TURN-TAKING, POLITENESS, AND IDENTITY: A CONVERSATIONAL STUDY OF SPEAK YOUR HEART

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Abstract

This study investigates the dynamics of turn-taking, politeness, and identity construction in the YouTube talk show Speak Your Heart, a popular digital media platform in Pakistan. Drawing on Conversation Analysis (Sacks et al., 1974), Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), Interactional Sociolinguistics (Goffman, 1959; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), and Digital Discourse Studies (Page, 2012; Tagg et al., 2017), the research explores how conversational structures shape participant roles and audience engagement in mediated talk. Data was collected from selected episodes of Speak Your Heart, transcribed, and analysed qualitatively to examine turn allocation, interruptions, overlaps, politeness strategies, and identity markers. The findings reveal that turn-taking is strategically managed by both hosts and guests to maintain conversational flow, assert authority, and highlight stance. Politeness strategies, particularly positive politeness and mitigation, are frequently employed to balance face needs while addressing sensitive topics. The analysis further demonstrates that identity is not fixed but dynamically negotiated, as participants align or distance themselves from cultural norms, professional affiliations, and audience expectations. The results highlight how digital talk shows function as hybrid spaces where personal narratives intersect with public performance, combining informal conversational styles with structured media formats. The study contributes to ongoing discussions in discourse analysis by situating Pakistani digital discourse within broader sociolinguistic scholarship. It also underscores the role of online talk shows in shaping contemporary cultural identities and provides insights for media practitioners on fostering meaningful, respectful, and engaging interactions.

Keywords: Conversation analysis, politeness, identity, digital discourse, Pakistani talk shows

Background of the Study

With the exponential growth of digital content platforms such as YouTube, talk shows have undergone a structural shift in format, tone, and audience engagement. Unlike traditional televised interviews, many YouTube-based talk shows adopt a casual and unscripted discourse style that more closely mirrors everyday conversation. This shift has opened up new avenues for linguistic inquiry, particularly within the domain of conversation analysis. The digital space allows participants to perform identities, manage face, and negotiate meanings through subtle language practices such as turn-taking, overlapping speech, silence, humour, hedging, and other interactive resources.

Among such digital productions, *Speak Your Heart* is a YouTube interview series hosted by YouTuber and comedian Samina Peerzada. The show features Pakistani celebrities and public figures who engage in one-on-one conversations in an intimate setting. Unlike traditional media interviews, the show's discourse is marked by a more emotionally vulnerable tone, open-ended questioning, and minimal institutional framing. This relaxed atmosphere provides a valuable

site for examining conversational practices in digital talk shows—where speakers not only share narratives but also construct social identities and negotiate politeness norms.

Studying this show offers insights into how interpersonal dynamics are linguistically managed in non-scripted, semi-structured media interactions. By investigating how participants take turns, show or resist deference, and position themselves relationally, the research situates itself at the intersection of discourse analysis, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics.

Statement of the Problem

While conversation analysis has been extensively applied to institutional settings such as courtrooms, classrooms, and news interviews, there is a relative scarcity of research on informal digital talk shows, especially those produced in South Asian contexts. Furthermore, the intersection of turn-taking, politeness strategies, and identity construction within such platforms remains underexplored. This study addresses the gap by examining how conversational norms are shaped, followed, or flouted in the *Speak Your Heart* series. The research focuses on how speakers manage turns in emotionally charged or controversial discussions, how they exercise or resist politeness, and how these practices contribute to the construction of personal and public identities.

Research Questions

1. What turn-taking mechanisms are employed in the conversations featured in *Speak Your Heart*?
2. What politeness strategies are observed in the verbal interactions between host and guest?
3. How is identity linguistically constructed, negotiated, or resisted in these conversations?

Significance of the Study

This research holds theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, it contributes to the field of conversation analysis by applying its frameworks to a digital, culturally specific context. It extends Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) and Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's model of turn-taking (1974) into the realm of new media discourse. Practically, it offers insights for media practitioners and discourse analysts seeking to understand the shifting boundaries of public and private speech in digital storytelling. Furthermore, the study adds a South Asian perspective to the literature, reflecting how local cultural norms shape language use even in seemingly globalized platforms. It also highlights the hybrid nature of identity construction in mediated talk, where speakers oscillate between professional, personal, and performative selves.

