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3

Conversation Analysis: "Okay" as a Clue for Understanding Consequentiality

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Participants in interaction routinely make available their orientations to, and thus understandings of, the moment-by-moment contingencies of unfolding actions. Conversation analysis (CA) is centrally concerned with excavating the constituent and organizing features of these collaborative efforts. How do specific kinds of actions get brought off as demonstrably relevant by and for participants? What is the distinctive, methodical, and achieved character of any given spate of interaction? On what resources do participants rely in contributing to and providing solutions for immediate interactional circumstances?

These questions begin to address how participants delicately tailor their talk-in-interaction in ways that influence the recognizable evolution of practical courses of action. By attempting to describe and explain the precise ways that participants' actions make a practical difference, impacting the continuous and negotiated character of everyday conversation, the empirical focus of CA rests with providing evidence that reveals (among other features) the inherent consequentiality of communication:

For the target of its inquiries stands where talk amounts to action, where action projects *consequences* in a structure and texture of interaction which the talk is itself progressively embodying and realizing, and where the particulars of the talk inform what actions are being done and what sort of social scene is being constituted.... How does the fact that the talk is being conducted in some setting ... issue in *any consequences* for the shape, form, trajectory, content, or character of the interaction that the parties conduct? And *what is the mechanism by which the context-so-understood has determinate*

consequences for the talk? (Schegloff, 1991, pp. 46,53; italics on first two *consequences* added; other italics original)

This chapter begins with a basic and brief overview of CA as an empirical enterprise, focusing especially on the ways in which the import of consequentiality is self-evident within such a research focus. Relationships among data collection and analysis, participants' orientations and sequential organization, and *issues* of "talk and social structure" (cf. Boden & Zimmerman, 1991) are summarized. Attention is then given-in some detail and as a means of empirically illustrating otherwise conceptual claims-to how "Okay" usages in casual conversations are recruited by participants to achieve particular kinds of actions: The usages are not employed as isolated tokens or discourse particles, but as positionally active and consequential for unfolding talk. Examinations of a variety of interactional environments begin to reveal how participants' "Okays" are responsive to prior talk, but also prefigure movements toward next-positioned matters as a pivotal resource impacting the shape and trajectory of conversation.

CONVERSATION ANALYSIS AND CONSEQUENTIALITY

First, CA employs research methods fashioned after the social phenomenon being examined: the independent and natural existence of social order. A basic tenet of CA is the recognition that social order-evident within the detailed and contingent activities of societal members-exists independently of social-scientific inquiry. Irrespective of the possibility of being examined and in some way analytically dissected for purposes of research, interactants simply go about their daily business performing routine and often mundane tasks. Thus, CA gives priority to gaining access to social activities comprising a wide variety of natural settings. However, to examine such activities in "real-time" detail (i.e. on their own merits as interesting phenomena), there is a systematic reliance on carefully produced transcriptions of audio and video recordings. Recordings and transcriptions allow for repeated hearings, viewings, and inspections of "actual and determinate" (Schegloff, 1986) interactional environments:

It was not from any large interest in language or from some theoretical formulation of what should be studied that I started with tape-recorded conversations, but simply because I could get my hands on it and I could study it again and again, and also, consequentially, because others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to be able to disagree with me. (Sacks, 1984, p. 26)

Although neither recordings nor transcriptions are conversations in and of themselves (Beach, 1990c; Zimmerman, 1988), they nevertheless preserve and embody the integrity and distinctiveness of many conversational activities. Moreover, as selected fragments of transcriptions are made available for readers' critical inspections, attention can be drawn to specific details and practical consequences of unfolding actions rather than glossed or presumed versions of what might or could have happened (i.e., idealized, intuited, and/or recollected data; cf. Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Heritage, 1984).

Second, analysis of conversational involvements reveals the omnipresence of patterned orientations to "context." To introduce and articulate fundamental grounds for CA as an empirical social science, Heritage (1984; but also see Lee, 1987; Zimmerman & Boden, 1991) posited three central and working assumptions: "1) interaction is structurally organized; 2) contributions to interaction are contextually oriented; 3) these two properties inhere in the details of interaction so that no order of detail can be dismissed, *a priori*, as disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant" (p. 241).

