Andriy Ivanchenko

ESTABLISHING CONVERSATIONAL DOMINANCE AS A JOINT EFFORT: CARYL CHURCHILL'S *THREE MORE SLEEPLESS NIGHTS* ACT 2

ABSTRACT. Caryl Churchill's work has been the object of critical attention for quite a while now; however, certain aspects of the celebrated playwright's dramatic language have received much less attention than they deserve. For instance, Churchill's use of overlapping dialogue is pointed out by some critics as a 'distinctive style which declares authorship' (Wallis and Shepherd 1998: 46-47); yet, her use of pausing has been largely overlooked. I would suggest, however, that certain types of pausing at the micro level of inter-character dialogue can have an impact at the macro level of the play as a whole and can ultimately be related to the playwright's large-scale concerns. In Churchill's usage, these discursive features may contribute to the construction of 'traditional forms' of male-female relationships, based upon 'prevailing power relations' – as Kritzer (1991: 135) argues with reference to the play *Three More Sleepless Nights* (Churchill 1990). In the following, I shall concentrate on Churchill's use of pausing in *Three More Sleepless Nights* Act 2, where overlapping is conspicuously absent. Textual examples and their discussion are prefaced with a brief explication of my approach.

1. Gender and power

According to a number of critics, a recurrent theme in Caryl Churchill's drama is the operation of power in its various guises – gender and/or class based. Thus Churchill's work is placed in the context of the feminist philosophical enterprise: the importance of reanalyzing power in society has been emphasised for the construction of 'non-patriarchal subjectivity' (Kritzer 1991: 196). In the feminist view, individual subjectivity is constructed by means of a self/other opposition, which is organized by patriarchy around the masculine/feminine division (Kritzer 1991: 6-7). Marohl, however, contrasts the apparent dichotomy female/male that Churchill's characters may be seen as asserting and the underlying dichotomy oppressor/oppressed that operates 'outside of the classifications of sex and gender' (Marohl 1987: 387). Churchill's view of dominance then can be understood as a function of power relations based on social [class] status interacting with power relations based on gender. This focus corresponds to the general socialist-feminist outlook. Socialist-feminism is here understood as a practice which addresses 'both the struggle against

patriarchy and the struggle against capitalism' (Fitzsimmons 1987: 19 after Hartmann 1981: 33). It relates the elimination of gender oppression to the elimination of the capitalist system (cf. Kritzer 1991: 3).

The construction of power relations in fictional or dramatic dialogue has been specifically addressed by stylisticians. Politically-minded scholars regard language use in social discourse as fundamentally based on 'struggles for privileging […] specific participants over other participants; specific ideas over other ideas' (Birch 1991: 46). Situated language use, including drama dialogue, is therefore 'always about power and control' (ibid. 75). Therefore, participants' linguistic choices, whether in 'simulated' or 'naturally occurring' talk, will be value-laden with respect to power relations. This understanding of power informs many researchers' views of interactional instantiations of participants' interpersonal context, particularly in and through speech activities realizing interpersonal opposition.

2. Conversational dominance

Conversational dominance is instantiated in 'strategies which enable speakers to dominate their partners in talk' (Coates 1998: 161). A number of researchers studying mixed-sex conversation point out asymmetries with respect to conversational strategies. They associate men's reportedly greater use of some strategies with gender-based dominance in conversation. In particular, it is often suggested that interruptions can be used 'both to exhibit and to accomplish socially sanctioned relations of dominance and submission' (see Coates 1998 for a brief outline). This proposal is expressive of the 'dominance' approach in language and gender studies.

The dominance approach focuses on 'social mechanisms of control and exertion of power' – specifically with reference to the dominant-subordinate relationship between men and women (Troemel-Ploetz 1998). This approach gained wide currency from mid-1970, after a well-known study by Zimmerman and West (1975) whose claim was that in informal conversations men interrupt women much more often than women do men. The authors went on to compare this pattern with the one observed in the parent-child interaction (West and Zimmerman 1977). The conclusion was that in the modern (American) society, women, like children, have restricted speaking rights.

In subsequent research, a number of other discursive features in addition to interruption were pointed out as means of exercising male dominance in conversation. For instance, DeFrancisco (1998) studied general 'non-cooperation' strategies in marital interaction, including not only interruption but also 'no-response' and delayed response as means of male conversational dominance[1]. She argued that men's no-response silences, as well as delayed response, could be even more widespread than interruption in mixed-sex interaction (DeFrancisco 1998: 179). While women talked more and introduced more topics, that was not, in the author's

---

[1] Following Sattel (1983), who suggests that men can often use silence (or 'male inexpressiveness') as a method of achieving control in conversation, and Zimmerman and West (1975), who suggest that delayed minimal responses ('mhm'; 'yeah') can be used by men strategically in mixed conversation.

view, associated with dominance – because the women were less successful in having their topics accepted. The idea, then, is that men can control conversation by means of exploiting response turn format ('no-response' or delayed response) as well as initiatory turn format (such as interrupting to introduce an alternative topic). Turn-taking can thus be used by men as a means of achieving conversational dominance and enforcing women's subordination. This means that women have to adapt to the daily patterns of communication defined by men. The general stance of dominance theorists is summarised by Cameron (1998: 440): 'whatever women do results from or creates their powerlessness and whatever men do results from or creates their dominance'.

