

TOPIC SHADING IN AN UNPLANNED IGBO DISCOURSE

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This paper looks at the strategies employed by speakers in Topic Shading in an unplanned Igbo discourse. The results of an investigation involving some Igbo adult students might lead us to infer that individuals shade topics for various reasons and that conversational rules may not be as obligatorily governed as those of grammar. Shading strategies might depend on culture and context. A cross-linguistic study of planned and unplanned discourses might help not only in developing more appropriate and specific conversational maxims, but will also be helpful in determining how strategies of conversational interaction could be integrated into other aspects of speakers' linguistic knowledge and culture.

1. Introduction

The term "Discourse Analysis" means different things to different people. Although increasing attention is being given to this area of study, the ambiguity associated with the term has given rise to the question as to what should or should not fall within the domain of "Discourse Analysis". The focus of pragmatic theory seems to be on linguistic communication, although in actual fact linguistic communication is simply a subpart of a whole range of phenomena involved in speaker-hearer interaction. Non-linguistic aspects of interaction, for example, are probably regarded as independent of linguistic considerations, but they are crucial for effective interaction. The ambiguity associated with the term "Discourse Analysis" arises from the often ignored subtle distinction between "linguistics" and "discourse analysis".

As pointed out by Stubbs [1983], the domains and goals of linguistics and discourse analysis are slightly different. Although both are concerned with language, in a general sense linguistics studies language while discourse

analysis attempts to study the organization and the actual mechanisms by which communication, understanding, and interaction are maintained by the speaker and hearer above the clausal or sentence levels. Therefore, it falls within the domain of discourse analysis to study the way language is used in social contexts (and in particular, with interaction or dialogue between speakers), and the way in which information is selected, formulated, and conveyed between speakers. This, of course, presupposes the problems inherent in negotiating mutual understanding when speaker and hearer have different perspectives. Bennett [1976:186] calls this the "coordination problem".

In an attempt to eliminate this problem, I shall assume the existence of background knowledge available to both the speaker and the hearer without which there will be a breakdown in communication. The speaker's task is not only to understand his hearers, know what they know, and give them what they expect or want to hear, but also to expect his hearers to understand and respond "cooperatively" to his utterances and strategies. The speaker's strategy could be verbal or non-verbal, but armed with the shared background knowledge (existing between the speaker and the hearer), the hearer is expected to understand and respond appropriately to the speaker's strategies. It is the ability of the speaker and the hearer to negotiate mutual understanding in spite of their different perspectives that makes interaction possible.

"Topic shading" in discourse presupposes mutual understanding between speaker and hearer, and it is the recognition of this fact that enables the hearer to give appropriate interpretation and response to the speaker's utterance and strategy. Topic shading is one of the strategies employed by the speaker in conversational interaction. This paper seeks to explore the part played by such shadings in unplanned Igbo discourse.

2. Topic

Although many definitions of "topic" are available in linguistic literature (cf. Keenan and Schieffelin [1976], Chafe [1976], Goodenough and Weiner [1978], Bates and MacWhinney [1982], Ochs [1979], and Reinhart [1982]), there is as yet no universally accepted definition of the term. Here, I shall adopt Keenan and Schieffelin's [1976:338] definition of topic as "proposition or

sets of propositions about which the speaker is either providing or requesting new information". In addition to this, I shall also believe Reinhart [1982] that there is a psychological distinction between sentence topics and discourse topics. According to her, a sentence topic must correspond to an expression in the sentence while discourse topic refers to a topic of larger units which, in most cases, could be more abstract. Take, for example, a situation where a student (Ngozi), who has been invited for an interview for a job, asks her teacher to write a letter of recommendation about her character. The teacher's recommendation is this:

(1) Ngozi is always neat and she is above average academically.

Let us assume also that sentences (2) and (3) below are equally about Ngozi's character:

(2) The University of Benin is the only university in Nigeria with a female Vice Chancellor.

(3) Paul is always neat and is above average academically.

With respect to the discourse topic, recommendations (1), (2), and (3) are all irrelevant, conflicting with the employer's expectations. At least, none of them is saying anything about Ngozi's character. However, there is a clear difference between recommendation (1) on the one hand, and recommendations (2) and (3) on the other. (1) can be interpreted along the lines outlined by Grice [1975] as implicating that Ngozi's character is nothing to write home about. If this implicature holds, then (1) is an appropriate recommendation. But no such implicature is possible in the case of (2) and (3). At best (2) and (3) would be regarded as rejections, violating the "cooperative principle". Thus, we find that although (1) fails to assert anything about Ngozi's character, it does say something about Ngozi, but the recommendations of (2) and (3) fail even that. (1), therefore, adheres to the sentence topic specified by the request.

It is this subtle difference between (1) on the one hand, and (2) and (3) on the other, that makes Reinhart [1982:3] conclude that there is a psychological distinction between sentence topics and discourse topics. According to

her, "a violation of expectations concerning discourse topics can be more easily repaired or interpreted than violations of expectations concerning sentence topics". Bates & MacWhinney [1982] go on to add that discourse topics are closely associated with or dependent on the shared or old information between speaker and hearer, the perspective of the speaker, and the salient aspects inherent in the specific speech situation or context. In other words, the basic criterion for identifying discourse topic is being aware of the speaker's purpose or aim in speaking.

3. Planned and Unplanned Discourse

Ochs [1979] discusses the distinction between a planned and an unplanned discourse. When a discourse is planned, the idea of forethought prior to its expression is implied. In other words, the producer of a planned discourse has thought of and organized the discourse before rendering it. It follows, therefore, that an unplanned discourse lacks organization and forethought. The producer "has not organized how an idea or set of ideas is going to be expressed or how some speech act ... or event ... is going to be performed prior to the time of communication" [Ochs 1979:55].

