

Overlapping Speech in Chinese Conversation*

Kawai Chui 徐嘉慧

National Chengchi University

64, Chi-nan Road, Sec. 2, Mucha, Taipei, Taiwan 116

kawai@nccu.edu.tw

Abstract

In daily conversations, overlaps can be placed at IU boundary. However, most of them violate the sequential organization of talk and occur within an IU. The purpose of this study is to explore how the Chinese speakers initiate overlap at these two major sites.

The results show that the interactive function of the initiator's utterance does not determine the placement of overlap. The distribution of interactional and non-interactional utterances, floor-taking and non-floor-taking utterances, as well as the various kinds of non-interactional speech, is similar across the two overlap types.

Two constraints were found at IU boundary. The first has to do with turn organization, in that a boundary overlap tends to take place at the first speaker's turn beginning due to its vulnerability. The second constraint is partly syntactic and partly prosodic, since the clause-completion point and/or the boundary prosodic cues might suggest turn completion, which is appropriate for the initiator to start a new turn. Finally, the main predicate is the syntactic site where the speaker inclines not to place an overlap, because it usually bears important information in the clause. This structural consideration is the only constraint for IU-internal overlaps.

Keywords

IU-boundary overlap, IU-internal overlap, turn organization, interactiveness, syntactic sites, clausal completion

1. Introduction

Daily conversations are fundamentally a turn-taking system, in that speakers prototypically hold the orderliness to talk one after another at a turn-completion point. However, in a multi-party interaction, speakers may disrupt such sequential organization and start their utterance before a turn has been finished. As a result, people talk in overlap.

I follow Biq (1998:3) to distinguish the *first speaker* who has been speaking before the overlap, and the *second speaker* who refers to the other interlocutor. Take example (1) for

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instance. The *first speaker* is the person Z because she starts her turn first at IU1 (see Appendix B for the definition of ‘intonation unit (IU)’). At the intonation-unit boundary after the verb *dao* ‘pour’, speaker L, the *second speaker*, begins his part (IU3), even though Z has neither completed her turn nor her clause about having the beer poured onto the table. Example (1) is an instance of *IU-boundary overlap*. Biq (1998:4) further identified two subtypes based on intonational and syntactic completion at this particular site: the first are ‘IU-boundary overlaps that occur after both a final intonation and a syntactic completion’; the second are those ‘that occur after a continuing intonation with no syntactic completion’. This study does not make such a distinction, especially Biq has shown that the two subtypes are similar regarding to the ratios of full turns and reactive tokens, as well as the use of interactional and non-interactional functions.

- (1) 1 → Z: ..Weishenme hui **dao**% --
 why will pour
 2 → ...[^dao zai zhuomian shang a=]?!/
 pour at table surface on PRT
 3 → L: [Wo jindu zui man ei=].\
 1SG progress most be.slow PRT
- Z: ‘Why would (the beer) be poured...be poured onto the table?’
 L: ‘I am the slowest.’

Ford and Thompson (1996) have a broader definition for the IU-boundary overlap. Their category includes those that take place within the first two syllables of the first speaker’s utterance. However, the present study categorized them as overlaps occurring within the first speaker’s IU, not only because the two-syllable demarcation is arbitrary, but also the syllable structures differ between Chinese and English. Two syllables in Chinese can constitute two words bearing different syntactic status, which may be crucial to the organization of overlap (see Section 5).

Another type of overlap is placed in the midst of an IU where the first speaker’s utterance is not yet finished. I employ Biq’s terminology *IU-internal overlaps* for this kind of utterances.¹ In example (2), speaker H does not wait until L finishes his clause at IU1; he starts his part right after L’s production of the verb *dao* ‘fall’.

- (2) 1 → L: ..Dengyixia bu zhidao **dao** [de <F shi shui a= F>]?!/
 later NEG know fall ASSC COP who PRT
 2 → H: [Diqu shi ^yuan de],_
 world COP be.round PRT
 ..wo gaosu ni ^a=.\
 1SG tell 2SG PRT
- L: ‘Later, I don’t know who is going to fall.’
 H: ‘The world is round, let me tell you.’

¹ In the corpus, ten overlaps occurred at a pause within an IU. Owing to rarity, they were not discussed here.

