Forgetfulness as an Interactive Resource

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Using as data videotapes of conversation in natural settings, this paper investigates (1) how displaying uncertainty is organized as interactive activity, (2) how this activity can be used to modify the participation framework of the moment, (3) the consequences this has for subsequent interaction and (4) how such events can invoke larger social identities in the midst of moment to moment interaction. Alternative syntactic and paralinguistic techniques for displaying uncertainty make relevant different types of responses from recipients. Such structure provides speakers with resources for shaping emerging interaction.

A primordial locus for the occurrence of events that are usually glossed as remembering and forgetting is conversation,[1] people talking to other people. In the midst of a description speakers quite frequently display uncertainty about something they are saying. The following, which was videotaped at a midwestern backyard picnic, provides an example. Three couples, Pam and Curt (the host and hostess), Mike and Phyllis, and Carney and Gary are present. Mike is just beginning to tell a story about a guest on the Johnny Carson show who wore a belt buckle showing "two people hugging and kissing" that the network censors would not let be photographed. Data are transcribed using the Jefferson transcription system (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 731–33). A list of the transcription conventions most relevant to the present analysis can be found in Appendix A:

(1) G.86:490

> Mike: I was watching *Johnny Carson* one night
> en there was a guy by the na- *What* was
> that guy's name. = Blake?

Mike starts to provide the name of the guest being talked about ("there was a guy by the na-") but then interrupts himself in midword and indicates that he is having trouble finding that name ("*What* was that guy's name."). Finally he produces a candidate name but marks it as problematic by pronouncing it with rising intonation ("Blake?").

Traditionally, events such as this have been used to demonstrate the defective performance of speakers in actual talk, and indeed to provide a warrant for ignoring actual talk in the investigation of language (Chomsky, 1962, p.

2–3, 58). When they have been studied, such phenomena have been typically approached from a psychological perspective. Thus, Freud (1975) argued that such 'slips of the tongue' provided clues about unconscious, psychodynamic processes. More recently speech errors have been investigated for what light they might shed on how language is processed and sentences built (see for example Allen and Guy, 1974; Argyle, 1969; Beattie, 1978; 1979; Bernstein, 1962; Cook, 1971; Cook et al., 1974; Cutler, 1982; Dittman, 1974; Dittman and Llewellyn, 1969; Fromkin, 1971; 1973; 1980; Goldman-Eisler, 1961; 1972; Henderson, 1974; Jones, 1974; Maclay and Osgood, 1959; Mahl, 1959; Martin and Strange, 1968; Mishler and Waxler, 1970; Seigman, 1979). Within both the psychodynamic and the speech processing approaches, such events are effectively treated as being situated within the mind of a single individual, the speaker.

By way of contrast, this paper will analyze such displays as social phenomena. To do this we will investigate how the production of a strip of talk provides a participation framework that includes the recipients of the talk as well as its speaker. In essence, it will be proposed that displays of forgetfulness and uncertainty not only enable a speaker to display to others some

[1] Recently, several psychologists have argued that the study of memory will have to take into account the conversational context within which the tasks posed for memory are characteristically embedded (Edwards and Middleton, 1986), a position toward such phenomena that is quite relevant to the analysis developed in this paper.

of the information processing, or other "back-stage" work involved in producing an utterance,[2] but also provide participants with resources for shaping their emerging interaction.

Displays of uncertainty invoke particular types of social organization in a range of ways. First, by marking something as problematic, a speaker can both bring the material being looked for into a position of salience that it would not otherwise have had, and make the task of searching for that material the primary activity that the participants to the conversation are then engaged in. This shift in activity changes the participation framework of the moment, and with it, the ways in which those present are aligned towards each other, as well as the behavior they are engaged in. Second, through the way in which a speaker performs the display of uncertainty, he or she can make a variety of proposals about the social position of others present. Thus a speaker can signal that others present share with him or her access to the material marked as problematic, and invite them to aid in the search for it. Different recipients are thus asked to participate in the search in alternative ways, a process that places those present in a set of contrasting discourse identities. These same resources can also be used to make relevant larger social identities. For example, signaling that a particular recipient shares with the speaker access to a specific type of information can mark those participants as a couple, and in so doing make an identity relationship (Goodenough, 1965) such as "hus-band-wife" relevant to the organization of the talk of the moment. Finally, the social proposals

made possible by a display of uncertainty provide a speaker with resources for attempting to reshape the structure of the interaction of the moment in ways better suited to that party's current projects. Examination of phenomena such as these will provide the opportunity to investigate in detail the interactive organization that is invoked and sustained through a display of uncertainty.

BRINGING MATERIAL BEING SEARCHED FOR INTO PROMINENCE

A speaker's display of uncertainty draws the material so marked into heightened prominence. The name marked as problematic in (1) occurs within a "background" segment (C. Goodwin, 1984) of a more extended story. Characteristically, information in such a position is treated as preliminary to further talk (Schegloff, 1980) and not dwelt upon in its own right, unless special operations are performed to extract it from its embedded sequential position (C. Goodwin and M.H. Goodwin, 1982). Indeed, a moment after the data presented in (1), Mike himself treats the exact name being searched for as unimportant (line 12 below) when he attempts to close the search that has begun by saying "Er somp'n like that," and tries to move forward with his story. However, once the name has been marked as problematic, an extensive search for it follows with recipients, as well as speaker, contributing possible names, despite the fact that Mike has what turns out to be the correct name available immediately (line 3):