Situated examination of social interaction's details is prerequisite to addressing whether and how actions emerge rapidly and spontaneously, and are delicately organized as interactional achievements. However messy and disordered naturally occurring conversations might appear, at least initially, considerable evidence exists that supports a central tenet of social interaction studies: that there is "order at all points," much of which awaits discovery by analysts, but all of which was produced in the first instance as meaningful, and thus in meaningful ways by and for interactants.^t

Moreover, just as participants reside within and inevitably orient to the *scenic* world-composed of seeable, hearable, behaviorally recognizable actions, activities, and objects-so does CA avoid "mentalist" or "psychologistic" explanations of patterns of action. As I noted elsewhere (Beach, 1989, 1990c), such a position does not deny the existence of a wide range of personality variables and cognitive-processing phenomena (e.g., motives, values, attitudes, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, interpretations, perceptions, memory, emotions, etc.). Rather, it focuses on the methods and practices (i.e., interactional resources) through which such phenomena may or may not visibly enter into, (i.e., be determined to be relevant and consequential in shaping and being shaped by) streams of ongoing action. Nor does CA prematurely dismiss the relevance and impact of relation-

Goodwin (1990) traced a neglect of talk-in-interaction through the history of anthropological, sociological, linguistic, and communication research. By ignoring the embedded details of interactional conduct, the diverse range of social actions achieved through talk-in-interaction are systematically excluded. Such a position is, of course, a rejection of Chomsky's (1965) well-known, but misdirected, assessment that talk, per se, is altogether too messy, flawed, and degenerate for studies of phenomena such as *competence*.

ship "history" or "background understandings" on everyday talk-in-interaction, or more generally knowledge about the evolving world and its past, present, and future events and possibilities. On the contrary, in the precise ways that participants use and rely on such resources in the course of organizing interaction, so may analysts attend to these actions as relevant to what participants treat as meaningful, and thus consequential for what and how understandings about everyday life get cogenerated (cf. Beach, 1994).

As originally described by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) and further elaborated by Schegloff (1987b, 1991), context is not understood as external to or otherwise exorcized from interaction (see also Beach, 1991c; Mandelbaum, 1991). On the contrary, context is continually and intrinsically re-achieved as participants display their understandings of specific moments of conversational involvement. Each emergent action is both *context-shaping* in the way it is tailored to prior and immediate circumstances, and *context-renewing* by means of its contribution to and thus impact on next-positioned actions. For example, and to simplify, Schegloff (1991) made reference to CA's concern with "structures of single actions and of series and sequences of them" (p. 47). From this it becomes clear that even a minimal understanding of context begins with a compilation of the following: what participants' actions are responsive to, or how they emerged in the first instance; the detailed resources employed, or what actions participants are "up to" or achieving; and, consequently, where the interaction proceeds as what was once "next speaker," now "current speaker," orients in some meaningful way to prior turn-at-talk by engaging in some relevant next action.

It is in this basic sense that consequentiality of communication becomes important—first for participants of interaction, and secondly for analysts of conversational organization: not as some removed, telescopic conceptualization or component of social order, but as evident in how participants differentially and embeddedly reveal and document, each for the other, "what is going on" within a given spate of talk and in consideration of its attending relevancies (cf. Beach, 1990c, 1991b; Jefferson, 1981; Wootton, 1988).

CA has invested considerable effort in evidencing the bedrock details underlying the very possibility of an interactionally produced social order (but see also Goffman, 1983). Toward these ends, a set of interrelated and universal features of conversational organization have been put forth. As already noted, whenever participants design and place their utterances within a series of actions, a speaker's current turn projects the relevance of a next, such that the range of possible activities accomplished by the second speaker reflect an understanding of, as well as an orientation to, the emergent character of interaction. In and through the adjacent ordering (cf.

Heritage, 1984; Sacks et al., 1974) of first and second actions, utterances are seen to be "sequentially implicative" (cf. Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) in the exact ways that speakers systematically organize the occasions in which *they* are involved. Therefore, during a series of turns-in-interaction, speakers design their talk to the occasion of its use and with particular recipients in mind. Just as speakers rely on recipients to display whatever impact(s) their utterances might have in the course of their delivery, so do recipients overwhelmingly design their talk in "conditionally relevant" ways: Not just any response will normally suffice because some prior speaker projected the relevance of some range of appropriate and next actions. Of course, because talk has been found to be "sensitive to recipients' design," *how* some next turn-at-talk is tailored to some prior action or set of actions becomes the "grist" for analysts' "mills." This is especially so when conversation is understood more or less as spontaneously combustible: "locally occasioned and managed" in ways that any given participant's actions reshape and renew the "context"—as a set of methodically and systematically organized, yet constantly changing and updated, series of actions (cf. Jefferson, 1978).