This general stance has been criticised by Tannen (1993), who insists on the 'relativity' of linguistic strategies, thus articulating the 'difference' approach. Apparently, the problem with the dominance approach is that it regards certain strategies as inherently powerful or powerless. Furthermore, the ambiguity of many findings related to conversational dominance has been noted by several scholars. For instance, James and Clarke (1993), in their detailed review of mid-1970s to early 1990s research, point out both methodological problems and some additional factors that might have affected many studies' results. In particular, with regard to the most popular subject of dominance-related interrupting, James and Clarke suggest that the analyst's decision as to whether an instance of overlapping speech should be counted

as a disruptive interruption must involve considering a number of parameters related to *both* participants' conversational behaviour. They argue (James and Clarke 247, 268) that one should consider the larger context including the syntactic and semantic content of the overlapped and overlapping fragments, general trend and content of the conversation up to that point, the relationship between participants and their respective conversational styles. I adopt a similarly context-oriented approach to the interpretation of dramatic speech, described in more detail below.

3. Interpreting a play script

In my opinion, interpreting a dramatic representation of an instance of conversational interaction presupposes a certain emergent view of participants' relationships. The reader's interpretations of those aspects might be reasonably expected to depend on some kind of textual 'evidence'. In asserting this, I assume that interpreting a play script depends on the reader's ability to draw on a number of 'informational systems' that range from grammatical structure and lexical patterning to linguistic politeness, turn-taking conventions, and so on (see Short 1998: 13). It is on this assumption that discourse analytic methods used in analyzing naturally occurring conversational behaviour are considered applicable to drama dialogue by stylisticians. I am principally interested in the turn-taking 'informational system' and its interrelations with some of the others. Appreciating these features gives the reader

an idea of the fictional interlocutors' attitudes to each other's conversational behaviour and thus contributes to a certain interpretation of the dramatic situation.

I suggest that the speaker orientations ('stances'), as well as the broader context of speech activity, are crucial in assessing the discursive significance of turn-taking phenomena, such as overlapping speech and pausing. The speaker's orientations are displayed in their interactional strategies. That is, strategic orientations are understood as 'members' and analysts' interpretative constructs which are used to explain the behaviour of participants in an interaction'; while strategies are defined as interactional products recognizable for members and analysts under certain conditions (Gruber 2001: 1821-1822). The reader's interpretations of those orientations are inevitably subjective and ideological, being dependent on their background assumptions determined by one's social, historical, and intertextual context (Weber 1992: 11 & 12). These interpretations are framed either within 'ordinary contexts of living' or within the fictional world of drama (Herman 1995: 8), but in either case they necessarily depend on inferential processes. Ultimately, then, the reader's inferences should be enabled by specific configurations of discursive features in the text.

From my viewpoint, an array of discursive features becomes interpretable as a means (and a product) of negotiating interpersonal issues, thus contributing to

characterization. So certain performance possibilities become relevant, both with regard to the dialogue and the characterization generally. I shall try to show that the reader's interpretation, if it is to result in a 'reasonable rendering' (Short 1998), should draw on the interactive organization of the ongoing speech activity and so on the characters' displays of their understanding of each other's turns as components of that organization. Local interactional patterns can then be interpreted as marking developments in the situation, character, or characters' relationships and thus can have 'global' significance for the reader's understanding of the play. It is suggested by Downes (1988: 226) that characterization involves a manifestation of inner states, intentions, and beliefs through action (including conversational interaction); one may ask then how changes of attitude can be inferred from changes in a character's conversational behaviour. I expect my 'interactive' approach to indicate how discursive patterns in drama dialogue can influence interpretations of the play script (see Ivanchenko 2007). Understanding those patterns in a particular way would lead to choosing particular performance options; these options would result in a more or less 'reasonable rendering' of the episode and the play as a whole (cf. Short 1998: 7-9).

