


Analysis of Topic Shift Used by Host in The David Rubenstein Show

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A B S T R A C T

In talk shows, the host's management of conversation topics plays a very important role in improving the quality of communication. However, research on topic management in talk shows is still limited because most previous studies have focused on other aspects of talk shows. To fill this gap, this study aims to identify the topic shifts used by hosts in talk shows based on the typology of topic shifts proposed by Crow (1983). The research data was taken from a YouTube video titled "The David Rubenstein Show: Maria Sharapova," which was then analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach. The results show that the host used all types of topic shifts with a total of 35 utterances, and the most frequently used were topic initiation and topic shading. Therefore, this study reinforces that hosts in talk shows have a major influence on the flow of interaction through the use of topic shifts.

Keywords: *Topic Shift, Talk Show, Host, Interaction, Conversational Control*

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INTRODUCTION

In today's media landscape, talk shows have evolved into public discussion forums that serve not only as a medium of entertainment, but also as a medium for conveying information, social reflection, and discussion of important issues. According to (Timberg & Erler, 2002) television talk shows are a product of 20th-century broadcasting that are intensely topical. Talk shows are defined by (Ilie, 2001) a form of semi-institutional discourse, which is a socio-cultural practice that combines institutional structures and conventions with spontaneous interactions and discursive outcomes that are not always predictable. This situation can cause tension between the rules of the show and natural conversation, because the way of speaking must be constantly adjusted to the current situation of the conversation. This means that the host needs to direct and shape how the conversation proceeds, which in certain circumstances can increase the engagement of the guests and audience of the talk show (Adeoye et al., 2025; Bode et al., 2018).

A key part of managing conversation in a talk show is making smooth transitions between topics. According to Maynard (1980) 'topic' in a conversation is what the conversation is 'about'. This definition emphasizes that a topic is understood as the content or focus of attention shared by participants at a particular moment in an interaction. Topics can also be understood as summaries of the most important parts of a discourse, functioning like titles (Schiffrin, 2012). As the interaction progresses, the topic may change to suit the ongoing conversation, known as a topic shift. The term "topic shift" is commonly used to cover all changes in topic direction (Morris-Adams, 2016). This is a common and natural phenomenon in information-seeking conversations, where the topic develops dynamically based on the semantic connection between utterances, rather than shifting randomly (Adlakha et al., 2022).

Previous researchers have identified various typologies and conceptual terms related to topic shifts. For example, Elinor Ochs (1983) distinguish between continuous and discontinuous discourse based on the relevance of the topic with the previous utterance. Meanwhile, Gardner (1987) introduced six kinds of topic development, including topic introduction, topic continuation, topic shift, topic change, topic recycling, and topic reintroduction. On the other hand, Mentis & Prutting (1991) highlighted the differences between topic change, topic shift, and incoherent topic change, although the conceptual boundaries have not been explained in detail. Among these various studies, Crow's (1983) typology is considered the most operational because it formulates clear types of topic shifts; topic initiation, topic shading, topic renewal, and topic insertion. These topic shifts do not occur abstractly, rather they are realized through the management of turn-taking.

In talk shows, interaction management is very important for the host. This is in line with research conducted by Limarandani et al. (2025), which shows that the host's ability to create a friendly atmosphere, use easy-to-understand language, and provide space for the audience to actively participate greatly influences the success of the interaction. In addition, a study by Pang & Wang (2023) analyzing humor also concluded that the host's language competence and ability to adapt to various situations play a very important role. According to research conducted by Özsöz (2024) humor can be strategies used to lighten the mood or shift the conversation without disrupting the flow of interaction. Other Communication strategies that can also be used include abbreviations, denials, questions, repetition, referrals, interruptions, delays, literal translations, and language exchanges (Salbi et al., 2022).

