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Asking to Speak to Another: A Skill for Soliciting Survey Participation

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Abstract

This paper is in the vein of applied conversation analysis, dealing with a problem of declining participation rates for survey interviews. When calling a household to request participation in a survey, interviewers may ask for a pre-selected “sample person.” We first explore how interviewers design this request in a more or less presumptive way, depending on how and when they identify themselves. Secondly, we analyze different linguistic structures that embody degrees of entitlement. Thirdly, we examine greeting items for their degree of ceremoniousness and in terms of what work they do when not part of an explicit greeting sequence. We examine other features of asking to speak to another as well, including “please” and references to the sample person. Our strategy for analyzing survey interview data is to explore the design of “switchboard” requests in ordinary telephone calls. We relate our analysis to previous research that addresses whether the detailed practices for asking to speak to another matter for obtaining consent to do an interview. We draw implications for obtaining participation in the survey interview and other kinds of phone call solicitations. Data in American English.

This paper arises from a collaborative project, along the lines of applied conversation analysis (Antaki, 2011b), designed to address the issue of declining public participation in survey interviews in recent decades (Battaglia et al., 2008; Groves et al., 2006; Groves, Singer, & Corning, 2000). Over time, the difficulty of reaching potential respondents to request participation has increased, and these respondents are more likely to say they do not have time and/or that they are not interested (Krosnick, 2005). This paper is one of several deriving from a project funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation (a federal agency concerned with participation rates for both survey research and census data) to combine conversation analysis (CA) along with interaction coding and regression analysis to see whether it would be possible to identify conversational practices on the part of the interviewers that would make a difference in recruiting participants to the survey. The project was very much along the lines of what Antaki (2011a:8) has called “interventionist” CA in the sense that (1) its aim was to address a preexisting problem, (2) its assumption was that CA could help to identify solutions by analyzing the sequential organization of talk, and (3) the investigation would be done alongside practitioners whose professional work involved the interaction to be studied.¹

Our specific phenomenon is that of “asking to speak to another,” which is scripted as an interviewer's first turn after someone answers a phone. For example, an interviewer may say, “May I speak to John Jones?” or, “Is Jane Smith there?” Such phrases are similar to what Schegloff (1979:30) terms a “switchboard request,” and do not comprise one simple kind of utterance. Rather they have various permutations that, we will show, are related to conversational strategies for opening an ordinary telephone call and embody degrees of presumptiveness, entitlement, and ceremoniousness. Our purpose in this paper is to explore these permutations and to discuss their relevance to understanding the social organization of survey call openings as a form of institutional interaction. We also discuss related quantitative research based on our analysis, which has shown that these permutations in “asking to speak to another” utterances can affect the odds that a called person will participate in the interview.

BACKGROUND, DATA, AND METHODOLOGY

We suggest that, as interviewers call prospective respondents on the telephone, they are like the jurors whom Garfinkel (1967:110) studied in the sense that they draw heavily on their everyday practices for engaging a situated task. In Garfinkel's (1967) study, this was the task of deciding legal case outcomes: “A person is 95 per cent juror before he comes near the court,” Garfinkel (1967:110) asserted. In our data, the phenomena involve the more prosaic but still consequential job of making switchboard requests. Interviewers can be presumed to have knowledge of requesting methods from everyday life experiences, in the way that conversation analysts have shown how ordinary talk provides a baseline for the deployment of utterances as actions in so-called institutional settings (Drew & Heritage, 1992; cf. Maynard, 2003:26). Different from Garfinkel's (1967) study, which inferred everyday practices from jury room talk, we investigate actual telephone talk in ordinary settings. In other words, the initial collection from surveys in which interviewers ask for another—i.e., the predesignated “sample person”—prompted our fuller exploration of ordinary conversation to explicate the phenomenon. Our main goal for this paper is probe the relationship between practices for doing switchboard requests at the beginning of ordinary landline telephone calls and the deployment of such practices when interviewers are attempting to solicit survey participation.

Schegloff (1968, 1979, 1986) has provided much of the orienting conceptual and empirical groundwork for other CA studies of phone call openings (Frankel, 1977; Maynard & Schaeffer, 1997; Raymond & Zimmerman, 2007; Wakin & Zimmerman, 1999; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1998; Whalen, Zimmerman, & Whalen, 1988; Zimmerman, 1992). One of the main “jobs” in conversational openings, as Schegloff (1986:113) observes, is that of “gatekeeping” whereby participants work out “... whether or not some co-present persons are going to engage in a sustained episode of interaction on some incipient occasion.” Simply put, persons answering a phone call, including calls from survey organizations, are in the position of making a decision about whether to open the interactional gate and provide

¹Regarding criterion 3: Along with this paper's first author and Professor Jeremy Freese of Northwestern University, a co-investigator on the project was Professor Nora Cate Schaeffer, who serves as the Director of the University of Wisconsin Survey Center.

access to the person being requested so that inquiry can be made about completing an interview.

The data initially used in this study are digital audio recordings of what emerged as a 506-member subsample² of telephone call openings in which employees of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Survey Center attempted to recruit graduates of Wisconsin high schools to participation in the 2004 wave of the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study. The WLS began in 1957 with a random sampling of 10,317 Wisconsin high school seniors from the population of such seniors (Hauser, 2005; Sewell, Hauser, Springer, & Hauser, 2004). Subsequent surveys, conducted in 1964, 1975, 1992, as well as 2004, included questions about a variety of domains in respondents' lives but focused mostly on finances, work histories, marital and fertility histories, educational attainment, and health (Hauser, 2005). For the conversation analysis (CA) part of our project, we used the initial 108 of the 506-call subsample for transcription according to CA conventions. Our project began with downloading interviews as they became available, transcribing a set of 108 introductions to such interviews, and conducting detailed sequential analysis of the talk and social interaction therein. In the literature on survey sampling, this is called a "haphazard" or "fortuitous" (Kish, 1965:19) or convenience sample, as distinct from a systematic random sample. Three of the 108 were eliminated from the present study because the calls started out with answering machine responses, which a member of the household intercepted to talk to the interviewer, altering the opening moments of the call. Thus, the present paper is based on 105 survey calls. In providing direction for interaction coding of the larger, probability sample from the entire WLS study, the practices identified by way of this initial sequential analysis, which draws in part on a master's thesis (Hollander, 2009) by the second author, informed a more comprehensive CA examination of requesting participation (Maynard et al., 2010) as well as the quantitative study (Schaeffer et al., 2013) examining the effects of interviewer practices on odds of gaining respondent participation.³