In summary, the next turn-at-talk may be the foundational building block of human understanding. It is here that next speakers contribute to an already unfolding interactional environment, producing a wide variety of actions (e.g., agreeing/affiliating, disagreeing/disaffiliating, attending-disattending, accepting, rejecting, closing, opening, reconciling, mitigating, canceling, deleting, avoiding) and a considerably more diverse set of possibilities (in both kind and degree). Each possibility evidences little more or less than how participants display and detect one another's orientations to the occasion at hand. Exactly what gets achieved is undeniably the upshot of how speakers fashion, shape, and make available to one another their understandings of the local environment of which they are an integral part.

A third and final set of issues arises from a melding of the dual focus on interaction as "structurally organized and contextually oriented": "These two properties inhere in the details of interaction so that no order of detail can be dismissed, *a priori*, as disorderly, accidental, or irrelevant" (Heritage, 1984, p. 241). As already noted, when turning directly to interactional materials to discover how participants meaningfully organize conversation, there is an unwillingness to (a) rely on intuited or idealized data; and (b) posit, *a priori*, that interaction is driven by individuals' motives, needs, or other mentalistic phenomena (as was the case, e.g., with Garfinkel's original critique and extension of Parson's treatments of "moral norms," "need dispositions," and "personality"; cf. Heritage, 1984, chap. 2-5). Similarly, data-driven analyses tend not to be usefully informed *by a priori* theoretical musings or propositions. On the contrary, empirical observa-

tions repeatedly make clear how "theory construction," per se, is overwhelmingly premature. Due to its proclivity toward underspecification, claims and warrants about the detailed workings of interactional activities are routinely glossed by a priori theoretical propositions and, consequently, incapable of revealing recurrent practices and patterns of everyday talk.

Therefore, there is a decided "off-stage" role of theory in CA that includes a set of long-standing debates and empirical studies (see, e.g., Alexander, Giesen, Munch, & Smelser, 1987; Beach & Lindstrom, 1992; Boden & Zimmerman, 1991; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Hopper, 1989a; Mehan, 1991; Roger & Bull, 1989; Schegloff, 1987b, 1991). These studies collectively address issues such as framing "culture and/or institution" as some externalized causal agents predetermining actions and their consequences versus situating "culture and/or institution" as ongoing, methodically produced, locally occasioned, inherently accountable, altogether practical achievements. These traditional "macro-micro" debates (e.g., involving matters of power, status, role, gender, class, bureaucracy, etc.) will undoubtedly continue to receive considerable attention. However, such debates are not limited to CA and alternative social-science inquiries. There are long-standing and key debates between ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts as well, particularly "with the central role accorded to talk-in-interaction in the investigation of situated action" (Zimmerman & Boden, 1991, p.7). Thus, the debates more generally focus on issues of "larger contexts" and, relatedly, matters such as the role of extrasituational knowledge, what counts as a verifiable claim, and criteria for identifying "members' phenomena."

Although these matters are interesting and relevant, they are not addressed directly in this chapter. Rather, having laid general grounds for understanding the relationship between CA and the consequentiality of communication, I now turn to a specific operationalization of these, concerns by focusing on how participants rely on "Okay" in ways impacting the unfolding character of interactions.

SITUATING UNDERSTANDINGS OF "OKAYS" IN CONVERSATION

The present analysis focuses on how participants rely on "Okay" in recognizably nontrivial, transitionally relevant, altogether pivotal ways in conversation. Basic and empirically defensible grounds for such transitional usages, and their differential consequences for ordinary talk, are elaborated. As part of a larger project on "Okay" usages (Beach, 1991b), it is not coincidental that such an undertaking commences by drawing attention to

these fundamentally projective qualities. Yet such a focus does not discount how "Okays" are also specifically and unequivocally designed, by and for participants, in ways that are responsive to prior turn(s). By attending to backward and forward features of "Okay" usages, understandings can be generated regarding actions involving (as becomes evident) a host of shift-implicative moments in conversation.

Similar to what Jefferson (1981) aptly described (e.g., "Yeah") as *speaker* shift-implicative actions possessing a "topically dual-faceted character," making "topical movement transparently relevant," the following questions arise: How might "Okay" come to be understood as "on topic," yet doing something more (Jefferson, 1981:36)? What work is involved when speakers rely on "Okay" responsively, but also transitionally, and thus en route to continuation?²

Before turning directly to inspections of data whose features allow for such questions to be answered, an overview of the following three primary issues seems in order. First, all "Okay" usages (employed in considerably diverse ways, and in equally varied sequential environments) can be understood as locally occasioned resources available to participants for achieving specific and relevant tasks. Apparently and contingently, participants use and rely on "Okay" as partial solutions to ongoing interactional problems. The precise nature of these problems, and how participants rely on "Okay" as one means to resolve them, are reflections of what participants initially treat as meaningful in the course of achieving interaction.