(1) G. 86:490

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 1  Mike:  I was watching Johnny Carson one night
 2          en there was a guy by the na- What was
 3          that guy's name. = ⌐Blake?
 4  Curt:                      ⌊The Critic.
 5  Mike:  Blake?
 6  Mike:  ⌐No.
 7  Pam:   ⌊A no-
 8              (0.6)
 9  Mike:  Rob⌐ert Blake?
10  Pam:      ⌊Reed?
11              (0.2)
12  Mike:  Er somp'n like 'at. ⌐=He was-
13  Pam:                        ⌊Robert Reed.
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14              Robert Reed.
15   Mike:   No:, ┌This guy's-
16   Curt:         └No:, Rex Reed.
17   Curt:   ┌┌ °(              )
18   Pam:   └└ Rex Reed.┌= Yuh.
19   Mike:              └This guy's name was Blake,
20              (0.4) He was in the movie uh:, (0.6) In
21              Cold Blood
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By marking his access to the name as problematic, Mike has extracted it from its embedded, preliminary position in his story and made it the focus of attention at the moment. Indeed, searching for that name becomes *the* activity in progress, with the development of the story put on hold. Moreover, what occurs here is not simply a shift in attention, with the name being given increased cognitive salience, but also a shift in participation structure. Instead of having a single speaker tell a story to a group of recipients, several different parties are actively searching for the name and producing talk. This new participation structure is embedded within the larger participation framework of the story. Thus, when a speaker displays forgetfulness or uncertainty, a shift in both the organization of the talk in progress and in participation in that talk can occur (i.e., an item can be given a salience that it would not otherwise have had, and this can lead to changes in the behavior of listeners as well as speakers).

PARTICIPATION IN A WORD SEARCH

The participation framework that is invoked by a word search will now be investigated in more detail. On many occasions, recipients continue to attentively gaze at a speaker who is engaged in a word search (M.H. Goodwin and C. Goodwin, 1986). Though such recipients orient to the speaker, they remain silent, and thus grant speaker the opportunity to find the word on their own. On other occasions, however, such as the data found in (1), listeners take a much more active role and help speaker in the search. An issue that can arise from such observations is how recipients decide when it is appropriate to engage in such different types of behavior during a word search.

Gaze During a Word Search

During the talk in (1), the participants are seated at a picnic table, with Mike and Phyllis on one side and the others (Gary, Carney, Curt and Pam) on the other. When Mike starts his story he is gazing across the table toward Curt. However, as he begins his word search, Mike moves his gaze to his wife, Phyllis, who is seated next to him:

(1) G.86:490

Mike: I was watching *Johnny Carson* one night
       en there was a guy
       by the na- *What* was that guy's name.
                  ↑
       Mike Shifts Gaze To Phyllis

By virtue of its placement precisely at the point where the word search is initiated, the shift in gaze appears to be intimately tied to the word search. Other analysis (M.H. Goodwin and C. Goodwin, 1986) has revealed that gaze shifts are indeed a systematic component of word searches, with speakers typically withdrawing their eyes from their current recipient(s) as they begin a word search. After it has been withdrawn, speaker's gaze can follow at least two alternative trajectories of action. Most frequently, speakers then assume a clearly recognizable, almost stereotyped, facial expression that shows visually that they are engaged in a word search. Indeed, the practice of averting gaze while searching for a word has been frequently noted, not only by students of gaze (Argyle and Cook, 1976, p. 122; Kendon 1967, p. 41), but also by psychologists (Kinsbourne, 1972) and ethnologists (Worth and Adair, 1970, p. 26). Within this posture, gaze is not focused on anyone or anything in the local environment but instead assumes an out of focus "middle-distance" look. The following, in which speaker's eyes move to such a position as she withdraws her gaze from her recipient, provides an example:

(2) G.50:8:30

Clacia: B't, a-*an*other one theh wentuh school
         Gaze Withdrawn From Recipient
                     ↓
         with me ⌐wa:s a *gi*rl na:med uh, (0.7)
                 └──────┬──────
                 Thinking Face
         ──────────────┴─────
         →°W't th'hell wz'er name⌐. = *Ka*ren. Right.
         *Ka*ren.er name wz Karen something or
         other.

On some occasions, however, as is seen in the data in (1), speakers withdraw their gaze from one recipient as the search is entered, but then move it to another party. Gaze toward a coparticipant is one way of addressing an action to that party, and thereby marking the action as socially directed toward another rather than self-directed (C. Goodwin, 1981). Thus, instead of being offered as a private event (as the out of focus "thinking face" in (2) depicted what was happening) the word search becomes formulated as a social activity, one that parties other than the speaker can actively participate in. In (1), the social character of the word search is further highlighted by the wh-question ("*What* was that guy's name.") that occurs with the gaze shift. This question explicitly asks Phyllis to provide the name of the person being talked about.

The gaze that occurs during a word search can thus act as a framing device which has consequences for both how what is happening is to be interpreted, and the participation structure that is invoked. Thus in both (1) and (2), a wh-question asking for the name being sought occurs. Despite close similarities in syntactic structure, the two utterances construct different types of action. By virtue of the way in which speaker's gaze in (1) addresses the action to someone else, the utterance constitutes a request that the other provide the name being sought. However, both the lack of gaze to another in (2), and the "thinking face" display that encompasses its speaker's eyes locate the action in (2) as self-directed rather than as a request to another party. In these ways, gaze displays made by the speaker constitute contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982) that frame talk in progress, with the effect that utterances that have the same underlying syntactic structure (e.g., "What was X's name") can constitute very different types of action.

SOCIAL IDENTITIES INVOKED BY A
WORD SEARCH

In constituting different types of action, displays of forgetting invoke and accomplish discrete forms of social relationships. This is true with respect to whether a word search invites another's participation, or proposes that the "other" remain silent as self performs an autonomous search. It is also true for more "macro" level identities and relationships. In the present section we will first look at *discourse identities* relevant to such an action, and then at how such discourse identities can invoke larger social identities. Finally, we will investigate how an action such as a display of uncertainty might constitute a solution to systematic problems that emerge in talk for participants in particular relationships.

