8
Recognizing Assessable Names

Charles Goodwin
UCLA

Robert Hopper's work has been centrally concerned with the question of how human beings produce action in concert with each other by deploying the resources and practices used to organize talk-in-interaction (e.g., Hopper, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1999; Hopper & Chen, 1996; Hopper & Glenn, 1994; Hopper & LeBaron, 1998). The present chapter explores one facet of this process, focusing on the way in which culturally relevant understanding of the names used to identify valued objects is made visible through specific interactive procedures.

What is investigated here is the ability of a hearer to "spontaneously," "on his own," recognize the assessable character of an object being named (a *Cord,* a particular type of car built before World War II). The name is dropped in a "deadpan" fashion, without alerting the hearer to its assessable status, and thus poses a recognition test for the hearer.[1] Is he a competent member of the domain of discourse indexed by the name, such that he can recognize on his own the special status of the item that speaker has just named? Indeed, in the data examined herein, there are two hearers, only one of whom passes this test.

SIGNPOSTED ASSESSMENTS

This practice of producing assessable names as recognition tests must, however, be seen as part of a larger family of practices that also includes alternative procedures used by speakers to explicitly signal their hearers that an assessable is about to be produced. As a point of departure for the phenomenon explored in this chapter, some of these are briefly described. In earlier work, Marjorie Goodwin and I (C.Goodwin & M.H.Goodwin, 1987) investigated how turns at talk containing assessments can be organized as a multiparty interactive activity. Thus in the following, as the speaker pronounces an assessment adjective "good," the entity being assessed—"asparagus pie"—is formulated as a highly valued object through a range of both talk and embodied displays by both speaker and hearer:

(1)

Nancy:	Jeff made en asparagus pie.
	It was s::so [: goo:d.
Tasha:	[I Love it.

Here, the hearer simultaneously produces a positive evaluation at the very moment that the assessment adjective is spoken. She doesn't wait until after speaker has said "good," but

[1] in that talk about cars in this fashion is explicitly marked by the participants themselves as a distinctively gendered, male practice, I use the male pronoun to talk about an addressee of this talk.

instead starts to evaluate it before the speaker has even stated her own evaluation. What interactive practices make such concurrent assessment possible? Before producing the talk that constitutes the peak of the assessment, the speaker "signposts" its upcoming arrival with an intonationally enhanced intensifier "s::so_i". The hearer can use this prepositioned evaluative frame to project what is about to happen, and indeed she does so by starting her own assessment at the very end of the intensifier.

In Example 1, the projective signpost took the form of an intensifier ("s::so:") and the assessment peak occurred at the place where the speaker produced an assessment adjective. These slots can, however, be filled with other types of units. For example, one very common type of assessment is formatted as a noun phrase within which an assessment adjective, such as *beautiful* precedes a description of the object being assessed.

(2)

Paul:	Tell Debbie about the dog on the golf course t'day.
	((intervening talk omitted))
	Noun Phrase
Eileen:	An this beautiful, (.) [Irish Setter
	I[rish Setter ((rev erently))

(3) Curt: This guy had, a beautiful, thirty two Olds

The assessment adjective tells the recipient that the object about to be described is being assessed in a particular way. Moreover, though the entity being assessed may indeed be relevant to a larger sequence of activity, such signposting is a local operation. Example 2 occurred in the midst of a story. Paul and Eileen had played golf together, and Paul asked Eileen to tell the others present how "a dog" stole the speaker's golf ball. Eileen's pronunciation of "Irish Setter," just after the assessment adjective "beautiful," is overlapped by an intonationally enhanced, appreciative version of the same name by Paul. Note how Paul's treatment of the Irish Setter as an assessable differs markedly from the way in which he formulates this same dog within the frame of the report being made by the larger story, that is, as a protagonist in a laughable event (see C.Goodwin & M.H.Goodwin, 1987, for more detailed analysis). By placing signposts before the peak of the assessment the speaker informs the recipient of what is about to happen, with the effect that when this talk is actually spoken, the recipient is already in a position to treat it as an assessment.

