apa*". The form of question here does mean the speaker wants to ask a question, but the speaker disagrees of what other conveyed. Little sum up of the last function that what the second speaker said was the opposite of the statement of the first speaker. Then, the second speaker objected to what the first speaker uttered.

Conclusion

To conclude, the main findings of the study are when overlaps do occur in conversations in Bahasa Indonesian, the purpose of confirming and floor taking are the most common one. Some overlaps in terms of continuing and objecting also occur in the conversation of Bahasa Indonesia, but they did not occur at many times. In our global societies it is important to have an understanding of other people and cultures. What is acceptable in one culture can be very impolite in another. Overlapping in conversation is according to Wardhaugh (1985) and others generally not desirable in any culture. This fact shows that scaling up the study would be important to get a clearer picture on turn-taking in less studied

languages. In future also more in-depth studies investigating possible differences in genders and turn taking would be an interesting aspect on overlapping in conversation in Bahasa Indonesian. In all events of overlapping the Bahasa Indonesian speakers did give up their turn very quickly so that the overlap did not lead to a lengthy struggle for attaining the turn to speak. This aligns with what Tannen (1990) said that Overlap is an act of interruption without leaving any pauses. Hence, this will make the second speaker's words and the first speaker's words heard together at the same time in the conversation. Also, the occurrence of overlaps in the conversation of Bahasa Indonesian with its function indicates that the conversation is productive or the information is exchange well. This accordance with what Sack et al (1974) expressed that overlaps is helpful and positive tool in conversation.

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