Discourse Identities

Many actions in conversation propose that an appropriate addressee of that action possesses particular attributes (cf. C. Goodwin, 1981, Chapter 4). The request to Phyllis treats her as someone who would be able to provide the information being sought, i.e., she is treated as already informed about that event. In this she differs from Mike's initial recipients, who are being told the story precisely because they have not yet heard it. Attributes of participants such as these will be referred to as *Discourse Identities*,[3] and for simplicity an addressee such as Phyllis, who is presumed to have prior knowledge of the event being described, will be called a *Knowing Recipient*, while parties who are treated as not yet informed about that event will be called *Unknowing Recipients*. Such discourse identities are intimately tied to, and indeed part of, the activities that are being done within the talk in which they occur.

Larger Social Identities Invoked by Discourse Identities

One issue that has assumed great methodological and theoretical importance in studies of language as a social phenomenon is the question

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[3] For other analyses of how discourse identities are relevant to the organization of conversation, see Maynard and Zimmerman (1984) and West and Zimmerman (1985).

of how those engaged in talk are to be categorized as social entities. Thus, within the ethnography of speaking, classification of participants is crucial to the description and analysis of speech events (Hymes, 1972). Similarly, much work in sociolinguistics relies upon establishing correlations between social attributes of speakers (e.g., their sex, social class, ethnicity, age, etc.) and features of their talk. For example, analysis within such a tradition might make statements about how men differ from women in their pronunciation of the sound conventionally written as "ing." There are, however, problems when descriptions of speakers are used to explicate the talk being studied in this fashion. As has long been argued by ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts (Garfinkel, 1967; Sacks, 1963; 1972; Schegloff, forthcoming), simply showing that a category can be accurately applied to a participant does not demonstrate either that the participants themselves are dealing with each other in terms of such a category, or that it is in fact a relevant organizational feature of the activity being studied. Thus Schegloff (forthcoming) notes that

> The set of ways of describing any setting is indefinitely expandable. Consequently the correctness of any particular characterization is by itself not adequate warrant for its use; some sort of "relevance rule" or "relevancing procedure" must be given to warrant a particular characterization.

As was seen in the preceding section, the action that Mike addresses to Phyllis characterizes her in a way that is relevant to the specific activities being performed within the talk of the moment; i.e., categorizing her as a knowing recipient is an essential prerequisite to the action she is being asked to perform. The social

consequences of the display of uncertainty do not stop here, however. While discourse identities are invoked to specific actions within the conversation, they also make visible larger social identities that go beyond the talk itself.[4] Maynard and Zimmerman (1984, p. 305) have argued that

> . . . rather than approaching relationships as a reality lying behind and influencing members' face-to-face behavior, we can investigate them for how, in the course of time, they are accomplished within everyday interaction by various speaking practices . . . That is, the phenomenon of relationship can be located as a feature of conversational interaction, reflected in work done on the occasion of its display and recognition.

In the present data, by asking her for the information that he does, Mike treats Phyllis as someone who shares with him access to the event that is being described: a late night television show. Insofar as Phyllis is Mike's wife and is known to live in the same household with him, such treatment is quite appropriate. The status of Phyllis as Mike's spouse is thus invoked within the utterance itself by Mike's treatment of her as someone who has shared with him a specific kind of event. In doing so, he provides grounds for others to invoke or infer a relationship (i.e., spouse) that is organized as normatively including that type of activity.

Indeed, producing statements that provide for relationship-inferences is one of the things that young couples who live together must learn to avoid when visiting parents who are not aware of this arrangement. Consider the readings that could be made (and in fact were) of the following utterance produced by a college student who had brought her boyfriend home to dinner:

(3) G. 128.33

Jane: We went t- I went to bed really early.

Several features of the process through which social relationships can be read in events such as this require further comment. First, to understand talk, participants rely upon a range of mutually assumed knowledge about each other and the incidents being constituted within the talk (Garfinkel, 1967; Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984; Sacks and Schegloff, 1979). However, while a listener might have prior biographical knowledge about the parties whose relationship is being exhibited in a particular utterance, the social information that can be found in that talk is not restricted to what is already known. This is especially clear in (3), in which the talk makes it possible to see the relationship between Jane and her boyfriend in a

way that goes beyond previous biographical information. In (1), even someone not informed about the marital status of Mike and Phyllis would be able to see that they shared certain kinds of experience with each other, and could use this information to make inferences about their relationship (e.g., that they lived together). It is thus not the case that one understands the

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[4] See Drew (forthcoming), Jefferson (1974), Maynard and Zimmerman (1984), and Sacks (1978) for other analyses of how details of talk can invoke the relevance of larger social identities. For analysis of how changes in the state of participants' relationship can be negotiated within moment to moment talk, see Jefferson (1973) and Jefferson et al. (forthcoming).

talk by having a prior list of features that specify its "context" (for example a description of the participants and how they are related to each other). Rather, such context and the talk it accompanies stand in a reflexive relationship to each other (Heritage, 1984, p. 106–09); the talk invokes relevant contextual features that are then used for further elaboration of both the talk and the relevant characteristics of the participants involved in it.

Second, the relationship between participants that is inferable is not equivalent to the verbal categories (e.g., Husband–Wife, Boyfriend–Girlfriend, Sister–Brother) that are characteristically used by both participants and analysts to describe persons and their relationship to each other. In order to share the experience that they do, Mike and Phyllis need not be married, and that experience encompasses but a very small part of their marriage (and nothing of its formal, legal constituents). Rather, the action in the talk of the moment picks out those aspects of the ties between Mike and Phyllis that are relevant to the activities currently in progress. As activities change, other aspects of their relationship, or completely different relationships, can emerge as salient and relevant. The relationship that is made visible in the talk is thus more specific and limited than the verbal categories that are usually used to code such events. However, the displays being examined also provide participants with resources to infer, and if relevant, use, appropriate wider relationship categories.