To address the issue of how WLS survey interviewers may rely on and modify practices characteristic of ordinary talk to accomplish their institutional call openings, we turned to additional data sources – five collections totaling 60 ordinary phone call openings with switchboard requests involving family members, friends, and business associates.⁴ In

²At the time of the Maynard et al. (2010) study, the subsample was 400. As more resources became available, that subsample was increased to 506, as reported in Schaeffer et al. (2013).

³Pseudonyms were used throughout the transcripts for the names of sample persons, their former high schools, and the cities in which these schools were or are located. Data were digitally audio-recorded with the post-hoc consent of participants (i.e., permission for the recording was asked for and granted after the survey introduction and before the questionnaire itself commenced), in accord with protocols approved by the University of Wisconsin Social and Behavioral Sciences Internal Review Board.

⁴Three collections are audio recordings commonly used by conversation analysts, and the accompanying transcripts (totaling 60 calls with switchboard requests): NB (in which the speakers are American) contributed 1 case, while the British collections Holt (17) and Rahman (12) yielded a total of 29. A fourth collection (8 calls) is labeled HC and contains calls recorded in the home of a student for a university class taught by the first author. A fifth collection of 22 is from the University of Texas Conversation Library (UTCL) and are calls recorded in a home in which the husband, "Hank Smalley," has an office where he often works as a real estate agent, although he also has an outside office. This collection includes 11 that are regular (non-business) telephone calls with switchboard requests, and 11 that involve business contacts mostly related to Hank's real estate profession, although there are two calls involving Hank or his wife, "Cora Smalley," calling other businesses for particular services (e.g., house cleaning). Because those that are related to Hank's business involve Hank or Cora answering the phone with a usual "Hello" type of response rather than the name of the business, these call openings initially are not distinguishable from more regular calls, and we include them, along with a small number of business-type calls in the Holt collection, as having "ordinary" type openings. (The UTCL collection was assembled by the late Robert Hopper, Professor of Communications at the University of Texas.)

contrast with these calls, a defining characteristic of survey calls is that they are conducted between people who are strangers to one another. These calls are unidirectional in the sense of going from the survey center to the sample person's home, whereas the ordinary phone call openings we investigate embody a range of acquaintanceship between interlocutors and are initiated under varying auspices.⁵

VARIABILITY AND PATTERNING IN ASKING TO SPEAK TO ANOTHER

When interviewers initiate a survey call, they have a CATI (Computer-Aided Telephone Interview) script, which we describe later, to guide their talk.⁶ It appears on-screen in their interviewing carrels. During training they are told to use this part of the script “flexibly.” And our investigation shows that interviewers exhibit a great deal of variability in how they manage movement toward the request to participate. This variability, we show, has its roots in practices that derive from familiar practices in ordinary phone calls. We will address methods and practices associated with three main phenomena in asking to speak to another in both (a) ordinary and (b) survey telephone openings, and in that order—(a), then (b):

1. Positioning: *when* or *where* callers or interviewers ask to speak to a particular person. Depending on the sequential position in which that request takes place, callers are more or less presumptive.
2. Entitlement: how callers or interviewers linguistically format the utterance when asking to speak to the target person. As part of this section, we briefly discuss person-reference: how callers or interviewers name the person.
3. Salutation: given that there is no greeting sequence per se in survey calls, how callers or interviewers may use a greeting term, what sorts of items they use, and what the interactional work of such usage is in a ceremonial sense.

1. Presumptiveness: Identity-immediate and identity-delayed requests

For ordinary telephone calls, the term “switchboard request” (Schegloff, 1979:30) has been used to evoke an image of the caller treating the answerer as a telephone operator able to facilitate an electronic communicational connection between the caller and the targeted call-recipient. In a related way, Frankel (1977) suggests the term “intermediary” as someone who acts as a “bridge” or conduit between caller and the targeted party. In both ordinary and survey calls, a first source of variability and patterning is the respective positioning of the “asking to speak” practice and caller's self-identification.

⁵Not only are WLS call participants strangers to one another, but also the interviewers are acting in their occupational capacities or institutional roles to *solicit* participation from individuals who were 1957 Wisconsin high school graduates. That is, there is a specific social action that characterizes the WLS telephone inquiries (Maynard et al., 2010), differentiating them from more ordinary calls. Previous research (Maynard & Schaeffer, 1997, 2002) has found that survey interviews, as compared with ordinary calls, and in line with Schegloff's (1986:141) suggestion that “how are you” and greetings are not relevant in particular types of business calls, contain only two of the four core opening sequences (cf. Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987).

⁶See the Whalen, Whalen, and Henderson (2003) study of a teleservice center and the ways that representatives handle telephone service calls while navigating through computer screens and handling documents and other objects at their workstations.