Studies on talk show discourse have developed widely. A study conducted by Luh et al. (2024) focuses on the use of discourse markers, specifically how individuals engage in interaction, negotiate meaning, and establish social relationships in informal settings. In line with this research, a study conducted by Faisal (2023) also examined the use of discourse markers in talk shows by focusing more narrowly on one type of discourse marker, "Well". Fei (2023) then adds a new perspective in her study by showing that the use of discourse markers in television talk shows serves to support the implementation of question-and-answer conversations. Meanwhile, other studies describe how hosts ask questions and show that questions are not only used to gather information, but also as a way to steer the topic and show their stance (Chen, 2018). Further studies indicate that follow-up questions in conversations do not always maintain the same topic but often involve shifts in topics that remain relevant (Kundu et al., 2020). Moreover, questions are utilized to construct verbal attacks in political interactions (Handayani, 2023). The results odd studies by Astyanto (2025) and Yoon (2023) also shows that hosts who tend to direct the conversation through direct questions make the conversation orderly and coherent.

Regarding power relations, Tao (2018), Maghfiro et al. (2020), and Ratnadi et al. (2022) argue that the host has the authority to direct the topic. This management of conversation can influence the roles of participants and audience engagement (Ishfaq et al., 2025). In relation to this, a study by Uddin & Sharmin (2019) analyzed differences in interaction management strategies based on host's gender in television talk shows. Studies on gender representation in talk show programs have also been conducted in a number of previous studies and show an imbalance in the roles of men and women during discussions (Ahmad et al., 2024; Ilyas, 2025a, 2025b).

Although these studies have made important contributions to the understanding of talk show discourse, most of them have not specifically focused on topic shifts as their main analytical focus. Topic shifts often appear only implicitly as part of questioning practices, humor, or side comments, without being analyzed as deliberate and systematic discursive strategies. This condition indicates a research gap that needs to be further explored. To fill the gap this study positions topic shifting as the main unit of analysis to understand how topic shifts used in semi-institutional talk show. *The David Rubenstein Show* was chosen as the object of this study because the program is a semi-institutional talk show featuring two-way dialogue. In this program, the host plays an important role in managing the flow of conversation by initiating, developing, and changing the topics discussed. This helps create

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the right context for analyzing topic shifts regularly and systematically. The results of this study are expected to deepen the theoretical understanding of topic management in media communication and provide empirical contributions to research on institutional interactions regulated through the media. Therefore, the study attempts to answer the following research question: What types of topic shifts used by the host in *The David Rubenstein Show*?

METHOD

This study examines the types of topic shifts used by host in talk shows using a descriptive qualitative case study approach. The descriptive method in qualitative research is an approach to analysis where the researcher stays close to the data, uses limited frameworks and interpretation for explaining the data, and catalogs the information into themes (Creswell, 1994). This study aims to identify the types of topic shifts made by the host.

The theoretical framework used in this study is the typology of topic shifts proposed by Crow (1983) which is used as a reference to identify and classify the types of topic shifts made by the host during the talk show. Crow (1983) divides topic shifts into four types, namely: (1) Topic initiation: an attempt to introduce a new topic either at the beginning of a conversation, after the previous topic seems to have ended, or after a period of irrelevant talk or silence. (2) Topic shading: introduce new topics by first explaining their relevance or connection to the topic currently being discussed. (3) Topic renewal: returning to the previous topic after one or more other topics or topic shifting attempts have been disruptive. (4) Topic insertion: a sudden shift that fails to gain the topic's attention.

Data Collection

The data source for this study focused on one talk show video titled "The David Rubenstein Show: Maria Sharapova" uploaded to David Rubenstein's YouTube channel with a total duration of 24 minutes and 7 seconds. Observation was conducted in this study and to assist the process, the author transcribed the video. This transcription process was aided by an artificial intelligence (AI) tool called "NoteGPT." Afterwards, the researcher manually checked the transcription by comparing it to the video repeatedly. This was done so that the transcription would be much more accurate. After the transcription was corrected and more accurate, it was described qualitatively using Crow (1983) theory.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis process was conducted by adapting the interactive analysis model of Miles et al. (2014). This analysis consisted of three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing as well as verification.

Data Condensation

In the data condensation stage, the researcher took samples by selecting a talk show titled "The David Rubenstein Show: Maria Sharapova." This talk show was chosen because there were various shifts in topic due to the diversity of topics discussed by the host and guests.