Third, note that a number of separate structures interact with each other in the production of a request of the type being examined here. Among these are

(1) The display of uncertainty itself;
(2) The way in which the display of uncertainty is formatted as a request to another party, rather than as an activity that speaker should pursue alone. By virtue of this, the addressee of the action is treated as someone who shares with speaker access to the material being searched for;
(3) The particular content domain that is the subject of the request.

Thus the status of Phyllis as someone who shares a household with Mike is invoked when he performs a display of uncertainty that is addressed to her about a particular topic: a late night television program.

The topic chosen, and the activities it indexes, provide for the relevance of a specific type of relationship. This suggests that if the topic were to be changed, a similar request could invoke a quite different type of relationship. Consider a situation in which couples are present but the men also happen to be army veterans. Were the topic to shift from stories about events in each household to army stories, and one of the men were then to turn to another with a display of uncertainty about some detail of army experience, the relationship invoked would be "fellow soldiers," not spouses. Moreover, this shift in topic would also have consequences for how those present were aligned to the stories in progress. During the household stories, the wife of the teller would be the knowing recipient and the others present would be unknowing recipients; displays of uncertainty about household affairs could be addressed to her. However, when talk turned to war stories, the men who had shared army experience would be knowing recipients (and the potential addresses of requests about problematic information), while their wives would become unknowing recipients. Holding type of action constant but shifting topic would thus modify both the type of relationship that was relevant at the moment, and the way in which those present were organized relative to each other as participants in the talk in progress.

Similarly, holding topic constant but modifying the action in progress would also change the structure of relationships that were visible and operative at the moment. This is in fact precisely what happens when Mike turns away from his unknowing recipients to address the request for information to Phyllis. Before this occurs, Mike is not displaying in his talk his relationship to Phyllis (note that he says not "*We* were watching Johnny Carson" but "*I* was watching Johnny Carson one night"), and indeed the story as begun could well be told in a way that made no reference to Mike's domestic arrangements. As Mike begins his story, he is not talking as a husband, or as someone in any way tied to Phyllis. That identity, and the relationship it is embedded within, emerges as relevant only with the request to Phyllis. Moreover, the range of phenomena that can alter the social relationships that are visible in the talk of the moment are quite varied, with the effect that even small changes in the structure of the talk can significantly alter the social relationships that emerge as salient at a particular moment (note, for example, the consequences of changing a single pronoun in [3]).

One implication of this is that an analyst can not conceptualize social identities and context as static attributes of settings and participants. Rather, it is necessary to look at them as dynamic phenomena that emerge and change as the talk in progress unfolds.[5]

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[5] For another analysis that bears on this argument, see Maynard and Zimmerman (1984).

The request to Phyllis is relevant to her relationship with Mike in another way as well. As noted above, many types of action, including the story that Mike is now telling, propose that an appropriate recipient to them is an unknowing recipient, i.e., has not yet heard the story now being told. This poses a systematic problem for spouses (Sacks, October 19, 1971) in that their shared experience includes knowledge of each other's stories. However, they also attend as a couple many events where these stories will be told (such as the picnic in [1]).

This leads to a set of concrete troubles, ranging from the nontelling spouse's boredom, to interruptive competition for telling the story (see C. Goodwin, 1981, p. 156–58 for a specific example). Speakers, however, can organize their talk in ways that are sensitive to the interactive presence of parties who already know the story being told. For example, a speaker can embed actions designed for a knowing recipient within the larger telling addressed to the unknowing recipients, and thus build a turn capable of providing for the participation of both (cf. C. Goodwin, 1981,

Chapter 5). This appears to be the strategy when Mike displays uncertainty about a detail of the event he is describing, and addresses to his spouse a request for the missing information. The action to Phyllis includes her within the field of action being invoked through the telling of his story. He is thus able to build a turn at talk that provides for the participation of both unknowing and knowing recipients.

The solution that Mike employs to the problem of making Phyllis an appropriate recipient of his story is not idiosyncratic but rather represents a pattern by which tellers attend to the various knowledge-states of recipients. Thus when speakers are telling stories to others in the presence of their spouse, quite frequently they become uncertain about something they are saying, shift their gaze to their spouse, and address a request for information or verification to the spouse. The following provide examples (note in the sections of talk that are addressed to the spouse the rising intonation, indicated in the transcript by a question mark, as well as the pauses and sound stretches which are characteristic components of word searches). Gaze direction is indicated above the utterance:

(4) G.99:385

((Speaker is talking about having her ears pierced.))
Pat: Jere had to help me. I gotta twist it.
         They told her to twist
                    Unknowing Recipient
         it com'pletely around like six times.
                    Knowing Recipient
         (0.'8) three times a day or something?

(5) G.99:380

                    Unknowing Recipient

Pat: They Just s:taple it. And the earring
         is in and you leave it in. (0.4) for:,
                    Knowing Recipient
         (0.6) for:, (0.4) six weeks or
         something?

(6) G.75:290

                    Unknowing Recipient

Barb: Gordie bought some Orange Crush at
         Rink's this morning.
                    Knowing Recipient (Gordie)

         Six? For *what?*

In short, requests that appear to index defective speech performance or psychological states provide one resource for dealing with interactive problems, for example, building turns that can provide for the participation of both knowing and unknowing recipients.

SPEAKER'S UNCERTAINTY

The method used to address different types of recipients within a single turn does, however, pose a puzzle of its own: if *recipients' states of knowledge* are relevant to speaker's gaze movement from one to another, why does the request that provides for this movement display as the reason for its occurrence a change in the state of *speaker's* knowledge (i.e., that speaker becomes uncertain about something that he or she is describing)? An event that has clear social and interactive consequences seems to emerge from "within the mind" of the speaker alone, as though it is the product of psychological processes that have no social component.