Theoretical Framework

1. **Turn-Taking Theory** by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), which explains how speakers manage speaking rights, transitions, interruptions, and silences.
2. **Politeness Theory** by Brown and Levinson (1987), which provides a model for understanding how face-threatening acts are mitigated through positive and negative politeness strategies.
3. **Identity Construction Theory** as discussed in the works of Bucholtz and Hall (2005), which sees identity as an emergent, interactionally achieved social construct formed through linguistic choices.

These frameworks are used to examine how conversational structure, politeness strategies, and identity performance interact in the discursive space of the show.

Literature Review
Turn-Taking

Turn-taking refers to the structured yet flexible organization of speaking rights and obligations during interaction. As first outlined by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), the foundational model of turn-taking is grounded in implicit conversational norms. These norms operate through mechanisms such as the recognition of **transition relevance places (TRPs)**—points where speaker change is relevant—and the use of allocation techniques such as **current speaker selects next** or **self-selection**. The model aims to maintain smooth conversational flow by minimizing interruptions and long silences, thus supporting coherence and mutual intelligibility.

In media discourse, especially in interview formats, these rules are still at play but often modified to fit institutional constraints and broadcast expectations. **Clayman and Heritage (2002)** emphasize that media interviews function as **hybrid speech events**, blending characteristics of spontaneous everyday conversation with the structured demands of institutional talk. As a result, turn-taking here is less free-flowing and more **pre-allocated**, though room still exists for spontaneity. Interviewers may dominate turn allocation to maintain editorial control, but guests can strategically **claim turns**, **interrupt**, or **delay responses** to assert agency, manage face, or negotiate meaning.

In *Speak Your Heart*, the semi-structured nature of the show reflects this hybridity. The setting allows for pre-scripted questions, yet leaves space for unfiltered emotional expression, storytelling, and even silence. Turn-taking in such contexts carries relational as well as discursive weight. **Overlap**, for instance, may not just reflect enthusiasm or interruption—it may signal emotional resonance, solidarity, or anxiety. **Laughter** can simultaneously defuse tension and mark discomfort. **Elongated pauses**, hesitations, or **false starts** are not merely linguistic artifacts but performances of thoughtfulness, emotional restraint, or even resistance to dominant narratives.

Jefferson's (1984) detailed study on **overlap and repair** further deepens this understanding by showing how speakers use self-correction, repetition, or clarification to manage breakdowns in interaction. These repair strategies are not just pragmatic—they are deeply interpersonal. In emotionally vulnerable moments, such as confessions or confrontations in *Speak Your Heart*, **turn repairs** serve as tools for preserving face, reorienting interaction, or even reasserting control over narrative. For example, when a speaker shifts topic abruptly or delays answering a provocative question, it may not be a breakdown—it may be a **deliberate conversational strategy** to manage emotional risk or reposition their identity.

This becomes particularly relevant when analyzing **power asymmetries and identity positioning** in the show. The host, often representing institutional or cultural authority, may subtly guide the discourse through controlled turn allocation or topic steering. Yet, participants—especially when emotionally charged—may subvert these dynamics through **strategic silences**, **meta-comments** (e.g., "I don't know if I should say this"), or **non-verbal cues** that complicate the linear flow of turn-taking. These micro-level choices become sites where identity is not just expressed but negotiated and constructed.

Furthermore, **Goffman's (1981)** notion of **footing**—the alignment or stance participants take toward what is being said—intersects productively with turn-taking analysis. Changes in footing (e.g., from personal storytelling to general observation) often occur at TRPs or during repairs, signalling shifts in the speaker's epistemic or affective stance. These shifts offer a deeper reading of **how emotional Labor and identity performance unfold interactively**, not in isolation but co-constructed with the interviewer and, indirectly, with the audience.

In short, turn-taking in *Speak Your Heart* is not just a technical system for managing talk. It is a socially charged, emotionally expressive, and ideologically embedded process. Each turn—whether marked by smooth transition, overlap, silence, or repair—reveals layers of identity, power, and affect. Analysing these moments with attention to conversational structures and contextual cues opens up a rich terrain for understanding how talk functions not just to communicate, but to **construct self and relation** in mediated public space.

Conversation Analysis: An Overview

Conversation analysis (CA), as a research tradition, emerged from the work of sociologists Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), who examined the structure of everyday talk through detailed transcriptions. CA studies how interactional order is collaboratively maintained, focusing on the sequential organization of talk, speaker transitions, repairs, and interactional cues. Unlike content analysis, CA is less interested in what is said than in how it is said and how that shapes social meaning.