As pointed out by Ochs, planned and unplanned discourses characterize the extremes of the concept of planning. For example, by our definition above, an unplanned discourse will show no evidence of preparation either in terms of organization or structure. But it should be borne in mind that any discourse that fully adheres to this will surely be a nonsensical utterance. On the other hand, a planned discourse ideally would be one in which every idea or lexical item or structure used must have been thought of and organized in advance. However, even most formal presentations may not be regarded as satisfying the crucial aspects of planning. It should be noted that discourses vary in the degree to which they are planned, for example, with reference to the social acts. Discourses in which the form of every social act is worked out before hand is the most planned; those in which only certain acts are worked out are less planned; and those in which acts are thought out in course of their production are even less planned. Thus, we find that in the course of our day-to-day interaction, the type of discourses we encounter do not fall

within any of the extremes: most that we encounter are either relatively planned or relatively unplanned. I am not trying to say that these extremes are never encountered, but that they are relatively uncommon.

In this paper, I am regarding as unplanned such discourses that are truly spontaneous and unprepared, the type of discourses that obtain when two friends meet. The data for my discussion will be based on such unprepared and spontaneous exchanges.

4. Topic Shading in Discourse

In discourse, topic is manipulated in several ways (for a more detailed discussion see Keenan and Schieffelin [1976]). In any conversational exchange, once a topic is introduced by the speaker, it may or may not be maintained in subsequent utterances depending on whether or not certain conditions are satisfied. The topic is maintained if

- a. the topic of the subsequent utterance agrees or matches the topic of the preceding utterance (collaborating discourse topic), or
- b. the topic of the subsequent utterance either incorporates the topic of the immediately preceding utterance, or provides additional information concerning that topic (incorporating discourse topic).

However, the topic is changed if

- a. a totally new topic is introduced, or
- b. a previous, but not immediately preceding, topic is reintroduced.

To explain these conditions better, let us look at this piece of discourse:

Speaker A: The menace of thieves annoys me so much. Do you know they broke into my house again yesterday?

Speaker B: Really? Was any of them caught?

Speaker A: How dare you say that? Catch them empty-handed?

Speaker B: And even the death penalty doesn't seem to be helping.

Speaker A: Don't you know that the police aids them?

In the above discourse, the initial discourse topic introduced by Speaker A has been maintained throughout. This is because the subsequent topics either agree with the initial topic or provide additional information relevant to the initial topic.

But in the following example

Speaker D: I'm awfully tired. I need a heavy lunch.

Speaker E: Mela Motels will open for business tomorrow.

the topic introduced by Speaker D has not been maintained. Although it could be argued that Speaker E's response implicates a maintenance of the initial topic, i.e. if the response suggests that the needed heavy lunch could be available at Mela Motels, it seems to me that Speaker E's response does not maintain the initial topic just as would something like

"Some pounded yam and egusi soup will do it."

Speaker D needs a heavy lunch, but this need has not been solved by Speaker E's response. In other words, Speaker E's statement is a new topic that does not incorporate or add additional information to the initial topic.

However, it is often the case that in conversations a topic is neither strictly maintained nor changed from utterance to utterance. Goodenough and Weiner [1978] call this phenomenon "topic shading". A topic is shaded when

- a. a speaker is not allowed the opportunity to exhaust all he has to say on a particular topic before another topic is introduced, or
- b. the subsequent utterance neither agrees with nor incorporates the topic of the previous utterance.

For an example, let us look at the following exchange:

Speaker F: I had to walk to school yesterday. The taxi drivers were on strike.

Speaker G: Oh, my! I never knew anything as exhausting. I tried it one day and I almost fainted.

Speaker H: *This forthcoming exam frightens me.*

Speaker G: I know; I am particularly afraid of my syntax course.

In the above example, the initial discourse topic is maintained by the first two speakers. But Speaker H suddenly switches to another topic that neither incorporates nor agrees with the previous topic. The initial topic, therefore, has been shaded.

When a topic is shaded, two things could happen: the introducer of the

original topic could reintroduce and maintain the topic, or he could tolerate the shading and switch to the new topic. It is permissible in discourse for a speaker who introduces or contributes to a topic to continue with that topic in his subsequent utterances. If, however, he yields the floor to another speaker, it does not necessarily mean that he has exhausted all he has to say on that topic. He can decide to reintroduce and maintain the original topic or decline to continue with it if another speaker changes the topic unilaterally.

Factors responsible for topic shading are various and may probably differ from culture to culture. This paper attempts to determine some of such factors in relation to an unplanned Igbo discourse.

5. Method

I used four adult students in this study, all males and all Igbos. All of them were peers and friends. I have taught them for three years and I can distinguish between their voices even at night. The selection was biased in this way to ensure free interaction, to maintain a constant flow of conversation, and to be able to distinguish between their utterances. It is easier for friends and peers to interact more freely, varying the tempo and changing the topic of conversation without any unnecessary embarrassments.

The subjects were invited to take part in a linguistic project and were left in an office containing a table, chairs, books, and a tape-recorder. I bought some snacks and soft drinks for them, and told them that they would have to wait for half an hour while I went to collect the questionnaires from the typist. The tape-recorder was left on without their knowledge, and I asked them to "just feel free and talk and relax" until I came back. I came back after their conversations had been recorded for thirty-five minutes. The question of ethics should not really arise, since if they knew that their conversations were being recorded, I wouldn't have got what I wanted. However, I later told them that I had tape-recorded their conversations for a study.