Repeated examinations of a large collection of recorded and transcribed instances of naturally occurring interactions reveal certain predominant, and at times striking, interactional moments wherein "Okay" appears indispensable for participants. One elementary set of moments-addressed herein and recurrently available for analysts' and, eventually, readers' inspections-may be summarized as follows: "Okay" is employed *pivotal*ly, in the midst of precise moments of *transition*, by recipients and current speakers alike, across a variety of speech exchange systems (both casual and institutional); and not just in any sequential environment, but where what is "at stake" involves movements from prior to next-positioned matter(s). Such tasks routinely evidence a universal and therefore basic

²At the outset, it is worth noting that concerns with "topically progressive" talk, as addressed in Jefferson (1981) as well as Sacks (1987), are directed less toward what is "talked about" and more toward the organizing work that "talk does" (cf. Schegloff, 1990). This distinction is important in minimizing ambiguities and thus problems emerging when *topic* is treated as more or less synonymous with *order*, compared with what participants treat as orderly "in the first instance."

feature of involvement in interaction, roughly stated: In the course of organizing conversational activities, speakers and recipients are persistent in the insertion of, and thus movement toward, elaborated and/or new orientations to ongoing talk. These movements are generally en route to activity shifts (and, although much less frequently via "Okay" in casual talk, speakership). Participants can be shown to rely on "Okay," and thus design their talk to be responsive to prior talk, yet they also shape next-positioned activities in specific ways. Such "Okay" usages are uniquely and variously consequential for unfolding interaction.

Toward these ends, priority is given to features generalizing across diverse speakers, settings, and activities by focusing on recurring, free-standing, and "Okay + [fuller turn]" occurrences: universal in scope, yet-without exception-sensitive to the contingencies of any given moment of conversational involvement.

Second, extant theoretical concerns with "discourse markers" (e.g., see Fraser, 1990; Levinson, 1983; Redeker, 1990; Schiffrin, 1987) have neither necessarily nor systematically addressed fundamentally transitional, and thus projective, qualities of "Okay" usages. Conceptual definitions of *markers-as* categorical members of classes (i.e., discourse particles, conjunctions, connectives, interjections) that signal or reveal "pragmatic relations" (Redeker, 1990; Schiffrin, 1987) as essential components for discerning sentence meaning and language grammar (Fraser, 1990), and/or as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk," syntactically and sententially (Schiffrin, 1987, p. 31)-have not emerged from decidedly user-shaped streams or contingencies of language use. Thus, what recipients and current speakers might be orienting to via "Okay" (i.e., are occupied with and thus treat as significant in particular turn-taking environments) remains unexplicated (cf. Beach, 1990c, 1991a, 1991b; Jefferson, 1981; Wootton, 1988).

Third, a related and substantive basis exists for examining the interactional organization of particular "acknowledgment tokens," including their consequences for particular types of activities in conversation, and on which this and subsequent inquiries into "Okay" usages are demonstrably reliant (cf. Heritage, 1984, 1990; Jefferson, 1981; Schegloff, 1982). Devoid of these detailed examinations of tokens such as "Mm," "Mm-hmm," "Uh-huh," "Ah-hah," "Yeah," or "Oh" (and related other tokens, produced at times with upward intonation and, on all occasions, in precise orientation to the interactional task at hand), it may be easy to conclude that these otherwise minor features are not only disorderly and quite random, but perhaps inconsequential to unfolding talk in the first instance. But the opposite has convincingly been shown to be the case for a broad range of activities, including: initiating, extending, and terminating topics; display-

ing reciprocity to ongoing tellings; preparing the way for movement from passive reciprocity to more active speakership; and displaying receipt, possible surprise, and/or a change of state in information following prior delivery of some news via "Oh."

In terms of "Okay," the initial work by Schegloff and Sacks (1973) on preclosings in telephone calls identified key ways in which "Okay" is sequentially active: Recurrently, "Okay" emerges as a device initiating movement toward closure and/or as passing turns en route to terminating phone calls (see Segments 16-19 herein). These are the usages most commonly cited (e.g., Button, 1987, 1990; Levinson, 1983; Schiffrin, 1987) as representations of the ways participants use "Okays," noticeably and positionally, in conversation. Similarly, Schegloff's (e.g., 1968, 1979, 1986) work on telephone openings also contributes to a sequential understanding of how "Okay" marks movements to initial topic(s), and/or the business of the call (see Segments 11-15, as well as Hopper, 1991).