Signposting is, however, but one of many ways in which assessments can be organized as an interactive activity. One of these alternatives is examined next. Instead of announcing to the recipient that what is about to be said should be assessed in a particular way, speaker produces the assessable "out of the blue." In that the talk containing the assessable has not been categorized as such (e.g., with an anticipatory signpost), the recipient is faced with the task of discovering that an assessable has been produced on his or her own. The following provides an example. In these data, the participants are car buffs. Curt is trying to restore a Model T and asks Mike where he can get a rear spring for the car:

(4)

1	Mike:	Lemme ask *a guy* at work.
2		He's gotta bunch a' old clunkers.
3		(0.2)
4	Mike:	Well I can't say that they're ol: clunkers=
5		eez gotta Co:rd?
6		(0.1)
7	Mike:	Two Co:rds,
8		(1.0)
9	Mike	[And
10	Curt:	[Not original,
11		(0.7)
12	Mike:	Oh yes. Very original,
13	Curt:	Oh:: reall[y?
14	Mike:	[Yah. Ve(h) ry origi(h)nal.
15	Curt:	˙Awhh are you shit tin m [e?
16	Mike:	[No I'm not.

In Lines 5–7 Mike describes a particular type of car, a Cord, without explicitly assessing it. However his recipient, Curt, treats such a car as a very highly valued object with a series of elaborate displays in Lines 10, 13, and 15, for example, asking Mike "are you shittin me." Once Curt uncovers the assessable character of the car, Mike joins him in displaying appreciation of it. Thus Curt initially treats what Mike said as so remarkable that it can hardly be believed by saying "not original," a proposal that if true would diminish the assessable status of the cars being evaluated. This question provides an opportunity for Mike in Line 12 to emphasize that they are indeed original, and in so doing to display his own appreciation of the cars. Note the placement of the word "Very" before "origi(h)nal," the enhanced intonation with which both of these words are spoken, and the emphasis provided by placing "Oh" before "yes" at the beginning of the turn. The process of assessing the cars thus becomes a mutual, collaborative activity.

The assessment-relevant nonvocal behavior that occurs in this sequence merits special comment. While saying "Oh yes'" in Line 12, Mike shakes his head from side to side. Rather than contradicting the "yes" in his talk, this head shake simultaneously displays that he is disagreeing with the assessmentdiminishing proposal just made by Curt (that the Cords were "not original") and constitutes a form of assessment activity in its own right, an "oh wow" headshake. Because these phenomena have already been described in detail elsewhere (M.H.Goodwin, 1980; Schegloff, 1987) they are not discussed further here.

In these data, Curt is able to recognize the exalted status of a Cord without being explicitly told that it is an assessable by Mike. This suggests that speakers have available to them at least two alternatives for introducing an assessable into talk:

1. Announce to recipient that what is about to be said is an assessable. For example put an assessment adjective like *beautiful* before it.

2. Produce an object without marking it as an assessable and thus place recipients in a position where they must recognize its assessable status on their own.

RECIPIENT RECOGNITION AS AN INTERACTIVE PROCESS

For clarity, recognition of an unmarked assessable has so far been treated as something done entirely by the recipient working alone. I now want to explore the possibility that the process through which the recipient recognizes even an unmarked assessable can itself be organized as an interactive activity.

Seeding the Ground for an Assessable

In Example 4, despite the speaker's deadpan production and lack of explicit assessment terms, there are in fact some features of the talk that might guide the recipient to see what is about to be said as an assessable. Mike first describes the cars of his friend as "old clunkers," but then says that they are **not** old clunkers:

(4)

1	Mike:	Lemme ask a guy at work.
2		He's gotta bunch a' old clunkers.
3		(0.2)
4	Mike :	Well I can't say that they' re ol: clunk- ers=
5		eez gotta Co:rd?
6		(0.1)

The recipient is thus instructed to hear what is about to be described as something that stands in marked contrast to "old clunkers." Through the operation of such contrast organization, the assessable name in Line 5 emerges within an environment that has already been subtly shaped by its presence; the shadow of its properties become visible before the object itself. Though not explicitly marking the name being produced as an assessable, Mike has nonetheless seeded the ground for its recognition.