Scholars like Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) emphasized that everyday conversation is not chaotic but organized through patterned behaviors. These include turn-taking norms, adjacency pairs (such as question–answer or greeting–response), and preference structures (e.g., agreement being socially preferred over disagreement). CA has been widely applied in fields like institutional talk, clinical communication, classroom discourse, and media interviews, but fewer studies have addressed YouTube-based talk shows, especially in the Global South.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory remains foundational in pragmatics and discourse analysis, particularly for its conceptualization of social interaction as inherently face-oriented. Their model revolves around two primary types of face: *positive face*, which reflects an individual's desire for social approval and inclusion, and *negative face*, which concerns one's wish for independence and freedom from imposition. Every communicative act potentially threatens one or both of these faces, making politeness not merely a matter of etiquette but a strategic, context-dependent phenomenon. Speakers mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) using a variety of strategies—ranging from bald-on-record to off-record moves—depending on the level of imposition, power dynamics, and social distance involved. These strategies include hedging, honorifics, indirectness, softeners, and even humorous framing.

However, scholars have long critiqued the model for its Anglo-centric bias. In collectivist and high-context cultures, like those in South Asia, the expression and perception of politeness often operate through culturally specific norms that may not align with Brown and Levinson's framework. As Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) emphasized in their cross-cultural pragmatics study, what constitutes politeness is not universal—it is mediated by culture-specific ideologies about hierarchy, respect, and social role expectations. In South Asian interactions, for instance, age, gender, professional status, and religious values shape politeness behavior. Indirectness might be preferred not to mitigate imposition, but to maintain social harmony (*lajja* or *sharam* in Urdu/Hindi contexts), a value not fully addressed in Brown and Levinson's framework. Moreover, the presence of honorific systems and ritualized deference, such as in kinship-based or senior-junior interactions, complicates the neat binary between positive and negative face.

Within the media discourse of *Speak Your Heart*, these theoretical distinctions become especially nuanced. The show's emotionally open format encourages disclosure, reflection, and candid engagement, yet such openness must be carefully managed in the public eye. The host consistently uses a combination of mitigated questioning (e.g., "May I ask—if it's not too personal—how that shaped you?"), empathetic listening cues, and positive backchanneling (e.g., "I hear you," "That's brave to share") to reduce the threat of vulnerability and enhance guests' positive face. This interactional sensitivity fosters a safe conversational space, aligning with the host's performative role as both interviewer and emotional anchor. Simultaneously, it

reflects South Asian norms of hosting—where warmth, hospitality, and emotional intelligence are valued forms of respect.

Guests, in turn, navigate multiple identities: the professional, the personal, the cultural, and at times, the controversial. When recounting personal failures, social stigma, or traumatic experiences, many guests employ politeness strategies to soften self-disclosure. They often use passive constructions, indirect speech, or align themselves with broader moral values (e.g., "I believe everyone makes mistakes," or "That phase taught me resilience")—thereby protecting both their positive face and their perceived social credibility. This balancing act between honesty and self-preservation demonstrates that politeness in such settings is not a simple mechanism of face-saving—it becomes a vital means of identity management, public impression, and social alignment.

The show thus becomes a rich site for analyzing how politeness functions not only as a linguistic strategy but as a socio-discursive tool shaped by cultural expectations, media framing, and individual agency. It extends the applicability of politeness theory to mediated discourse and hybrid identities, especially in settings where traditional norms intersect with modern self-expression. The study will closely examine how these politeness strategies reflect both structural norms and personal negotiation, offering insight into the cultural pragmatics of South Asian public dialogue.

The construction of identity in *Speak Your Heart* is not just a matter of individual self-expression, but a response to layered social, cultural, and technological conditions that shape how individuals can and should present themselves. The foundational notion, as Bucholtz and Hall (2005) posit, is that identity is discursively produced—not pre-existing but continually reconstructed through talk. This aligns with poststructuralist views that reject essentialist notions of identity, seeing it instead as a site of struggle, negotiation, and performance. The show's format—semi-scripted yet intimate—offers a fertile ground for such performative identity work.

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model gains renewed relevance in digital and televised contexts. The "frontstage" and "backstage" distinction blurs in mediated platforms where guests, aware of constant recording, often oscillate between revealing and concealing aspects of their identity. This makes identity management both strategic and affective. For instance, displays of emotional openness are calibrated—not raw confessions, but stylized vulnerability. This aligns with the concept of "emotional labor" (Hochschild, 1983), where affective displays are regulated to maintain a desirable public persona, especially for public figures under surveillance.