We may solve this puzzle by considering the way in which relevant actions propose particular states of knowledge for speaker as well as recipient. Moreover, the proposed states of knowledge for speaker and addressee are linked, so that if one changes so must the other. Thus in acting as a *teller,* speaker proposes not only that appropriate recipients are *not* yet informed about the event being told, but also that teller *is* so informed. However, when making a *request,* speaker proposes that recipient has information

that speaker lacks (or is uncertain about), and this indeed provides the warrant for the request.

	Speaker	Recipient
Telling	*Knowing*	*Unknowing*
Request	*Unknowing*	*Knowing*

Thus a complementary relationship is maintained: if recipient is *unknowing,* speaker is *knowing,* while if recipient is *knowing,* speaker is *unknowing.* The effect of this complementarity is that a speaker who wishes to address a knowing rather than an unknowing recipient must also change the state of his or her own displayed knowledge.

The extent to which a speaker in such circumstances displays his or her self as unknowing is, however, systematically minimized. Thus in (4) and (5), speaker correctly produces the information at issue in the request but marks it (for example by pronouncing it with rising intonation) as problematic, i.e., she produces a request for verification rather than an outright request for information. In so doing she constructs an action that can validly locate a knowing recipient as its addressee, but changes her own state of knowledge no more than is necessary, i.e., she displays almost complete access to the information marked as problematic. In (1), speaker, with his wh-question, does request information that he explicitly marks as not having available, but he then immediately produces a candidate version of that information (the equal sign indicates that no gap whatsoever occurs between "name." and "Blake?"):

(1) G.86:490

Mike: *What* was that guy's name. = Blake?

In essence, Mike immediately changes his request for information to a request for verification, an action that reduces the uncertainty being displayed. Such a process of minimization is precisely what would be expected if phenomena relevant to the occurrence of the request included not only psychological processes internal to the speaker, but also social and interactive tasks, such as designing talk for alternative types of recipients.

Speakers working to include a knowing recipient in talk otherwise designed for unknowing recipients thus seem to be simultaneously attending to a number of conflicting constraints:

(1) Speaker is not only already informed about the material being talked about at the moment, but is using that status as the basis for acting as a teller to unknowing recipients;

(2) The action to the knowing recipient must treat its addressee as already informed about the substance of the talk; and

(3) Many of the actions available for doing this propose a complementary distribution of information between speaker and hearer, with the effect that speaker must display his or her self as lacking the information being requested.

By minimizing the extent to which they display themselves as lacking the information being requested, but at the same time displaying some uncertainty, speakers attend to these constraints, while also maintaining their position as tellers who are well informed about what they are talking about.

These are social organizational matters. Drawing attention to them is not meant to suggest that any real difficulty a speaker might be having in finding a word, or other processes internal to the speaker, are not relevant to such displays. Rather, psychological *and* social phenomena are deeply intertwined in the organization of such events.

SHAPING THE REQUEST TO THE KNOWING RECIPIENT

In some ways, Mike's request seems to be a poor way to move forward with the telling of his story. As was noted above, his request leads to a long digression in which several different parties try to recover the name that is the object of the request, despite the fact that Mike produces what turns out to be the correct name immediately. Indeed, when we look more closely at the request, we find that its structure systematically provides the opportunity for the extensive digression that follows it:

(1) With his wh-question Mike explicitly asks others to contribute to his talk. Indeed the request constitutes a prototypical example of what Sacks et al. (1974) have called a *First Pair Part*, an action that systematically transfers the floor to someone other than speaker at its completion.

(2) By formatting his action in this way Mike provides a specific place—the end of the turn-constructional unit containing the request—for others to produce their talk, and this is indeed where the initial response to it (Curt's "The critic") occurs.[6]

(3) Though the request is addressed specifically to Phyllis, the particular type of information that it deals with (events on a late night television show) is something that parties other than the speaker's spouse may have access to as well

The way in which Mike's request is formatted as an action that invites someone else to talk into his story thus makes his telling vulnerable to interruption and digression, and indeed this does occur. In view of this, it is relevant to ask whether a request of this type could be formatted in a way that lacked such vulnerability.

Alternative Formats for Building a Request to a Knowing Recipient

The data so far examined have revealed a number of different ways in which speakers can build requests to knowing recipients. We will now look in more detail at the cognitive and interactive consequences of various alternatives.

In (1), Mike used a wh-question to address his knowing recipient, while in examples (4)–(6), speakers constructed a display of uncertainty by pronouncing an item with rising intonation while turning to the knowing recipient:

(4) G.99:385

Pat: Jere had to help me. I gotta twist it.
      They told her to twist it completely around
      like six times.
                 Knowing Recipient
      ┌─────────────┴──────────────────
      (0.8) three times a day or something?

Using different syntactic and intonational resources for the construction or requests has different consequences for the cognitive operations that recipients perform, and the responses that they are invited to make. In order to produce an answer to a request with a wh-question, its recipient must search his or her knowledge of the event being described for details that the speaker is unable to provide. In the answer to the request, recipient produces these details, for example, the name being sought. The recipient of such a request thus

begins an active search for material that the speaker has failed to provide, precisely the type of activity that is found in situations in which a knowing recipient interjects additions and corrections into principle speaker's telling (C. Goodwin, 1981, p. 156–57). A request with such a structure invites its recipient to produce a reply that contributes substantive new information to the telling in progress

By way of contrast, a request made by producing a particular term but marking it as problematic projects a different type of answer, a display of confirmation or disconfirmation. If confirmation occurs, recipient is not offered the opportunity to contribute substantive information to the speaker's description. Such a request also engages the mind of its recipient in particular types of operations. In order to provide an answer to the request, the recipient should compare what the speaker has said and marked as problematic with his or her own knowledge of the event being described. The recipient is not, however, asked to examine

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[6] Speakers performing actions such as stories frequently receive (or negotiate) the right to produce a turn consisting of multiple turn-constructional units without others having an opportunity to take the floor at the end of each unit (C. Goodwin, 1984, Sacks, 1974). A request such as that produced by Mike in (1) provides one systematic way of putting such organization on hold (the story remains something to be returned to when the issues being dealt with in the request are resolved) and inviting others to speak in the midst of the story.

other aspects of the event. Thus, though both these structures can be used to address a knowing recipient, they have different consequences for the subsequent course of the interaction. While a wh-question grants its recipient rights to substantive participation in the telling, requesting verification of a problematic item projects minimum disruption of speaker's ongoing description to the unknowing recipients.

