

The Performance of Topic Shifting in Inclusive Female Informal Gatherings: A Case Study

Ghada Abdullah Al-Ghathami

College of Language and Translation
Imam Mohammad Bin Saud Islamic University
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This paper analyzes how topic shifts are performed and perceived in conversations. It investigates the way topic shifts are constructed and sequenced in Saudi female conversations, focusing on the structure of topic shifts along with their discourse markers. It also aims at highlighting the way these topic shifts are observed by participants. This paper is a case study that tries to understand the performance of topic shifts in a recorded conversation with emphasis on the construction, markers and sequences of topics, adding empirical evidence to the overall knowledge related to this issue. It also studies perceptions of Saudi women on topic shifting. Two instruments were used: data recording and analysis, and a four-axis questionnaire. Gathered data was analyzed using interactional sociolinguistics analysis and statistics to arrive at results. The findings of the study indicate that the most frequent shifts of topics occurred after a pause where speakers introduced a new topic. These shifts were performed by using discourse markers such as asking questions, seeking explanations, or telling personal stories. Topic shifts might be violated in informal settings based on relations between participants. Questionnaire results conclude that topic shifts are performed in relation to interest, and motivated by closeness and need. It is recommended that further investigation is carried out considering different social variables and domains of interaction.

Key words: conversation analysis, discourse markers, interactional sociolinguistics analysis, topic, topic shift, turn-taking system

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