It is perhaps apparent from the terminology that my approach is based on the Conversation Analysis (CA) procedure (Sacks et al. 1974; overview in Levinson 1983: 284-367; analytical procedure in Pomerantz and Fehr 1997). The turn-taking

'rules' or 'practices' of the CA sequential-production approach (Schegloff 2000) are meant to reflect orientations that participants display in conversational interaction. It reflects the CA view of the 'conduct of everyday life' as sensible, meaningful, and produced to be such (Pomerantz and Fehr 1997: 69). In dramatic performance, interpersonal behaviour presented on stage is by definition significant in that sense. It is treated as 'action', i.e. as intelligible activity by theatre semioticians such as Elam (1980) or Pfister (1988). CA, in its turn, assumes that meaningful conduct is produced and understood based on 'shared procedures or methods'; its goal is then to explicate the shared methods interactants use to produce and recognize their own and other people's conduct (Pomerantz and Fehr 1997: 69). The way the actions are accomplished is analyzed to see how it can 'implicate certain identities, roles, and/or relationships for the interactants' (ibid. 74). Actions in a sequence are described in terms of expectations they set up and fulfil, or fail to. Turn-taking is analyzed as part of action packaging, i.e. the way actions are formed up and delivered.

For my interpretation, I shall draw upon spoken discourse studies. I want to argue that in every case it is interactive structure of conversational interaction that enables interpretation – observably manifest in the 'next turn proof procedure' (Sacks et al. 1974). With certain qualifications, this procedure and the reasoning behind it should apply to the constructed conversation, including drama dialogue. I believe that communication between the author and the reader, and between actors and audiences

depends on the recipients being able to process what is presented on the page or on stage. It is therefore a special case of 'language in use', i.e. 'language used by someone to someone for specific purposes' (Herman 1995: 200). Given the normal native speaker competence (plus adequate theatrical competence) a reader should be able to derive performance features from the way the interaction is presented on the page (cf. Short 1998).

I assume that all communication between the author and the reader happens within the theatrical frame. The play script is therefore not to be understood as a transcript of an actual conversation, but a detailed 'recipe for pretence' (Searle 1975: 328), where theatricality is implied as one of conditions for proper understanding. It is then a factor in the reader's interpretation of character and situation. However, such interpretation would still depend on the reader's ability to make sense of the inter-character interaction in the play script she is presented with. This interaction is formally realized through discursive patterns interpretable as manifesting the characters' understanding of and orientations to

> the ongoing activity (consensus on the speech activity or lack thereof);
> one's own and the other's role in it (discursive identity negotiation)[2];
> prospective outcomes (including orientation to dominance).

---

[2] According to Weber (1998), 'discursive identities' are created by the verbal activities speakers engage in (for instance ordering, accusing, questioning can help create powerful discourse identities – depending on the recipients' response). These identities are the medium for the constant re-negotiating of social power, which has multiple sources including age, class, sex, job status (Weber 1998: 114).

I would like to stress that interactants should not be assumed to hold shared views of any one of these aspects. Participants have ways of signalling their recognition of given action(s) as 'doing' something in a particular interactional context by responding to them using certain turn formats. Their interactively displayed attitudes to the [supposed / inferred] discursive ends at this particular point in the interaction and interactional strategies adopted with regard to that enable the reader's inferences concerning these characters. Thus performance features can be derived from the script, which is vital for its 'reasonable rendering' (Short 1998: 7-9).

As should be clear from the above explanation, my premise is that interactional strategies based on an array of discursive features (including pauses and/or overlaps) will be reacted to by co-participants, thus providing an interpretative resource with regard to the dramatic situation and character. As Gruber puts it, 'the form, content, and sequential placement of utterances continually reflect interactants' understandings of the previous utterance and also what kind of interpersonal relationship they deem to be appropriate at that very stage of the interaction' (Gruber 2001: 1817). My contention is that interpersonal context is constructed interactively and a broad range of discursive phenomena may be contributing to its construction. For instance, Kritzer (1991: 134) suggests in her literary critical analysis that the characters in *Three More Sleepless Nights* effectively operate on 'behavioural models

of archetypal status in Western culture – emotional, dependent woman, and detached and uncommunicating man'. In her view, such models will persist despite any attempts to establish 'egalitarian forms of intimacy within traditionally structured relationships'. From my perspective, these 'behavioural models' will essentially comprise certain kinds of interactional and interpersonal orientations that can be locally interpreted in terms of speech activity organization: respectively, towards a particular format of opening/continuing/closing the interaction and towards affiliation/separation/control. These orientations will be interrelated with the characters' interactive displays of their assessment of the current power balance, both discursive and social (cf. Weber 1998). Indeed, it seems that one can talk about Caryl Churchill's concern with 'the operation of power' and 'the forms of resistance associated with its exercise' (Thomas 1992: 161 & 163) because discursive manifestations of this 'operation' and 'resistance' are particularly prominent in Churchill's plays.

4. Textual Examples and Discussion

The male character's dominance in Act 2 of *Three More Sleepless Nights* is established interactively: it is both an object and a product of negotiation[3].