Although "Okay" usages have been given limited attention beyond the work on phone call openings and closings by Schegloff and Sacks, such work has occurred (cf. Condon, 1986; Merritt, 1984). Most recently, Beach (1990a) gave attention to how a "facilitator" of a focus-group meeting relied on "Okay" to initiate and manage such actions as closing preceding topics and moving on to next topics, including usages as a preclosing device employed to close down a given interactant while eliciting comments from a next (facilitator-selected) speaker. Somewhat related research on "Okay" in service encounters (cf. Merritt, 1980), as well as in recordings of interaction tasks given to families for making decisions about "vacation" (Condon, 1986), also exists. Identifiable contributions of these efforts-such as offering preliminary observations of "Okay" as a "bridge, a linking device between two stages or phases of the [service] encounter" (Merritt, 1980, p. 144), or by treating "Okay" (Goffman, 1974, 1981) as a "bracketing or framing" device that "appears as decision points at which participants choose among alternatives" (Condon, 1986, p. 75)-nevertheless reveal a tendency toward underspecification: The interactional work giving rise to "Okay" usages, participants' orientations to them, and their consequences for subsequent talk remain largely unaccounted for in the literature.

The scope of this investigation extends beyond those previously mentioned by attempting to establish transitional "Okay" usages occurring in more diverse interactional environments. Consequently, it provides a basis on which subsequent work might build, while also pointing to the need for fuller explications of the kinds of interactional tasks speakers use "Okay" for, in varieties of casual and institutional speech-exchange systems. Moreover, analyses of this type seem particularly well suited to

developments in linguistic pragmatics. For example, in concluding his discussion of potential contributions of "conversation analysis" to pragmatics, Levinson (1983) observed:

Finally, aspects of overall conversational organization also interact with linguistic structure, most noticeably in the linguistic formulae typical of openings and closings ... but also in the use of particles like *Well* and *Okay* in pre-closings and *the like*. In the present state of our knowledge, remarks of this sort can only be suggestive of the many, largely unexplored, ways in which conversational organization interacts with sentence and utterance structure. (p. 366; first two italics original, last italics added)

Another question thus arises: Upon consideration of casual "Okay" usages, what are these "largely unexplored ways" (i.e., "and the like")?

The analysis presented here proceeds in a step-by-step manner that gradually establishes "Okay" as responsive, yet displaying state of readiness for movements to next-positioned matters. First, to understand how "Okay" is employed transitionally, it may be useful to locate noncontinuative usages with a brief overview of "Okay" as a free-standing receipt marker employed by both recipients and current speakers. Second, ways in which "Okay" has been found to work in phone opening and preclosing environments are sketched. These instances begin to reveal, through prior empirical findings, basic transitional features of "Okay." Third, it is argued that participants rely on "Okay" as a means of simultaneously attending to prior turns while also setting up next-positioned matters (topics, activities). Fourth, on this basis, a case can then be made for "Okay" as a projection device for turn and, at times, speaker transition (i.e., a *conversion technique* for extending prior and/or establishing new priorities for subsequent talk). Although "Okay" may appear as free standing, and next speakers may treat "Okay" as noncontinuative and/or closure relevant, they may nevertheless be shown to project subsequent and fuller turns (i.e., "Okay + [the work of additional turn components]"). Finally, having established a variety of "Okay" usages as transitionally relevant to ensuing talk, and having laid grounds for its examination, implications for future research are briefly sketched.

"Okay" as a Free-Standing Receipt Marker

Recipients may rely on "Okay" as a shorthand display that marks: (a) acknowledgment and/or understanding (e.g., confirmation) of, and/or (b) affiliation/alignment (e.g., agreement) with what prior speaker's utterance was taken to be projecting. In these ways "Okay" can and often does stand alone, adjacently placed and specifically designed to demonstrate

recipients' orientations to the topic and activities at hand. Thus, in Segment 1,

(1) #3; (M. Goodwin, 1980, p. 676)

Sha: Your mother wants you!

-* Flo: Okay

Flo's "Okay" does not signal that she will necessarily and immediately abide by her mother's wishes; rather, it signals adequate receipt of Sha's informing (see Appendix for description of transcription conventions). In drawing attention to John's "Okay" in Segment 2,

(2) Auto Discussion: (C. Goodwin, 1987, p. 211)

Don: I'll go get some more water ((Leaves with pitcher))

- John: Okay.