Holding the Name Available

Despite the way in which its status has been foreshadowed, when the word "Co:rd?" is actually spoken it is not treated as an assessable. Mike ends his pronunciation of the word with a rising contour (indicated in the transcript by a question mark), an act that frequently functions as a solicit for a response from the recipient, and leaves a space after producing the word for the recipient to respond. However, the recipient does nothing and in Line 6 a gap ensues.

Mike thus produces a **response-relevant object** that does not receive an appropriate response. He now employs a standard procedure available to speakers for pursuing a response: rather than moving his talk forward into new material, he redisplays this object for his recipient (Line 7):

(4)

4	Mike :	Well I can't say that they' re ol: clunk- ers=
5		eez gotta Co:rd?

6		(0.1)
7	Mike:	Two Co:rds,

Indeed, in the present case Mike upgrades the assessable from "a Cord'" in Line 5 to "Two Cords'" in Line 7. Continuing to hold the assessable available in this fashion both extends the time available to recipient for producing a response[2] and also subtly signals (e.g., through the reiteration of the assessable and its upgrade) that further response is relevant.

Mike also performs a nonvocal gesture that helps to solicit a response. To look at how this gesture operates it is helpful to consider the actions of the third party present during this exchange, Gary. Recall that the sequence began with Curt asking for help in finding a high arch spring for his Model T. Right after Mike mentions his friend with the "old clunkers," Gary offers the name of someone else (it is later revealed that this person builds street roadsters and is thus a possible source for the spring):

(4)

1	Mike:	Lemme ask a guy at work.
2		He's gotta bunch a' old clunkers.
→	Gary:	Y'know Marlon Liddle?
3		(0.2)
4	Mike :	Well I can't say that they're ol: clunkers=
5		eez gotta Co:rd?
6		(0.1)
7	Mike:	Two Co:rds,
8		(1.0)
9	Mike	[And
10	Curt:	[Not original,

Just as Mike reveals that the cars are not old clunkers, Curt orients to the fact that Gary has just said something by shifting his gaze noticeably away from Mike and toward Gary. He continues to gaze away from Mike until after Line 7. Thus throughout the time that Mike is announcing the presence of the Cords, Curt is looking away from him. As Mike says "Two Cords" in Line 7, he moves his hand forward with two fingers extended in a V (i.e., a hand gesture for the number two) toward Curt and then back to his own face. This very noticeable gesture occurs right at the point where Mike is upgrading his assessment and appears to act as an additional solicit to Curt (for more detailed analysis of how gestures can be used to attract the gaze of nongazing recipients, see C. Goodwin, 1986b). Very shortly after this happens, Curt brings his gaze back to Mike with a movement that also shows heightened attentiveness to what has just been said (e.g., while moving, Curt raises his head). When this movement is completed, he begins his vocal response to the assessable in Line 10, intercepting Mike's appending "And." Note that Curt's head movement

[2] See C.Goodwin (1981, chapter 3) for other analysis of how speakers add new segments to their talk in order to coordinate the unit production of that talk with relevant actions of their recipients.

occupies the silence in Line 8 with the beginning of his response. Thus, unlike the much shorter silence in Line 6, it is not a gap, but instead becomes a space filled with assessment relevant activity.[3]

In brief, here Curt, unlike Gary, is able to display his ability to independently recognize the exalted status of a *Cord*. However that "independent" display has in fact been made possible through a subtle interactive process of prompting from Mike, who has worked hard to hold the assessable name available until Curt can see its import and react appropriately to it.

More generally, here we find an instance of what seems a more general strategy of downplaying something before its emergence, and then dropping it as a bomb, so that its unique assessable character is highlighted by its sudden emergence within a relevant but unlikely environment. Indeed, one can speculate that the ideal way this sequence would have run off would have been for Curt to have asked what kind of "old clunkers" "the guy" had, and then received "a Cord" in response. Note that unlike the congruent assessments in Example 1, where both participants were enthusiastically evaluating the assessable, the current strategy is characterized by asymmetry in participation, with each party displaying markedly different affect. The party dropping the bomb, here Mike, talks with deadpan, cool nonchalance. By way of contrast the recipient of the bomb displays shocked, elaborated amazement.