---

[3] Birch (1991: 55) points out that the cause of an interpersonal conflict [in drama] may not simply be a difference of opinions, but a struggle for control: "for one character to dominate the other; to manipulate the other character in order to achieve a particular individual goal". One would therefore assume that dominance, i.e. the position that lets one "achieve a particular individual goal" (Birch

Establishing dominance in conversation has both interactional and interpersonal relevance: respectively, to one's control of the conversation and of the co-conversationalist. It is negotiated through the characters' use of strategies based on a range of discursive features – the strategies that effectively make inferable the interpersonal context. Some oppositional turns, such as adversarial self-disclosures (negative, other-oriented) apparently realize what Gruber (1998: 489-491) calls dialogical type of antagonistic cohesion: they display 'co-operativeness at a basic level of interaction' by relating to the opponent's utterance[4]. Monological cohesion (i.e. consistently relating to one's own and not the opponent's utterances) can be used to challenge the other's speaking rights. Consider how Pete achieves dominance through ignoring Dawn's initiations: he exploits turn change options (pausing) and a particular type of verbalised turns. As noted earlier, an important point is the interactional significance of pausing. In Act 2, pauses are most often 'non-collaborative', sequentially inappropriate. Dawn's negative self-disclosures are consistently formulated as first pair part statements, conveying her claim to the initiatory role and topic introduction. Pete is able to thwart Dawn's initiatory attempts and to avoid dealing with her problems through his response being non-existent or strategically delayed:

1991) is instantiated in specific strategies that "enable speakers to dominate their partners in talk" (Coates 1998: 161).

[4] 'Self-disclosure' is here understood as verbally revealing information about self, including thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Dindia et al. 1997: 388). Negative self-disclosure is concerned with conveying 'painful memories, personal weakness and vulnerability, and negative emotions' (Gallois 1994: 308).

p. 260
PETE and DAWN are lying on the bed.
                A long silence.
                PETE asks DAWN if she's all right:

9 PETE   Uyuh?
10 DAWN Mmm.
11 PETE   Ah.
12 DAWN (moans) Ohhhhh.
                A short silence.
                PETE asks how DAWN is:
13 PETE   Mm? Mmm?
14 DAWN Uh.
                A long silence.
                PETE puts out the light. He asks if it was all right to put out the light:
15 PETE   Uh?
[p. 261]
                Silence.
1 DAWN Ohhhhh.
                Silence.
                PETE is comfortable:
2 PETE   Ah.
                A long silence.

One could suggest that Dawn's cooperative responses to Pete's initiations display her understanding of 'appropriate' responses at that point. She produces formally cooperative responses sustaining Pete's claim to the initiatory role. So she could expect reciprocity from Pete when introducing her topic: complaining about personal problems (whether verbally or not) and 'asking for help' – in Pete's own words from Act 3 (Churchill 1990: 267). All the sharper is the contrast between Dawn's conversational behaviour and Pete's: the latter consistently retains control through his enquiries. Effectively, pausing constitutes an aspect of a shared interactional repertoire in Act 2, which the characters use to negotiate conversational roles and to display understanding of the speech activity. In both cases, the characters' non-

complementary orientations are manifested in their interactional strategies (which include turn-change options).

In the extract above, Pete's second enquiry how Dawn is ('Mm? Mmm?' 260/13) can be a delayed reaction to Dawn's immediately preceding non-verbal complaint ('Ohhhhh' 260/12). Dawn responds cooperatively to Pete's enquiries (260/10 & 14). Where she does not respond, the absence of response has much less interactional significance than Pete's silences – i.e. Dawn's lack of response can hardly be a 'no-response violation' (DeFrancisco 1998) as it occurs at the point where absence of protest or of self-repair would suffice (260/15). Pete progresses from responding to Dawn's non-verbal complaints (or rather acknowledging them – 261/5-10) to ignoring her complaints completely (from 262/2). However, Pete's dominance has been collaboratively constructed; his extended monological turn (relating the plot of *Alien*, which enables him to retain control of the floor) is collaboratively introduced. Pete introduces the topic of movie plots and immediately opens a minimal pre-narrative sequence ('If you're not going to see it I'll tell you the story. Mm?' 261/11). With Dawn's 'approval' ('Mm' 261/12), it achieves a collaborative suspension of conversational turn-taking (Levinson 1983: 324), thus legitimizing Pete's initiatory / narrator role.

p. 261

DAWN moans, PETE acknowledges.
DAWN is fed up with the night, PETE sees where things have got to:

7 DAWN   Ohhhhh.
8 PETE   Mmm.
9 DAWN   Ugh.
10 PETE   Uh huh.
            A short silence.
11 PETE   The plot of Alien is very simple. You have a group of people and something nasty
       and one by one the nasty picks them off. If you're not going to see it I'll tell you the story.
       Mm?
12 DAWN Mm.
13 PETE   There's these people in a spaceship, right, and it's not like Startrek because the
       women wear dungarees and do proper work […]

