

Repair, Affiliation, and Account: How a Guest and Co-Hosts Handled a Delicate Topic in a Caribbean Spanish Radio Talk Show

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the introduction and management of a delicate topic in a radio talk show in Caribbean Spanish. It focuses on the interactional practices that occur when participants address a delicate topic. These interactional practices are delays, repairs, affiliation, and accounts. In managing delicate topics, participants draw on shared cultural references and humor. An understanding of how delicate topics are managed in conversations can assist language learning and teaching.

Introduction

To have interactional competence is to have the ability to participate in social actions through various interactional methods (Wong & Waring, 2020). Interactional competence is needed for participation in discursive practices—recurring instances of interaction in context or episodes of socio-cultural significance to a community of speakers (Taguchi, 2019). An important part of interactional competence is the ability to navigate delicate topics that may appear in conversation. A delicate topic may conceivably cause “cracks” (Goffman, 1956) in the speaker's mental image. Participants in conversations manage delicate topics by using interactional methods such as delaying the mentioning of a delicate issue (Silverman & Peräkylä, 1990; Yu, & Wu, 2014) and not addressing the topic directly or explicitly to avoid endangering the interactional harmony of the encounter (Linell & Bredmar, 2007). In the following analysis, I will highlight some of the key interactional methods used by a community of Latinos, including handling a delicate topic on a radio talk show as an example. The show takes place in a Spanish-speaking radio station located in New York City, where the Spanish population is dense and diverse. The radio show is called *El Vacilón de la Mañana*, [The Joking Around of The Morning], and in this particular show, it hosted artist Cardi B for the first time (see Figure 1). Cardi B began dancing in the Bronx and later starred in the reality show *Love and Hip Hop*, which was running at the time of the broadcast talk show. The radio hosts, Juan, Jose, and Nena, discussed the [display](#) put on by Cardi at the season's end review that was considered by some to be controversial. In



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that display, Cardi initiates a physical altercation with another artist and begins taunting another cast member, Asia, about a past relationship. I will show that by using repair, affiliation, and account, the hosts and the guest of *El Vacilón de la Mañana* manage this controversial topic tactfully.

Topic Initiation: Repair and Co-Hosts' Collaboration

The show opens with a pre-topical sequence where the hosts ask Cardi how she feels and what her favorite foods are. In a comical voice, she lists traditional Dominican foods her *abuela* [grandma] used to make. In Excerpt 1, we see how they shift the guest's attention and approach the delicate topic. All transcripts will be presented with the original Spanish, followed by the literal translation in the second line in red italics and the English rendering in the third line in blue italics. English words in original utterances will be copied in the literal translation and appear in the English rendering as plain text, not italicized (see Appendix). Each excerpt is hyperlinked to its video clip.

Figure 1

Participants in *The Conversation* (reproduced from NYC's *El Vacilón De La Mañana* Radio Talk Show)



Jose: Host



Nena: Host



Cardi B: Guest



Juan: Host

Excerpt 1

- 01 Cardi: it's ↓like aye: dios mios que yo estoy hablando
it's like oh god mine what i be-1stper talking
it's like oh my god what am i saying
- 02 [(Juan, Jose, and Nena laughing)]
- 03 Jose: [>tú hablas/hable/, bien tú hablas, bien °Tú hablas, bien°<]
you speak well you speak well you speak well
you are speaking well
- 04 Nena: [°estás/ta/ bien Estás/ta/ bien°, =]
your-2ndPERS good Your-2ndPERS good
you're doing fine You're doing fine
- 05 Juan: [e(h)st(h)ás /ta/ bié:n!]
your-2ndPERS good
you're doing fine
- 06 Nena: [=muy bien muy bien=]
very good very good
very good very good

- 07 Juan: ASÍ que(h)- así es que >la gente quiere escuchar aquí<
this what this is what the people want-3rdPERSSSG listen here
this is why the people want to listen here
 ((Pointing down repetitively))
- 08 [((Juan laughing))]
- 09 Nena: [=Muy bien. Qué bue:no mi amor]
very good what good my love
very good, how great my love
- 10 Juan: †ahora mira<yo me siento-. << yo (.) sé q:ue t:ú
now look I myself feel-1stPERS I know-1stPERS that you
now look, I feel- I know that you
- 11 t:e sient:e-.>> tienes que sentir super
yourself feel-2ndPERS you-have that feel super
feel- you must feel super
- 12 †orgullosa.(.)porque >yo recuerdo que >mucha gente<
Proud because i remember-1stPERS that a lot people
proud because I remember that a lot of people
- 13 (.)cuando tú comenzast:e (.) y eso, >Cuando
when you started and that when
when you started and when
- 14 te veían <coma una lo:ca!> esa no va [para ningún]
you they-saw-3rdPERS like a crazy that-one no go towards no
they saw you like a crazy person and she is not going,
- 15 Cardi: [mhm,]
- 16 Juan: lad:o /lao/ y eso(.) <y le ha da:do /dao/ una gall:eta así>
side and that and to them have given a smack like this
and that and you gave them a smack like this
- 17 Nena: sin mano ((meaning revenge))
without hand
with no hands
- 18 Juan: >a †toda la gente sin mano<
all the people without hand
all of the people, with no hands