The first five minutes of the tape-recorded discourse were discountenanced. The next twenty-five minutes of their conversations were transcribed and analyzed, yielding upwards of 620 utterances. Although English words and phrases

were occasionally thrown in (such mixtures are common among students and educated people), at least 80% of the conversation was carried on in Igbo. Each topic was determined by examining the conversational sequence and then labeling each proposition about which speakers were either contributing or requesting information. Then, for each utterance, a judgment was made as to whether that utterance maintained the topic of the previous utterance, changed the topic of the previous utterance, or shaded the topic of the previous utterance according to the guidelines suggested by Keenan and Schieffelin [1976]. An analysis of the patterns of topic shading followed.

6. Analysis

Table 1: Topic introduction and topic shading

	Subj. 1	Subj. 2	Subj. 3	Subj. 4	Total
Topics Introduced	12	10	8	4	34
Topics Reintroduced	6	4	3	5	18
Topics Maintained	18	12	11	8	49
Topics Shaded	5	4	7	8	24
Shadings Maintained	2	3	3	7	15
Shadings Reintroduced as Topics	0	1	2	5	8

A look at Table 1 reveals that the number of different topics introduced in the 25-minute span were fairly consistent across Subjects 1, 2, and 3. However, the table shows that previously discussed topics were occasionally reintroduced in the conversations by all the four Subjects.

Topics reintroduced were almost always maintained in succeeding utterances. As can be seen from the table, of all the 52 topics introduced or reintroduced, 49 were continued in the following discourses. Topics were frequently maintained for extended sequences of utterances. It was not uncommon for a single topic to run across 25 or 30 utterances and then reappear in a later sequence.

Table 1 also shows that shadings occurred in all the Subjects. It is interesting to note that Subject 4, who introduced and reintroduced topics only 9 times, shaded topics 8 times. Across the table, of the 24 times that topics

were shaded, the shaded topics were maintained 15 times. Also, topics that had been previously shaded into were reintroduced as topics later in the discourse 8 times. It is interesting to observe that Subject 4 particularly depended on topic shading and reintroduction to indicate the next topic of conversation.

Table 2: Methods of topic introduction

	Subj. 1	Subj. 2	Subj. 3	Subj. 4	Total
Shading	5	4	7	8	24
Direct Introduction	8	10	3	5	26
Indirect Introduction	10	4	8	4	26
Introduction through signal	0	1	0	2	3

Table 2 reveals that Subjects introduced or reintroduced topics in a direct way. In these cases, the speakers simply introduced new topics without any signal. Subjects 1 and 2 employed this method in the majority of the cases. An example of such a direct introduction can be seen in the following segment:

Subject 1: Oke mmiri ozuzo a na-ewe m iwe. The thing adìgo too much.

'These frequent heavy rains annoy me. The thing has become too much.'

Subject 3. Ọ bu oge ya ruru.

'It is the time for it.'

Subject 2. Nke na-ewe m iwe bụ nke ụzọ ụtụtụ, especially the day m ji enwe 8 o'clock class.

'The one that annoys me is the early morning one, especially on the days I have 8 o'clock classes.'

Subject 4: Test a ọ sị na a ga-emekwa na 322 a support ọ kwa m ya. Ike test agwugo m.

'This test he said we shall do again on 322, I don't support it. I am tired of tests.'

Indirect introduction also featured prominently. Here, I have used indirect introduction to refer to cases where choice questions have been used to

introduce a topic or where the boundary between the previous topic and the new topic is clearcut. Subjects 1 and 3 used this method in many cases. An example of this type can be found in this segment:

Subject 1: Echi ka ha ga-agbagbu ndi ohi ahu gburu that chief.

'They will execute those robbers who killed that chief tomorrow.'

Subject 3: M ga-eje i watch otu mgbọ si ga-agma ha n'isi. Thank God e nweghi m class echl.

'I shall go to watch how the bullets will scatter their heads. Thank God I don't have a class tomorrow.'

Subject 4: (to Subject 1) Anyi ga-eje ichita akwa anyi na nke that tailor n'oge mgbede?

'Shall we go to collect our clothes from that tailor this evening?'

Subject 1: Anyi nwere ike ije na 4. A maghi m ma that man o ga-akwatakwa akwa ahu.

'We could go at 4 p.m. I don't know whether that man will sew the cloths well.'

Introduction through signal is not very prominent. This would involve the use of such opening devices as 'let me tell you something', 'let's talk of something else', etc. These opening markers not only close the previous topics, but also prepare the participants for a new topic. From Table 2 it will be observed that participants hardly employ this method in switching from one topic to the other.

Table 3: Opening and closing devices

	Subj. 1	Subj. 2	Subj. 3	Subj. 4	Total
<u>Opening</u>					
Choice Question	6	4	5	3	18
Tieing Moves	4	1	3	1	9
<u>Closing</u>					
Passing Moves	2	4	2	3	11
Direct Closure	4	2	1	0	7

The speakers used several topic opening devices. Choice question seems

to be one of the most commonly used. For example, a new topic was opened when the speaker asked

Subject 4: Nna, onye kuziere gị ebe ahụ?

'(Regulator), who showed you the place?'

Choice questions such as this introduced new topics. In some other cases, choice questions were used to establish the necessary base of shared knowledge or old information. For example,

Subject 3: Nna, a kọrọlụm gị ihe mere yesterday.

'(Reg.), I didn't tell you what happened yesterday.'