Identity-immediate and identity-delayed openings in ordinary calls

Intermediaries emerge as such when the answerer is not the targeted party, whether callers identify themselves prior to a switchboard request (extract 1 below) or delay self-identification (extract 2). (Pseudonyms are used in all extracts; here, “Cora” is the wife of the targeted person, “Hank”):

(1) UTCL A35b.05

1 Cora: Hell ↑o::.
 2 Burt: Hello this is Burton:: King calling.
 3 Cora: ↑Ye::s.
 4 Burt: I:s: Hank there?
 5 Cora: .hh No he's not, may I take a message?
 6 Burt: .h Yes:: u:h the bank called today and said that uhm, .hhh they got
 a check ba:ck...
 7

(2) UTCL A35b.12

1 Cora: Hello?
 2 Dor: .h um is Hank Smalley there?
 3 Cora: Ye::s may I tell him who's calling?
 4 Dor: This is Dorothy Jefferson
 5 Cora: One moment please.
 6 Dor: Thank you

When callers delay in providing self-identification, answerers—although sometimes appearing to assent to the request (“Ye::s,” line 3, extract 2)—may react to the delay by initiating repair and overtly soliciting self-identification on the part of the caller (Schegloff, 1979:38-39). Such repair initiations indicate that identity-delayed requests to speak to another are *presumptive* in their tacit proposal that the caller should have access to the sample person without saying who she as caller/requester is in the first place. Once she self-identifies (line 4), Cora's expresses full compliance at line 5, and Dorothy adds what Schegloff (2007:118) calls a sequence-closing third (“Thank you”) at line 6. This turns out to be a business call, and is similar to the opening in extract 3 below, where speaker A is the father of Christine, a college-age female, and B is a college-age male (Bob) asking to speak to her:

(3) (Frankel, 1977:105)

A: H'lllo:,
 B: Yes,=Is Christine there
 A: Uh::, yes.=May I ask who's calling [please B: [Yes this'z Bob Brandt

A: Just one moment please.

B: Uh huh

An issue such a repair raises is for whom the caller's identity is relevant. In extract 2, the identity is treated as relevant to the called party ("may I tell *him*," our emphasis), whereas in 3, the request for caller's identity is ambiguous as to its relevance. The father may be implicitly screening the call for himself as well as for the daughter. Regardless of the reason for screening, this tactic makes visible as it calls into question the presumptiveness of the caller.

In our collection of ordinary home or business phone calls, 47 of 60 or 78% of the calls have identity-delayed openings, while 13 or 22% contain identity-immediate introductions. Identity-delayed calls exhibit a bias away from interactions based on biographies of the participants-so-far—i.e., caller and answerer—and toward more simply and expeditiously handling the business of the caller (Frankel, 1977:102-113).⁷ In that sense, in their presumptiveness, we refer to them as informal or casual kinds of requests.

Identity-immediate and identity-delayed openings in survey calls

A CATI script for the interviewers to use in their first turn of talk after someone in a household answers a ringing phone reads as follows: "Hello, my name is [first name/last name]. I'm calling from the University of Wisconsin Survey Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison." This script contains (A) a greeting token, (B) "self" identification (interviewer's name), and (C) "institutional" affiliation (reference to the survey center and university). Then the interviewer is to say (D), "May I please speak to [first name/last name]." If the sample person is the one who answers the phone, or when that person comes on the line, there are two components beyond (A) through (D): (E) an *identity-verification question* concerning the high school attended ("Is this the [first name/last name] who was enrolled at Wisconsin High School in 1957?") and (F) a statement about *the WLS advance letter* mailed to the sample person and describing the study. This statement (F) is the penultimate feature of the call's introduction, and is followed by the reason for the call, which is the request for participation, scripted as: "We'd like to interview you now for this important study."

Some interviewers reproduce the prescribed sequencing and phrasing of the CATI script with components (A) through (D). This involves an identity-immediate form of asking to speak to another (cf. Schegloff, 1979:31). The interviewer in extract 4, for instance, performs all four components in the prescribed manner in his first turn of talk, with minimal rephrasing—he abbreviates the university name to "UW Madison" while omitting "please"

⁷Of course, exchanges in which the caller does not self-identify and is oriented to obtaining a targeted recipient can at least briefly be transformed into something more personal (Frankel, 1977:104):

A: Hello

B: Hello, can I speak t'Terry please.

A: Oh hi John,=how's your mom feeling?

B: Much better thanks=

A: =Good well send her my regards. (0.2) Hang on an I'll get Terry.

and the sample person's last name. (FI and MI stand for female or male interviewer, while FR and MR designate female or male call recipient.)

(4) [HP058]

1 ((ringing phone))
 2 MR: tch Hello:?? (1.2)
 3
 4 MI: Hullo: my name is: (.) Marcus Beale an' I'm calling from the
 University of Wisconsin Survey Center: at the U: W Ma:dison: May I speak to
 Nathan? (0.4)
 5
 6
 7
 8 MR: ↑This i' Na:than.

By contrast, the interviewer in extract 5, in her first turn, only uses (A) the greeting token and (D) the request to speak to the sample person (cf. Schegloff, 1979). She identifies herself at line 6, after the call recipient verifies that he is the target of her call.

(5) [HP001a]

1 ((ringing phone)) (0.5)
 2 MR: .h Hello. h (0.2)
 3
 4 FI: tch tch ↑Hi: can I speak to Evan ↓Royal please?
 5 MR: °Yeah° thissiz Evan ↓speakin.
 6 FI: tch Hi:: u:h my name is Linda I'm calling from the University of
 Wisconsin ↑Sur:vey Center? .hh Um:: is this the Evan Royal who wuz enro:llled
 at Belmont High School in nineteen fifty ↑seven?
 7
 8
 9 MR: Yuh: huh.

This identity-delayed form of asking for another turns out to be the most common way that WLS interviewers adjust the sequencing of the opening script. In our 506-member sample, interviewers ask to speak to the sample person in their second turn of talk (as in extract 5) 65% of the time. After producing a greeting token (A), they temporarily skip personal self-identification (B) and institutional affiliation (C) components, opting instead and immediately to ask for the sample person (D). The omitted components (B) and (C) are then typically done in the interviewer's second turn (lines 6-7 in extract 5) or after the sample person comes on the line.