By these means, Pete is able to achieve a degree of control over the conversation –

but this would be impossible without Dawn's cooperation. Pete exploits his initiator /

narrator role further, resuming it as and when he sees fit – often in place of response

following Dawn's negative self-disclosures. Otherwise, he lets the turn lapse;

resulting silences are therefore attributable to him. So Pete's ignoring strategy is

based on pausing, along with formal cohesive devices such as self- and other-

repetition. While Pete consistently refers back to his own talk, he may sometimes

incorporate Dawn's formulations without taking up her topic. His reactions to

Dawn's verbalised distress signals can be delayed rather than non-existent; but

interactionally, they are in most cases irrelevant as responses. As part of his

avoidance strategy, he can exploit even such straightforward second pair part as

acknowledgement ('uh huh' 262/5 below):

p. 262
               DAWN puts the light on; PETE protests:
1a PETE   Errr.
2 DAWN   I feel completely unreal.
            Silence.
            DAWN gets up.

3 PETE   Uh?
               Silence.
3a [PETE.] I like movies where nothing much happens. Long movies, you can just sit there and look at them. The Tree of Wooden Clogs is a long movie. I wish they didn't have an interval.
               A long silence.
4 DAWN   I don't know if I'm unreal or everything else, but something is.
5 PETE   Uh huh.
               Silence.
               PETE gets a book and reads.
               DAWN dials a number on the phone. There's no reply.
6 DAWN   I think I'm dead.
               Silence.
7 PETE   We could have something to eat.
               Silence

Dawn's understanding of Pete's interactional strategy is manifested in her repeated re-introduction of her complaints, both verbal and non-verbal. Overall, she may be regarded as insisting on her own topic (being distressed and needing support). By turning on the light and switching to verbal formulation of her distress (262/2), Dawn signals that Pete's treatment of her previous, non-verbal distress signals has been inadequate. Yet, Dawn's verbalised initiations are treated in a similar way. Pete insists on the topic he has introduced 'in response' to Dawn's non-verbal distress signals [3a]. Now his reactions are even more grossly inadequate than before, since Dawn's distress has been explicitly articulated.

However, one might argue that Dawn's interactional strategy is also inadequate. Dawn seems to be able to bring up her distress only in the initiatory mode, which foregrounds both her dependence and her self-centredness. Consider the lapse (a 'long silence' following 262/3a above) after which Dawn self-repairs her previous

turn (262/2). Pete finishes talking and does not continue, and Dawn does not relate to his preceding turn in any way. Pete's 262/3a does not set a strong expectation for a second pair part. That seems to be the point of Pete's choosing the narrator role: as it is collaboratively established, Dawn's further attempts to bring up her problems would be interactionally inappropriate. So it is Dawn who will be construed as 'interrupter' here, even though no overlapping is involved. Now Pete is able to ignore her complaining 'legitimately'. He does not respond to Dawn's complaint (262/2); his following query/repair initiator ('Uh?' 262/3) may be related to her action (getting up) as well as (or rather than) to her preceding turn. Dawn's interactively constructed failure to engage Pete in a discussion of her needs will contribute to the reader's interpretation of the characters' problematic relationship.

Note that Dawn's understanding of Pete's behaviour as 'withdrawing' is manifested in consistent re-introduction of her complaints, both verbal and non-verbal. As noted above, by turning on the light and switching to the verbal formulation of her distress (262/2) Dawn signals that Pete's treatment of her previous non-verbal distress signals has been inadequate. That could be regarded as self-initiated self-repair (of her previous distress signals). This type of repair may appears when the speakers insist on their respective topics (e.g. Norrick 1987: 256); it contributes to manifesting their non-complementary orientations. In Act 2, Dawn's first verbalised self-disclosure/complaint 'I feel completely unreal' (262/2) is

followed by Pete's silence. Her following self-disclosure turns are rephrasings of the previous ones; interactionally, their function is similar to self-initiated self-repair: signalling a problem with one's own turn that in the originator's opinion may be impeding the addressee's uptake.

Formally, lack of response from Pete can be signalling lack of uptake. By re-introducing her complaints Dawn shows that it is important for her to make her distress known to Pete. To achieve this, she needs to ensure that he has taken up her negative self-disclosure. Yet, no response is forthcoming from Pete, or the minimal acknowledgement provided by him is interactionally inadequate as response. That is the case with Dawn's second negative self-disclosure; it is produced after a 'long silence', as rephrasing of her previous turn: 'I don't know if I'm unreal or everything else, but something is' (262/4). The minimal acknowledgement Pete produces ('uh huh' 262/5), however, does not elicit a repair initiator from Dawn (who might show that she is not satisfied with this response); nor does she self-repair that turn until later, after a silence. The silence here can be a turn-final 'switching pause' (both interactants waiting for the other to continue), which turns into a lapse when neither one does continue (cf. Levinson 1983: 299).

