



A Quantitative Turn Taking Analysis on the Female Social Status in *The Little Governess*

Fuqiang Ran

Xi'an International Studies University, Xi'an, China

1533365127@qq.com

Abstract. This paper aims to give a quantitative turn-taking analysis on the main character of “The Little Governess” to reveal the trait of the little governess, the female social status and the female education problem at that time. This paper picks out some meaningful conversations as the corpus and analyzes them from five aspects, the initiation and control of topic, turn-length, turn-type, interruption and monologue and turn-control strategies. The general result shows that the little governess not only has less turns but is much easier to be interrupted as well. This result reflects the weakness and naivety of the little governess, the female’s low social status and Katherine Mansfield’s criticism on the female education.

Keywords: Turn-taking, Kathrine Mansfield, The Little Governess, Female Social Status

1 Introduction

The Little Governess is one of Katherine Mansfield’s early works. Katherine Mansfield is a famous New Zealand female writer, considered as the “founder of the New Zealand Literature” and “one of the most influential New Zealand writers.” As a female writer, she focuses on the female characterization. In her novel, “The Little Governess”, Mansfield characterizes a little girl who intends to go abroad to pursue a governess job and during her journey, she suffered from many troubles. *The little governess* is not an individual case but a symbol of female social status and this practical significance attracts a few scholars’ attention and they have done some studies on it. María Casado Vilanueva is one of them. She studies this novel from how “Mansfield deploys the fairy tale of ‘Little Red Riding Hood’ in her story ‘The Little Governess’²”. (Vilanueva, 2012) Mohammad Shahidul Islam Chowdhury studies this novel from the femininity perspective and he thinks that works of Mansfield contains the horror, which “works as a dismantling force in the female characters of her stories that tell of their suffering, experience, and helplessness, which eventually reveal the horror they encounter throughout their existence.³” (Chowdhury, 2017) Studies above both adopt the literature methods but few studies are from the linguistic perspective and are mainly qualitative studies, so this essay tries to give a quantitative analysis from the turn-taking

perspective on the character study of the little governess, the female social status and female education problem reflected in this novel.

2 Theoretical Framework

The Turn-taking theory is proposed by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson in their article “A Simplest Systematic for the Organization of Turn-taking for Conversation”. G.D. Yu quotes Levinson to define turns as “a time during which a single participant speaks, with a typical, orderly arrangement in which participants speak with minimal overlap and gap between them⁵” in his book “Conversation Analysis: An Introduction” and he also mentions that the turn-taking system should be divided into two aspects, the Turn-construction Component and Turn-allocation Component. The turn-construction components divide turns into Lexical turns, Phrasal turns and Sentential Turns according to their components. The turn-allocation components divide the Turn-allocational Techniques into two types. One is by the selection of the former speaker and another is by self-allocation.

In the domestic research, Li and Yu build up a quantitative turn-taking analysis method in stylistics to study “the power among the characters, the characterization and the plot development of the drama⁴” and their method consists five aspects, the initiation and control of topic, turn-length, turn-type, interruption and monologue and turn-control strategies. (Li and Yu, 2001) This research will also follow this framework to study the character of the little governess, the female’s social status and the female education problem reflected in this novel.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Number of Turns and the Average Turn-length

Table 1. The Number of Turns and the Average Turn-length

Topics	Tips before Journey		Meet the Old Man		German Newspapers	
Character	Governess	Lady	Governess	Old Man	Governess	Old Man
Number of Turns	1	2	2	4	11	12
Average Turn-length	1	94	8.5	10.3	9.5	13.9
Topics	Share Strawberries		Munich Visit		Ask for Leave	
Character	Governess	Old Man	Governess	Old Man	Governess	Old Man
Number of Turns	4	7	2	8	11	17
Average Turn-length	5.3	6.1	6	16.4	12.1	15.2

The table 1 illustrates the number of turns and the average turn-length. It shows that there are 81 turns in the six topics, “Tips before the Journey”, “Meet the Old Man”, “German Newspapers”, “Share Strawberries”, “Munich Visit” and “Ask for Leave”. Among the 81 turns, 31 turns belong to the little governess, 2 turns belong to the lady at the bureau and 48 turns belong to the old man. There is a big gap in the number of turns between the little governess and the old man. Besides, the table also shows the

average turn-length, the ratio of characters' total word counts to their total turns counts. The average turn-length of the little governess is lower in all these six topics, especially in the topics, "Tips before the Journey" and "Munich Visit". In the topic "Munich Visit", the average turn-length of the little governess is 6 words per turn but the average turn-length of the old man is 16.4 words per turn, which is 10.4 words higher than the average length of the little governess. The difference is even bigger in the topic "Tips before the Journey". In this topic, the average turn-length of the little governess is 1 word per turn but the average turn-length of the lady in the bureau is 94 words per turn, which is 9.4 times as high as the average length of the little governess. To sum up, the number of the little governess' turns and the average turn length of the little governess are both lower compared to the other person in the six topics.

