

SPEAKING Model of Entertainment Sports TV show: A Conversation Analysis of Shaqtin' a Fool

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Abstract

The current study probes into the occurrence of speech events in Shaqtin' a Fool comedy series in the 2020-2021 season for its conversation analysis in media discourse. By applying the SPEAKING model and the concept of "communicative competence" from Hymes (1974), there are initial evidences by tracing along the guidance of ethnography of communication to detect the high-frequency communicative and cultural uses of language from seven parts: setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms and genre. The analysis from the chosen episode indicated that there were two typical speech events, i.e. argumentation and topic shift among the majority of language context and the four commentators presented the scenes by involving their conversations with distinctive and interactive roles.

Keywords: ethnography of communication, SPEAKING Model, *Shaqtin' a Fool*, speech event, conversation analysis

1. Introduction

Basketball has been a globally popular team sport since James Naismith invented this game in 1891. It is a skillful sport of team full of heroic spirit, while the NBA (National Basketball Association) brings together almost all the top players from various parts of the world in the spotlight. When all the talented basketball players are on the competitive court, it is a sport of excitement, elegance and passion. There are many more reasons for fans to craze about this game, such as players' physical fitness and acrobatic performance beyond anybody's imagination. It is one of the most commercial and wealthy sports leagues. According to the data from Statista (2021, February 17), all 30 NBA teams contributed a total amount of revenues about 7.92 billion U.S. dollars during the 2019/20 season, a minor decline from the previous season because the abrupt Covid-19 pandemic influence in the early 2020.

Why does NBA can be so profitable as the basketball associations of other countries have been struggling on a tight budget? The prominent entertaining features distinguish the league from a mere sports event but somewhat a recreational industry with multiple perspectives of selling points, both of money and popularity. A pure basketball fan can forget all the little things of life when he or she watches the games from NBA. The entertaining games and their licensed products are broadcasted in multiple channels of new media, such as electronic games (NBA 2K series), postgame shows (*Inside the NBA*), All-star weekend (the festival with global fans every February), and NBA Care (the league's responsibility program). But different from the channels above mentioned, there are more multimedia resources on the screens and *Shaqtin' a Fool* is one of the trendiest shows of basketball tags on multiple Internet platforms, such as YouTube, Twitter and Instagram.

For the analysis of speech events under a controlled and proved framework, this paper also imports criteria of Hymes' SPEAKING model (1974), including setting, participants, ends, act sequences, key, instrumentalities and genre. From these perspectives, there will be a pilot study in what factors can influence entertainment sports show like *Shaqtin' a Fool* and how discourse is organized in such settings. The following research aims to employ an ethnographical approach to observe the discourse of Episode 15 in the 2020-2021 season. Before moving on to the study, the research questions will be raised and three major aspects, namely ethnography of communication, SPEAKING model and speech event, form the forthcoming theoretical framework.

2. Research questions and theoretical framework

2.1 Research questions

To perform this study more effectively, this paper aims to answer the research question as follows:

(1) What are the speech acts observed and manipulated in the selected episode?

(2) How does the SPEAKING model shape the understanding of *Shaqtin' a Fool*?

2.2 *Ethnography of communication*

By establishing the Ethnography of Communication (EOC) concept, Hymes proposes this new concept to perform a communicative approach in language speaking and amendment and “indicate the necessary scope, and to encourage the doing, of studies ethnographic in basis, and communicative in the range and kind” (Hymes, 2013, p.3). For EOC researchers, it is imperative that “the study of language must concern itself with describing and analyzing the ability of the native speakers to use language for communication in real situations (communicative competence)” (Farah, 1997, p.125). With the early foundation and development of this framework, more and more relevant researches focus on conceptualizing it into the later SPEAKING model.