CONCLUSION: ASSESSMENTS AND THE INTERACTIVE ORGANIZATION OF CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Recognition of assessable names, and the tasks it sets its recipients, sheds interesting light on the organization of cultural knowledge as an interactive phenomenon. One of the central themes that has motivated research in cultural anthropology from Malinowski through contemporary studies of cognition, is the question of how members of a society recognize and properly interpret in a culturally meaningful way events in their phenomenal world. Building a response to an unmarked assessable is relevant to this process in a number of different ways.

First, in order to deal with the assessable properly recipient must *recognize* the object that speaker is talking about. This is by no means a trivial matter. For example, one person viewing these data heard the car that Mike was talking about as a (Honda) Accord, something that led her to become quite puzzled about Curt's reaction to it. Being able to properly identify items such as this is one of the things that establishes within the talk of the moment a participant's competence, and indeed membership (or non-membership) in a specific culture. In the present data, the cultural world at issue is that of car buffs, but equivalent recognition tests can be posed in almost any domain of discourse, for example, science, politics, farming, sports, and so on. Frequently names are used to describe assessable objects in talk, and a very interesting literature on the interactive organization of reference and name recognition now exists (c.f. Clark, 1996; Clark & Schaefer 1986; Clark & Wilkes-Gibbes, 1986; Isaacs & Clark 1987; Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1972).

[3] For other analysis of how nonvocal assessment activity can occupy silences, see M.H.Goodwin (1980).

Second, in order to find the assessable status of what is being talked about, the recipient must know how to rank and *evaluate* the object once it has been identified. A response to an assessable can contain an alignment display of some type (e.g., Curt's treatment of the Cords as highly valued objects). Therefore, mere recognition of the name and the entity it refers to is not sufficient to build an appropriate response to an assessable. In addition, the recipient must be able to evaluate the recognized object and properly place it within the larger cultural domain that it inhabits.

Third, the results of these operations can be publicly scrutinized by other participants. The recipient is performing the tasks of recognition and evaluation in order to build an appropriate response to the unmarked assessable. That response will display to others whether he or she did or did not recognize the assessable and how he or she evaluated it. Others can and do choose to disagree with a speaker's assessment of a particular entity. For example, shortly after the sequence being examined here, Curt proposed that a "thirty-two Olds'" should be treated as an exalted, highly valued object in much the way that the Cord here is, but Mike refused to go along with this proposal (for detailed analysis of these data, see C.Goodwin & M.H.Goodwin, 1987). Recognition and evaluation of a referent are frequently conceptualized as purely internal, psychological processes. Here, however, it becomes possible to analyze how performing these actions can be subjected to public scrutiny, confirmation, and challenge within systematic processes of interaction.

The public, interactive practices through which a name is both recognized and evaluated are quite relevant to central issues posed in the analysis of culture. For example, they permit empirical investigation of the process through which members of a society come to "share" a culture in the sense that separate individuals form judgements about the events they encounter that are congruent with those of their co-participants, but differ radically from the interpretations of these same phenomena made by members of another group. By viewing processes of categorization and evaluation within an interactive matrix, it becomes possible to shift analysis from specific cultural categories, that is, a list of fixed, stable entities argued to constitute the "culture" of the group, to the underlying social processes through which such categories are formed, tested, used, and changed as constitutive features of the activities the participants are engaged in.

Fourth, insofar as the identifications and judgments one makes can be scrutinized by others, and used to assess one's competence and membership in a particular culture, these processes provide a built-in motivation for members of a group to learn the background information, ways of speaking, and so on, necessary for appropriate participation in a specific domain of discourse. Talking about cars for these speakers is very serious business, and indeed one of the ways in which they negotiate and establish their competence and standing vis-à-vis each other. The same is true for many other domains of discourse. These interactive processes thus provide structures for both testing and motivating acquisition of particular bodies of knowledge.