Related research about soliciting participation for the interview itself (Maynard et al., 2010) shows presumptiveness to include a variety of features, such as entitlement displays, omission of mitigating words or phrases, and preemption of preliminary sequences concerned with respondent identity verification, references to a preliminary letter sent to the household, and a description of the study. To these features of presumptiveness in survey call openings can be added tacitly presumed access to the sample person, when interviewers use only components (A) and (D) and thus delay self and institutional identification. As in ordinary calls, such presumptiveness is made visible when a call recipient, having been asked for the sample person, through a repair initiation, solicits the caller's identity, as at line 7 in extract 6 below. The interviewer, by providing his institutional affiliation, then partially remedies the problem at lines 8-9 with his institutional affiliation.⁸

(6) [LP082r]

1 ((ring)) (2.6) (1.3) ((sound of FR handling phone))
 2
 3
 4 FR: Hel↑lō↑:
 5 MI: .hhhh ↑Hello:. .hh ↑May I please speak with Linda Radcliffe? (0.3)
 6
 7 FR: Uh ↑who's ↑calling plea[se?]
 8 MI: [.hh] Uh I'm calling from the University of Wisconsin for the
 Wisconsin Longitudinal Study? 10 (0.3)
 9
 11 FR: I::'m ↓not interested thank you. (1.4)
 12
 13 FR: ((hangs up))

Components (A) and (D) occur at line 5, and component (C) at lines 8-9 as an answer to the inserted query at line 7. A declination (lines 11, 13) is produced after the elicited claim of institutional affiliation.

Overall, the fact that interviewers predominantly ask to speak to sample persons in an identity-delayed manner (as in extracts 5 and 6) appears to reflect a practice that derives from routines in ordinary conversation, where callers in an informal or casual way also mostly delay in overtly identifying themselves. Further evidence for the informality of identity-delayed requests in the survey calls is that when the one who answers an interviewer's call is identifiable by the "gender" of the voice such that the interviewer can infer whether the answerer is the sample person or only an informant or intermediary, there is an asymmetry in the tendencies to delay or provide immediate self-identification. If the answerer is inferentially the sample person (see extract 5 above or extract 11 below),

⁸Extract 6 is one of the three cases in the 105 transcribed calls in which the interviewer does not provide component (B), personal self-identification. In no cases does an interviewer omit some form of institutional affiliation, which suggests that the crucial component of the (a) personal + (b) institutional identification turn is the latter (b) part rather than the former (a), possibly because it is informative about the purpose of the call, whereas the personal name is not.

interviewers presumptively ask for the sample person by delaying self-identification 75% of the time. In some cases, an interviewer may show their inference with a formulation such as, “Hi is this Angela?” (HP037r), or “Am I speaking with Georgia Bergstrom?” (HP034a). If the answerer is inferentially an informant (for example, see extract 10 below), they delay in self-identifying only 50% of the time.

2. Entitlement: Linguistic formatting in asking to speak to another

Recent research in interactional linguistics has shown how syntax can be deployed on behalf of the social action of requesting, which conversation analysts (Schegloff, 1980) have described as a dispreferred social action when it is initiating a sequence, offers being the preferred form for obtaining a desired social object. Then, as a variety of studies (Curl & Drew, 2008; Heinemann, 2006; Lindström, 2005; Maynard et al., 2010; Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski, 2005) show, when producing a request, speakers’ choice of linguistic form may display their *entitlement* to make the request and also an evaluation of the *contingencies* that surround its granting. However, these studies of requesting are conducted in different settings that involve distinctive social relationships such that it cannot be claimed that there is a one-to-one correspondence between linguistic form and degree of entitlement.

In our previous research on the actual request for participation (Maynard et al., 2010), we discuss declarative syntactic forms (e.g., “We’d like to interview you now for this study”) as higher in entitlement than interrogative forms or declaratives with “wondering” prefaces (“We were wondering if now is a good time to start the interview”). Overall, the entitlement of a request has to do with where the request is placed in ongoing talk—for example, in relation to encouraging or discouraging environments (Nolen & Maynard, 2013)—and with design features, including the deployment of mitigating terms of politeness and other factors, which can modify the syntactic force of the utterance (Heinemann, 2006:1101). In other words, linguistic forms such as requesting utterances are “indexical expressions” (Garfinkel, 1967) whose action force is a matter of local, sequential contexts in which the forms are embedded. Still, the lesson is that the linguistic structure of asking for something or someone—the syntax of an utterance—can play a strong part in the entitlement with which asking someone to do something is imbued.

Linguistic forms in asking to speak to another: Ordinary calls

Our data show two linguistically distinct formats by which callers ask for a target person: (1) a copula-prefaced “Is X there” form, which assumes a lack of contingency in terms of fulfilling the request; and (2) a modal-prefaced inquiry (“May I please speak to X”) that, partly through its regular coupling with a “please” term, is less entitled and in its context may be dealing with displayed contingencies.

The “Is X there” form predominates and can be said to be the default in ordinary telephone calls. In our collection, callers use it in 42 of our 60 cases. Extracts 1-3 above and extracts 7, 12-14, and 17 below, all have the form. Exactly how the form exhibits entitlement may be captured in the extract below. Ida, who is a sister to Jenny (“Mummy”), asks the latter’s son Mathew if she has gone shopping, inferring something of the circumstances:

(7) R:A:1:IMJ:1 (modified)

1 Mat: Re:dcahr five o'six one?,
 2 Ida: Mahthe:w? (.)
 3
 4 Ida: Has Mummy gone shopping,
 5 Mat: No she's still here dju want her. (0.3)
 6
 7 Ida: Is she in be:d,
 8 Mat: No?
 9 Ida: rRi:ght thank you,

Mathew, after disconfirming his mother's absence (line 5), immediately offers to bring her to the phone. So it appears that if a person is in the residence, that person is regarded as available to a legitimate caller. Yet Ida shows knowledge of another possible contingency, inquiring if she is in bed (line 7), and when it turns out not to be the case (line 8), she accepts the offer (line 9). Callers do not usually raise such possible impediments to granting the request for another. Rather, by asking, "is X there" or "is X available," they assume that, if a target person is physically present and also arisen, then she should come to the phone. Another way of saying that the "Is X there" form is entitled is that such requests do not usually require explanation or accounting. In the 42 calls with copula-prefaced, entitled requests to speak to another, only one has the answerer asking about the reason for the switchboard request. Accordingly, the entitlement that goes along with the copula-prefaced form of asking to speak to another lies partly in the non-accountability of the request.