Goodwin (1987) noted how Don's announcement of a departure simply "gets an answer in next turn from recipient" (p. 211). John's "Okay," however, is neither an answer to a question, nor does it indicate that Don has any trouble with the announcement. Such is also the case in Segment 3,

(3) SDCL: CallGdps:11³

G: Let's le- (I'll) let ya 1A to him for a minute

-a D: Okay

as D (Grandson) affiliates with his grandmother's announcement by displaying a willingness to talk with "him" (grandfather). In a similar fashion, recipients in the next two instances—from transcriptions of call-waiting

³ An explanation of this data source is as follows: SDCL is an acronym for San Diego Conversation Library; *CallGdps* is short for an audio-recorded and transcribed phone call entitled "Calling the Grandparents"; 11 marks the page number of the transcript from which the following interactional segment was drawn. Similarly, in the following data (Segment 4), UTCL is an acronym for University of Texas Conversation Library, *Family Phone* is the title given to this particular recorded and transcribed conversation, and 2 is the transcript page number. Each data segment throughout is similarly abbreviated, in many cases citing specific authors and references (including dates and page numbers) from which data were collected on "Okays." In these cases, specific definitions of data source abbreviations may be obtained from individual authors. Clearly, however, idiosyncrasies do exist in labeling and abbreviating data sources.

recordings (cf. Hopper, 1989a, 1989b, 1990)-essentially grant prior speakers' requests to "Hang on":

(4) UTCL: Family Phone:2

Subscriber: Hang on I got a call on the other line.

-* **Partner: Kay**

(5) UTCL: D10

A: Hang on one second okay?⁴

B: Okay.

Finally, in Segment 6 A's request to borrow B's car is eventually granted with "Okay":

(6) Sacks:4/1/72:16

A: Can I borrow your car?

B: When?

A: This afternoon.

--, B: Okay.

In this segment, "Okay" is placed as an answer to the initial question by B as recipient-one following an insertion sequence interjected between the first and second parts of the Q-A adjacency pair (cf. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1989).

Third-Turn Receipts by Current Speaker. Free-standing "Okays" are also employed by current speakers who initiate such activities as questions. Having received an affirmative, acceptable, and/or clarifying answer from recipient, current speakers move next to mark recognition and/or approval in third slot via "Okay":

(7) FN#6: (Davidson, 1984, p. 127)

A: You wan' me bring you anything?

(0.4)

B: No: no: nothing.

-- A: AY1(;kay.

⁴As evident in Segment 5, "Okay?" may be tag positioned with upward intonation/contour, and received with "Okay" in next turn. These specific usages lie beyond the scope of this analysis; they possess a different phenomenal status, occurring frequently, and are variously ordered in their own right. Examination of a collection of these usages recurrently reveals them to be devices for soliciting and ensuring agreement and/or alignment from next

Davidson (1984) treated A's "AV- kay." as a "rejection finalizer": "Okay is an instance of a class of objects that display that the inviter or offerer is going along with the rejection and is not (for the time being) going to produce any subsequent versions" (p. 127).

Alternative versions of third-turn receipts (cf. Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991; McHoul, 1978, 1985; Mehan, 1978, 1979; Schegloff et al., 1977; Tsui, 1991) appear in Segments 8 and 9. These "Okays" are employed not as responses to recipients' acceptance-rejection (or mitigated version) of an invitation/offer, but as affirmations of the correctness of an understanding check in Segment 8,

(8) HG:II:15-16: (Button & Casey, 1984, p. 168)

N: You'll come about: (.) eight. Right?=
H: =Yea::h,=
-a N: =Okay

and simple information query in Segment 9:

(9) SDCL: DrksCls:9

D: Who are you gonna stay with
F: I tsy
_+ D: O:kay

However, third-turn receipts marked with "Okay" occur in a wider variety of environments than those involving questions (and the work questions do-i.e., inviting, offering, checking understandings, clarifying, seeking information, etc.). One such segment appears next, where A provides information as grounds for minimizing S's concerns, which S then (having been informed) treats as "Okay":

(10) SDCL: SptsTrip:6

S: There's- there's gotta be a bigger refrigerator
than the little one or you're gonna be:

(.)