Looking at these data from a slightly different perspective, it can be observed that the situated identity offered the recipient of each of these actions is quite different. A "question answerer" is invited and requested to perform different types of action than a "verifier." Though the distinction between a "question answerer" and a "verifier" might initially appear rather subtle, it is in fact quite consequential for the trajectory of subsequent talk. Moreover, the way in which discourse identities such as these are formulated in the midst of moment to moment talk may have consequences for larger relationship patterns among people who regularly interact with each other. For example, who will get to tell a common story is an issue that couples can be quite sensitive to. The actions being examined here provide members of a couple with a range of resources for collaboratively organizing the telling of a shared story in a variety of different ways. Through use of them, a knowing recipient can be given opportunities for substantive participation of different types at various points

within the telling. Indeed, by addressing an appropriate wh-question to a knowing recipient, one member of the couple can transfer the telling of the story to the other (C. Goodwin, 1986). The patterns of interaction made possible by such structures stand in marked contrast to the situation that arises when a knowing recipient who is denied the opportunity for participation either retreats in boredom, or actively competes with the partner. It can be argued that the place where members of a couple constitute their "relationship" is not in talk *about* that relationship and the nature of their "commitment," but rather through the details of the way in which they organize their mundane interaction with each other.

Requests made with wh-questions and requests for verification of items marked as problematic have been contrasted as discretely different ways of addressing a knowing recipient. In reality, they stand at the ends of a continuum that includes a range of intermediate forms. Thus one very common way of constructing an action soliciting verification from a knowing recipient contains a wh-word. However, instead of using the wh-word to begin a new sentence devoted exclusively to the request, it is placed as a pro-term in the syntactic position of the word being sought. Quite frequently the pro-term is followed immediately by a candidate version of what that term might be, which is pronounced with rising intonation. For example:

(7) G.75:260

    Bea: I've got a daughter:, en s:on in law
         →that's won what. = Seven?

(3) G.126:330

    Jane: We went t- I went ta bed really
            early. = Paul left like
         →about what. = Eleven thirty?

(8) G.75:380

    Judy: Oh:: heavens I've been off, (0.3)
         →what. three months? now?

Actions built in this way combine features of wh-requests (the wh-word) and requests for verification (the candidate answer produced with rising intonation). Though the presence of a wh-word would seem to provide for the systematic possibility of overlap and digression of the type found in (1), the potential for this occurring is minimized by first, the placement of the wh-word late in the sentence rather than at its beginning (recipients are not alerted that they should be engaged in a search for some specific piece of information until the syllable before the

place provided for an answer) and second, the way in which speaker immediately follows the wh-word with her own version of what the sought-for information might be.

RESTRUCTURING THE INTERACTION OF
THE MOMENT

Analysis in the present paper is focusing on a situation in which a speaker is describing something to uninformed recipients in the presence of another, informed party. It has been

found that one way in which such speakers can include the knowing recipient within the turn addressed to the unknowing recipients is by displaying uncertainty about something in their description, and addressing a request about that information to the knowing recipient. From such a perspective, speaker's display of uncertainty constitutes a way of dealing with rather general problems that emerge in talk for people, such as spouses, who have many of their experiences in common. We will now shift from the level of looking at how such a request ties the details of the current talk to wider social identities, to study instead how actions with these properties might constitute resources for dealing with local

issues that emerge within the immediate interaction.

The Action and Its Local Environment

To summarize, in (1), Mike, by formatting his request to Phyllis as a wh-question, shapes it so that it is particularly vulnerable to overlap and subsequent talk from others, which it indeed receives despite the fact that Mike is able to immediately provide the name being sought. Moreover, alternatives exist for building such a request that would have left it less vulnerable. For example:

> I was watching *Johnny Carson* one night and there was a guy by the name of what. = Blake?
> or
> I was watching *Johnny Carson* one night and there was a guy by the name of Blake?

While recognizing the possibility that Mike's choice of a particular format for his action might be idiosyncratic, or the result of cognitive processes that have no interactive component, the availability of such alternatives does nonetheless pose the question of whether the format

chosen by Mike might be able to do things in the particular environment in which it occurs that other formats could not. Exploring this possibility requires that we look carefully at the talk and interaction that precedes his request:

(1) G.86:490

                  ((The participants have been discussing recent
                        Supreme Court pornography decisions))

```
 1  Curt:   The S'preme Court really screwed up.
 2                  (0.8)
 3  Curt:   I think that's terrible. I really
 4          do.
 5  Mike:      Well,
 6  Pam:  [[ Yeah.-] I think everybody should be
 7          allowed to (0.1) s:ee what they want er
 8  Pam:      read what they want. Bu:t,
 9  Mike: [[ I was watching Johnny Carson] one night
10          en there was a guy
11  Phyl:     Yuh:, 'h if they wanna go t'see it they should.
12  Mike: [[ by the na- What was that guy's name. = [Blake?
13  Curt:                                            [The Critic.
```

To summarize what will be found when we look more closely at this sequence, Mike's request to Phyllis occurs just after she has entered a line of talk that is competing with Mike's for the floor. The particular format he chooses for the request makes greater claims on her attentiveness and coparticipation than alternative formats would, and thus constitutes a more powerful tool for attempting to dislodge her from the competing line, and thereby establish his talk as the only line of talk in progress.