Audience design (Bell, 1984) further complicates this. Guests orient not only to the host but also to a composite audience: fans, critics, internet users, future employers, and even political actors. This anticipation shapes language choices—formal/informal register, hedging, or cultural references. The phenomenon of *context collapse* (Marwick & boyd, 2011) heightens the stakes. Since multiple audiences are collapsed into a single platform, identity must be palatable yet distinctive, authentic yet cautious. This duality reflects in guests' interactional strategies: code-switching between personal and performative voices, using humor or humility to downplay power, and constructing alignment with audience values through shared cultural references.

Linguistically, identity work is enacted through subtle markers. For example, interruptions, overlaps, or emphatic repetition may signal authority or passion. Turn-taking patterns can reveal whose voice dominates, who concedes, and who self-censors—each revealing the speaker's social positioning. Politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987), such as positive

politeness (e.g., affirming shared values) or negative politeness (e.g., avoiding imposition), are tools for negotiating power and identity simultaneously.

Additionally, gender, class, and celebrity status influence how identities are received and interpreted. Women guests may be judged more for tone or emotion, echoing Butler's (1990) theory of *gender performativity*, which argues that gendered identity is constituted through repeated acts. In this sense, Speak Your Heart becomes a site of *iterative performance*—a place where identities are rehearsed, affirmed, and sometimes re-scripted.

Finally, identity in this show is not just performed *by* individuals but also constructed *about* them—by the host, co-participants, editing choices, and audience reactions. This introduces a dialogic layer: identity is not only expressed but contested, co-authored, and sometimes resisted. As Bakhtin (1981) notes, meaning—and by extension, identity—is always shaped in relation to others' voices.

In sum, identity in *Speak Your Heart* is a collaborative, strategic, and mediated performance. It is shaped by theoretical forces (like performativity and audience design), interactional cues (turn-taking and politeness), and contextual pressures (like surveillance and digital permanence). It is not what the speaker *is* but what they *do*—and how that doing is received, challenged, or affirmed in real time.

Digital talk shows like *Speak Your Heart* inhabit a unique space within the evolving ecology of online media. They operate at the intersection of formal broadcast conventions and informal digital interaction, constituting what Tolson (2001) terms "intimate public discourse"—a genre that simulates everyday conversation but remains performative and self-aware. This hybridity allows for a paradox: while conversations appear casual, they are shaped by invisible scripts, platform logic, and audience expectations.

YouTube, in particular, fosters a style of communication that Tagg et al. (2017) describe as "narrative-affiliative." Speakers often rely on storytelling and vulnerability as a means of building authenticity and connection with viewers. Informality becomes a rhetorical stance— marked by hesitations, code-switching, overlaps, and even digressions—which lends credibility to the speaker's persona. However, this "realness" is not the same as raw authenticity. As Page (2012) and Androutsopoulos (2014) argue, digital discourse is deeply structured by platform affordances (like the presence of a camera, the editability of content, and algorithmic pressures) that subtly script the performance. The appearance of unscripted spontaneity is often the result of highly deliberate interactional labor.

In South Asian contexts, this façade of spontaneity is further complicated by cultural scripts. Norms surrounding modesty, gender propriety, and emotional restraint make self-disclosure a risky yet potentially rewarding act. The public–private divide is culturally significant in much of South Asia; to speak about trauma, family issues, mental health, or failure is to navigate a tightrope between relatability and reputational risk. As such, the show becomes a platform where taboos are not just "broken" but selectively softened, reframed, or contextualized through humor, disclaimers, or indirectness.

Speak Your Heart exemplifies this cultural hybridity. The host creates a conversational tone that mimics friendship, often through shared laughter, informal speech, and affective backchanneling. This establishes a low-threat environment where vulnerability is encouraged but still carefully mediated. Trauma talk, for instance, is often prefaced with qualifiers ("I've never shared this before…" or "It's a long story but…") that both signal intimacy and flag the limits of disclosure. Likewise, humor is used not only to entertain but to diffuse tension, normalize vulnerability, and retain audience engagement.

What makes the show especially relevant for discourse analysis is its simultaneous handling of low-stakes and high-stakes content. Small talk transitions seamlessly into identity-defining

narratives—be it about career choices, mental health, or social stigma—without breaking the conversational rhythm. These transitions are not incidental; they are interactionally managed through discourse markers, tonal shifts, turn-taking cues, and politeness strategies. The blending of the mundane with the meaningful is central to the show's appeal and indicative of how contemporary South Asian subjectivity is articulated: not through grand declarations, but through casual self-positioning in everyday speech.