With the less entitled, modally formed request, callers regularly may display the accountability of their request, observing contingencies possibly related to the request. In the extract below, a caller asks for a "parent of Joey Sowosky" (line 2), suggesting a basis for the call in there being business related to that membership category. The reference also suggests not knowing the parental names, a lack of acquaintance that may lessen her entitlement to speak to the parents, a matter with which the caller subsequently deals in the reason for the call (lines 7-10) by revealing that acquaintanceship apparently exists between the caller's daughter ("Regina," line 8) and the boy to whom a party invitation was sent.

(8) UTCL A35d.09

1 A: Hello
 2 Kris: .h Hello, may I please speak to a parent of Joey Sowosky? (0.4)
 3
 4 A: Umm neither of em are here right now.
 5 Kris: Oh is this his sister?
 6 A: Yeah
 7 Kris: This is Kristy Smally, and we sent him of uh- invitation .hh to
 Regina's birthday party and it retur:ned, and I just got it today, .hh and I

want to let your Mom or Dad know that the party's today, so he didn't feel left out.

8

9

10

Other circumstances besides non-acquaintance may play into the choice of a modally prefaced request form. In the extract below, Sam is calling Hank back at his home office after, in a recent call, having already discussed the problem of a cat in a property they are attempting to sell. In that call, he had used the copula form (“Is Hank home please?”). Now he has more news (not included below) regarding the problematic cat.

(9) UTCL A35b.13

1 Kris: Hello::.

2 Sam: W'l Kristy, this is me again=

3 Kris: =Well ↑hi [Sam

4 Sam: [Can I bother Ha(h)nk plea[se.

5 Kris: [↑Oh::, that's no ↑problem, just ↑a moment.=

6

7 Sam: =Thank you.

Sam, at line 4, exhibits the possible intrusiveness and “complainability” (Schegloff, 2005) of his call by characterizing it as a “bother” and inserting a lightening laugh token when he pronounces “Hank.” Kristy grants him access to Hank by way of formulating a gracious absolution (“no problem,” line 5) that, with its rising-falling intonation implemented three times across the duration of the turn, also conveys the non-seriousness of the imposition. In short, when Sam uses the modal (“Can I”) preface along with the please token, it suggests and is treated as an ingratiating form of requesting. Accordingly, even when there are not additional components (such as indications of complainability) to a modally formatted and “please”-betokened switchboard request, a main feature involved in the exhibit of low entitlement may be its operation for “doing” ingratiation. Modal forms along with “please” thereby have a formality to them in contrast with the copula-prefaced “is X there” device, which appears more informal and casual.

Linguistic forms in asking to speak to another: Survey calls

In our WLS collection, the two varieties of requests to speak to the sample person also show up. Given the predominance of identity-delayed openings with casual-type greeting tokens, we were surprised to find that interviewers, in asking for the sample person, overwhelmingly use the less-entitled, formal linguistic version. That is, their requests are designed with the “Can I” or “May I” preface coupled with “please” fully 88% of the time. Extract 4 above is a rare instance in which a modally formed request does not have the “please,” whereas extracts 5 and 6 show the use of “please” in identity-delayed requests. When self-identification and institutional affiliation are immediate, and an interviewer uses the modal

form to ask for the sample person, “please” also is the usual accompaniment (see also extract 18 below).

Only rarely did interviewers use the more entitled, copula-prefaced version of asking to speak to another. Again, interviewers may use the form in either identity-immediate (extract 10 below) or identity-delayed (extract 11) introductions. Note, however, the use of the term “available” rather than “there” (the usual form in ordinary conversation), which, in formulating not just the presence of the person but also their accessibility, may tone down the entitlement in these extracts (10, line 5; 11, line 3).

(10) LP021a

1 FIF: Hell ↑o::? (.)
 2
 3 FI: .h ↑hi ↓there: my name's Lisa Henderson: I:'m calling from the
 University of Wis↓consin about that Wisconsin Longitudinal Study? .h[h]
 [i:]s Vernon Duke av↑ailable?=
 4
 5
 6 FIF: [O]ka[y]
 7 FIF: =Y↓eah (.) sure jus' hang on
 8 FI: Ah↓:right thank you=

(11) LP004a

1 FR: Hel↓lo::.. (.)
 2
 3 FI: .hh ↑hi is Mrs. Lewis available? (.)
 4
 5 FR: (Yeah) this is ↑Monique. (.)
 6
 7 FI: ↑H(h)i: my name is Kelly I'm calling from the Wisconsin Longitudinal
Study. .hh=
 8

When the answerer's voice is recognizably the gender of the sample person, interviewers may use a slightly different version of the entitled request form, as in “Hello, is this Jacob?” (HP017a). However, in such cases interviewers regularly use the “Is X there/available?” form as well, as in extract 19.

Finally also note the person reference terms. As we know from the literature on person reference (Enfield & Stivers, 2007), such terms do more than “just” referencing and instead are involved in assembling social actions of various kinds. In asking to speak to another, naming choices can be displaying or claiming a relationship between caller and called party.