A: Well it's:: it's you know (0.5) it's like. the si-
half the size of a regular refrigerator

-a S: Okay

Segments 1-10 repeatedly illustrate how "Okays," although accom-
...: 1.... A:cc 4t...ac .F -1:- urn n.4:n `Onlhr nlar:Prl (in cornd nr third

Each **usage** examined thus far is *noncontinuative*, or what Davidson (1984) suggested is essentially a withholding by the producer to offer a "subsequent version" (p. 127). Yet these segments, and others similar to them, do not collectively warrant a "claim of exclusivity" in the free-standing status of "Okay" placements-by recipients or current speakers. Quite the contrary may be the cases As evident in the following discussion, "Okay" has **been shown** to possess fundamental "projective" qualities.

"Okay" In Phone Call Openings and Preclosing Environments

One useful means to understand how "Okay" exceeds singularized or free-standing usage is by turning to beginnings and endings of phone calls. Relying on the considerable research conducted on these interactional events (cf. Button, 1987, 1990; Hopper, 1989b, 1991; Schegloff, 1968, 1979, 1980; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), "Okay" has been found to have relevance for next-positioned matters.

Phone Call Openings. Consider, first, a canonical phone opening in which initial queries and responses involve "Okay":

The distinction between free-standing "Okay's" in Segments 1-10, and subsequent descriptions of "Okay's + [continuation]," is not offered as a "black-white" proposition. Numerous instances have been collected involving "Okay + [minimalized turn construction unit]" (e.g., assessing, thanking, address terms, etc.), which often occur in preclosing environments, at times in apparently "redundant" fashion (e.g., "Okay all right", "Okay good"). In the following segments, for example, each "Okay" prefaces a minimalized continuation prior to the Caller "moving out of" the closing Crandall appears to be initiating (cf. Button, 1987,1990):

(Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 321)

- Caller: You don't know w-uh what that would be,
how much it costs.
- Crandall: I would think probably, about twenty
five dollars
- Caller: Oh boy, hehh hhh!
- + Okay, thank you
- Crandall: Okay dear.
- Caller. OH BY THE WAY ((continues))

And here Mary offers a slightly upgraded response:

(A/M)

- Alan: W'l b-] bring a change a'clothes yih
c'n use the ba:th r'm d'change,

- (11) #263; (Schegloff, 1986, p. 115)

((five lines deleted))

C: How are you?

R: Okay:.

C: Good.=

R: =How about you.

It is seen here that "Okay" is, essentially, both responsive to C's query and preliminary to R's reciprocal "How about you." In Segment 12, Irene's "Okay" is used in like manner in the same turn, receipted by Marilyn with an "Okay + [initial (though unexplicated) topical direction]," which Irene specifies next:

- (12) #268; (Schegloff, 1986, p. 135)

Marilyn: Oh HI. = How're you do:in.

-a Irene: Heh okay. = How about you.

Marilyn: Okay, pretty goo:d. I've been busy:
bu(h)t,.hh other

Irene: [Are you tea:ching?,

But in Segment 13, notice what occurs when no reciprocal "How are you" gets produced:

- (13) #250a; (Schegloff, 1986, p. 139)

Marlene: Hi. this is Marlene:

Bonnie: Hi,

Marlene: How are you,

Bonnie: I'm fi:ne,

-a Marlene: Okay..hh D'you have Marina's
telephone number?

In the place of "How are you," Marlene moves directly to the business of the call with "Okay + [inbreath + question]." As Schegloff (1986) observed:

No such reciprocal is produced directly after the sequence-closing assessment ["I'm fi:ne"], nor in the inbreath which follows, which can be heard as *preparatory to further talk* by caller. Caller does not wait for the reciprocal; instead, she uses this position, otherwise the place for a return howareyou, to

In short, Marlene uses this position to initiate, if not something altogether new, at least something extended or noticeably different from the prior canonical greeting. Here Marlene's "Okay" is recruited to receipt and bring to a close activities comprising the phone opening, which Bonnie's "I'm fi:ne," initiates, giving rise to the inbreath (".hh") marking transition to a request for Marina's telephone number.

Just as variations from canonical greetings are not uncommon (cf. Hopper, 1989a, 1991), so is it that "Okay" is not infrequently in the "midst of," yet also "preliminary to," what comes next. In Segment 14, T's "Oka(h)y" is in third-turn position, marking receipt of A's prior response:

(14) UTCL: J10.1

- A: Allan
 T: Hi: this is Tuppel.
 A: Hi
 T: You r(h)eady for today's go rou:nd?
 A: Sure h
 T: Oka(h)y hih hih hhhh well- I just had a call from Joe and he says ((continues))

As a pivotal resource, notice also that T's "Oka(h)y" is immediately followed by "hih hih.hhhh well-"-essentially two laugh tokens, an inbreath, and a topic initial "well-"-which, not unlike Segment 13, intervenes; following T's attempt to close the phone opening and as a preface to both initiating a new topic and offering a first reporting.