Scholars expand their horizons based on Hymes' model into more scopes. Duff (1995) applies this framework in the educational context and performs analytical classroom case studies for immersive teaching and learning. After that, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) claim that code and message form are two indispensable parts in the communication process. Communicators should also understand the topic thoroughly for smooth information exchange. McConachy (2008) shifts his focus on sociocultural contexts of dialogues and uses this model as “a useful device for making salient the myriad sociocultural factors that influence language use in order to generate sociocultural meta-awareness, as well as to highlight specific interactional norms” (McConachy, 2008, p.124). In recent years, a “human turn” has signified its importance in sociolinguistics, such as a “move away from languages as linguistic systems used by people, toward language or languaging as a sociolinguistic system performed by people” (Juffermans, 2011, p.165).

At the first stage, the EOC approach justifies various means of communication in a specific language community and the very purpose is to figure out how senders and receivers could run the process. One notable feature is that this method is different from previous and current views from linguistics since EOC adopts the existence of language system variations in different contexts. It is intended to apply the vagueness of communication in the approach as other linguistic theories have already elaborated relevant terms. There is a skeptical observation from an EOC perspective about the communication manners, hunting for the methods of understanding in communities or institutions. For example, an institution may boast that it is more likely of the official media in a country. In this way, the institutional language is comparatively more intelligible and formal rather than other dialectal media agencies. In a word, EOC aims to explain and describe the timing, participants and reasons of language-related communicative activities.

2.3 *SPEAKING model and speech event*

People use speech in various occasions to express themselves for different purposes. In situational scenarios, it is imperative to delve into a particular perspective and analyze by following some existing research patterns. Through an ethnographical approach, this paper builds its framework upon Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model in 1974. Hymes (1974) proposed the concept of “communicative competence” which is underlying knowledge of the rules of speaking. They are the rules that allow the native speaker to speak appropriately. He offered three relevant units to be analyzed in ethnography of speaking that are hierarchically ordered, i.e., ‘speech situation’ as the highest-level unit, ‘speech event’ in the middle part and ‘speech act’ at the bottom.

Speech events are occasions when language of the speaker is prominent in its role. No matter what type of conversation it is, people can refer according to different contexts to various approaches by obeying cultural rules and regulations. In a communicative activity, conversational partners usually look at each other and do not speak at the same time. Majorities of people initiate their talk by free topics such as greeting and weather. After that, it is usually for the two sides to take turns to speak and not often interrupt abruptly each other. Before the conversation ends, people are more apt to complete their sentences and bid farewell to each other with good manners.

With the previous framework review and analysis based on EOC, it is significant to generalize all elements in the Hymes' SPEAKING model as a heuristic approach to evaluate each factor with its relevance of study object. From the perspective of cultural communication (CC) to intercultural communication (ICC), Hymes (1974) initiates the critical renovation of the competence-performance dichotomy from Chomsky and walks the grammatical structure through a sociolinguistic perspective, which is the essence of SPEAKING grid. The model is composed of seven parts, i.e., setting, participants, ends, act sequences, key, instrumentalities and genre.

S (setting): the time and place within the scope of culture and communication

P (participants): the message between speaker(s) and hearer(s)

E (ends): the results or aims of the interaction

A (act sequence): the mode and order of the message delivery

K (key): the manner in which the message is delivered

I (instrumentalities): the channels either via written or spoken, etc. for the message delivery

N (norms): normal criteria about the interactive manipulation determining the reaction from both the sender(s) and receiver(s) and their explanations of the messages.

G (genre): category of interaction readily accessible by the source language

There are two key elements from speech event in the setting. One is physical setting, which means the happening place and attached instructions of a particular event. To take an example, a talk show is usually held in a studio but a small talk among friends can happen anywhere without the prescription of a venue. Thus, the setting is not a fixed part in the speech event. Hymes (1974) also emphasized the psychological setting and scene to indicate the cultural identity of a specific event. It is necessary for the researcher to pay attention to the emotional status of the setting and depict via its prominent speech act. A talk show is a purpose-driven activity partially aiming at entertainment and audience rating. On the other hand, a friend's talk is a casual occasion that unconsciously enhances relationship and releases pressure within same or different cultural backgrounds.