From lines 3 to 9, the hosts collaboratively close the current topic with assessments, repetition, and laughter. Juan starts in line 10 by calling the attention of everyone with the disjunctive marker, *ahora mire* [now look]. In lines 10 and 11, he proceeds with a disjunctive topic shift while producing a same-turn self-repair. We can see replacing and deletion in *yo me siento* [I

feel], changing into *yo sé que tú te sientes*, which means [I know that you feel]. Finally, he aborts the turn construction unit about his feelings and shifts to how Cardi feels *tienes que sentir* [you must feel] as the repair resolution. By using repair practices, Juan is also creating a delay from the initiation of the topic to the source itself.

In line 12, Juan prefaces the new topic with a compliment, *super orgullosa*, [super proud] before describing the negative perception of Cardi by some people (lines 12-14). This topic proffer is recognized and aligned with the response token in line 15 by Cardi, inviting continuation (Schegloff, 1982). In lines 10 through 13, brief moments of delay are notable throughout the topic proffer and filler statement, *y eso* [and that], in line 13.

Once the topic is made visible, the co-hosts collaborate to forward its development. When Juan speaks metaphorically about revenge ([She gave them a hit like this], line 16), which correlates specifically with her action in the clip, Nena affiliates with Juan by adding an increment *sin mano*, [without hands], completing the metaphor. In line 18, Juan accepts her addition and expands on it by saying everyone got hit without hands, meaning everyone felt a bit of her revenge. The hosts use a discursive practice by employing a metaphor common to the Caribbean Latinos and accompanying it with an interactional practice where the delicate issue is not explicitly addressed but implied.

In short, by letting the previous topic close down over several turns, using self-repair and delay as well as prefacing the topic proffer with a compliment, the host, Juan, manages to introduce a delicate topic in a way that is aligned with by the guest. The co-host Nena's collaboration with Juan to produce a second compliment contributes to this tactful topic initiation.

Topic Development: Guest's Accounts and Co-Hosts' Affiliation

In the excerpts to follow, Cardi gives a preferred response to the host by accepting the topic proffer and extending and accounting for her actions. Excerpt 2 is immediately after Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 2

- 19 Cardi: *yo soy MUY CHISTO:SA*, entonce >yo soy ↑DE
I am-1stPERS very funny-F, then I am-1stPERS from
I am very funny, and then I am from the
- 20 *BRO:NX*, YO SOY *DOMINICA:NA*,YO SOY [de]*TRINIDA:D<*,
Bronx I am-1stPERS dominican-F,I am-1stPERS from Trinidad
 ((moving one hand))
Bronx, I am Dominican I am Trinidadian
- 21 *entonces* like (.) mi- mi actitud, es muy, *fuerte*.
Then like my my attitude is very strong
 ((moving hands around in circles))
so my attitude is very strong
- 22 Jose: es /e/ *lambia* ((Dominican slang))
a mouth-F
big mouth

- 23 Juan: ((*laughs*))
- 24 Cardi: hh (.) ehh [.hh]↓espérate, que mi papá me está /tá/
ehh wait that my dad me be-3rdPERS
wait because my dad is listening to me
- 25 Juan: [Sí.]
yes
yes
- 26 [((Juan, Jose, and nena laughing))]
- 27 Cardi: ↓oyend:o! [que (.1)] espérate que la familia está
listening that wait that the family be-3rdPERSSG
wait because my family is
- 28 oyendo OKAY:?
listening okay
listening okay?!

Rather than talking about the specific controversial incident, Cardi mentions her personality trait (“I am very funny,” line 19), local identity (“I am from The Bronx,” lines 19&20), and ethnicity (“I am Dominican, I am from Trinidad,” line 20) as accounts for the foundation of her mannerisms and core being (“strong,” line 21). By doing this, she is invoking the cultural stereotypes associated with these traits and identities as a subliminal factor that can not be helped. At the same time, by highlighting her local and ethnic identities as assertions of who she is, Cardi is also giving ratification of these identities in the broader sense. By not addressing the topic directly, the guest participates in the same interactional practice as the hosts.