In ordinary conversation, the use of first names is associated with displays of familiarity, and first name-last name or use of Mr. or Mrs. Last Name is associated with displays of distance. In extract 10 above, the interviewer uses the distanced first name/last name reference, and the interviewer in 11 refers to “Mrs. Lewis” as the sample person. In contrast, extract 4 and others show the interviewer using the familiar first-name only form, although at this point the relationship between interviewer and members of the household including the sample person is an “essentially anonymous” (Heritage, 2002:314) one, and although by survey center policy, interviewers are required to use first name and last name. Interviewers used first and last name about 70% of the time (73 calls) and only first name about 30% (32).⁹ Overall, with regard to the linguistic formatting including person reference, interviewers largely deploy the more formal and less entitled version when asking to speak to the sample person.

3. Ceremoniousness: Salutations

Besides the immediate or delayed position in which they may self-identify, and the grammar by which they construct their requests, callers produce other variations in asking to speak to another. A prominent feature is the regular presence of greeting tokens. Of course, such tokens need to be distinguished from the action of greeting. Schegloff (1986:121-2) argues that greeting forms such as “hello” in an *answerer’s* first turn are not greetings or doing the action of greeting. They are answers to the ringing and summoning phone. For these reasons, we refer to “hello,” “hi,” and related phrases as greeting forms, objects, or tokens—Duranti (1997) refers to these as greeting “items”—rather than greetings as such, and we discuss two interrelated issues. One has to do with the frequency and kinds of forms that are used, while the other issue concerns the interactional work such forms may do.

Forms of greeting

In our collection of ordinary phone-call requests for another, 32 of 60 or over half are straightforwardly prefaced with a greeting token such as “hello” or “hi.” Another subgroup of 12 has the caller delaying the production of a greeting object by way of “oh” signs that suggest a “change of state” recognition of the answerer (Heritage, 1984) just before that recognition is displayed by using the answerer’s name. In-breaths or other hesitations regularly accompany these “oh hellos,” suggesting effort to perform such recognition:

(12) Holt:SO88:l:4

Ray: He(.)ll@:, g'morning Ri[mbold [.hhh .hhh hOh hello:: .hh Uh:m (0.3)
Ski: Ray is: ↑Fred the:re, hh

When callers produce a switchboard request that is not prefaced with a greeting token or hesitation + greeting token (16 instances), utterances are of the “Is X there” form (9/16), or

⁹Correspondingly, interviewers identified themselves by first name-last name in about 67% of the calls, by first name only in 30%, and institutionally (the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study) about 4% of the time.

they immediately propose recognition of the answerer (5/16), as in “Dave?”, or use some other small token (2/16), such as “Yeah” or “Yes.”

Turn-initial salutations of either the “hi” or “hello” variety are audibly perfunctory in terms of prosody, typically exhibiting the features associated with what Pillet-Shore (2012:390-92) calls “small” greetings. Without audible smiling, having lower onset and falling to lower pitch, and being soft, they are “little,” “subdued,” and “reserved.” As distinct lexical items, however, there is some indication in the literature that they can be distinguished from one another in that “hi” is less and “hello” is more formal (Greere, 2005; Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006).¹⁰ We make such a distinction on the following basis. In four of the five instances of “hi” prefacing, it is accompanied by the use of the answerer’s name:

(13) A35b.11

Cora: Hello? (0.5)
 Stan: Hi, Cora is Hank home plea:se?
 Cora: ↑Ye:s, (.) just a moment.

Using a token with the terminally intoned name fits the pattern that Schegloff (1979:34) identifies: it “constitutes a claim by caller that he has recognized the answerer from the answerer’s first turn.” The one out of five in which the caller does not use the answerer’s name nevertheless has a stretched greeting token that suggests confidence in having reached the right home and tacit recognition of the answerer, whose answering “male” voice may be revealing of identity:

(14) A35c.20

1 Hank: Hello.
 2 Caller: Hi:::. Is Cora there?
 3 Hank: No:: she's not. (0.2)
 4
 5 Caller: Has she gotten home from the game?=
 6 Hank: =No, she hasn't gotten home yet . . .

Such tacit recognition is retrospectively apparent when the caller exhibits knowledge of the target’s whereabouts (line 5).

By contrast, in our ordinary switchboard requests, callers’ use of the hello-token occurs when they do not show recognition of the answerer (or vice versa):

(15) Holt: Field: SO88:1:1

¹⁰See also Pillet-Shore’s (2008:100, fn. 33) discussion of “hey” as a casual greeting.

Wom: ... Five oh six nine[↓five
 Gor: [.h h h h Hello. C'n I speak to William ↓pleas[e.
 Wom: [Right 'oo is this?

(16) UTCL A35d.26 (Ordinary)

Pat: °Lo'°
 Cora: Hello may I please speak to Patty?
 Pat: This is she

These two extracts involve identity-delayed openings, but callers also use the hello as a preface to immediate self-identification, as in extract 1 above. Additionally, when they are recognizable to answerers, and therefore possibly know and can recognize the answerer while not showing their knowledge, “hello” still may be the greeting token of choice:

(17) SO88:2:6

Les: Hello:?
 Ken: Hello is Gordon there[please
 Les: [.h h h h Oh →hang on Ken he's jus'. . .

In our collection of 27 switchboard requests with turn-initial, straightforward (non-hesitating) greetings, five involve answerers who are children and, in fact, nieces or nephews of the caller. These may be special in some way, and if we exclude them from the collection, then in all 22 cases where the opening exchange is between adults, and callers use the “hello” item, they provide no display of recognizing the answerer.¹¹ The caller, accordingly, is performing the requesting action in a way that is relationally distanced from that answerer. In fitting the “hello” token to that action, it is thereby characteristically more formal than the way in which “hi” regularly accompany strong displays that acknowledge the answerer's identity.

The interactional work of greeting forms in asking to speak to another

Whether “hello” or “hi” is used, these extracts raise a question of what kind of interactional work the tokens are doing in the caller's first turn. Our proposal is, and the evidence shows, that the caller may be treating the answerer as a “greetable” person and simply not

¹¹All five of the switchboard requests in which the answerer is a child also has a caller who is the child's aunt or other close relative. The calls are from what is known as the Rahman corpus, and here is an example:

R:B:1:VMJ:10

Matt: Hello Redcah five o'six one?.