The statistics from the table 1 shows the weakness and naivety of the little governess, the female social status and Mansfield's criticism on female education at that time. In the topic "Tips before the Journey", there is a huge gap in the average turn-length between the little governess and the lady in the bureau. The huge gap results from the difference in their experiences. The lady in the bureau experiences more and is more mature than the governess so she knows more about how to protect herself as a female at that time but the little governess has not gone abroad before and she is also very young, thus she is naïve and don't know how to protect herself, which makes the lady in the bureau feel responsible to say something about the female protection and then leads to the huge gap. Besides, this huge gap also results from the female education problem. Villanueva quotes in her article "the governess has been trained to interpret life according to story-book paradigms but in practice they do not prove as absolute or perfect as convention declares them to be²⁹". It is true in this topic. As a governess, she must have been educated but she still does not know how to protect herself in the society and needs the bureau lady's advice, which reflects Mansfield's criticism on the female education. What's more. The female status can also be shown from the statistics. In most cases, the number of female's turns and the average turn-length of female are both lower than male's, which shows the inequality of voice and the lower social status of female.

3.2 Turn-holding Strategies

Table 2. The Distribution of Turn-holding Strategies

Topics	Tips before Journey		Meet the Old Man		German Newspapers	
Character	Governess	Lady	Governess	Old Man	Governess	Old Man
Space Making Strategy	0	2	0	0	0	0
Interruption and Monologue	0	0	0	0	0	3
Topics	Share Strawberries		Munich Visit		Ask for Leave	
Character	Governess	Old Man	Governess	Old Man	Governess	Old Man
Space Making Strategy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Interruption and Monologue	1	0	0	0	0	1
Sum of Space Making Strategy	5(71%)		Sum of Interruption and Monologue		2(29%)	

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of two turn-holding strategies in the novel “A Little Governess”. There are only two space making strategies and both of them belongs to the lady in the bureau, which accounts 29% in the turn holding strategies. The interruption and monologue strategy accounts for 71% and there are 5 in this novel.

Space Making Strategy

Space Making Strategy is a commonly used strategy for turn-holding. Huadong Li and D. Yu take “I have three points to make⁴” to explain the space making strategy in their article “Quantitative turn-taking analysis: an alternative method in in stylistic of drama”. “Three points” gives restriction on the length of the speaker’s turn and any interruption during these three points will be considered as impolite behavior. Besides, linking words are also widely used to prolong one’s turn. Here is one example to illustrate this.

Example 1:

The Old Man: I wonder if you would let me show you a little of Munich to-day. Nothing much—but just perhaps a picture gallery and the¹Englischer Garten. It seems such a pity that you should have to spend the day at the hotel, and also a little uncomfortable... in a strange place.²Nicht wahr? You would be back there by the early afternoon or whenever you wish, of course, and you would give an old man a great deal of pleasure.⁶

This turn takes place after the old man’s strawberry sharing and the old man tries to persuade her to spend one day with him in Munich even though his invitation is refused by the little governess before. In this turn, three “and” are used to prolong the old man’s turn. The first “and” is between a picture gallery and the English Garten, which is used to show the little governess that there are amount of great and magnificent scenic spots in Munich and to arise her interest in Munich as much as possible. The second “and” is between “spend the day at the hotel” and “a little uncomfortable”. It is used to prolong his turn to state what she is going to lose and suffer if she doesn’t go to Munich. The third “and” is between “You would be back whenever you want” and “give an old man a great deal of pleasure”, which is used to dispel the little governess’ doubt and state the benefits of visiting Munich with the old man. All in all, all the three linking words are used by the old man to hold his turn and express his own feeling, which makes it hard for the little governess to express her idea and this clearly reflects the little governess’ weakness and the loss of her voice which also symbolizes the loss of the females’ voice and their low social status.

Interruption and Monologue

Turn-taking is considered to take place in the TRP (Transition-relevance Place) and the interruption in the non-TRP will be consider as impoliteness and disruptive interruption, as Chen and Liu mention “When interruption fails to happen in the right transition-relevance place, it belongs to disruptive interruption.¹”

¹ Englischer Garten (German): English Garden

² Nicht Wahr? (German): Isn’t it?

Table 2 shows that eighty percent of the interruption and monologue turns are belonged to the old man. Three of them are in the topic “German Newspapers” and one is in the topic “Ask for Leave”. Compared to the old man, the little governess has less interruption and monologue turns and she only has one that occurs in the topic “Share Strawberries”. The difference in the number of the interruption and monologue turns between the old man and the little governess shows the old man’s impoliteness to the little governess, reflecting the female-unfriendly social environment.

Example 2:

I: "I am not going to stay in Munich," "I am going to a post as governess to a doctor's family in Augsburg."

Old Man: "Ah, that was it."