The hosts appear to affiliate with Cardi by inserting a joke. In the Dominican dialect of Spanish, the word *lambia* takes on various meanings. In the context of this dialogue, the word means [big mouth], which also has a sexual reference in this case. In line 22, Excerpt 2, Jose adds a stronger assessment to Cardi’s initial accounts but with a sexual innuendo making it both affiliative and humorous because it leads to laughter in lines 23 through 28. Cardi orients to the sexual innuendo, making it relevant to the conversation. She does this by first delaying and following with saying her family is listening and implying to behave accordingly. This triggers louder and longer laughter by the hosts.

After responding to the joke by the hosts, Cardi provides a second account (Excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3

- 29 Cardi: °yo sé lo que yo estoy haciendo° (.)
I know that which I am-1stPERS do-1stPERS(.)
I know what I’m doing,
- 30 yo-yo estudio lo que yo hago.
I I study-1stPERS that which i do-1stPERS.
I study what I’m doing.

Here, she elaborates further upon the topic proffer response by focusing on her agency

rather than her given personality and identities. Using cognitive verbs with the first-person subject “I know” and “I study,” she highlights her understanding and choice in what she did.

Finally, Cardi gives a third account for her actions (Excerpt 4), namely, the support of her family. Here again, the host shows clear affiliation with her.

Excerpt 4

- 31 Cardi: Yo. tengo >parientes< que, siempre ↑están=
I have-1stPERS family members that always be-3rdPERS
I have family members that always are
- 32 Juan: ↓↑pendiente de ↓ti
thinking of you
thinking of you
- 33 Cardi: =pendiente de ↑mí
thinking of me
thinking of me
 ((punching her palm))
- 34 pero >mí papá< siempre me dice like(.) tu estás /ta/ ↑muy
but my dad always me tell like you be-2ndPERS very
but my dad always tells me like you are very
- 35 fam:osa! <Inv:ierte di:nero!> >MIRE COMPRARTE UN
famous invest-you money look buy-you a
famous. Invest your money. Look, you should buy an
- 36 APARTAMENTO EN SANTO DOMINGO<(.)1 eso, lo que me dice.
apartment in Santo Domingo this that which me tell
apartment in Santo Domingo. This is what he tells me.

In line 31, Cardi makes a statement but pauses in what seems to be an attempt to catch her breath. Juan jumps in and finishes her TCU with *pendiente de ti*, [thinking of you], in line 32. Cardi then accepts and incorporates his completion into her TCU. In lines 34 through 36, she begins to shift topics by invoking a semantic relationship between her family's support and guidance.

Discussion

This conversation on *El Vacilón De La Mañana* is an example of interactional methods typically used when tactfully addressing a delicate topic. The hosts found a way to proffer the topic through a positive assessment as a preface, self-repair, and collaborative complimenting. The guest gave a preferred reply with response tokens that encourage continuation and expansions in her multiple accounts, which the hosts affiliate with through humor and collaborative turn completion. In this way, the hosts and the guest jointly achieve the guest's voice and view on the controversy.

In second language teaching, it is important to expose students to this type of interaction, in which a delicate topic is handled effectively. Students can benefit from listening to and tracing

the topic management by noting the key interactional practices. When approaching a delicate topic, delay, deletion, and repair practices effectively maintain the conversation's harmony. By affiliating and aligning with the speaker's utterances, the participants use the interactional practice of topic maintenance by respecting raised topics, orienting to the present topic, and responding with relevant remarks (Sacks 1992). The data provided could give Spanish language learners a glimpse into the culture by observing the discursive practices in use. Metaphors and delay in mentioning a controversial or delicate topic are utilized in the conversation between the co-hosts and the guest to prevent any gaps in their perception of intent. Reenacting the communicative practices above may help students discern delays and cultural references along with the accounting, affiliation, and repair utilized in the Caribbean dialect.

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About the author

Brittany Victoria Roa holds a BA in TESOL from Hawaii Pacific University. Her research interests are Discourse Analysis and International Education and their applications in the language classroom. Roa hopes to provide insights on the speaker's choice of syntax, repair, etc. in lingua franca conversations.

Appendix

Transcript Notation in Addition to Jefferson's (2004) System

Blue lettering	Translation
Red lettering	Direct translation
Black lettering	Transcription in original language
<i>-1stPERS</i>	First person suffix
<i>-2ndPERS</i>	Second person suffix
<i>-3rdPERS/ 3rdPERS SG</i>	Third person suffix/ third person singular
<i>-F/M</i>	Female/male marker
<i>-PosMark</i>	Possessive marker