Vera: Hello Mathew is yer mum the:re love.

Matt: Yeh,h MUM?

It may be that the use of the turn initial greeting object along with an endearment term at utterance end embody a kind of detachment (formal “hello”) and attachment (“love”) that mark aunt-child relationships (cf. Radcliffe-Brown, 1949). However, this is speculation and would need a wider and more representative set of data to verify.

anticipating a second pair part. “If we take the adjacency pair format to be a defining feature of greetings,” Duranti (1997:69) has written, “a one-pair-part greeting—not as uncommon as one might think—would be ‘defective’ or in need of an explanation.” The explanation here would be that, because of the request to speak to another, the occasioned response is granting the request rather than a return greeting. In that acceding to a request is asymmetrically displayed as favored over denying it (Schegloff, 2007:59-60), and dealing with the most immediately previous action is advanced in relation to any earlier action in a prior turn (Sacks, 1987), there are two structural preferences for directly and affirmatively answering a caller's asking to speak to another. In brief terms, there is a preference for contiguity, and a preference for accepting a request that are set in motion when a caller asks to speak to another. Returning a greeting that prefaces the request, accordingly, can be an electable rather than required action. As such, it can do further work in the interaction by mitigating, through a kind of ritual acknowledgement of answerer's own identity (Duranti, 1997:89), that request's status as a dispreferred social action. We also have seen how such requests are presumptive (whether self and/or institutional identification is done in an immediate or delayed fashion), and more or less entitled (as this is embodied in its linguistic format). Greeting the recipient of the request also can mitigate such presumptiveness and entitlement.

Straightforward “hello,” “hi,” and “oh-hello/hi” greeting items, compared to instances in which the caller uses more relaxed tokens (e.g., “yeah”) or no tokens whatsoever (e.g., “is Hank there?”), are somewhat *elaborated* linguistic forms that implicate a ceremonial greeting action (Duranti, 1997:68; Irvine, 1979:775). In our use of “ceremony” here, we follow Goffman (1956:376):

A ceremonial rule is one which guides conduct in matters felt to have secondary or even no significance in their own right, having their primary importance—officially anyway—as a conventionalized means of communication by which the individual expresses his character or conveys his appreciation of the other participants in the situation. This usage departs from the everyday one, where “ceremony” tends to imply a highly specified, extended sequence of symbolic action performed by august actors on solemn occasions when religious sentiments are likely to be invoked.

Whether the individual is expressing his or her own character with a greeting is not in point with our data, but electing to use the token to suggest the greetability of the other can convey respect for or appreciation of the recipient without need for a return.¹²

Salutations in the survey calls

Where ordinary calls show both a wider range in terms of greeting or non-greeting practices associated with requests to speak to another party, and a predominant use of “hello” across a variety of relationships between caller and answerer, survey calls are different. First, in our 105-member subsample, interviewers almost invariably do use a greeting token before

¹²For an instance of a single-greeting in a face-to-face episode, see Pillet-Shore (2008:81-84); in this instance it is coordinated with self-introductions by two parties in the midst of a four-party interaction and “gaze dance” between the two.

asking for the sample person. There are two “good morning/afternoon” objects, three “Hi, hello” items, and otherwise there are single “hello” or “hi” (and one instance of a “hey”) greeting tokens before an interviewer asks to speak to another. In other words, interviewers do not proceed directly to ask for the sample person as in (hypothetically), “Is Nathan there,” or “May I speak to Nathan” without first issuing a greeting—either “hello” or “hi.”

Typically both tokens are of the “small” prosodic variety that Pillet-Shore (2012:390-92) identifies. However, there is an asymmetry different from their use in ordinary conversation. Instead of predominantly using “hello” as a greeting token (extracts 4 and 6), they mostly use “Hi” (extract 5). In 75% of the survey calls with “hi” or “hello” tokens in the interviewer's first turn, they use “hi” as a token before asking for the sample person, and “hello” just 25% of the time. This asymmetry is the case for both identity-delayed (extract 5) and identity-immediate requests (extract 10). It is also true that “Hi's” predominate whether it is the sample person (extract 4) or an intermediary (extracts 10 and 19) who answers the phone. Although this departs from the distributional usage of greeting tokens in ordinary telephone calls, it may be that interviewers are using a device for informality that has its home in those ordinary calls, insofar as “hi” therein is regularly deployed as a token asserting familiarity along with confidently proposing the identity of the answerer.

In the survey calls, despite the inability to propose the identity of the answerer, the tendency to use the informal greeting token suggests that interviewers can work in a way additional to delaying self-identification for being informal or casual. Such usage appears to reflect their competence not as trained interviewers who can follow a formal script, but rather their commonsense knowledge of practices for “doing” being informal or casual in everyday talk.

ASKING FOR ANOTHER: HOW FORMALITY & INFORMALITY MATTER

When we consider the array of practices involved in asking to speak to another, it suggests a continuum between formal strategies and informal or casual approaches. For our survey calls, we can consider an illustration on each end of this continuum and then, drawing on related research and returning to the applied aspects of the project, review whether different approaches matter in the sense of having an effect on survey response. Each of our illustrative calls involves an intermediary answering and then summoning the sample person to the telephone.¹³

Being Formal in Asking for Another

At the formal end of the continuum is extract 18 below. The interviewer greets the answerer with a “hello” rather than “hi” object (line 2), identifies himself immediately (lines 2-4), requests speaking to the sample person using a modal, ingratiating form with an embedded “please” token, referring to him by first name and last name (line 6):

(18) HP079a

¹³When the answerer is not the sample person (and turns out to be an intermediary), it may be that the interviewer's ways of asking for that person are a marker of other facets of the interviewer's strategies for getting to the ultimate request to participate, particularly the manner of greeting and introducing her/himself to the sample person when that person comes on the line.