In a multi-party conversation, it is possible for more than one participant to start talking simultaneously, as illustrated by speakers L, Y, and W in example (3) after the copular verb *shi* within L's turn. This was counted as two tokens of overlap in the present tabulation.

- (3) Z: ...(2.2)<P Ni yao wen <L2 Amy L2> a P>.\
- 2SG have to ask Amy PRT
- L: ...(1.6)Bu **shi** [ta],_
- NEG COP 3SG
- Y: [Na bu] shi ta=,_
- that NEG COP 3SG
- W: [Wen <L2Amy L2>] mei you^yong a,_
- ask Amy NEG be.useful PRT
- Z: 'You have to ask Amy.'
- L: 'It is not her.'
- Y: 'That is not her (business).'
- W: 'Asking Amy is useless.'

Biq (1998:1-2) examined Mandarin overlap mainly in dyadic conversations regarding: "(1) its placement with respect to turn projection cues, (2) speakership negotiation and the form that realizes the overlapping speaker's speech, and (3) the function of the overlapping speaker's speech in its sequential context." The purpose here is to investigate this pragmatic phenomenon in multi-party conversations from other perspectives, namely *turn organization*, *interactiveness*, and *clausal completion*.

The next section introduces the database. Section 3 considers the turn organization on the part of the first speaker, followed by the interactiveness of the second speaker's utterance in section 4. The syntactic completion of the clause will be analyzed in section 5. The last section provides concluding remarks.

2. Corpus of data

The database for this study consists of five commonplace, multi-party face-to-face conversations among friends for a total of two hours and twenty minutes: one conversation includes five speakers; one involves four; three comprise three speakers. The database yields 1035 overlap tokens. The frequency distribution of IU-boundary overlaps and IU-internal overlaps is shown in Table 1.

	n	%
IU-boundary overlap	377	36.4
IU-internal overlap	658	63.6
total:	1035	100.0

Table 1. Frequency distribution of two types of overlaps

The IU boundary is a plausible site for overlap to occur, because the prosodic, pragmatic, and syntactic cues might signal potential turn completion for the second speaker to start a new turn, or at least the first speaker's original stretch of utterance is not affected.

However, from Table 1, it is intriguing that internal overlaps even outnumber boundary overlaps by 1.7 times, suggesting the second speaker's preference to start talking when the first speaker is still uttering. Similar results can be found in Biq (1998): 59% of overlaps take place in the middle of the first speaker's IU. How do overlaps at these two major sites differ? Is there any constraint on initiating either type? The sections below will consider various factors with respect to both the first speaker's and the second speaker's utterances in this kind of speaking environment.

3. Turn organization

Schegloff (1979, 1987) claims that the beginning of a turn is more vulnerable to repairs and overlaps, since the speaker just gets the floor and the turn is not yet well underway. This section thus examines the factor of turn organization on the part of the first speaker.

The operating principle for identifying the beginning of a turn is that it has to be the first clause of a turn before the main predicate emerges, be it a verb or a predicate nominal, be it overt or elliptical. In the excerpt (4), the overlap is positioned after the preverbal adverbial *yijing* 'already', an instance of *turn-beginning overlaps*.

- (4) → H: ...Na tian wo **yijing**%,
 that day 1SG already
 ...[jiao^tong la].\
 foot hurt PRT
 O: [Dui a].\
 really PRT

 H: 'That day, I already...my foot hurt.'
 O: 'Right.'

Example (5) illustrates a turn-beginning overlap within an IU, as the first speaker Z has just uttered the conjunctive *houlai* 'later' before the overlap.

- (5) → Z: ...**Houlai** [jiu ^shuo mingbai le ma=.\
 later then say clear PRF PRT
 ...<PP dui bu dui PP>]?!
 right NEG right
 W: [Chen yizhi bu zai.\
 Chen continuously NEG be.at
 ..Wo jiu yong wo de mingzi] zheyangzi.\
 1SG then use 1SG ASSC name like this

 Z: 'Later, then it was made clear, right?'
 W: 'Chen has not been (here) for a period of time. I then (wrote to him)
 under my name.'

On the other hand, *non-turn-beginning overlaps* take place either after the main predicate, such as *shuo* 'say' in example (6), or more than one clause has already been produced within the same turn. In the excerpt (7), though speaker Y begins to talk before the main

verb *ti* 'kick' emerges in W's turn, the initiation is still non-turn-beginning, because *ti* is part of the second clause following the first one about sitting there.