Data Presentation

The data coding process was carried out by grouping the utterances. Initially, the transcribed data, which was already accurate, was organized and numbered so that the sequence of utterances could be seen more clearly. Subsequently, each topic shift was marked according to its category. To ensure accuracy, the data was checked repeatedly after the initial coding. After all the data was coded, the coded data was counted based on its category. Lastly, the data was then presented in a table as shown in Table 1.

Conclusion

In the final stage, the findings were interpreted and conclusions were drawn based on the research objectives mentioned above.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part will discuss the results of analyzing the use of topic transitions in a video interview titled "The David Rubenstein Show: Maria Sharapova" uploaded on YouTube.

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Specifically, it will focus on the various types of topic shifts used by the host. The analysis was conducted based on Crow's typology of topic shifts. Based on the data shown in Table 1, all four types of topic shifts were found in this study. Each type of topic shift has a different function. Topic initiation is used when the host starts a new discussion. Topic shading is used when the host begins to shift or expand the main topic. On the other hand, topic insertion is used when the host inserts another discussion without completely leaving the main topic. Meanwhile, topic renewal is when the host returns to the previous discussion.

Table 1. Number of Topic Shift

Types of topic shift	Frequency
Topic initiation	12
Topic shading	12
Topic renewal	4
Topic insertion	7
TOTAL	35

Of the total 102 utterances spoken throughout the talk show, a total of 35 topic shifts were found, as detailed in Table 1. The use of topic initiation and topic emphasis were equally dominant, as each category was identified 12 times in the talk show. On the other hand, the use of topic renewal and topic insertion was less frequent, with topic renewal found only 4 times and topic insertion 7 times. Further explanation of the types of topic shifts according to Crow (1983) will be discussed as follows.

Topic Initiation

Topic initiation was identified 12 times in the talk show. This shows that the host actively initiated and directed the conversation to new topics. Topic initiation served as a tool to control the flow of conversation, preventing it from getting stuck on one issue for too long. This can be seen in the 5th utterance when the host said,

Table 2. Example of Topic Initiation

Turn	Utterance
5	Host: "So let's talk about what it's like to be the number one tennis player in the world, your number one female tennis player in the world. And you were for many years, number one. And you won many singles titles, including Wimbledon at the age of 17. Seems like an ungodly young age to win."

This statement clearly signals a transition to a new topic. At the beginning, he says, "So, let's talk about...". This phrase clearly indicates a transition to a new topic and shifts the focus of the discussion from the previous topic. The application of this strategy reflects the host's position as the moderator of the interaction, who is responsible for maintaining the dynamics and variety of the discussion. Another example of topic initiation can be seen in the 17th utterance, when the host states,

Table 3. Example of Topic Initiation

Turn	Utterance
17	Host: "So you're at the top of the game in tennis for quite some time, and now you're in the business world. You're on the board of Montclair when you're going to board meetings. Now, did they say, Well, she's a former athlete, you don't expect her to know much about the business world? Or do they actually say, you we want to hear your opinion on the business side of it? And do you bone up on the business side and how actively are you involved in the board meetings?"

This utterance also shows the presence of a topic initiation. In this utterance, the host first frames the context of the previous topic which is the discussion when the guest was a top athlete, before finally introducing the new topic, "the business world." Conceptually, this method not only serves as an opening for a new topic, but also as a mechanism for controlling the structure of discourse. This pattern shows that the topic of initiation is not done suddenly but is done in a structured manner so that the flow of interaction is maintained. Another example can be seen in 27th utterance as follows:

Table 4. Example of Topic Initiation

Turn	Utterance
74	Host: So at any point in your tennis career, did you say, "I've had enough and I'm just going to retire at the top"? Or how much? Athletes sometimes stay a little bit longer than they should. You didn't do that. But did you ever worry about that problem staying too long?"

Similar to the utterance in Table 2, here the host directly states the main topic to be discussed and then elaborates on it. Tennis career is the main topic of discussion, which is

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mentioned directly in the first sentence. The host then elaborates on it so that the guest can catch the flow of the conversation and the discussion can go deeper.