1 FIF: H↑el:↓lo.=
 2 MI: =.hhh Hello↑ (.) ↓my name is Ron Gardner, ↓I'm calling from the
 University of Wisconsin Sur↑vey Center? ↓at the University of Wisconsin
 Madison? .hh[hh]
 FIF: [Uh] huh?=
 MI: =May I please speak to Henry Lincoln? (0.4)
 FIF: O↓kay:: hold on just a second.

This request is very close to the interviewer's CATI script, and it happens that when the sample person comes on the line, he agrees to do the interview (transcript not included for reasons of space).

Being Casual in Asking for Another

At the informal or casual end of the continuum, we find Extract 19. Here, in a rather terse although upbeat fashion, FI uses a “hi” greeting token (line 3), and presumptively—in an identity-delayed mode—issues a copula-prefaced, entitled, request along with the first name only in referring to the sample person (line 2). (MIF refers to the Male Informant.)

(19) HP057r

1 MIF: Hello?
 2 (.)
 3 FI: tch .h ↑Hi is ↑Cindy there?
 4 (0.3)
 5 MIF: Yep.
 6 (3.7)
 7 FR: Hello?
 8 FI: .hH↑I: my name is Ka↑te. ↓Um I'm calling from the >University of<
 9 Wisconsin? Um regarding the Wisconsin [Longitudinal? Study?]
 10 FR: [U:::h I'm not interest]ed
 11 in that.
 12 (0.6)
 13 FI: U[m]
 14 [(click)]

The request for the sample person departs widely from the scripted version. After FR comes on the phone (line 7), the interviewer uses the informal greeting token again and introduces herself by first name and institutional identification (lines 8–9). As FI also refers to the study (line 9), FR interrupts to decline with a “not interested” formulation. As FI starts another utterance (line 13), FR resorts to the “impolite” tactic of hanging up (line 14).¹⁴

¹⁴On polite and impolite declinations of requests to participate in the survey interview, see Maynard and Schaeffer (1997)

Asking for Another: Does it Matter How it is Done?

These illustrations in which the formal approach results in an interview and the informal one occasions a declination, could indicate that interviewers, in order to enhance survey responsiveness, should follow their CATI script and be formal as opposed to casual when asking for a sample person. If we only had anecdotal evidence like these illustrations, such an assertion would be on shaky grounds, but a recent paper from this project (Schaeffer et al., 2013), using the larger 506-member WLS subsample, addresses the issue along with other complexities to the opening of survey calls by examining the entire introduction quantitatively using multiple regression techniques. That study sheds light on the specific phenomenon of asking for another, while also probing the relevance of related features in the introduction, including reference to and description of the advance letter sent to the household, two types of emergent respondent questions (about the length and content of the interview), laughter tokens and others. The Schaeffer et al. study (2013) also uses measures of (a) sample person propensity to participate and (b) the interactional environment—whether it is an “encouraging” or “discouraging” one (Maynard et al., 2010). The findings suggest that, holding other factors constant, various discrete actions at the beginning of a survey call are associated with ultimate acceptance of the request to participate. Identifying self and institutional immediately rather than in a delayed fashion, using modal, less-entitled and please-marked forms of asking to speak with the sample member (“May I please...” “Can I please ...,” etc.) rather than the copula-prefaced and more entitled version (“Is X available/there?”), and greeting the sample member with “hello” rather than “hi” or other casual terms and referring to the sample member with first and last name or title plus last name, all increase the odds of obtaining an interview.

On average, interviewers tend to be more informal than formal, at least in the predominant use of identity-immediate, presumptive requests with the informal “hi” greeting token, although they do use less entitled, modal grammatical forms more often than the copula-prefaced ones. However, the largest estimated effect in terms of increased odds of accepting the request to participate derives from interviewers providing immediate self-identification and institutional affiliation rather than presumptively delaying until after the call answerer acknowledges being the sample person or after that answerer obtains the sample person and the person comes on the line. In short, the quantitative data suggest that a more consistently formal approach, especially the identity-immediate practice whereby an interviewer identifies self and/or institution before asking for the sample person, is most beneficial for successful recruitment to the interview itself.

CONCLUSION

Our study draws on the ethnomethodological suggestion that concrete everyday, commonsense practices of talk and social interaction pervade the work setting. To adapt Garfinkel's (1967) phrase about jurors to the circumstances of the survey, it seems that as interviewers work to solicit participation in the interview, they already are 95% solicitors before they come near the survey center. They use their everyday skills, despite their training and a script that provides a standardized survey introduction. The analogy to the jury study fits because it is also the case that the jurors whom Garfinkel (1967:112) studied

had received instructions from various sources about the “official line” they were to follow when deciding their verdicts, and nevertheless relied heavily on “habitual rules of social judgments.” Whereas the Garfinkel study inferred such habitual rules, however, we have investigated actual practices for asking to speak to another in ordinary conversation. At least with matters of delaying self-identification and using an informal greeting object, the distribution of their deployment in the survey calls seems aligned to the casual ways in which callers ask for another person in more everyday circumstances.

Previous recommendations from this project, in line with the “interventionist” mode of applied CA (Antaki, 2011b:8), have suggested the relevance of “tailoring” aspects of the introductory script to the turn-by-turn responsiveness of sample persons in order to enhance the possibility of their participation (Maynard, Schaeffer, & Freese, 2011). To this we have added the more specific recommendations about immediately offering identifying information about who is calling, greeting the sample person, and using modal-type requesting forms. Future research can investigate whether there are effects from these ways of asking for targeted persons in other environments, such as telephone calls in which coordinators from a medical agency ask individuals about donating tissues from recently deceased family members (Weathersbee, 2009). Such research also can benefit from the study of ordinary talk, as it provides a sense of how and to what extent practitioners in institutional settings draw on commonsense knowledge for their work-related skills, and whether and how interventions should attempt to alter habitual ways of performing social actions.

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