For the participants, they are anonymous people involved in the speech event based on their roles. In the talk show, there are commonly a host/hostess and guests on site. To build such an institution, director, camera operator, lighting engineer and audiovisual technician are also indispensable in the whole process. According to different programs, the participants could adapt their roles and communicative manners in different contexts.

Ends or the ending parts are the output of the speech event in the target goal of a task. Talk show usually pursues its goal with good reputation and high rating from the audiences or listeners. Ends can be bilateral between the show participants and audiences in the activity. Despite same or different goals, all people involved in the speech event walk the program through its purpose to the end.

For act sequence in the speech event, it is a depiction of significant parts in the message or information form and content. To begin with, form in the event is beyond the use of language-related strategies. There are more stylistic features and options in the process. For example, in an English-spoken context, people are inclined to the immediacy and frankness of a potential message content. Thus, a speech act would be more popular if fine and referential content is provided. As for the reference of participants, the above-mentioned tips are only expected results and in real cases, there may be some changes at various degrees.

As for the key or manner of the event, Hymes prescribes the tonality and style of a cultural activity. In this way, the study of tone is important to figure out what identity it is. In the program of talk shows, entertainment or joking tone is the prevalent type. Despite of cultural differences, this characterization of talk show is comparative stable with minor localization.

Instrumentalities regulate the method of speech with its routine production. The form could be either spoken or written. Participants would utilize these tools in many aspects, such as singing, talking, imitating and writing. There are also various speech forms in the instrumentalities, including language styles, register types and coding strategies in a specific context. It is also important to assume that it is a message delivery medium upon which participants distinguish instrumentalities.

In a speech event, norms are composed of two types: interaction and interpretation. The first type regulates the basic rule patterns of the behavioral suggestions among event participants. These rules include speech order, time, manner, content and many others, which could be expanded into norms. The other type is interpretation. In these norms, it is various based on the cultural factors like experience, ideology and language.

The last member of the grid is genre. There have been abundant examples of such speech event throughout human history, such as poem, tale, proverb, riddle, prayer, oration, lecture, commercial and editorial. Genres include two notable features. The first is that it is the formal characterization in an activity. The difference between a talk show and casual chitchat may not be the content, which could be both celebrity gossips. The second is that genres in this characterization can be symbolized as a series of interactive process. When we try to deliver and explain message form, it is reasonable to argue whether this kind of genre permits participants to conceptualize over relevant cultural activities.

In a word, this SPEAKING model is a guiding checklist for ethnography of communication. Most EOC activities urge a more complex input and output to interact these components but which may not be all included in the process. To elaborate this framework, this study would be discussed and summarized by the case analysis of *Shaqtin' a Fool*.

3. The Study: Conversation analysis of *Shaqtin' a Fool*

Shaqtin' a Fool is a postgame TV show of NBA basketball weekly matches on TNT. The title is quite similar to "actin' a fool" as a wordplay. It first aired since 2011 and employed former NBA All-Star center Shaquille O'Neal to be the host and presenter together with basketball commentators Ernie Johnson, Kenny Smith, and Charles Barkley. With humorous and teasing comments on faulty plays in the previous week, all of the four host and analysts provide impromptu reaction and comments.

From the perspectives of a qualitative approach, this study has employed a specific context from *Shaqtin' a Fool* by mixing the basketball terminology and humorous discussion together. Language as well as its speakers are far beyond a pure grammatical issue but more likely to apply individual utterance in a culture-specific context. As a communication gaming process, there are a series of rubrics and skills for the institutional members in the talking community. Thus, it is imperative to allow each member in the discussion to deepen his/her understanding constantly.

This project draws on the method of Conversation Analysis (CA) with the analysis of speech events and Hymes' SPEAKING factors, which is both qualitative in its detailed analysis of individual cases in the selected two scenes and informally quantitative in its systematic analysis of general patterns across cases (Schegloff, 2007). All video clips will be transcribed according to transcript symbols (Jefferson, 2004) and then analyzed using CA methodology. Several speech events will be discussed in the following case studies under this research framework. There are two typical speech events focused in the analysis: argumentation and topic shift.