I: "I am sure I shall."

Old Man: "But what a pity not to see Munich before you go. You ought to take a little holiday on your way"(he smiled)⁶

In the example 2, the little governess wants to tell the old man that she is busy with something else and implies that she ought to go but the old man interrupts the little governess’ turn and take the turn to persuade the little governess to visit Munich with him. It reflects that the little governess isn’t taken seriously by the old man and the little governess’ own matter and life are both neglected by him. Furthermore, it reveals the female social status is so much lower than the male.

3.3 Turn-type

Huadong Li and D. Yu divides turns into five types, Initiative turns, Responsive turns, Initiative turns after response, Interruption turns and Monologue turns.⁴ (Li and Yu, 2001) This study also divides the little governess’s turns into four turns to analysis the character, the little governess. (The little governess has no monologue turn so the monologue turn is neglected in this study)

Table 3. The Percentage of Turn-type

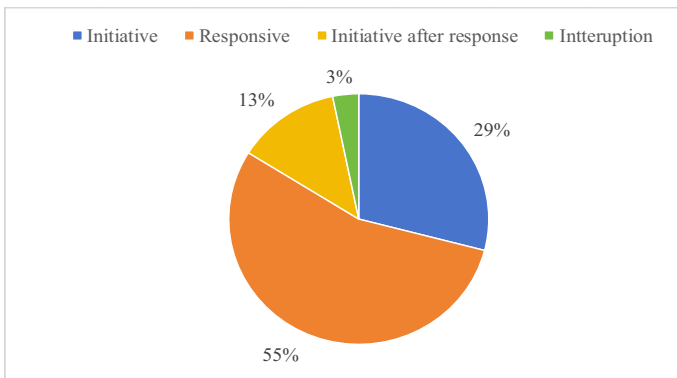


Table 3 shows that the responsive turns of the little governess account the most in her turns and it accounts for 55% but the interruption turns accounts the least and it only accounts 3%. What’s more. It also illustrates that the initiative turns accounts for

29% and the initiative turns after response account for 13%. The gap between the percentage of the responsive turns and initiative turns has reached up to 26% and this gap shows that female at that time seldom initiate a sequence and mostly. What female can do is just to give response and follow male's guidance. There are two possible reasons for her low percentage of initiative turns. The first is her lack of social experience and she is not clear how to deal with the social conversation, which reveals "Mansfield's criticism of a model of education relegates women to a state of undesirable naïve²". (Villanueva, 2012) The second is the low social status of female and she is not expected to initiate turns too much.

4 Conclusion

This essay gives a turn-taking analysis on the little governess from these five aspects, the initiation and control of topic, turn-length, turn-type, interruption and monologue and turn-control strategies. The result shows that the little governess seldom initiates topics and just give response in most cases. Moreover, it also illustrates that the little governess is more likely being interrupted and has less chance to say her will. This result clearly proves the weakness and naivety of the little governess, female's low social status and Mansfield's criticism on the female education problem. Different from previous studies, this study tries to give a quantitative analysis on the character of this novel from a linguistic perspective, which dose not only offer some reliable evidence on the study of Kathrine Mansfield but expand the application of the Turn-taking theory.

References

1. Chen, Y., Liu, M. (2022) Analysis of Squealer's Character in Animal Farm Based on Turn-Taking Theory. *International Journal of Languages, Literature and Linguistics.*, 8: 178-181. DOI:10.18178/IJLL.2022.8.3.344
2. Villanueva, M. C. (2012) The Little Red Governess: Mansfield and the Demythologisation of the Motif of 'Little Red Riding Hood' in 'The Little Governess'. *Katherine Mansfield Studies.*, 4: 5-19 DOI: 10.3366/kms.2012.0024
3. Chowdhury, M. S. I. (2017) Katherine Mansfield: The horror of Femininity. *East West Journal of Humanities.*, 6 & 7: 78-88. <http://103.133.167.11:8080/handle/123456789/3232>
4. Li, H.D., Yu, D.M. (2001) Quantitative turn-taking analysis: an alternative method in stylistics of drama. *Journal of Sichuan International Studies University.*, 17: 46-49. https://kns.cnki.net/kcms2/article/abstract?v=DNPf6DgFijteK5k8xsAv-VJG0nvjYT15DAkS82FSolujTmw7T2wVXrEzmljORnff3n7RcU1oZ-WwuAvnJOg3HhUIwKjHcYAB9UHvOfMxavzog-FFJ2qpamI_ON3xmlbNVgCFBxPXnM=&uniplatform=NZKPT&language=CHS
5. Yu, G.D. (2008) *Conversation Analysis: An Introduction*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai. ISBN: 978-7-5446-1036-0
6. Katherine Mansfield Society. (2021) *The Little Governess*. <https://katherinemansfieldsociety.org/archive/www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/assets/KM-Stories/THE-LITTLE-GOVERNESS1915.pdf>

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