Topic Shading

Just like the topic initiation discussed earlier, topic shading also showed up 12 times in the data. Topic shading acts as a smooth transition mechanism that keeps the discourse coherent, so that changes in the focus of the discussion don't disrupt the speaker's train of thought or the overall flow of the discussion. This can be seen in the 19th utterance

Table 5. Example of Topic Shading

Turn	Utterance
18	Guest: "Yeah, I was very intimidated by the role. I was intimidated that I was asked in the first place. I knew Remo Ruffini for for several years and it's very official. It's like a UN meeting. You're sitting around this large. I mean, you've attended several board meetings in your life, but this is one of my first and there's a microphone and it's translation because it's an Italian public trading company. So there's definitely like an intimidating factor to it, but they're all very collaborative. I selfishly took on the role because I felt like I could learn from a lot of people sitting in that room. And I feel like that's kind of been the trajectory of of my career is even though I was passionate and so deeply involved in one thing, I stayed really open minded and curious about other things. I let other people kind of guide my education because I didn't have a formal education. So I felt like -"
19	Host: "Ou, if somebody is watching this and they say, "I have a company that would benefit from having you on the board," are you open to going on other boards? And if you go on a board, would you want to invest in the company or just want to be on the board? "

In utterance 19, the host shifts the focus of the conversation into the possibility of the interviewee's involvement in other companies. This indicates that the host does not abandon the main topic, but rather shifts the focus of the discussion to the possibility and form of the interviewee's involvement in other companies as a subtopic or further exploration of the topic. This shift broadens the scope of the discussion without breaking the continuity of the previous discussion. Another example can be seen in 27th utterance as follows:

Table 6. Example of Topic Shading

Turn	Utterance
25	Host: "Well, now, do you invest in companies?"
26	Guest: "I do. I do, yeah."
27	Host: "So do you-- do you test the brands before and make sure you actually like the brand? How do you decide you're an investor or not?"

Here, the host initially asked the guest about his involvement in investment in the 25th utterance. Then, after the guest answered, in the 27th utterance, the host shifted the focus of the discussion to the basis of the guest's considerations for becoming an investor. This shift was made through a conceptual link between investment participation and considerations for becoming an investor. In this way, topic shading served as an elaborative strategy that broadened the scope of the topic without interrupting the continuity of the discussion.

Table 7. Example of Topic Shading

Turn	Utterance
82	Host: "You can you go to a restaurant and people don't bother you."
83	Guest: "Yes. Yes, definitely."
84	Host: "Okay. And so do you miss people not coming up to you saying, 'Hey, I know who you are' or you actually are happy they don't come up to you?"

The 84th utterance indicates topic shading. This utterance that carries question is the topic that the host actually wants to discuss. However, before asking the question, in the 82nd utterance, the host first delivered an opening sentence as an introduction to the conversation. This shows that the question in the 84th utterance had been prepared in advance by the host, but its delivery was temporarily delayed in order to provide an introduction first so that the flow of the conversation would be more structured.

Topic Renewal

This utterance shows that the host consciously reactivates the previous topic, when the guests In the David Rubenstein and Maria Sharapova talk show, the topic renewal appeared just four times in the data analysis. Although this number is the lowest compared to the others, the existence of this topic renewal still plays an important role in creating cohesion during the interaction. Topic renewal refers to returning to the previous topic after one or more other topics or topic shifting attempts have been disruptive. This indicates that the host plays an

active role in keeping the conversation flowing and ensuring that important topics remain the focus. The use of topic renewal is clearly seen in utterance 31, where the host states,

Table 8. Example of Topic Renewal

Turn	Utterance
31	Host: "When you were playing tennis-- let's go back to the beginning."