Overlap and Schism

We will now look at this process in more detail. In lines 5 and 6, just after Curt's turn has

come to completion, Mike and Pam self-select as next speaker simultaneously. The overlap that thus results is resolved in a characteristic fashion: one party, in this case Mike, relinquishes and allows the other, Pam, to continue. However, just after the first possible completion of Pam's sentence (which occurs near the end of line 7), Mike reasserts his claim to a turn by overlapping her continuing talk (line 8) with the beginning of this story (line 9).

Participants' procedures for negotiating overlap (c.f. Jefferson, 1973; 1983a; 1983b; Schegloff, forthcoming), rather than being chaotic, might constitute something like a small vernacular legal system. When Mike relinquishes to

Pam, he does not abandon the turn he was about to begin and grant her unlimited rights to talk, but rather claims residual rights to the floor he has given up, and moreover insists that that floor revert to him at a specific point: as soon as the party he has yielded to can be seen to have completed a turn, i.e., at the first possible completion of her sentence. As in legal contests, claims advanced by one party can be disputed by another, which is what each party does during the overlap in lines 8 and 9, when each refuses to relinquish to the other. Their behavior here stands in marked contrast to the way in which the overlap in lines 5 and 6 was handled.

When Pam stops talking in line 8, Mike's talk emerges in the clear and he has the floor to himself. However, Phyllis soon begins a new utterance directed to what Pam has said (line 11). Once again Mike's talk is overlapped. Phyllis' action marks the initiation of a schism (Goffman, 1963, p. 91; Sacks et al., 1974, p.

713; Scheflen, 1974, p. 62–63) in the conversation. A participation framework that includes several participants and is thus capable of sustaining itself independently (i.e., a structure that contains enough people to simultaneously occupy the positions of speaker and recipient, and provide for an exchange of speakers) exists in competition with Mike's. Note that insofar as Phyllis is already informed about what Mike is describing, she is a likely party to enter a competing conversation, and indeed the absence of a position for her in Mike's turn may provide some motivation for such an action.

Dislodging a Knowing Recipient from a Competing Line of Talk

Immediately after Phyllis starts to talk, Mike abandons his projected sentence, turns to Phyllis and directs his request for the name to her.

(1) G.86:490

```
Mike:    I was watching Johnny Carson one night
         en there was a guy
Phyl:    ⌈Yuh:, 'h if they wanna go t'see it they should
      [[⌊by the na- What was that guy's name.
                  ↑
```
Mike Shifts Gaze To Phyllis

If Mike can dislodge Phyllis from her alignment to Pam, their participation framework will dissolve. Mike constructs his request in such a way that its ability to attract the attention of someone not now attending him is amplified.

(1) By interrupting his current talk in midword and beginning a new sentence devoted exclusively to the request, he produces a restart in his talk. Other research (C. Goodwin, 1981, Chapter 2) has revealed

that speakers who do not have the attention of their recipients can use phrasal breaks, such as restarts and pauses, to request their coparticipation in the turn. Recipients who have not been gazing at the speaker characteristically start to move their gaze to the speaker right after such a phrasal break. Thus the pause in the following draws recipient's gaze:

(9) G.50:3:50

Dianne: He pu:t uhm. (0.8) Tch! Put crabmeat on
                         ↑
Recipient Brings Gaze to Speaker

Indeed phrasal breaks such as this are able to secure the attention even of parties who appear to have been completely disattending the talk in progress. By introducing his action to Phyllis with a restart, Mike thus both increases its visibility to someone (such as Phyllis) who is not currently attending him, and uses an action that on its own can be heard as a type of request to a recipient.

The use of a phrasal break to request recipient's attention has other conse-

quences as well. For example, recipient's lack of attentiveness is not explicitly acknowledged. Note that if it were, the focus of the participants could shift from the present topic to talk about problems in their interaction (e.g., instead of continuing with his story, Mike might find himself in a dispute with Phyllis about whether she had in fact been disattending him, why she should be expected to pay exclusive attention to him, etc.). However, by using the phrasal break within

the word search to request recipient's gaze, a speaker can not only maintain his current line of talk as the topic of the moment, but draw heightened attention to it. In brief, a speaker's engagement in a search for forgotten material, by virtue of the way in which it makes the talk marked as problematic particularly salient, can simultaneously draw recipients *away* from other events that are also in progress, without, however, bringing into focus the fact that recipients have been disattending speaker.

(2) The salience of Mike's action is further amplified by the special emphasis given to the first word in his sentence *"What."* Such emphasis helps the new utterance stand out from the background of prior talk.

Other formats for building such a request do not produce restarts in the talk. Thus, while the format used by Mike is more vulnerable to overlap and subsequent digression than its alternatives, it is also more capable of gaining the attention of someone, such as Phyllis, who is not currently attending the speaker. In the particular environment in which it occurs, it is a more powerful and appropriate action than alternative ways of formatting the request would be.

The structure of the request facilitates other tasks posed in the interaction as well. In that Phyllis is not currently attending Mike, the request requires her to not only answer him, but also sets her task of returning her orientation to Mike. The use of a wh-question provides its recipient with more time between the point where the action is visible (i.e., the first word of the sentence alerts recipients to the fact that speaker is making a request) and the place where an answer is due than the other formats examined, something that could be quite relevant to a recipient who had to make a substantial shift in her orientation. In addition, it offers the recipient of the request the opportunity for substantive participation in the telling (providing the name and possibly other information) rather than mere acknowledgement of the correctness of something that speaker has marked as problematic. The use of a restart also allows Mike to initiate his request immediately,

something that might be quite relevant if it is in fact responding to something that has just occurred in the interaction.