Subject 2: Ọ gịni?

'What is it?'

Subject 3: E meetiri m that chick na library. Anyị we discuss ba, o wee sị m na ya ga-abịa na hostel na 7. Ka m lewenu anya, a ma m ma ọ ga-abịa ma ọ bụ na ọ gaghị abịa.

'I met that chick (girl) in the library. We discussed, and she promised to come to the hostel by 7 o'clock. I shall be on the look-out. I don't know whether she will come or not.'

Subject 2: Dianyi, i nafelugo.

'(Reg.), you are lucky.'

Subject 4: *I makwa nke education ahụ di ọcha? Nke George na-achụ?*

'Do you know that fair one in education? The one George has been running after?'

Subject 2: E-he.

'Yes.'

In the utterance of Subject 4 in italics above is a choice question which relates to a shared knowledge, and this question signals a shift from the previous topic to a new one.

New topics were also introduced with opening statements and what I will call (for want of a better term) "introducers" like

A kọrọlụm gị ihe mere nụ 'I didn't tell you what happened.'

Ị maghị ihe mere 'You didn't know what happened.'

Chere ka m gwa g| 'Wait, let me tell you.'

and "regulators" like nna , diany| , etc. which, with reference to the context, are empty in content. The regulators don't really communicate anything in particular, except to demonstrate closeness, and they are equally used to initiate topics.

Topic closing markers are not as evident as the opening markers. Occasionally such passing moves such as h-mm , e-ye , m-mm , and such statements as | nafelugo 'you are lucky' are found. Direct closures comprise such closing signals as 'nna forget it', 'mechie that topic', 'stop it', etc. It seems that topic change is primarily manipulated by an opening rather than a closing marker.

7. Shading as a Discourse Strategy

Topic shadings are employed in discourses for several reasons. Goode-nough and Weiner [1978] found that topic shadings were inefficient in discourse inasmuch as shadings tended to interrupt the exchange of information about a particular topic. In one quarter of the incidents of topic shading produced by my subjects, the shaded utterance or utterances did indeed seem to temporarily interrupt the conversational flow, usually contributing information irrelevant to the topic under discussion. For example, one of the subjects was informing the others that he had discovered a place where beer is cheap in town and girls abound. He was describing the location of the place to them:

Subject 1: | makwa ebe Holy Cross Church d|?

'Do you know where the Holy Cross Church is?'

Subject 2: Nke d| na Mission Road?

'The one on Mission Road?'

Subject 1: A-ha. | gafes|a ya, ka | na-eje new Bini market, o nwere one street | ga-ah| by the right.

'Yes, after it, towards new Bini market, there is one street you will see by the right.'

Subject 4: Nna, onye kuziere gi ebe ah|? O nweghi ebe i maghi na Bini a.

'(Reg.), who showed you the place? There is no place you don't know in this Benin.'

Subject 1: *Ọ kwa Paul kpọọrọ m gaa ebe ahụ, ụbọchị anyị chọjere nwata ya.*
'It was Paul who took me there, the day we went to look for the girl friend.'

Subject 2: *Ọ bụ nakụkụ ebe ha?*
'Is it the side where they live?'

Subject 1: E-e.
'Yes.'

Subject 3: *Ọ dị ka ụmụ nwata riri nne nakụkụ ebe ahụ.*
'It looks like there are plenty of girls that side.'

Subject 1: E-he. *I soro ụzọ ahụ, gafesịa Bendel Line, o nwere obere street* *dị by the right. That street bara n'ime ebe ahụ.*
'(Reg.), if you follow that street, after the Bendel Line office, there is one street by the right. That street enters into the place.'

In this example, the shaded utterances (italicized above) contribute no information to the topic of discussion, namely, how to get to the place being described. In this case shadings acted as conversational interruptors but did not in any way change the topic of conversation. The probable reason for this type of shading is to add humour and life to the conversation.

A common reason for shading which was employed by all the subjects is to effectively shift the discourse from one topic to another (see Table 4). From my observation, it does seem that this type of shading is employed by a conversational partner when he is either uninterested in the topic under discussion or wants something new. Since most conversational partners do not employ any overt signal to announce a discontinuation, they simply intrude a new topic to halt any further continuation of the previous topic. A good illustrative example is the following segment:

Subject 3: Nna, *i ma ụdị ihe a ga-eme na project a?*
'(Reg.), do you know the type of thing we shall do in this project?'

- Subject 2: Amaghikwa m, kama o di ka oby maka Igbo language.
'I don't know, but I think it relates to Igbo language.'
- Subject 3: Ebe isi okwu di by na my amaghi ede Igbo.
'The main point is that I don't know how to write Igbo.'
- Subject 1: (laughs) ! ga-amu ya taa.
'You will learn it today.'
- Subject 4: *Nna, exam a na-eche m uche.*
'(Reg.), this coming exam frightens me.'
- Subject 3: ! makwa na 324 na my enweghi Idea ihe a na-akọ na course ahy.
'Do you know that in 324 I have no idea what is being said in that course.'
- Subject 4: That man nye m C na course ahy a ga m adi very happy.
'If that man gives me a C in that course I will be very happy.'
- Subject 3: *Nna, ya wetakele the project ka m jee mara ihe M ga-eme eme.*
'(Reg.), let him get the project so that I go and know what to do.'