Thus the pause that can be initially interpreted as Pete's 'no-response violation' (DeFrancisco 1998) becomes more interactionally ambiguous. As in the previous

instance, Dawn produces a negative self-disclosure, but does not self-repair that turn when such self-repair becomes relevant. This contributes to the effect of failed communication on Dawn's part, also foregrounding her self-centredness. After a while Dawn produces a third verbalised negative self-disclosure, again claiming the initiatory role: 'I think I'm dead' (262/6). This is followed by a silence attributable to Pete, who then produces an offer: 'We could have something to eat' (262/7). Dawn does not respond and Pete goes on reading. When Pete reintroduces his last offer (though non-verbally), Dawn responds cooperatively. This pattern of Dawn abortively (re)initiating self-disclosure and cooperatively responding to Pete's following initiations, can contribute to the critic's impression of Dawn's 'dependence' on Pete (as per Kritzer 1991). Interactionally, Dawn depends on Pete for the acknowledgement of her distress signals (which is never forthcoming). So her dependence on Pete (for help or at least understanding) is interactively constructed.

This dependence is manifested in the way Dawn's conversational actions set expectations for relevant response from Pete. By consistently violating these expectations (using an interactional strategy based on pausing) he is able to gain control over the conversation. Incidentally, one might note that Pete often reacts to Dawn's physical actions rather than to her conversational gambits. For instance, Pete acknowledges Dawn's turning on the light (262/1a), getting up (262/3), and later her getting 'dressed, beautifully, in a dress' (Churchill 1990: 263). I have mentioned

Pete's reactions (using conventional self-repair initiators) to her non-verbal distress signals: [following 'Ohhhhh' 260/12] 'PETE asks how DAWN is' (260/13). I suggest that Pete asserts his control over Dawn by monitoring her actions. Pete insists on his topic introduced 'in response' to Dawn's non-verbal distress signals (which is formally supported by Dawn). Dawn continues to produce cooperative responses and attempts to initiate a discussion of her needs. It is then Dawn who is construed as 'interrupter' in Act 2, where no overlap is involved.

Dawn repeatedly (re)uses Pete's formulations in her negative self-disclosures. That may be a means of making her complaints more 'relevant' to Pete's ongoing turn – again showing both her insistence and her dependence. There is, however, a difference between the two characters' use of other-repetition. In Dawn's case, lexical other-repetition ('frightened' 264/3 → 263/10) is combined with phrasal self-repetition ('I'm frightened' 264/3 & 5); it becomes an inter-turn self-repair. Thus Dawn reintroduces her negative self-disclosure, signalling that Pete's response to the initial instance (264/3) has been inadequate. Note how it is again preceded by a collaborative (though non-verbal) exchange initiated by Pete (263/10a-264/2 below).

p. 263

10 PETE   If you're looking forward to being frightened you can be frightened but a friend of mine went to sleep because it was so dark.
                    Silence.
                    PETE eats. DAWN gets undressed.
                    PETE asks if she wants any more food; she says no.
                    He is pleased to eat it:

10a [PETE]   Uh?
[p. 264]
1 DAWN   Uhuh.
2 PETE   Mmm.
                Silence.
3 DAWN   I'm frightened.
                Silence.
4 PETE   You'd think from those German movies that Germans were always sitting about not doing too much and staring into space and then whenever you meet Germans they're not like that at all, they're very adult. I suppose the movies seem quite different there.
                Silence.
        I'm thinking of The Lefthanded Woman. The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty. The American Friend. No, there's more rushing about in The American Friend. I won't tell you the plot, it's quite confusing.
                Silence.
5 DAWN   I'm frightened.
                Silence.
                PETE finishes eating.
6 PETE   The most frightening bit of Alien for me was when one of the crew turns out to be a robot and his head comes off.
                Silence.

Dawn's initial negative self-disclosure reusing Pete's formulation '[be] frightened' (264/3) is followed by a silence. This silence is attributable to Pete because he has been chosen as the next speaker: the format of Dawn's turn, a potential sequence initiation, makes relevant a second pair part response. Pete then resumes his topic ('movies'), but Dawn reintroduces her own topic using inter-turn self-repetition. Note how this reintroduction is preceded by two silences (264/4). The first one (potentially a switching pause unused by Dawn) is incorporated into Pete's turn as a 'gap'. The second silence becomes a 'gap' when Dawn finally speaks again (264/5). Once again, Pete fails to respond immediately – and when he does (264/6), he again refers back to his previous turn. While his turn contains a lexical element that relates to Dawn's previous self-disclosures ('frightening'), he uses it to describe his own experience of

Alien, relating it to his own topic ('movies'). The whole exchange becomes bitterly ironic in retrospect, when in the end of Act 2 Pete goes to sleep while Dawn cuts her wrists under the sheet (cf. PETE: '[…] you can be frightened but a friend of mine went to sleep […]' 263/10).