This performance of subjectivity is deeply tied to digital culture's demands. Relatability is currency, especially in an attention economy driven by "authentic content." However, relatability in the South Asian YouTube space often involves a careful balancing act—offering enough personal insight to seem genuine, without transgressing social expectations. Guests on *Speak Your Heart* must construct a coherent and likeable identity in real time, often while recounting fragmented, complex, or painful experiences. This raises critical questions: Who gets to speak? How much can they reveal? And what kinds of narratives are validated or dismissed in these spaces?

Ultimately, *Speak Your Heart* functions not just as entertainment, but as a discursive arena where contemporary identities—especially those shaped by gender, fame, failure, and resistance—are publicly negotiated. It represents a shift in South Asian media discourse where affective storytelling, mediated vulnerability, and strategic informality redefine what it means to be "real" in the digital public sphere.

Conceptual Framework (Extended)

This study draws upon four interrelated theoretical orientations to build a multidimensional lens through which the conversations in *Speak Your Heart* can be analyzed: **Conversation Analysis**, **Politeness Theory**, **Interactional Sociolinguistics**, and **Digital Discourse Studies**. Each framework provides specific analytical tools and assumptions that illuminate the nuanced interactional strategies participants employ in a mediated talk-show format.

Conversation Analysis (CA)

Originally developed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974), Conversation Analysis offers a fine-grained method for examining the sequential organization of talk. It treats naturally occurring conversation as data and aims to uncover the systematic procedures participants use to produce and interpret social interaction. In *Speak Your Heart*, CA is used to examine **turn-taking mechanisms**, including overlaps, pauses, repairs, and topic shifts, which are crucial for understanding how interlocutors collaboratively manage conversational flow. Given the show's format—informal yet structured, emotional yet performative—CA enables a grounded account of how participants orient to norms of speaking, silence, and interruption, especially under institutional pressures such as time constraints or audience presence.

Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory is employed to investigate how face wants—both positive (desire for approval) and negative (desire for autonomy)—are negotiated through verbal behavior. In emotionally charged or socially sensitive segments of *Speak Your Heart*, speakers often navigate complex face-threatening acts (FTAs), especially when topics relate to personal identity, trauma, or public controversy. The theory helps examine how participants mitigate potential threats using strategies such as hedging, humor, indirectness, or honorifics. It also reveals how politeness is not merely about etiquette but is a strategic resource in managing power dynamics and establishing social alignment.

Interactional Sociolinguistics

Rooted in the work of Goffman (1959) and furthered by scholars like Bucholtz and Hall (2005), Interactional Sociolinguistics emphasizes the co-construction of identity through discourse. It views identity not as a fixed attribute but as something **performed** and **negotiated** in real time.

The show's setting—semi-public, digitally broadcasted, and socially significant—becomes a site where participants index various identity positions: as celebrities, activists, victims, or everyday citizens. Through code-switching, stance-taking, and narrative choices, speakers engage in **identity work** that reflects broader social ideologies and alignments. Bucholtz and Hall's principles of *adequation and distinction* (2005) are particularly useful in examining how participants construct sameness or difference in relation to co-speakers and audiences.

Digital Discourse Studies

Given the platform and format of *Speak Your Heart*—a YouTube-based show with comments, subtitles, and visual cues—Digital Discourse Studies (Page, 2012; Tagg et al., 2017) offer necessary tools to understand how interaction is shaped by technology. This framework accounts for the **multimodal and asynchronous aspects** of digital conversation, such as the presence of editing cuts, background music, on-screen prompts, and the public nature of online viewership. It helps situate the talk-show discourse within a broader ecosystem of digital meaning-making, where conversation is not limited to the studio but extends into comment sections, clips, and social media discourse. It also highlights how the digital medium influences turn-taking norms, self-presentation, and the performativity of emotion.

Interplay of Frameworks

Rather than treating these frameworks as discrete, this study uses them in **complementary alignment**. Conversation Analysis provides the micro-structural insight into how talk unfolds. Politeness Theory adds a layer of interpersonal negotiation, especially around sensitivity and facework. Interactional Sociolinguistics connects these features to broader social meanings and identity construction. Finally, Digital Discourse Studies contextualize the interaction within the technological and public affordances of the YouTube medium. Together, these approaches allow for a more holistic understanding of how talk on *Speak Your Heart* functions as **social action**, where every utterance is a site of positioning, politeness, and performativity.