- (6) → Z: (0)Ni **shuo** ta gei yao=?/
 2SG say 3SG give medicine
 ...[ba] ni chulidiao.\
 BA 2SG handle
 Y: (H)[^Dui%] --
 right
 Z: 'You said he gave (you) the medicine to handle your (situation)?'
 Y: 'Right.'
- (7) → W: ...**Jiu** ^**zuo zai nali Ranhou**=?/
 EMP sit at there then
 → ..[jiu zai ^**ti** a].\
 EMPPROG kick PRT
 Y: [^Ershi zhi,_
 twenty CL
 <A Bu hui na ji zhi gei women A>].\
 NEG will take a few CL give 1PL
 W: '(I) sat there. Then (I) was kicking (the doll).'
 Y: 'Twenty (dolls). Why didn't you get some for us?'

The non-turn-beginning type of overlaps can also be found within an IU. In the following pair of examples, the second speakers start their turns after the main verbs: *kanbuqi* 'look down upon' in example (8), and *jiao* 'ask' in example (9) after the first clause about someone who cares about the person H.

- (8) → L: ...Ni **kanbuqi** [<@ tamen nian na zhong dongxi de a=@>]?/
 2SG look down upon 3PL study that CL thing PRT QST
 Z: [Quanguo de --
 whole country ASSC
 ..quanguo de] yiqi shen --
 whole country ASSC together REPAIR
 ..shenqing de=.\
 apply PRT
 L: 'Are you looking down upon the subject they study?'
 Z: 'The whole country's...people from the whole country applied...applied (for the scholarship) together.'
- (9) → H: ..^**Ta hen guanxin wo de ma,**_
 3SG very concern 1SG PRT PRT
 → ..**he**?/
 right
 → ..Yihou ^**jiao** [ta chulai a=].\
 in future ask 3SG go out PRT

L: [Yinwenke] ni you mei qu.
English class 2SG also NEG go

H: 'She is very concerned about me, right? (We should) ask her out in future.'

L: 'You also did not go to the English class.'

The question to be examined is: Owing to vulnerability, does the first speaker's turn beginning include a greater proportion of overlapping speech? Does it display a difference across the two major sites? Table 2 presents the frequency distribution of IU-boundary and IU-internal overlaps vis-à-vis turn/non-turn beginning. The highly significant X^2 value evidences that at IU boundary, the second speaker inclines to place an overlap at the first speaker's turn beginning, but there is no such preference for the internal overlaps.²

	IU-boundary overlap		IU-internal overlap	
	n	%	n	%
turn beginning	255	67.6	272	41.3
non-turn beginning	122	32.4	386	58.7
total:	377	100.0	658	100.0

Table 2. Turn organization and overlap types

4. Interactiveness

Rather than the first speaker's utterance, this section focuses on the speech of the overlap initiator. First, the second speaker's utterance was distinguished into two types, depending on whether it responds to a prior speaker: *interactional overlaps* and *non-interactional overlaps*.

The interactional speech reacts directly to what a former speaker has uttered. When the second speaker responds to a third speaker, rather than to the immediately previous or the current speaker, this is a 'delayed' reaction. In example (10) Z's utterance is not subject to speaker L's, but to speaker Y's instead, questioning Y about the location of a place he has just mentioned.

- (10) → Y: ...Nage jiu zai nali a,
that just be.at there PRT
L: (0)^Guang ji ge <L2 museum L2>,
Just few CL museum
...[guang ji ge <L2 museum L2>],
just few CL museum
→ Z: [Ni shuo zai nali],
2SG say be.at where
Y: 'The (park) is just there.'

² The X^2 test for boundary overlaps and internal overlaps with regard to turn beginning is: $X^2.95(1)=*66.34$.

- L: 'Just a few museums, just a few museums...'
 Z: 'You said where?'

Similarly, within the first speaker's IU, speaker O in example (11) does not respond to H's utterance but answers L's tag question by providing a reason for Huang's behavior after drinking. In the corpus, the second speaker mostly responds to the first speaker directly in various ways.