In this example, the first topic centred on the project I had informed them I was going to collect from the typist. Through shading, the topic was effectively shifted to the forthcoming examinations. Discussions on the impending examinations continued for a while until the earlier topic was reintroduced. Shading, in this case, was used by Subject 4 to effect a topic change either because the previous topic was becoming boring or because the new topic, being of a more general concern, would be welcomed for discussion. One can only assume that this particular type of shading strategy is employed when a participant wants something new. Although he could declare his intention for a change openly, e.g. by saying, "Let's talk about something else," it is common in such spontaneous exchanges for such a participant to simply intrude a new topic without any overt signal. The other participants reserve the right to accept the new topic (by continuing discussions on the new topic) or reject it (by shading it and switching to something else).

Igbos are a talkative people, and as a result, great emphasis is placed

Table 4: Shading strategies

	Subj. 1	Subj. 2	Subj. 3	Subj. 4	Total
Irrelevant Material	0	1	2	2	5
Topic Shift	1	3	4	5	13
Silence	2	0	0	0	2
Interruption	2	0	1	1	4

on oral communication in whatever form. Thus, in such a society where verbal communication is highly valued, silence introduced at any point in the course of a communication is significant and can mean different things in different contexts. Nwoye [1985] mentions that silence among the Igbos could be positive or negative. It could be positive when used in reiterating the traditional wisdom, e.g. as embodied in the proverb *o gbalu nkiti kwelu ekwe* 'he who keeps silent consents', as when one consents to a collective decision without necessarily verbalizing his consent; or in the case of elder/younger (or parent/child, husband/wife, employer/employee) relationship where silence is a mark of good behaviour when the former is talking. Silence has a negative effect, for instance, when it implies a deferred action. If, for example, A hurts B and B keeps silent, B's silence could be interpreted to mean that he is contemplating a retaliatory action.

In this study, silence as a shading device was used as a rejection, consequently forcing a change of topic. Subject 3 was trying to reveal Subject 1's sexual exploits which Subject 1 was in no mood to discuss. Subject 1, therefore, played deaf ears to all prying questions on details:

Subject 3: *Diany!, obu ebe ahu ka i butere nwata i menyere egwu unyahuru?*
'(Reg.), was that the place you picked the girl you showed pepper yesterday?'

Subject 1: (Silent)

Subject 2: (Calls Subject 1 by name) *Kedu onu nwata di?*
'How was the girl?'

Subject 1: (Silent)

Subject 4: Nna, ! chqgh! Inye any! details?
'(Reg.), don't you want to give us details?'

Subject 1: (Silent)

Subject 3: Kedu onye ma oge bank ji emechi?
'Who knows when the banks close?'

Subject 4: Ọ d!kwa m ka ọ by 1 o'clock.
'I think it is 1 o'clock.'

In this example, Subject 1's silence seems to have caused the discontinuation of the topic raised by Subject 3. In spite of the fact that Subject 3 could have thrown more light on the topic (he seems to know enough details himself that he could share with others), he switched to another topic to divert the attention of the curious enquirers. Rejection of the topic of discussion by Subject 1 through silence shaded it, necessitating the introduction of a new topic. The other participants, unable to proceed any further with the previous topic, accepted the shading by continuing another topic.

This example differs from the earlier one where the participant intruded a new topic either out of a desire for a change or as a result of lack of interest. In the case of shading through silence, the mood of the participant introducing the shading may have indicated indifference and complete rejection, signifying that the topic should never have been thrown open for discussion. It is an indirect way of warning the speaker to watch his utterance. Shading through lack of interest does not imply this.

Another reason for topic shading is to rudely interrupt a speaker. Depending on the context and the topic of discussion, it is usually possible for a speaker to retain the conversational initiative. In such cases, the exchange structure could be represented as initiative by one speaker, followed up by some kind of supportive material by other participants. Conversational support could be in the form of feedback (whose exponents could be acknowledgements, endorsements, claims and proofs of understanding of the topic under discussion, etc.). It follows, therefore, that participants in a conversation are expected to provide audience appreciation and ritual support to

the speaker. Lack of such support can lead not only to a dramatic change of topic, but also to complete breakdown in communication. Participants can demonstrate lack of support or disapproval of the topic by rudely interrupting the speaker through the introduction of a new topic. The following piece of discourse is an example:

Subject 2: (Calls Subject 3 by name) | mes|go assignment 324 ka | kuziere m na a magh| m ihe a na-akọ na course ahụ.

'Have you finished your assignment on 324 so that you teach me because I don't understand anything in that course.'

Subject 3: | s| mmes|? A kagh| m ele ya anya ncha ncha.

'Do you say finishing? I haven't looked at it at all.'

Subject 2: (Referring to Subject 1) | mego ya?

'Have you done it?'

Subject 1: *Kedu ihe bụ na ndi Police enweghi ike ijide this man na-egbuchasi ndi mmadu?*

'Why is it that the Police can't apprehend this man that has been killing people?'

Speaker 4: Nna, nke a gbalu m ghar|!. Ndi Police ga-ejide ya, a s|kwa na ya na ha na e cooperate.

'(Reg.), this surprises me. The Police that will catch him, rumours say they cooperate with him.'

Subject 1: Sọsọ Chukwu ga e save mmadu na state a.

'Only God will save somebody in this state.'

In this example, the initial topic centred on the assignment in course 324. This was shaded by Subject 1 and a more current topic introduced. I wouldn't really say that the shading occurred as a result of lack of interest since Subject 1 is equally involved in the assignment being discussed. It might be interesting to know that this particular segment of example is contiguous to the example where the topic was shaded through silence. It is, therefore, possible to assume that Subject 1's refusal to respond to Subject 2's question and the consequent introduction of a new topic to obliterate the old one may not be unconnected with the grudge Subject 1 bears Subject 2 for

prying into his personal love affairs. Although conversational conflicts may not be the only reason for interruption, it is no doubt one of the strategies employed in topic change in unplanned discourse.