So, both characters use combinations of inter-turn self- and other-repetition to reintroduce their own respective topics and reject the other's topic initiation. Yet, these strategies have quite different interactional consequences and interpersonal significance for the two characters; the result of that difference is quite tragic. In the extracts discussed above, pausing and repetition contribute to constructing the interactional and interpersonal context. Combinations of these features with turn change options help the reader to make inferences about the participants' attitudes to the idea of engaging in the speech activity, to its topic, and to one another. I have briefly considered the potential relevance of such feature combinations to inferring interpersonal aspects of the interaction. My interpretation of the characters' interactional strategies (involving repair procedures along with turn-change options and other discursive features) specifically addresses participants' treatment of each other's turns as sequentially implied components of the speech activity organization. It also addresses the ways discursive power balance can be affected by certain strategies. Thus the interpersonal significance of those strategies can be inferred, contributing to a certain understanding of the dramatic situation and characters.

5. Summary

1) Dawn brings up her distress only in the initiatory mode, which foregrounds both her dependence and her self-centredness. Her cooperative responses to Pete's initiations (while Pete insists on his topic) further contribute to seeing her as dependent.

2) While continuing in his initiatory role, Pete incorporates Dawn's formulations without taking up her topic; other-repetition is here used as a dominance device. A semblance of dialogue is created, with Pete consistently retaining control of the topic.

3) As soon as Pete's narrator role is collaboratively established, Dawn's further attempts to bring up her problems would be interactionally inappropriate, while Pete will be able to ignore her complaining 'legitimately'. So Dawn will be construed as 'interrupter', even though no overlapping is involved.

4) Dawn's dependence is manifested in the expectations for relevant response from Pete. By consistently violating these expectations (using an interactional strategy based on pausing) he is able to gain control over the conversation.

What emerges is an interactively constructed inability of both characters to deal successfully with relationship problems by collaboratively initiating and sustaining a discussion of those problems. Interactional strategies the characters use while trying to initiate such discussion (or to avoid it) will contribute to the reader's inferences about their attitudes to each other and the dominant discourse: implementing conversational behaviour seen as 'appropriate'.

6. Conclusion

In Act 2 of *Three More Sleepless Nights*, Churchill's 'trademark' overlapping is absent. However, the characters' non-complementary orientations are inferable from their interactional strategies. While the dialogue is riddled with pauses rather than with overlaps, monological patterns prevail. Both characters flout sequential expectations by failing to attend to the other's talk, while claiming the initiatory role and repeatedly re-introducing their own topics. Churchill herself referred to the speech activity in *Three More Sleepless Nights* Act 2 as a kind of 'quarrel [...] where you can't speak' (Churchill 1990: Introduction). The characters' non-complementary orientations to the speech activity outcomes are interactively displayed – and so are the characters' assessment of each other's success in bringing about those outcomes. The male character's success in controlling the conversation is tacitly acknowledged by the female character; this contributes to interpreting those interactions as exemplifying 'traditional forms of male-female relationships' (as per Kritzer 1991:

135). Indeed, the characters' negotiation of the topic is interrelated with negotiating discursive power. The characters' interactional strategies make inferable not only their views of the topic but also their views of (in)appropriateness of certain conversational behaviour. Their concepts of 'appropriate' behaviour become instantiated in attempts to enforce those 'norms' on the other(s) through negotiating conversational dominance.

REFERENCES

Birch, J. 1989. *Language, Literature and Critical Practice: Ways of Analysing Texts.* L.: Routledge.

Birch, J. 1991. *The Language of Drama: Critical Theory and Practice.* L.: Macmillan.

Burton, D. 1980. *Dialogue and Discourse: A Sociolinguistic Approach to Modern Drama Dialogue and Naturally Occurring Conversation.* L.: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Cameron, D. 1998. '"Is there any ketchup, Vera?" Gender, power and pragmatics.' *Discourse and Society* 9: 437-455.

Churchill, C. 1990. *Shorts.* L.: Nick Hern Books.

Coates, J. 1998c. 'Conversational dominance in mixed talk' in J. Coates (ed.) *Language and Gender: A Reader.* L.: Blackwell, 161-163.

DeFrancisco, V. L. 1998. 'The sounds of silence: How men silence women in marital relations' in J. Coates (ed.) *Language and Gender: A Reader.* L.: Blackwell, 176-184 (first publ. in *Discourse and Society* 2 [1991]: 413-424).