3.1 Argumentation

The definition of argumentation can be easy in life while complex in learning the working mechanism behind some language events. According to Frans H. van Eemeren, Sally Jackson and Scott Jacobs, argumentation uses language to justify or refute a standpoint, with the aim of securing agreement in views (2015). As for the dramatic effect in the show, there are frequent techniques of argumentative scenes while commenting the video clips from NBA games. It is not deviated to observe the norms of interaction from different perspectives by the four commentators. Thus, in most situations, audiences would take them as a natural flow of conversation with individual emotions and speaking styles. On the other hand, it is also notable that Shaq and other guests are managing to build a context like a mini ad-lib that a specific commentator is targeted and argued to promote the entertaining effectiveness.

Speech event #1: Argumentation

Setting and Scene: the setting of this speech event is in an NBA regular season game between Phoenix Suns and Los Angeles Clippers; Jamal Crawford from Suns committed an unforced passing turnover.

Participants: Charles Barkley, Ernie Johnson, Shaquille O'Neal and Kenny Smith

Ends: every commentator teases Charles with a kuso picture of Charles at the end of the scene.

Act sequence: First Shaq introduces the player's name and ranking. Then, Kenny rebuts with his common respect for the player. Shaq together with Ernie make an analogy with "nachos" to mock at this turnover. Charles claims that this is an unforced turnover since there is no one around. Kenny points out the roller may also take responsibility.

Key: the tone is joking, emotional and even sarcastic.

Instrument: the channel is oral and the register is very informal.

Norms of interaction: In this kind of speech event, it is usually the case that they do not say things directly. As the tone is joking and sometimes sarcastic, they make wisecracks that are usually short.

Genre: an NBA entertainment show commentary

Transcript:

- 1 Shaq: Number 4, J'mal Crawford=
- 2 Kenny: =No, n' not crossover king.
- 3 Shaq: With a pass so bad, it makes the phoenix nachos looks go::od↓.
- 4 All: AAUUGH! MA:::::N!
- 5 Charles:↑He was open though.
- 6 Kenny: ↓He sh'd—no, that was the RO::LLER's fault.

(0.5)

- 7 Charles: <Oh [↑there it is.
8 Kenny: [That was the roller's fault.
9 Ernie: On'of the pickles↓ on the nachos↓.

(0.6)

- 10 Kenny: <That was↓ the roller's fault.
11 All: [laughter]
12 Charles: No question<

The video excerpt initiates with the opening introduction from Shaq to announce the coming scene and its leading player (line 1). Kenny immediately expresses his confusion and surprise. He even emphasizes Jamal's nickname "crossover king" to state his misbelieving opinion (line 2). Shaq is continuing his imbedding voiceover along with the funny scene and roaring of laughter that how ridiculous Jamal's pass is. Since Jamal is in the Phoenix Suns, Shaq banter his performance with a well-known local food "nacho" in an extended tone to make a sharp and nonsensical metaphorical teasing on that mistake (line 3). This is a common approach in the show by applying some metaphors to combine the players or commentators with some typical American food, the representative of culture deviation from the screen to the audience for closer distance to understanding their meanings immediately.

Upon hearing Shaq's inconsequential comparison, everyone else joins the teasing group and ends up with guffawing at this scene (line 4). After that, Charles, Kenny and Ernie perform a mini-conversation on the specific reasons why this turnover happens (line 5-10). Charles starts the talk by stressing the unforced condition Jamal has in the play. Kenny is about to agree only when he notices the roller (or screener) on the court wrongly acts their pivot due to dislocation and it leads to the turnover.

By the emphasis of the word "roller", Kenny once again asserts his firm support to Jamal out of respect. What's more, he even repeats it for two more times with the identical sentence (line 8 and 10) to emphasize his opinion. In a short period of pause, Charles also notices this and gives his endorsement. Ernie in line 9 embellishes Shaq's "nacho" metaphor with an enhancing "pickle" to shift the laughing perspective to the roller. At the end of speech event, all hosts are laughing both at the perseverance of Kenny and at the funny meme pictures of Charles. To terminate the embarrassment, he draws the conclusion with "no question" to escape from this argumentation.