- (11) → L: ...**Na xiang huang dui bu dui,**
 PRT like Huang right NEG right
 ...**he de chabuduo la,**
 drink COMPL just about enough PRT
 ..**Ta yiding pa xialai shui.**
 3SG surely lie down sleep
 ..**dui bu dui?**
 right NEG right
 H: ...**Na kan zenme [he a=],**
 that see how drink PRT
 → O: [**Na ta shi**] **ganghao a=.**
 PRT 3SG EMP be.just right PRT
 L: 'Like Huang, right, when (she) has had enough wine, she surely will lie down to sleep, right?'
 H: 'That depends on how (you) drink.'
 O: 'She just has the right amount.'

Biq (1998) also distinguished interactional and non-interactional overlaps, and she proposed two subtypes of interactional overlaps for the IU-internal type: those that react to the first speaker in the current IU (*interactional/current*), and those to the first speaker in a prior IU (*interactional/prior*). This paper rather differentiates *floor-taking overlaps* used to claim speakership, and *non-floor-taking overlaps* for displaying attentiveness to what the other speaker is uttering and remaining as a listener.

While the floor-taking utterances mainly convey information, the non-floor-taking ones are the reactive tokens of backchannels, reactive expressions, collaborative finish, and repetition (Clancy et al. 1996). First, backchannels are non-lexical expressions that signal the second speaker's understanding of or interest in the first speaker's speech, like *uhuh* in (12).

- (12) W: ..**Wo zuobuwan a,**
 1SG NEG.finish PRT
 ..**[Na] wo neng zenme ^ban.**
 PRT 1SG can how do
 → Y: [**Uhuh**],
 BC
 W: 'I cannot finish (the work). What can I do?'
 Y: 'Uhuh.'

Reactive expressions function like backchannels, except they are short lexical words or phrases, such as *dui dui dui* ‘right’ in example (13).

- (13) W: ...Youde hui ^jiao a=?/
 some can make noise PRT
 ..[Ranhou wo ji]--
 then 1SG REPAIR
 → J: [<A **Dui dui dui** A> he].\
 right right right PRT
- W: ‘Some (dolls) can make noise. Then I...’
 J: ‘Right, right, right.’

Sometimes, the second speaker may finish up the rest of the clause for the first speaker to show his/her understanding. In the excerpt (14), L collaborates with W to complete the clause about a manager who gets used to scold the employees on Mondays.

- (14) W: ...(1.)Ranhou libaiyi lai,_
 then Monday come
 → ..**Ta jiu** [kaishi] ma.\
 3SG then start scold
 → L: [jiu nian].\
 then mumble
- W: ‘Then, on Mondays, (they) come (to the office). He then starts to scold (them).’
 L: ‘then mumbles.’

The last type of non-floor-taking speech is to repeat part of the former speaker’s utterance, such as Z repeating the part *ta bu hui jiang* ‘he won’t say (it)’ which has just been uttered by the first speaker H in example (15). Not only does the second speaker show understanding, but the repetition may also suggest his/her agreement.

- (15) → H: ...Wo ^zhidao **ta bu hui** zheyang **jiang**.\
 1SG know 3SG NEG will like this say
 ..[Keshi%]?/
 but
 → Z: [**Ta bu hui jiang** de=].\
 3SG NEG will say PRT
- H: ‘I know he won’t say (it) in this way. But...’
 Z: ‘He won’t say (it).’

Resumptive openers are regarded by Clancy et al. (1996) as reactive tokens because their first part comprises either a backchannel or a reactive expression in response to the first speaker’s speech, like *dui dui dui dui* ‘right’ in example (16). However, its second part starts some new content about everybody’s attitude toward a past event. This is what Jefferson (1993) termed ‘attending while shifting.’ The present study regards this type of

overlapping speech as *floor-taking*, because the second speaker's goal is mainly to claim for speakership.

- (16) H: ..Ni hui ^shoudao%?/
 2SG will get
 ...<F yu^lun de qianze F>[jiu dui le=].\
 public opinion ASSC blame then be.right PRT
 → L: [Eh= ^**dui dui** **dui dui**.\
 PF right right right right
 → ...(.8)**Dajia juede shuo,**_
 everybody feel COMPL
 → ..**uh jintian haihao shi zheyang.**\
 PF today fortunately COP like this
- H: 'You will get the blame from the public.'
 L: 'Eh...right, right, right, right. Everybody feels that...uh...fortunately, this time (it) was like this.'