8. Conclusion

In this limited study, I have tried to look at the ways conversational partners manipulate topic change through shading. It does seem to me that there are enormous range of signalling resources available in various languages and cultures as well as many culturally specific ways for operating the rules of conversation. These rules may not necessarily be governed like the rules of grammar because, in most cases, particular interpretations may take the form of preferences rather than obligatory rules. It is true that topic change in unplanned discourse presupposes the existence of mutual understanding between the conversational partners and that if the partners fail to understand the speaker's strategies and intentions, then there would be no audience support and the interpretation and proper response to the speaker's utterances may hinder interaction. But the point still remains that at the level of conversation there are always other possible alternative interpretations, in fact, many more than exist at the level of sentence grammar. However, choice among these alternatives is constrained by what the speaker intends to achieve through a particular strategy, as well as by his expectations of the others' reactions and assumptions. Yet, once a particular interpretation is selected, it holds until something else occurs in the conversation to make participants aware that a change in strategy is intended. Thus, we find that it is possible to negotiate, repair, or even alter interpretations through interactive processes.

The main reason for topic shading seems to be to effect a change to something new. Sometimes, irrelevant materials are thrown in as topics probably to bring in humour and make the exchanges more relaxing. Different strategies are employed in effecting this change, and it is possible that these might differ across cultures and from context to context. This paper is silent on how participants' grammatical and phonological abilities are employed in topic transitions. For example, if a regular change of topic is to take

place, participants should be able to scan phrases and watch the intonational pattern to predict that a speaker is about to end an utterance and to await a possible introduction of a new topic. That is to say, they must be able to distinguish between rhetorical pauses and turn-relinquishing pauses, thereby maintaining interactional synchrony to avoid random interruption of speakers.

I believe that a study of the patterns of utterances among speakers in planned and unplanned discourses might go a long way not only to help develop more appropriate and more specific conversational maxims, but also to show how strategies of conversational interaction could be integrated into other aspects of speakers' linguistic and cultural knowledge.

APPENDIX

Note: Here I have provided first an interlinear translation of a sample of the data, followed by a free translation. The utterances in both translations are numbered. The following abbreviations are used: S = Shading, TC = Topic Change, and TR = Topic Reintroduction.

Text and interlinear translation

- Subject 2: (1) Nna, now ka obi ru-ru m ala. (2) Mgbe o
 introducer that mind reach-past me ground when he
 kpọ-rọ aha m na class, m che-re ma o by last
 call-past name me in me think-past whether it be
 class my ab|a-gh|. me come-not
- Subject 3: (3) M che-re ma o by maka coke m na-anụ.
 I think-past whether it be because I pres-drink
- Subject 1: (4) Akwukwọ dị n'office a dị egwu (TC). (5) ! na-ekwu
 book is in this is fear you pres-say
 na mmady gụ-cha-ra ihe a agụ?
 that person read-all-past thing this read
- Subject 2: (6) A na-abụ Doctor na nkịtị. (7) O dị m ka si
 one pres-be for nothing it be me that like
 gbu-wa isi m tinye akwukwọ nile a ka m pass|a soso B.A.
 cut-open head me put book all this that I pass only

- Subject 4: (8) $\text{\textcircled{O}}$ $\text{d}\bar{\text{i}}\text{-gh}\bar{\text{i}}$ ofele. (9) M nwee ike nwee B.A., onye $\text{h}\bar{\text{y}}$
 it is-not easy I have strength have person see
 $\text{m}\bar{\text{y}}$ na akwukw $\text{\textcircled{O}}$ $\text{\textcircled{O}}\text{\textcircled{O}}$, ya gbu-jie m aka.
 me and book again he cut-off me hand
- Subject 1: (10) $\text{\textcircled{O}}$ otu e si ekwu. (11) Mgbe $\bar{\text{i}}$ graduatielu
 it how Neut.Pro. like say when you graduate
 $\text{k}\bar{\text{i}}\text{taa}$ $\bar{\text{i}}$ $\text{ch}\bar{\text{o}}\text{-ghar}\bar{\text{i}}\text{ba}$ Postgraduate form.
 now you look-around for
- Subject 3: (12) Nna, $\bar{\text{i}}$ ma ud $\bar{\text{i}}$ ihe a ga-eme na project a (TC)?
 introducer you know type thing we Fut-do in this
- Subject 2: (13) A ma-gh $\bar{\text{i}}$ -kwa m, kama $\text{\textcircled{O}}$ $\text{d}\bar{\text{i}}$ ka $\text{\textcircled{O}}$ $\text{b}\bar{\text{y}}$ maka Igbo
 I know-not-Emph. me but it be like it be about
 language.
- Subject 3: (14) Ebe isi okwu $\text{d}\bar{\text{i}}$ $\text{b}\bar{\text{y}}$ na $\text{m}\bar{\text{y}}$ ama-gh $\bar{\text{i}}$ ede Igbo.
 Where head talk is be that I know-not write
- Subject 1: (15) (laughs) $\bar{\text{i}}$ ga-am $\bar{\text{y}}$ ya taa.
 you Fut-learn it today
- Subject 4: (16) Nna, exam a na-eche m uche (S).
 introducer this pres-think me thought
- Subject 3: (17) $\bar{\text{i}}$ ma-kwa na 324 na $\text{m}\bar{\text{y}}$ enwe-gh $\bar{\text{i}}$ idea ihe a
 you know-Emph that that I have-not thing they
 na-ak $\text{\textcircled{O}}$ na course ah $\bar{\text{y}}$.
 pres-say in that
- Subject 4: (18) That man nye m C na that course, a ga m ad $\bar{\text{i}}$ very
 give me in I will me become
 happy.
- Subject 3: (19) Nna, ya weta-kele the project ka m jee ma-ra
 introducer him bring-Emph that $\bar{\text{i}}$ go know-FAC
 ihe m ga-eme eme (S/TR).
 thing I Fut-do do
- Subject 1: (20) Office a $\text{d}\bar{\text{i}}$ very cool. (21) Ud $\bar{\text{i}}$ ebe a $\text{d}\bar{\text{i}}$ mma
 this is type place this is good
 $\bar{\text{i}}\text{g}\bar{\text{y}}$ akwukw $\text{\textcircled{O}}$ (S).
 to read book