Linguists and psychologists have used phenomena such as the restart, and the search for the name that Mike initiates, as prototypical examples of the "speech errors" that demonstrate the defective performance of speakers in actual talk, and both constitute examples of what Freud (1975) analyzed as the intrusion of unconscious, psychodynamic processes into everyday life. Looking at such phenomena from a different perspective, the present analysis has provided some demonstration that such events constitute artful solutions to social tasks posed in the midst of moment-to-moment interaction. Such a perspective is quite consistent with Giddens' (1984, p. 103) argument that the "flawed character of day-to-day talk . . . is actually generic to its character as enmeshed in human *praxis.*" I.e., rather than responding primarily to the distortions of the unconscious, "talk is saturated with the practical demands of the routine enactment of social life."

Recipients' Response

Though it is common in studies of language to analyze the organization of talk from the perspective of the speaker, the hearer is not a mere addressee but an active coparticipant. In these data, despite the way in which Mike designs his talk specifically for Phyllis, and even turns away from his other recipients towards her as he speaks it, she does not respond to it, or in any way acknowledge that Mike has said anything to her. Some demonstration that Mike himself reads what she is doing as failing to coparticipate in the action he has addressed to her is provided by the fact that immediately at the end of his request he turns away from Phyllis and back to his original recipients, while producing a possible version (pronounced with tentative rising intonation) of the name being sought.

The combination of a visible request for help, and the failure of its addressee to respond to that request, creates the possibility for others to try to aid the party in trouble, and the extended multiparty search for the name is begun. The following is a transcript of the entire sequence we have been examining.

(1) G.86:490

```
1 Curt:    The S'preme Court really screwed up.
2               (0.8)
3 Curt:    I think that's terrible. I really
4          do.
5 Mike:    [[ Well,
6 Pam:        Yeah.-] I think everybody should be
```

```
 7              allowed to (0.1) s:ee what they want er
 8  Pam:    ⌜⌜ read what they want. Bu:t,
 9  Mike:  ⌞⌞ I was watching Johnny Carson⌋ one night
10             en there was a guy
11  Phyl:   ⌜⌜Yuh:, 'h if they wanna go t'see it they should.
12  Mike:  ⌞⌞by the na- What was that guy's name. ═ ⌜Blake?
13  Curt:                                         ⌞The Critic.
14  Mike:   Blake?
15  Mike:  ⌜No.
16  Pam:   ⌞A no-
17                  (0.6)
18  Mike:   Rob⌜ert Blake?
19  Pam:       ⌞Reed?
20                  (0.2)
21  Mike:   Er somp'n like 'at.⌜═He was-
22  Pam:                       ⌞Robert Reed.
23             Robert Reed.
24  Mike:   No:, ⌜This guy's-
25  Curt:        ⌞No:, Rex Reed.
26  Curt:  ⌜⌜°(              )
27  Pam:   ⌞⌞Rex Reed.⌜═Yuh.
28  Mike:             ⌞This guy's name was Blake,
29             (0.4) He was in the movie uh:, (0.6) In
30             Cold Blood
```

Several features of this sequence require additional comment. Note that despite the fact that Mike has the correct name available in line 12, he is not able to produce it definitively until line 28, after an extended search for it has ensued, and with another couple, Pam and Curt, looking for and eventually finding the name of a different guest that they saw on the show. Moreover, within this sequence Mike's actions display a stepwise movement from tentativeness to certainty. Such events provide some evidence that rather than being governed entirely by prior intentions, actions rely as well on the interpretive work done by their recipients (Duranti, 1984). Once a speaker produces an action, he or she is responsible for all of the legitimate interpretations that others might make of that action, i.e., once Mike has marked the name as problematic, he is committed to whatever work might ensue to resolve that problem before he can return to the onward development of his story. As Sacks (May 29, 1968, p. 10) notes:

> Once a thing gets done, whatever gets done, it may have to be dealt with for whatever it is, independently of the sort of thing it's directed to accomplishing.

Speaking of the interaction between language and thought, Sapir (1968, p. 14) observed that while a word may be a key to new concepts, symbols and ideas, "it may also be a fetter." Much the same argument could be made about language as a mode of action. Mike's request provides resources for restructuring the situation of the moment, but at the same time constrains the subsequent action of the party who uses it by making them responsible for whatever legitimate interpretations might be applied to what they have just said.

CONCLUSION

The data which have been examined provide some demonstration of how displaying uncertainty can invoke particular patterns of social organization within a field of action that is interactively constituted. Using a display of uncertainty to make a request to a knowing recipient provides resources for dealing with both systematic problems faced in talk by parties, such as couples, who share many of their experiences, and with local contingencies that emerge in the midst of interaction. With such a request, a speaker can attempt to rearrange the structure of the current interaction. From such a perspective the social character of an utterance lies not in its ability to convey to hearers a speech act (or sequence of speech acts), but rather in the way in which its production embodies a course of action constituted through the collaborative work of separate individuals. Moreover, using such issues to investigate different formats for constructing actions permits us to see how alternative ways of building the action have differential consequences for how the interaction of the moment is to be structured.

APPENDIX

Transcription

Data are transcribed using the Jefferson transcription system (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 731–33). For purposes of

the analysis to be developed in this paper, the following transcription conventions are the most relevant:
— Punctuation symbols are used to mark intonation changes, rather than as grammatical symbols.
  • A period indicates a falling contour.
  • A question mark indicates a raising contour.
  • A comma indicates a falling-raising contour.
— Italics indicates some form of emphasis, which may be signaled by changes in pitch and/or amplitude.
— A bracket joining the talk of separate speakers marks the point at which overlapping talk begins.
— A dash marks a sudden cut-off of the current sound.
— An equal sign indicates that talk attached by the equal sign follows prior talk without any gap whatsoever.
— Colons indicate that the sound just before the colon has been noticeably lengthened.
— Numbers within parentheses (e.g., "(0.5)"), mark silences in seconds and tenths of seconds.

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