From this utterance, it is clear that the host consciously returned to a previously discussed topic. At first, the host immediately directs the conversation to the topic to be discussed again by saying "when you were playing tennis--" but before this sentence is finished, the host immediately says "let's go back to the beginning". The phrase "let's go back to the beginning" serves as a marker that indicates a return to the topic. The host uses this marker to inform the guest that they will return to the initial discussion. This usage indicates that the host ensures that important topics are not left out or ignored, but rather raises them so that the discussion stays on track. Another example can be seen in utterance 13, when the host says,

Table 9. Example of Topic Renewal

Turn	Utterance
13	Host: "So when you win Wimbledon, obviously you you're excited. You're only 17 years old. Was there any match that could ever replicate that feeling of winning at Wimbledon at 17? There's anything you want other championships? Was anything ever comparable to that even?"

In this utterance, the host returns to the original topic in utterance 5, which discusses the guest's feelings when winning the match. Previous discussions about the guest's feelings when winning the match were distracted by other topics, so here the host tries to return to the main discussion. The approach taken by the host in this example is to make an introductory statement before moving on to the main question.

Topic Insertion

In talk shows, hosts initiate topics seven times. This type of topic shift refers to the host's sudden insertion of a new topic in the middle of a discussion of the main topic. Unlike topic initiation, which explicitly opens a new topic, and topic shading, which shifts the current topic, topic insertion is generally interruptive and incidental, but still has an important communicative function. In this talk show, this method allows the host to seize opportunities to explore additional information, enrich the content of the discussion, and also build rapport with the guest. The following is an example of the use of topic insertion

Table 10. Example of Topic Insertion

Turn	Utterance
8	Guest: "I did call my mom. She was actually on her way to New York to meet me because I was then going to fly to New York for some press engagement. And she saw me win on television while I was playing the Wimbledon final and watching a lot changes for the good and for the bad. And that moment, you're you're such a young girl and all the things that come with it that you've never really expected in your life, you know, an opportunity to say yes to so many things when actually you should be saying no. And, you know, getting back on the horse and doing the things that made you a champion on that day, because while you're winning, everyone else is trying is training to beat you in the next tournament. I flew back to Los Angeles shortly afterwards as my coach was was there, and my family and I used to stay when we visit him. We didn't have that much money at the time, but we'd stayed in one of these hotels and after I won Wimbledon, my agent upgraded us to a hotel and it had this like yellow rubber duck next to the bath. And I called him and I said, Winning Wimbledon is the best thing that's ever happened to me. And that's coming from a teenager's perspective."
9	Host: "No more Holiday Inn Express or so?"

The 9th utterance can be categorized as topic insertion. This host response appears after the guest recounts their experience of winning a competition. This question is inserted suddenly without introduction and is not directly related to the main topic structurally. However, this insertion serves to enrich the guest's personal portrait and create variety in the interaction, so that the discussion does not get stuck in a monotonous domain of discussion. Another example of topic insertion can be seen in 41st utterance.

Table 11. Example of Topic Insertion

Turn	Utterance
40	Guest: "So I started when I was four and I started playing tennis when I was four. And at five and a half, my father took me to this exhibition in Moscow. He saved up a little bit of money. We took the train from Sochi, and Martina Navratilova was holding a kids tennis clinic and there are a few hundred kids. And she pulled my father aside and said, Your daughter has talent and you should go somewhere where this talent can be developed. And. And my father read every newspaper articles he saw that the Williams sisters were training in Florida. He saw that Anna Kournikova was training Florida. And he's like, Our path is going to Florida."
41	Host: "Did he have the money to do all that?"

In this example, in 41st utterance, the host suddenly inserts a question about the guest's financial condition, even though the guest had not mentioned this at all previously. This insertion is temporary and does not permanently shift the main topic because after the guest responds, the discussion returns to the previous topic. This pattern shows that topic insertion functions as a interlude that aims to broaden the perspective of the discussion without disrupting the macro structure of the conversation.

Discussion

According to the findings described above, the host dominantly controls the talk show through the topic initiation and topic shading techniques they employ. Through topic initiation, the host regulates how a topic is introduced, not merely determining which topic will be discussed. A study by Khalid et al. (2025) indicates that hosts often initiate topics in controlling interactions, consistent with the findings of this research. In order for guests to respond as expected, the host needs to direct the conversation towards the intended goal by designing the topic opening in such a way. When this is done correctly, the guests' responses will also be detailed and follow the direction controlled by the host, as in the talk show "The David Rubenstein Show".