Given 377 IU-boundary and 658 IU-internal overlaps, 52.8% (n=199) of the former and 55.9% (n=368) of the latter have the interactional function (see Table 5). Table 3 shows that the ratios of *floor-taking* to *non-floor-taking* are similar across the two overlap types without statistically significant difference.³

	IU-boundary overlap		IU-internal overlap	
	n	%	n	%
floor-taking	98	49.2	163	44.3
non- floor-taking	101	50.8	205	55.7
total:	199	100.0	368	100.0

Table 3. Subtypes of interactional overlaps

In contrast to the interactional function, the non-interactional speech suggests that it does not directly relate to any other interlocutor's construction. This can further be divided into four groups. The first is for the second speaker to start a new topic. In example (17), W is talking about the cost of a software, but L raises a new question about the computing method instead.

- (17) W: ...(1.9)Fanzheng jiushi yibaijiushijiu [kuai
 anyway EMP one hundred and ninety-nine dollars
 jiudui la].\
 okay PRT
 → L: [**Na mei you banquan de** **wenti ma?**]
 that NEG have copyright ASSC problem QST
- W: 'Anyway, (the software costs) one hundred and ninety-nine dollars.'
 L: 'Doesn't the (computing method) have the copyright problem?'

³ The X^2 test for boundary overlaps and internal overlaps with regard to floor taking is: $X^2_{.95(1)}=1.275$.

The second kind of non-interactive overlaps is continuation. Speaker L at IU4 in (18), within Z's turn (IU3), tries to complete his clause in his prior turn (IU1-2) concerning how he felt about someone making a trouble. This is called 'delayed completion' (Lerner 1989).

- (18) 1 L: ...(1.4)Na yi ci yaoshi chu da yidian de pilou he?/
 that one time if has big a bit ASSC trouble PRT
 2 → ...**Women liangge dagai,**_
 1PL both probably
 3 Z: ...Jintian yiding yao [song ta].. ^huijia=.\
 Today must have to accompany 3SG go home
 4 → L: [**bu haoguo a=**].\
 NEG feel.fine PRT
- L: 'That time, if (he) had made a bigger trouble, we both probably...'
 Z: 'Today, (we) must accompany him to go home.'
 L: '(would) feel bad.'

The following exchange (19) exemplifies self-repetition—another kind of non-interactive speech, as Y mentions again what he has said in his prior turn about Taiwan's tasteful lobsters.

- (19) → Y: ..**Taiwan nage** hen **haochi** a=?/
 Taiwan that very be.tasteful PRT
 J: ...Nage shi longx- --
 That COP REPAIR
 ...dui a?/
 right PRT
 ...[na shi longxia],_
 that COP lobster
 → Y: [**Taiwan de nage hao haochi** o]?/
 Taiwan ASSC that very be.tasteful PRT
- Y: '(Lobsters) in Taiwan are very tasteful.'
 J: 'That is...right, that is a lobster.'
 Y: '(Lobsters) in Taiwan are really very tasteful.'

Finally, the second speaker may just rephrase what he/she has just been uttered, such as rephrasing *bucuo* 'not bad' as *man hao* 'quite good' by W in example (20).

- (20) → W: ...Keshi ^na ye hai **bucuo** a=,_
 but that also still be.NEG.bad PRT
 Z: (0)Erqie [ta ^gui de difang] shi yinwei ta=?/
 And 3SG expensive ASSC place COP because 3SG
 → W: [**man hao** de a=],_
 quite be.good PRT PRT
- W: 'But the (dorm) is not bad.'
 Z: 'And it is expensive because it...'
 W: '(It is) quite good.'

The frequency distribution of these four types of non-interactive speech is presented in Table 4, and the X^2 values are insignificant.⁴ Their respective proportions are very similar across the two placements of overlap.