This integrated framework strengthens the study's ability to uncover how the show's speakers do more than simply exchange ideas—they craft identities, manage face, and construct social meanings through talk.

Research Design

This study follows a **qualitative research design**, specifically using **conversation analysis (CA)** as the primary method. CA is a micro-analytic approach that examines naturally occurring talk-in-interaction. It focuses on how participants co-construct meaning, organize speaking turns, and negotiate social roles through language. CA is appropriate for this study because it allows for a fine-grained analysis of verbal exchanges, enabling the researcher to identify patterns in turn-taking, politeness, and identity construction that emerge organically in the discourse.

Sample Selection

The sampling strategy used is **purposive sampling**. A total of **6 episodes** of *Speak Your Heart* were selected based on the following criteria:

1. One-on-one interviews (no group or panel discussions).
2. Episodes featuring diversity in guest background (gender, profession, age).
3. Episodes containing emotionally charged or socially sensitive topics (e.g., grief, conflict, trauma).
4. Availability of high-quality audio and video for clear transcription.

This allows for variability in interactional tone and depth while keeping the data manageable for in-depth analysis.

Data Collection

Data was collected from publicly available YouTube episodes of *Speak Your Heart*, hosted on the official channel of Samina Peerzada. The selected episodes were downloaded and transcribed manually using Jefferson's transcription conventions (simplified where appropriate for readability). Each transcription includes features such as pauses, overlaps, intonation, and self-repairs.

Transcription Example:

Samina: So, when did you realize this was more than just a hobby?
Guest: Uh (.) I think (1.5) maybe when people started paying attention.
Samina: Hm-hmm
Guest: And that kinda scared me, honestly.

Transcription accuracy was prioritized to preserve the nuances of speech, including hesitation, interruption, and laughter.

Data Analysis

The transcribed data was analysed using three interrelated frameworks:

Turn-Taking (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974)

i. Identified how speaking turns are allocated and managed.
ii. Noted overlaps, interruptions, gaps, and topic shifts.
iii. Analysed how speakers repair turns or co-construct dialogue.

Politeness Strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

i. Coded speech acts for face-saving strategies: hedging, indirectness, honorifics, etc.
ii. Noted use of positive vs negative politeness depending on power, familiarity, and topic sensitivity.
iii. Traced how politeness helped manage emotional or risky disclosures.

Identity Construction (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005)

i. Examined how speakers position themselves (e.g., as victims, professionals, learners).
ii. Identified relational identities through alignment, distancing, or facework.
iii. Considered use of humour, narrative stance, or affect to perform identity.

Data was thematically coded using a manual qualitative approach. Emergent patterns were noted in a codebook and revisited across transcripts to ensure consistency.

Ethical Considerations

This study uses publicly available content, which exempts it from requiring formal human subject consent. However, ethical research practices were followed:

i. The analysis focuses on linguistic features, not private lives or personalities.
ii. No defamatory or speculative commentary on guests is included.
iii. All examples are anonymized in academic dissemination unless the speaker is a public figure in a public context (i.e., on YouTube).
iv. Copyright rules were followed by not redistributing or altering the original videos.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

To ensure analytical rigor:

i. **Triangulation** was applied by using three overlapping theoretical lenses.
ii. **Peer debriefing** was done with two academic colleagues to validate interpretations.
iii. **Thick description** was maintained in presenting excerpts and analyses, allowing readers to follow the logic of interpretation.
iv. **Reflexivity** was maintained by journaling potential researcher biases during coding.

Discussion and Results
Turn-Taking Patterns
    1. **Hybrid Turn-Allocation System**
Result:

The data reveal a **hybrid** turn-taking system that merges institutional interviewing norms with informal conversational features. In most cases, the host retains control over turn allocation through direct questions (current-speaker-selects-next). However, guests frequently self-select during emotionally charged segments, especially when narrating personal experiences. Overlap is common but rarely treated as competitive; instead, it often functions as a supportive interjection (e.g., "yeah, exactly," "oh wow").

Discussion:

This supports Sacks et al.'s (1974) observation that turn-taking systems adapt to context. In *Speak Your Heart*, the mix of structured questioning and spontaneous self-selection reflects the tension between the need to manage airtime and the show's aim to simulate intimacy. Clayman and Heritage's (2002) claim about hybrid media talk is reinforced here—turn-taking is not rigid but responsive to emotional intensity and rapport-building.