Dindia, K., M. A. Fitzpatrick, and **D. A. Kenny.** 1997. 'Self-disclosure in spouse and stranger interaction: A social relation analysis.' *Human Communication Research* 23: 388-412.

Downes, W. 1988. 'Discourse and drama: King Lear's "question" to his daughters' in W. van Peer (ed.) *The Taming of the Text: Explorations in Language, Literature, and Culture.* L.: Routledge, 225-257.

Elam, K. 1980. *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama.* L.: Methuen.

Fitzsimmons, L. 1987. '"I won't turn back for you or anyone": Caryl Churchill's socialist feminist theatre.' *Essays in Theatre* 6: 19-29.

Gallois, C. 1994. 'Group membership, social rules, and power: A social-psychological perspective on emotional communication.' *Journal of Pragmatics* 22: 301-324.

Gruber, H. 1998. 'Disagreeing: Sequential placement and internal structure of disagreements in conflict episodes.' *Text* 18: 467-503.

Gruber, H. 2001. 'Questions and strategic orientation in verbal conflict sequences.' *Journal of Pragmatics* 33: 1815-1857.

Hartmann, H. 1981. The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism: Towards a more progressive union' in L. Sargent (ed.) *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism.* Boston: South End Press, 1-42.

Herman, V. 1995. *Dramatic Discourse: Dialogue as Interaction in Plays.* L.: Routledge.

Ivanchenko, A. 2007. 'An "interactive" approach to interpreting overlapping dialogue in Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* (Act 1)', *Language and Literature* 16(1): 70-86.

James, D. and **S. Clarke.** 1993. 'Women, men, and interruptions: A critical review' in D. Tannen (ed.) Gender and Conversational Interaction. Oxford: OUP, 231-280.

Kritzer, A. H. 1991. *The Plays of Caryl Churchill: Theatre of Empowerment.* L.: Macmillan.

Levinson, S. 1983. *Pragmatics.* Cambridge: CUP.

Marohl, J. 1987. 'De-realised women: Performance and identity in *Top Girls.*' *Modern Drama* 30: 376-388 (reprinted in H. Zeifman and C. Zimmerman (eds) 1993. *Contemporary British Drama, 1970-90: Essays from 'Modern Drama'.* Basingstroke & L.: Macmillan, 307-322).

Norrick, N. 1987. 'Functions of repetitions in conversation.' *Text* 7: 245-264.

Pfister, M. 1988. *The Theory and Analysis of Drama* (trans. by J. Halliday). Cambridge: CUP.

Pomerantz, A. and **B. J. Fehr** 1997. 'Conversation Analysis: An approach to the study of social action as sense making practices' in T. van Dijk (ed.) *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (in 2 vols), vol. II. L.: Sage, 64-91.

Sacks, H., E. A. Schegloff, and **G. Jefferson.** 1974. 'A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation.' *Language* 50: 696-735.

Sattel, J. 1983. 'Men, inexpressiveness, and power' in B. Thorne, C. Kramarae, and N. Henley (eds) *Language, Gender and Society*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 118-124.

Schegloff, E. A. 2000. 'Overlapping talk and the organization of turn-taking for conversation.' *Language in Society* 29: 1-56.

Searle, J. 1975. 'The logical status of fictional discourse.' *New Literary History* 6 (2): 319-332.

Short, M. 1998. 'From Dramatic Text to Dramatic Performance', in J. Culpeper, M. Short, and P. Verdonk (eds) *Exploring the Language of Drama: From Text to Context.* L.: Routledge, 6-18.

Thomas, J. 1992. 'The plays of Caryl Churchill: Essays in refusal' in A. Page (ed.) *The Death of the Playwright? Modern British Drama and Critical Theory*. L.: Macmillan, 160-185.

Troemel-Ploetz, S. 1998. 'Selling the apolitical' in J. Coates (ed.) *Language and Gender: A Reader.* L.: Blackwell, 446-458 (first publ. in *Discourse and Society* 2 [1991]: 489-502).

Wallis, M. and **S. Shepherd.** 1998. *Studying Plays*. L.: Arnold.

Weber, J. J. 1992. *Critical Analysis of Fiction: Essays in Discourse Stylistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Weber, J. J. 1998. 'Three models of power in David Mamet's *Oleanna*' in J. Culpeper, M. Short, and P. Verdonk (eds) *Exploring the Language of Drama: From Text to Context.* L.: Routledge, 112-127.

West, C. and **D. H. Zimmerman.** 1977. 'Women's place in everyday talk: Reflections on parent-child interaction.' *Social Problems* 24: 521-529 (reprinted in J. Coates (ed.) 1998. *Language and Gender: A Reader.* L.: Blackwell, 165-175).

Zimmerman, D. H. and C. West. 1975. 'Sex roles, interruptions and silences in conversation' in B. Thorne and N. Henley (eds) *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 105-129.