	IU-boundary overlap		IU-internal overlap	
	n	%	n	%
new topic	107	60.1	160	55.2
continuation	61	34.3	115	39.7
repetition	5	2.8	6	2.1
rephrasing	5	2.8	9	3.1
total:	178	100.0	290	100.0

Table 4. Subtypes of non-interactive overlaps

I rearranged the statistics in Biq in order to compare with those in this study concerning the distribution of interactive and non-interactive overlaps at the two overlap sites. Despite the fact that interactive overlaps predominate at a mean of 76.2% in Biq’s data while there is no such preference in ours, both studies are consistent in the lack of statistically significant correlation between interactivity and overlap types.⁵

	This study				Biq (1998)			
	IU-boundary overlap		IU-internal overlap		IU-boundary overlap		IU-internal overlap	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
interactive	199	52.8	368	55.9	75	79.8	101	73.7
non-interactive	178	47.2	290	44.1	19	20.2	36	26.3
total:	377	100.0	658	100.0	94	100.0	137	100.0

Table 5. Interactivity and overlap types

Table 6 displays the distribution of floor-taking and non-floor-taking interactive overlaps. Though Biq uses *full turn* (FT) and *reactive tokens* (RT), they are parallel to *floor-taking* and *non-floor-taking* respectively. These two subtypes do not show a clear preference in our data, but the non-floor-taking outnumber the floor-taking by two to one in Biq’s. Nevertheless, the chi-square test for Biq’s data confirms our finding in Table 3 that whether the occurrence of an overlap at IU boundary or within the first speaker’s IU is not related to whether the second speaker utters for speakership or listenership.⁶ The result is still the same even though the resumptive openers in Biq’s study were counted as floor-taking.

⁴ The X^2 test for non-interactive boundary overlaps and non-interactive internal overlaps is: $X^2_{.95(3)}=1.611$.

⁵ The X^2 tests for boundary overlaps and internal overlaps with regard to interactivity are: $X^2_{.95(1)}=0.955$ in this study; $X^2_{.95(1)}=1.13$ in Biq’s study.

⁶ The X^2 tests for boundary overlaps and internal overlaps with regard to floor-/non-floor-taking are: $X^2_{.95(1)}=1.275$ in this study; $X^2_{.95(1)}=2.354$ in Biq’s study.

	This study				Biq (1998)			
	IU-boundary overlap		IU-internal overlap		IU-boundary overlap		IU-internal overlap	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
floor-taking	98	49.2	163	44.3	29	38.7	28	27.7
non-floor-taking	101	50.8	205	55.7	46	61.3	73	72.3
total:	377	100.0	658	100.0	75	100.0	101	100.0

Table 6. Floor-/non-floor taking and overlap types

5. Syntactic completion of the clause

This section will approach the issue from the structural perspective by investigating the various syntactic points of the first speaker's utterance, to know if there is any syntactic site that the second speaker prefers to place or not to place the overlapping utterance?

The boundary overlap in (21) and the internal overlap in (22) are both initiated right after the first speaker has finished a clause. Ford and Thompson (1996) defines a complete clause as the one with 'an overt or directly recoverable predicate, without considering intonation...includ[ing] elliptical clauses, answers to questions, and backchannel responses.'⁷ This is, of course, an optimum site for the second speaker to start his/her part, since the clause boundary is the convergence of prosodic, syntactic, and pragmatic completion to signal the potential turn completion (Ford and Thompson 1996).

- (21) L: ...(1.3)Ke[^]shi wo shi zenme pa zhuozi shang,_—
 but 1SG EMP how lie table on
 → ..**wo dou bu zhidao** a=_—\
 1SG all NEG know PRT
 ...(8)[Cong shenme shihou] --
 since what time
 O: [Ni na shihou] yijing chengbuzhu le la_—
 2SG that time already NEG.bear PRF PRT
- L: 'But, how did I lie on the table, I didn't know at all. Since when...'
 O: 'At that time, you already could not bear (anymore).'
- (22) → L: ..[^]**Ta man neng zuoshi** [Ranhou,_—
 3SG quite can work then
 ...gongsi=_—
 company
 ...<L2 Macintosh L2> de shi=_—
 Macintosh ASSC matter
 ..dou zai kao ta ma]_—\
 all PROG rely on 3SG PRT
 W: [Hao=_—

⁷ Different from Ford and Thompson, only backchannels signaling answers to questions were taken as clauses in this study.

okay
 ..na jiusuan naxie bu ^suan.\
 PRT even though those NEG count
 ..Yeshi liang nian a=].\
 still two year PRT

L: 'He is quite capable. Then, (as to) the matters about Macintosh, (our) company relies on him.'

W: 'Okay, even though those do not count, it (i.e., the promotion) still (takes) two years.'