    2. **Overlaps as Affiliation**
Result:

Overlaps frequently occur when the guest is sharing a vulnerable narrative, with the host using minimal responses ("right," "hmm," "I know") that begin before the guest's turn is complete. These overlaps rarely result in repair sequences, indicating that they are received as affiliative rather than disruptive.

Discussion:

This aligns with Jefferson's (1984) work showing that overlap can signal alignment. In the *Speak Your Heart* context, overlaps appear to function as face-enhancing moves, reassuring the speaker of empathetic listening. The absence of repair sequences indicates that participants orient to these overlaps as cooperative, which may be culturally reinforced in South Asian conversational norms that value supportive co-talk.

    3. **Pauses and Silences as Meaningful**
Result:

Long pauses—sometimes exceeding 2 seconds—occur when sensitive topics arise, such as family conflict, mental health, or public criticism. Rather than rushing to fill these silences, the host often maintains eye contact and leans forward, signalling attentiveness.

Discussion:

Such silences can be interpreted as **interactional resources**, not breakdowns. They serve to allow the guest to gather composure, while also dramatizing the emotional weight of the content. This resonates with Heritage's (1984) notion that silence can be a marked conversational choice with specific interactional import.

Politeness Strategies
    1. **Mitigation of Face-Threatening Acts**
Result:

When addressing sensitive or potentially confrontational topics, the host often uses indirect questioning, hedging ("Some people might say…," "Would it be fair to say…?"), and humour. Guests likewise mitigate self-disclosures by embedding them within broader narratives, avoiding blunt self-criticism.

Discussion:

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains these strategies as attempts to protect

both positive and negative face. In *Speak Your Heart*, mitigation preserves rapport while enabling the exploration of potentially face-threatening content. Humour functions as a **softener**, a well-documented South Asian politeness strategy (Baxter, 2011), which maintains dignity while engaging in critical or personal talk.

2. Positive Face-Work through Backchanneling

Result:

The host's frequent use of backchannel cues ("I get you," "That's brave," "You've been through a lot") validates the guest's experience. These are often accompanied by nodding and facial expressions of empathy.

Discussion:

This demonstrates active co-construction of a safe discursive space, aligning with Goffman's (1967) notion of face as a jointly managed resource. The positive politeness moves here not only enhance the guest's comfort but also signal to the viewing audience that the guest's voice is valued and trustworthy.

3. Strategic Self-Deprecation

Result:

Guests sometimes downplay their achievements or make light of personal flaws before sharing a story. This occurs most often when the topic involves public controversy or professional criticism.

Discussion:

Self-deprecation serves as a pre-emptive politeness strategy to reduce the perceived threat of self-promotion, especially in collectivist contexts where humility is socially valued (Scollon & Scollon, 2011). In this way, politeness overlaps with identity work.

Identity Performance

1. Stance-Taking and Alignment

Result:

Identity is constructed dynamically through stance-taking—guests position themselves as resilient survivors, passionate advocates, or misunderstood public figures. Linguistic markers include intensifiers ("really, really hard"), evaluative adjectives, and narrative sequencing that builds towards moments of moral or emotional climax.

Discussion:

Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) framework of adequation and distinction explains how these stances both align the speaker with certain audiences and distance them from others. The digital medium compounds this by making identity claims persistent and publicly accessible, amplifying their stakes.

2. Code-Switching as Identity Indexing

Result:

Code-switching between Urdu and English is common, often signaling shifts in topic or audience orientation. English tends to be used for abstract or professional terms, while Urdu dominates in emotionally charged storytelling.

Discussion:

This finding supports Myers-Scotton's (1993) markedness model, in which language choice index's identity and relational stance. Code-switching here is not random—it serves to manage intimacy, authority, and audience reach in a multilingual setting.

3. Performativity and Emotional Labor

Result:

Guests often modulate voice pitch, speech rate, and facial expressions when narrating

emotionally heavy segments. These performances are heightened by camera close-ups and host prompts that encourage elaboration.

Discussion:

Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model is apt here: identity is being performed for a composite audience, including the host, in-studio crew, and online viewers. Emotional labor becomes part of the identity display, especially in moments where vulnerability is framed as authenticity.