Fifth, such considerations raise the question of how participants learn relevant information about a domain of discourse in the first place. Clearly a multiplicity of acquisition processes are involved.[4] The present data shed light on how assessments might be relevant to such issues. Someone listening to this talk who had never heard of a Cord before could find from the way in which it is treated by Curt and Mike (a) that a Cord is a type of car, (b) that it is a very highly valued object in this culture, and (c) something about the criteria

used to evaluate such phenomena in this particular domain of discourse, for example, that the status of a car as "original" is a most relevant attribute for judging it (i.e., this is the first question Curt raises about the Cord in Line 10). The sequence thus provides information about both the status of particular objects in this culture and ways of invoking these objects and their relevant attributes within talk. Such phenomena provide a practical resource for parties involved in the interaction. Indeed one of the men participating in this interaction, Gary, is not able to display the competence about the world of cars that Mike and Curt exhibit, and one can in fact see him trying to learn how to talk about them appropriately as the conversation unfolds (see Goodwin, 1986a).

The self-explicating resources provided by assessments are available not only to participants but also to ethnographers and analysts. Such structures provide a way of getting information about the content of a culture without querying participants. Use of methods such as this seems especially important because membership in a culture involves not merely recognition of content items, but also particular ways of talking about these items, appropriate alignment displays to them, and so on.

The phenomena investigated here provide one demonstration of how fine-grained cultural knowledge is built, organized, and deployed through precise use of the practices used to build action within talk-in-interaction.

REFERENCES

Clark, H.H. (1996). *Using language.* Cambridge England: Cambridge University Press.

Clark, H.H., & Schaefer, E.F. (1986). Collaborating on contributions to conversations. *Language and Cognitive Processes* 2(1), 19–41.

Clark, H.H., & Wilkes-Gibbes, D. (1986). Referring as a collaborative process. *Cognition, 22,* 1–39.

Goodwin, C. (1981). *Conversational organization: Interaction between speakers and hearers.* New York: Academic Press.

Goodwin, C. (1986a). Audience diversity, participation and interpretation. *Text,* 6(3), 283–316.

Goodwin, C. (1986b). Gesture as a resource for the organization of mutual orientation. *Semiotica, 62(1/2),* 29–49.

Goodwin, C., & Goodwin, M.H. (1987). Concurrent operations on talk: Notes on the interactive organization of assessments. *IPrA Papers in Pragmatics,* (1) 1–52.

Goodwin, M.H. (1980). Processes of mutual monitoring implicated in the production of description sequences. *Sociological Inquiry, 50,* 303–317.

Hopper, R. (1988). Speech, for instance: The exemplar in studies of conversation. *Language and Social Psychology,* 7(1), 47–63.

Hopper, R. (1989). Sequential ambiguity in telephone openings—What are you doin. *Communication Monographs, 56(3),* 240–252.

Hopper, R. (1992). *Telephone conversation.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hopper, R. (1999). Going public about social interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction,* 32(1–2), 77–84.

Hopper, R., & Chen, H. (1996). Languages, cultures, relationships: Telephone openings in Taiwan. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 29(4),* 291–313.

[4] For a very subtle example of learning within the midst of conversation, see Jefferson (1987).

Hopper, R., & Glenn, P. (1994). Repetition and play in conversation. In B. Johnstone (Ed.), *Repetition in discourse: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (Vol. 2, pp. 29–40). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Hopper, R., & LeBaron, C. (1998). How gender creeps into talk. *Research on Language and Social Interaction, 31(1),* 59–74.

Isaacs, E.A., & Clark, H.H. (1987). References in conversation between experts and novices. *Journal of Experimental Psychology; General, 116(1),* 26–37.

Jefferson, G. (1987). Exposed and embedded corrections. In G. Button & J.R. E. Lee (Eds.), *Talk and social organisation* (pp. 86–100). Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Sacks, H., & Schegloff, E.A. (1979). Two preferences in the organization of reference to persons and their interaction. In G. Psathas (Ed.), *Everyday language: Studies in ethnomethodology* (pp. 15–21). New York: Irvington.

Schegloff, E.A. (1972). Notes on a conversational practice: Formulating place. In D. Sudnow (Ed.), *Studies in social interaction* (pp. 75–119). New York: The Free Press.

Schegloff, E.A. (1987). Analyzing single episodes of interaction: An exercise in conversation analysis. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 50* (2), 101–114.