The relationship between clausal completion and IU boundary is not symmetrical. Although the overwhelming majority of full clauses are found at IU boundary, not many IUs include clausal completion because of the fragmented nature of spontaneous speech (Tao 1996). When a clause has underway, other favorable syntactic points to initiate overlap would be the backchannel, the reactive expression such as *dui* 'right' in (23), or the pause filler *ah* in (24), i.e., before the substantive constituents emerge.

(23) W: ..Haoxiang man chang huiqu de,_
 seem quite often go back PRT

→ Z: ...^**Dui** a=,_
 right PRT
 ...[Ranhou tamen%] --
 then 3PL

L: [huiqu an%] --
 go back REPAIR
 ...huiqu anpai tuilu,_
 go back arrange return

W: '(He) seems to go back (to Japan) quite often.'

Z: 'Right, then they...'

L: '(He) goes back...goes back to arrange for (his) return.'

(24) Z: ...(H)<A Youshimeishi wo <P jiu wen A>.\
 no matter what 1SG EMP ask
 ...da dao <L2 LA= L2>,_
 call to LA

→ ...(.9)**ah**=,_
 PF
 ...[mianfeide%] --
 be.free

L: [<P duoshao qian P>]?!
 how much money

Z: 'No matter what, I (call the telephone company and) ask, (if I) make a call to LA...ah...a toll free (call)...'

L: 'How much?'

According to the statistics, the second speaker prefers to start his/her new turn when a clause has just been completed or the contentful part of a new clause has not yet been started, as evidenced by 66.8% (n=252) of all the 377 boundary overlaps. Thus, the completion of a clause can be regarded as a structural preference to initiate overlap at IU boundary. Internal overlaps, however, do not have such preference; merely 5.8% (38 out of all 658) were placed at the end of a clause within the first speaker's IU, like example (22), because clausal completion is very unlikely to occur within an IU.

When the substantive part of a new clause has underway, overlap is seen to take place at every syntactic point of the clause. Seven major sites were identified: *the preverbal argument, the preverbal modifier, the main verb, the main nominal predicate, after the main verb, the postverbal argument, and the postverbal modifier*.⁸ Does the speaker prefer certain syntactic positions to place or not to place an overlap? Is the clause beginning before the main predicate emerges as vulnerable as the turn beginning? Is there any difference between the two types of overlap? Table 7 presents the frequency distribution across the seven major syntactic positions.

	IU-boundary overlap		IU-internal overlap	
	n	%	n	%
I preverbal argument	21	16.8	80	12.9
II preverbal modifier	53	42.4	191	30.8
III at main verb	3	2.4	43	6.9
IV at nominal predicate	2	1.6	35	5.6
V after main verb	17	13.6	79	12.7
VI postverbal argument	23	18.4	129	20.8
VII postverbal modifier	6	4.8	63	10.2
total:	125	100.0	620	100.0

Table 7. Syntactic sites and overlap types

In spite of the fact that the chi-square test is significant in Table 7,⁹ there is a general tendency that overlaps were more commonly found at the preverbal modifier (II), regardless of overlap types, probably because the preverbal arguments are usually zero anaphora in Chinese conversations (Chui 1994; Li and Thompson 1979; Tao 1996). However, there is also a substantial portion taking place postverbally (V~VII), as indicated by 36.8% (n=46) of the total 125 boundary overlaps and 43.7% (n=271) of all the 620 internal overlaps. Therefore, clause beginning is no more vulnerable to overlap. In fact, the most prominent syntactic site is the main predicate. The second speaker, either at IU boundary or within an IU, does not incline to start a turn while the first speaker is constructing the main predicate which usually carries important information to determine the syntactic and semantic relation with other constituents of the clause.

⁸ To simplify the categorization, topics were incorporated into the category 'preverbal modifier'; postverbal complements into the category 'postverbal argument'.

⁹ The X^2 test for boundary overlaps and internal overlaps with regard to syntactic sites is: $X^2_{.95(6)} = *15.911$.

In short, different from turn organization and interactiveness, the speaker prefers the clause-completion point at IU boundary to place an overlap. The main predicate is also the site where overlap tends not to occur.