Integrated Interpretation

The interplay of **turn-taking**, **politeness**, and **identity work** in *Speak Your Heart* reflects a broader trend in digital South Asian talk shows: the blending of casual talk with public performance. Turn-taking structures create space for intimacy, politeness strategies maintain social cohesion, and identity work resonates with a diverse online audience. These processes are shaped not only by conversational norms but also by the affordances and constraints of the YouTube platform, where authenticity is both expected and curated.

Conclusion and Implications

1. Turn-Taking in Hybrid Media Contexts

The findings show that *Speak Your Heart* operates with a **hybrid turn-taking system**. While the host retains institutional control over turn allocation, the interaction allows for spontaneous self-selection, especially during emotionally charged moments. Overlaps are not treated as interruptions but as affiliative cues, supporting intimacy. Strategic silences function as narrative tools, signalling seriousness and encouraging reflection. This challenges the binary framing of "formal interview" versus "casual conversation," suggesting that hybrid formats actively blend the two for audience engagement.

2. Politeness as a Tool for Emotional Safety

Politeness strategies—particularly hedging, humour, backchanneling, and self-deprecation—play a central role in maintaining **face** for both parties. These strategies are not merely linguistic devices; they are interactional resources that protect the guest's dignity while enabling the discussion of sensitive topics. In the South Asian digital context, these politeness practices are culturally inflected, reflecting collectivist values and audience expectations of humility.

3. Identity as Performed and Negotiated

Identity in *Speak Your Heart* is fluid and situational. Guests shift between personal and professional selves, often indexing different identities through stance-taking, narrative framing, and code-switching. Emotional Labor is a deliberate part of this performance, with vulnerability framed as authenticity to connect with online audiences. This confirms that digital talk shows are sites of **layered identity negotiation**, intensified by the permanent, searchable nature of online media.

Theoretical Implications

1. Conversation Analysis

The study extends CA into a South Asian digital media context, showing that hybrid turn-taking systems can foster both efficiency and intimacy. Overlaps, pauses, and affiliative minimal responses serve as culturally appropriate tools for maintaining rapport.

2. Politeness Theory:

Brown and Levinson's framework remains useful but needs adaptation for digital, cross-cultural contexts. The data suggest that humour and self-deprecation—often underemphasized in classical politeness theory—function as high-value politeness resources in Pakistani digital discourse.

3. Interactional Sociolinguistics

The study supports Bucholtz and Hall's view of identity as relational and emergent, while showing that digital platforms amplify the stakes of identity performance through audience design and context collapse.

4. Digital Discourse Studies

Online talk shows demonstrate how mediated intimacy is curated, revealing that "casualness" is often a constructed performance designed to maintain both authenticity and control.

Practical Implications

1. **For Media Producers**
   - Encouraging moments of overlap and silence can enhance perceived intimacy without compromising flow.
   - Using politeness strategies intentionally—particularly humor and validation—can make difficult topics more palatable for diverse audiences.

2. **For Public Figures and Guests**
   - Balancing self-disclosure with boundary-setting helps manage public image without sacrificing authenticity.
   - Strategic code-switching can broaden audience connection and communicate nuance effectively.

3. **For Language and Media Training**
   - Training in conversational scaffolding (backchanneling, affiliative overlaps, hedged questioning) can improve on-camera rapport.
   - Awareness of cultural politeness norms can help interviewers avoid missteps when engaging with sensitive topics.

Limitations of the Study

The analysis is based on selected episodes and may not capture the full range of interactional variability in *Speak Your Heart* or in Pakistani digital talk shows generally. The focus on three analytical dimensions (turn-taking, politeness, identity) leaves other potential factors—such as multimodal cues or audience feedback—less explored. Additionally, the study did not incorporate quantitative measures of conversational features, which could complement the qualitative insights.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Comparative studies of **digital talk shows across different South Asian countries** could identify regional variations in politeness and identity work.
2. Multimodal analysis, incorporating gesture, facial expression, and editing choices, could deepen understanding of how intimacy is constructed.
3. Longitudinal tracking of recurring guests could reveal how identity performances evolve over multiple appearances in digital media.

Closing Reflection

Speak Your Heart is more than an entertainment platform it is a discursive space where personal stories, public identity, and cultural norms intersect. The show's conversational patterns reflect a balancing act between intimacy and publicity, humility and self-promotion, vulnerability and control. By examining these interactions in detail, this study not only fills a gap in the literature on South Asian digital media but also illustrates how talk, even in its most informal guise, is a finely tuned social accomplishment.

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