In addition, the host's sensitivity to the need for consistency in communication and movement of interactions that occur during the talk show is also very important. Topic shading in this talk show is seen from the host who adjusts the topic by building subtle and gradual shifts in topic while remaining focused and relevant to the main topic. In this way, the flow of conversation will remain connected because the transitions are interconnected. The connected transitions here serve to maintain topic continuity and interaction coherence, which is in line with Batais (2019) findings.

The next type of topic shift is topic renewal, which is rarely found in this talk show. Although rarely found, topic renewal also has its own role. Topic renewal here indicates further exploration and clarification of the meaning of information that has previously emerged. The rarity of topic renewal indicates that the host has directed the topic well beforehand, so that there are not many topics that need to be discussed again. Pacalna & Villazor (2025) study shows the use of repetition to highlight important topics and build emphasis during the conversation, which is in line with this study. This indicates that the discourse structure does not always move forward in a straight line, but can sometimes go back so that the participants involved in the conversation can understand the discussion more deeply.

The least common type besides topic renewal is topic insertion. Topic insertion functions as a supporting element of discourse by developing interaction patterns without disrupting the main focus of the discussion. Although, in general, topic insertion does not always have high urgency in conversation, its presence creates a flexible atmosphere of interaction. The insertion of topics strengthens participant involvement in the conversation and keeps the interaction alive. Even if there are topic jumps, this is acceptable as long as the shift in topic remains within the scope of the conversation and the purpose of the interaction. The use of topic insertion in this study is in line with the study conducted by Morris-Adams (2016). Therefore, it can be concluded that topic insertion is intended as a way to maintain comfort and flexibility during the interaction process, not as the main driver of the flow of discussion.

Overall, this study shows that the way the host manages topics on The David Rubenstein Show is not accidental, but rather a planned and structured practice. The use of topic initiation, topic shading, topic renewal, and topic insertion indicates the host's ability to control the direction and dynamics of the interaction. Therefore, topic management not only plays a role in regulating the flow of conversation, but also plays a role in improving the quality of communication. Thus, it can be concluded that these findings reinforce (Adeoye et al., 2025; Bode et al., 2018) which states that the success of a talk show is highly dependent on the host's ability to manage conversation topics.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the analysis, four types of topic shifts were found in the video "The David Rubenstein Show: Maria Sharapova" with a total of 35 statements delivered by the host. Topic initiation was found in 12 statements, topic shading in 12 statements, topic renewal in 4 statements, and topic insertion in 7 statements. These findings indicate that the host plays a central role in regulating the flow of conversation, whether in opening new topics, expanding the discussion of a topic, reviving a previous topic, or inserting necessary topics for better interaction.

The use of topic initiation and topic shading, which had the highest frequency, shows that the host placed more emphasis on developing and sharpening the discussion. Topic initiation plays a role in controlling the macro structure of the conversation by opening up new directions for discussion, while topic shading serves to gradually expand and deepen the main topic. In contrast, although topic renewal and topic insertion occur less frequently, these two types also serve a strategic function in maintaining the focus and flexibility of the discussion. Topic renewal allows the host to redirect the discussion and attention to important matters that may have been overlooked, thereby allowing for a more in-depth focus on the discussion. Topic insertion, on the other hand, acts as a temporary insertion so that the perspective of the discussion is more diverse and the interaction that occurs is maintained naturally.

As a whole, this study shows that host on The David Rubenstein Show have a major influence on the flow of interaction through the use of topic shifts. The way the host manages topics is a structured practice, not merely a coincidence. Thus, this study provides implications in discourse analysis that topic shifts are not just ordinary topic changes but can be used strategically for specific purposes in programs such as talk shows. However, this study is still far from perfect. The data analyzed is limited, consisting of only one video from The David Rubenstein Show channel, so it does not reflect the host's use of topic shifts in different situations. Therefore, further research is recommended to collect data from multiple sources so that understanding of the use of topic shifts can be further developed.

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