- Subject 4: (22) (calls Subject 3 by name) Kedu ihe i nwe-re na 31?
 what thing you have-past in
- (23) A na-ghị m anyị ihe onye ọcha ahụ na-asụ
 I pres-not me hear thing person white that pres-speak
 unless ma m nọ na front seat.
 if I stay in
- Subject 3: (24) A jụ-la m. (25) Kedu nke m na-apass? (26) Ihe
 you ask-not me which one me pres-pass thing
 na-esi-ri m ike na semester a.
 pres-hard-continuous me strength in this
- Speaker 1: (27) Le-nụ akwụkwọ a e recommendie-re anyị na 324
 Look-you(pl) book this they recommend-past we in
- (S). (28) A chọkata-go m ya na library ma ọ dī-ghị.
 I search-past me it in but it be-not
- Subject 3: (29) Weta ya ka m hụ. (30) Ọ ga-ekwe nye anyị ya ka
 bring it that I see he Fut-agree give us it that
 anyị photocopya ya.
 we photocopy it
- Subject 4: (31) Ego ole ka ọ ga-acost i-ji xerox nnukwu akwụkwọ
 money how much that it Fut-cost to use big book
 a? (32) Afụ, kọbọ, adī-ghị na pocket m now.
 this halfpenny penny exist-not in me
- Speaker 2: (33) (to Subject 3) Lee ihe i na-edede-kasị n'akwụkwọ m (S).
 See thing you pre-write-all on book me
- (34) Gịnị bụ all this?
 what is
- Subject 3: (35) Oh! A dī m sorry. (36) M che-re na ọ bụ rough work.
 I be me I think-past that it be
- (37) Ama-ghị m na ọ ka dī useful. (38) Biko sorry.
 I know-not me that it still be please
- Subject 1: (39) Chọọ topic anyị na-eme now (TR). (40) Ya ka m chọ-rọ
 look we pre-do it that me want-FAC
 i-photocopy.
 to
- Subject 2: (41) Ihe m needlll now bu i-relax for some time (TC).
 thing me need is to

(42) lsi m dɪ very hot.
head me is

Subject 1: (43) Nna, i ma-ghɪ ihe me-re yesterday evening (S).
introducer you know-not thing do-past

(44) Anyi rock-ru to finish with girls, wee nuo hell.
we dance-past and drank

Subject 2: (45) E-E! Ebee ka unu je-re?
really where that you(pl) go-past

Subject 1: (46) i ma-kwa ebe Holy Cross Church dɪ?
you know-Emph where is

Subject 2: (47) Nke dɪ na Mission Road?
One is on

Subject 1: (48) A-ha. i gafe-sɪa ya, ka i na-eje New Benin Market,
yes you pass-finish it as you pre-go
o nwe-re one street i ga-ahɪ by the right.
it have-FAC you Fut-see

Subject 4: (49) Nna, onye kuzie-re gi ebe ahɪ (S)? (50) O
introducer who teach-past you place that it
nwe-ghɪ ebe i ma-ghɪ na Bini a.
have-not place you know-not in Benin this

Subject 1: (51) O kwa Paul kpɔ-rɔ m gaa ebe ahɪ, ubochi anyi
it Emph call-past me go place that day we
chɔ-je-re nwata ya.
look-go-past child his

Subject 2: (52) O bu n'akukɪ ebe ha (S)?
it be by side place they

Subject 1: (53) E-e.
yes

Subject 3: (54) O di ka umu nwata riri nne n'akukɪ ebe ahɪ.
it be that children child many plenty by side place that

Subject 1: (55) E-he. (56) I soro uzɔ ahɪ gafe-sɪa Bendel
introducer you follow road that pass-finish
Line, o nwe-re obere street dɪ by the right (TR). (57) That
it have-FAC small be