In a word, there is always a basic feature of *Shaqtin' a Fool*, i.e., the omnirelevance of conversing interventions for the purposes of debating and laughing. On the other hand, it is hard to talk about the turnovers of players in a professional and serious tone. We thus see in and through the hosts' interactive actions of calling the scene to a pause with pros and cons. During the arguments, the whole show flow is drawn upon as each opinion in the production and recognition of ridiculous actions, and is accordingly constructed as the relevant commented context.

3.2 Topic shift

Communication is a well-designed means to reach effective discourse content and there are many cases of frequent topic shift happened in the process. According to the study of Qian and Jaeger (2011), most English speakers would "adjust the amount of unconditional information encoded in a sentence according to topic shifts in a discourse" (ibid:3318). It is worthwhile learning that how this shift can happen in a certain speech event to investigate the timing and reasons for conversation analysis. As each scene only appears on the screen transitorily, the focus would be mainly on the interjections and intonation variation in the following scene.

Speech event #2: Topic shift

Setting and Scene: the setting of this speech event is in a NBA regular season game between Minnesota Timberwolves and New Orleans Pelicans; players from both sides exchange their position randomly and frequently during a free throw shot break.

Participants: Charles Barkley, Ernie Johnson, Shaquille O'Neal and Kenny Smith

Ends: every commentator shifts their focus and tease on the Pelican "scary" mascot at the end of the scene.

Act sequence: At the beginning, Shaq introduces the ranking and the two teams. Then, Charles and Ernie begin the comment with their surprising reaction. Every one laughs at this chaotic rotation and suddenly Ernie and Charles find the weird mascot among the fans on the stands. They all share negative comments on the mascot.

Key: the tone is joking, emotional and even sarcastic.

Instrument: the channel is oral and the register is very informal.

Norms of interaction: In this kind of speech event, it is usually the case that they do not say things directly. As the tone is joking and sometimes sarcastic, they make wisecracks that are usually short.

Genre: an NBA entertainment show commentary

Transcript:

- 1 Shaq: Number 1, Timberwolves n' Pelicans=
- 2 Charles: =OOHHH, (inaudible)—
- 3 Shaq: —show us how NOT to set up for a free thro::w↓.
- 4 Ernie: <Oh, my GO::SH.
- 5 All: [laughter]
- 6 Kenny: NOOO!
- 7 Ernie: See↑, [I like staff like this that happens away from this action.
- 8 All: [laughter]
- 9 Kenny: Come on, MA:::::::N.
- 10 Ernie: This is just <
 - a. (0.5)
- 11 All: [laughter]
- 12 Charles: Oh, N::O! =
- 13 Kenny: =Oh!
- 14 Ernie: Uh oh, Chuck.
- 15 Charles: Not the <
- 16 Ernie: Oh my god.
- 17 Charles: Not the baby AGAIN.
- 18 Shaq: Uh oh, Charles↑.
- 19 Kenny: The worst mascot ever↓.
2. (0.8)
- 20 Ernie: That was the worst experience.
- 21 Kenny: It's the baby.
- 22 Ernie: Oh (chuckles), that was—
- 23 Ernie: What's that not the—
- 24 Kenny: That was sca::ry.
- 25 Charles: That was the UGLIESTmascot↓.

The second speech event of video excerpt opens with a routine introduction from Shaq to announce the forthcoming play and its leading teams, which are slightly different from the previous players (line 1). Charles soon interrupts with a big “oh” and mumbles some inaudible words out of nowhere (line 2). Shaq is finishing his intro along with the key words in the play and used a marked “not” to arouse great curiosity of the audience (line 3). From line 4 to 11, the conversation focus is on the disordered scenario of players from both teams and every host is building their comments with straight laughter and interjection. There are altogether three times of obvious group laughing in the process that tops this speech event in the episode. It is noticeable that when Ernie says he likes staff like this that happens away from this action, every one laughs at his words since they are almost on the same page with the “foolish” actions of players on the screen.