6. Conclusion

Besides repairing one's own speech (Chui 1996), for the speakers to utter simultaneously is another common phenomenon that hinders the flow of speech in interaction. To understand how Chinese speakers place and organize overlapping speech, this study has first distinguished two main types of overlaps in daily conversations: IU-boundary overlaps and IU-internal overlaps. The fact that the latter outnumbers the former suggests that this kind of speech largely violates the sequential turn-taking organization of talk. Then, various factors were considered to know whether the second speaker takes advantage of the vulnerability of the first speaker's turn beginning to initiate an overlap, whether the second speaker's utterance responds to the other interlocutor or not, whether the overlapping speech is used to claim speakership or to display attentiveness, whether the second speaker prefers certain syntactic site(s) to place or not to place an overlap, and most important of all, whether there is any difference between the two overlap types.

The results show that the interactive function of the second speaker's utterance does not determine the occurrence of an overlap at IU boundary or within an IU. The distribution of interactional and non-interactional utterances, floor-taking and non-floor-taking utterances, as well as the various kinds of non-interactional speech, is similar across the two overlap types.

Two constraints on placing overlaps at IU boundary were found. The first has to do with turn organization, in that an overlap tends to take place at the first speaker's turn beginning due to its vulnerability. The second constraint is partly syntactic and partly prosodic. On the one hand, most of the boundary overlaps take place at the clause-completion point; on the other hand, the remaining rely on the boundary prosodic cues for initiation. These two kinds of cues, or a convergence of both, signal a potential turn completion for the second speaker to start his/her talk appropriately, or at least, the first speaker's stretch of utterance is not abruptly interrupted. Finally, the main predicate is the syntactic site where the speaker inclines not to initiate overlap.

The IU-internal overlaps are not constrained by turn organization, clausal completion, and prosody. Their occurrences are just restricted by the same syntactic consideration that the second speaker does not utter while the first speaker is producing the main predicate, since it usually carries important information.

The statistics in the present corpus are not all identical to those in Biq (1998). Contrary to her findings, the interactional and the non-floor-taking (RT) functions do not dominate in our data. Nevertheless, below these quantitative differences are some commonalities across the two studies. First, internal overlaps are consistently the majority. Second, neither the distinction between interactional and non-interactional overlaps nor that between floor-taking/full-turn and non-floor-taking/reactive-token overlaps differentiates the two overlap types.

Finally, this study has found different constraints on placing overlaps at IU boundary and within an IU. The constraint proposed in Biq's study is rather subject to the two subtypes of internal overlaps. She found two opposite distribution patterns that "[f]or the interactional/current function, RT is much more preferred to FT...; for the interactional/prior function, FT is preferred to RT" (Biq 1998:14). The constraints found in

the two studies are not contradictory; they, together, suggest what the speaker usually considers when initiating an overlap in different situations.

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Appendix A: Abbreviations of Linguistic Terms

1PL	first person plural
1SG	first person singular
2PL	second person plural
2SG	second person singular
3PL	third person plural
3SG	third person singular
ASSC	associative morpheme
BA	the morpheme BA
BC	backchannel
BEI	the morpheme BEI
CL	classifier
COMPARE	compare morpheme
COMPL	complementizer
COP	copula verb
DUR	durative aspect
EMP	emphatic adverbial
EXP	experiential aspect
GEI	the morpheme GEI
INCHO	inchoative aspect
NEG	negative morpheme
PF	pause filler
PRF	perfective aspect
PROG	progressive aspect
PRT	discourse particle
QST	question particle
REPAIR	repair phoneme(s)
SELF	reflexive morpheme
SUO	the morpheme SUO
SUPL	superlative degree

Appendix B: Transcription conventions

'Intonation unit' is defined as a stretch of speech uttered under a single coherent intonation contour, which tends to be marked by a pause, a change of pitch, and a lengthening of the final syllable (Du Bois et al. 1993).

Units

{carriage return}	intonation unit
--	truncated intonation unit
{space}	word
-	truncated word

Speakers

:	speaker identity/turn start
[]	speech overlap

Transitional continuity

.	final
,	continuing
?	appeal

Terminal pitch direction

\	fall
/	rise
—	level

Accent and lengthening

^	primary accent
=	lengthening

Pause

...(N)	long
...	medium
..	short
(0)	latching

Vocal noises

(H)	inhalation
%	glottal stop
@	laughter

Quality

<@ @>	laugh quality
<A A>	allegro: rapid speech
<P P>	piano: soft
<DIM DIM>	diminuendo: gradually softer

Relevant expressions in examples are in boldface; the lines where the relevant expressions in question appear are marked by the arrow sign '→'.