street ba-ra n'ime ebe ahy.
 enter-past into place that

- Subject 2: (58) Nna, kpọ-ga m that place in the evening. (59) M
 introducer lead-go me I
 ga [go-nye g] beer.
 will to buy-give you
- Subject 3: (60) Biko, kpọ-nụ m ma ụny ga-eje. (61) E need-li m
 please call-you me if you will-go I need really me
 chick.
 girl
- Subject 1: (62) A dī-ghị m sure taa. (63) Ya bụ-ry echi. (64) M
 I be-not me today it be-FAC tomorrow I
 choro [-watch that programme na TV. (65) Unless ma anyi
 want-FAC to on if we
 ga-eje after 8.
 Fut-go
- Subject 3: (66) Mba. (67) O ga-adị too late. (68) Ndị ori dī too
 no it Fut-be those thief be
 many n'obodo a.
 in town this
- Subject 1: (69) Echi ka ha ga-agba-gbu ndị ohi ahy
 tomorrow that they FUT-shoot-kill those thief that
 gbu-ru that chief (TC).
 kill-past
- Subject 3: (70) M ga-eje [-watch otu mgbo si ga-agma ha n'isi.
 I Fut-go to how bullets aim Fut-scatter they on head
 (71) Thank God e nwe-ghị m class echi.
 I have-not me tomorrow
- Subject 4: (72) (to Subject 1) Anyi ga-eje [-chita akwa anyi na nke
 we FUT-go to collect clothes us at place
 that tailor n'oge mgbede? (S).
 in time evening
- Subject 1: (73) Anyi nwe-re ike ije na 4. (74) A ma-ghị m
 we have-FAC strength to go at I know-not me
 ma that man o ga-akwata-kwa akwa ahy.
 whether he Fut-sew-Emph. cloths that

Subject 2: (75) (to Subject 1) Anyị ga-eje na mgbede or not ka m ma-ra
 we Fut-go in evening so I know-FAC
 nke e decidịị (TR).
 which we decide-Emph.

Subject 1: (76) OK. Ụny sị na a ga-eje, a dị m ready. (77) Kama ụny
 you say that we FUT-go I be me but you
 ga-ego-nye-kwa m beer ole m chọ-rọ.
 Fut-buy-give-Emph me much I want-FAC

Free translation

- Subject 2: (1) (Introducer), my mind is now at rest. (2) When he called my name in class, I thought it was because I missed the last class.
- Subject 3: (3) I thought it was because of the coke I was drinking.
- Subject 1: (4) The books in this office are frightening. (5) Do you say that somebody read all these?
- Subject 2: (6) One cannot be a Doctor for nothing. (7) I wish my head could be cut open and these books stuffed in it so that I get my B.A.
- Subject 4: (8) It is not easy. (9) If I can get my B.A., anybody who sees me with any book could cut-off my hands.
- Subject 1: (10) That is what people always say. (11) When you graduate now, you start looking around for a Postgraduate form.
- Subject 3: (12) (Introducer), do you know the type of thing we shall do in this project?
- Subject 2: (13) I don't know, but I think it relates to Igbo language.
- Subject 3: (14) The main point is that I don't know how to write Igbo.
- Subject 1: (15) (laughs) You will learn it today.
- Subject 4: (16) (Introducer), this coming exam frightens me.
- Subject 3: (17) Do you know that in 324 I have no idea what is being said in that course.
- Subject 4: (18) If that man gives me a C in that course, I will be very happy.
- Subject 3: (19) (Introducer), let him get the project so that I go and know what to do.
- Subject 1: (20) This office is very cool. (21) This type of place will be good for reading.
- Subject 4: (22) (calls subject 3 by name) What did you score in 311? (23) I don't hear what that white man says unless I sit in front.

- Subject 3: (24) Don't ask me. (25) Is there any course that I am passing?
(26) Things are difficult for me this semester.
- Subject 1: (27) Look at the book recommended for us in 324. (28) I have searched around for it in the library but I couldn't find it.
- Subject 3: (29) Bring it let me see. (30) Will he agree to give it to us to photocopy?
- Subject 4: (31) How much will it cost to xerox a big book like this? (32) I don't have half a penny in my pocket now.
- Subject 2: (33) (to Subject 3) Look at what you are scribbling all over my book. (34) What is all this?
- Subject 3: (35) Oh! I am sorry. (36) I thought it was a rough notebook. (37) I didn't know it is still useful. (38) Please, sorry.
- Subject 1: (39) Look for the topic we are treating now. (40) That is the one I want to photocopy.
- Subject 2: (41) What I need now is to relax for a while. (42) My head is hot.
- Subject 1: (43) (Introducer), you didn't know what happened yesterday evening. (44) We danced exhaustively with girls and drank a lot of beer.
- Subject 2: (45) Really! Where did you go?
- Subject 1: (46) Do you know where the Holy Cross Church is?
- Subject 2: (47) The one on Mission Road?
- Subject 1: (48) Yes. After it, towards the New Benin Market, there is one street you will see by the right.
- Subject 4: (49) (Introducer), who showed you the place? (50) There is no place you don't know in this Benin.
- Subject 1: (51) It was Paul who took me there, the day we went to look for the girl friend.
- Subject 2: (52) Is it the side where they live?
- Subject 1: (53) Yes.
- Subject 3: (54) It looks that there are plenty of girls that side.
- Subject 1: (55) (Introducer). (56) If you follow that street, after the Bendel Line office, there is one street by the right. (57) That street enters the place.
- Subject 2: (58) (Introducer), take me to that place this evening. (59) I will buy some beer for you.
- Subject 3: (60) Please call me if you intend to go. (61) I need a girl friend.

- Subject 1: (62) I am not sure today. (63) Let it be tomorrow. (64) I want to watch that programme on the TV. (65) Unless we shall go after 8.
- Subject 3: (66) No. (67) It will be too late. (68) Thieves are too many in this town.
- Subject 1: (69) They will execute those robbers who killed that chief tomorrow.
- Subject 3: (70) I shall go to watch how the bullets will scatter their heads. (71) Thank God I don't have a class tomorrow.
- Subject 4: (72) (to Subject 1) Shall we go to collect our clothes from that tailor in the evening?
- Subject 1: (73) We could go at 4. (74) I don't know whether that man will really sew the cloths well.
- Subject 2: (75) (to Subject 1) Shall we go in the evening or not so that I know which we have decided on.

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