In the second part from line 12 to 25, the mascot of Pelicans appears on the stands and all three hosts except Shaq shout almost at the same time. The atmosphere soon varies from teasing at “foolish” players to complaining the aesthetic impression of the mascot. Charles says “not the baby again as well as the ugliest mascot”, Kenny “the worst mascot ever” and Ernie “the worst experience” (line 17, 19 and 20). The overwhelmingly negative comments indicate how this sharp vision focus influences commentators’ reaction in this entertainment sports show. Shaq only slightly rebuts Charles in a minor tone and this contradictory behavior compared to the other three commentators may indicate Shaq deliberately prearranges this plot to amuse the audience.

To sum up, the sharp and even illogical anticlimax is a common strategy used in the show. Guest hosts can hardly predict what Shaq and the producers prepare in these speech events for them to react. This setting can promote the unexpected effect in the commentary and satisfy viewers' novelty-seeking psychology. The sharp contrast among different scenes can also adjust viewers' attention without merely referring to basketball but more peripheral by-products in a wider scope.

By examination of selected speech events in the show, there are some fundamental finding of features and norms during the institutional interactions among hosts. Both the two segments reveal the working mechanism of Hymes' SPEAKING model.

In the first transcription, the study focuses on the argumentation, which is widely seen in the relevant show, to position each host's role and language style. After the comparison, it is not hard to see Shaq is the chairperson who sets a prearranged tone for the argumentation. Though pros and cons can be dependent on the understanding from the other three hosts, the speech event is flowing in a natural and friendly approach. It is important to find one of the hosts to be "mocked" (mostly in a nice way though) at for the show effect. Like Kenny in the first part and Charles in the ending meme, viewers could be more satisfied on this fast track by this sense of substitution to bring hosts into the funny scenario. We can safely conclude from both speech events that Charles could be the one who is regularly mocked at in the show. The rolesetting of *Shaqtin' a Fool* is not only describing how ridiculous the chosen NBA video clip seems like but closer to a friend's party and the small talks among the members.

For the second transcription, the paper is in another perspective of topic shift. Unlike the news or traditional talk shows, sports entertainment shows are congenitally deficient in their limited scope of professional topics and terms. If there are not shifts from its discipline to others, broadcast rating may be prevalent in negative comments like "boring", "basketball is not my type", "I watched that game already", etc. To enrich the conversation in a wider range, topic shift could be helpful among different genres in the previous analysis. This sudden change can immediate draw attention, even from non-basketball lovers in front of the screens. With the topic shift, the hosts could lead to more interesting topics or gossips that they brainstorm due to the stimuli of unexpected topics.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The current research is a pilot study focusing on the EOC application and analysis from the perspective of entertainment sports shows. Two representative speech events, argumentation and topic shift, are found to have detailed analysis under the framework of SPEAKING model. Through the observation in the sampling speech events, it is agreeable that Hymes' methodological approach is well designed to the analysis of this show from relevant indicators. Each host plays his role and propose their comment along the timeline according to their interactional norms. Since *Shaqtin' a Fool* is a show of enduring popularity, there is a visible congeniality among all hosts to guarantee both the professional and recreational targets fulfilled.

As new media takes its regime in the talk show and relevant programs, it is vital to understand the mixed-mode structures of both professional and entertainment topics in the news show like *Shaqtin' a Fool*. To better facilitate the norms applied in the new media, hosts and producers should walk themselves through the existing method to a more interactive and commutative approach. Current researches tend to ignore this mixing trend of hybrid genres and focus on the language only without referring to the reasons behind.

To answer the research question before, the present study is designed to the language of communication under an institutional talk show. There is a close observation at the discourse power and group relationship based on language variation and argumentative strategies. The result of the current research probes into the change regularity of language in the communication process with the influence by culture and society. There are also evidences found in the construction of social network and institutional relationships. This study is closely related to the speaking mode and communication modifiability in the specific speech events. In the process, ethnography of communication is considered as a bridge to connect language and speakers in a dynamic system. Future researchers may focus on more speech events in different patterns and find more perspectives from the parallel TV shows.

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