A similar case can be observed in Segment 15, but on this occasion a switching of speakers occurs within an embedded phone opening:

(15) SDCL: Maligl:13

- M: Yeah (.) Wu:ll he's (.) he's umm
 (2.0)
 ((father is talking in the background))
 M: wait a minu:te (.) T hold on T hold on
 (4.0)
 D: GOOD MORNING
 S: HI (.) how ya doin'
 D: O:ka:y (.) T Hey > waddaya wanna do about your car < (.) iz there any chance you wanna try an jump Start it?=
 (4.0)

- S: =I'm gonna trade it (.) for'n eighty: eight
 BMW seven this-fi:ve=
 D: Ri::ght.hhh=

D's "O:ka:y" receipts and brings the embedded phone opening to a close, and as an alternative to constructing a reciprocal "how are you/how ya doin'," transitions by relying on an attention-gaining "T Hey" to set up subsequent queries about jump starting the car.

Pre-Closings. Just as "Okay" can be understood as marking closure and giving rise to a shift in orientation toward initial topic(s) in phone call openings (e.g., via queries and reportings), so has "Okay" been evidenced as one routine component in "terminal exchanges" (e.g., along with "Well") and, more generally, topic closure. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) were fundamentally concerned with establishing a warrant for such claims (see also Button, 1987, 1990), as apparent in participants' orientations, that collaboratively refrain from continuing by working toward subsequent (and often relatively immediate) closure. As with Segment 16,

(16) Schegloff & Sacks (1973, p. 304)

- A: O.K.
 B: O.K.
 A: Bye Bye
 B: Bye

a warrant toward closure becomes available. Or as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) plainly stated:

Its effectiveness can be seen in the feature noted above, that if the floor offering is declined, if the "O.K." is answered by another, then together these two utterances can constitute not a possible, but an actual first exchange of the closing section. The pre-closing ceases to be "pre-" if accepted, for the acceptance establishes the warrant for undertaking a closing of the conversation at some "here." (p. 305)

In these ways, it turns out that a rather massive number of phone calls "begin to end" with markings such as "Okay," some that "may be said to announce it," as in "I gotta go," or,

(17) Schegloff & Sacks (1973, p. 307)

- A: Okay, I letcha go back tuh watch yer Daktari

Many others rely on "Okay" and/or (at times) its functional equivalent in phone pre-closings (e.g., "All right") to offer recognizable attempts at closure:

(18) Schegloff & Sacks (1973, p. 314)

--r B: Alrighty. Well U! give you a call before we decide to come down. O.K.?

C: O.K.

B: Alrighty

C: O.K.

B: We'll see you then

C: O.K.

B: **a** bye

C: Bye.

(19) SDCL:Drkscls:21

-4 D: Ahkay um (0.2) how kQut if I give you a call like around seven thirty

C: Akay

D: And we'll figure out a a:ctly whenurn (0.2) you want to > come get me or whatever <

C: Okay

D: At seven thirty I'll probably have eaten and be show:ered and stuff

C: SQunds good?

D: Okay a I'll talk to you then

C: Alright b ye

D: I I Bye

As becomes evident as this analysis unfolds, phone call openings and closings are by no means the only environments within which participants rely on "Okay" to close down and transition toward next activities or topics. In addressing how participants work to "get off/exit" varying kinds of troubling topics in conversation, Jefferson (1984) observed that a "recurrent device for moving out of a troubles-telling is *entry* into *closings*" (p. 191). In these kinds of contingencies, "acknowledgment tokens ... can be accomplice to topical shift. A recurrent phenomenon is the production of a token just prior to a shift..." (p. 216):

(20) Rahman:B:1:(11):6

A: Never mind it'll al come right in the end,

J: Yeh. Okay pu go and get your clean trousers on

Following a series of attempts by G to attribute wrongdoing and hold S accountable for her health by promising to make an appointment with a doctor (cf. Beach, 1991a) in Segment 21,

(21) SDCL:G/S:16

G: T O:ne > step at a time < Sissy
(0.5) we'll go the Qne tame (0.7)

that ch'u (0.4) promise me

that UI make the appointment ()

[I

S: T OKA::Y Alright (.) OKAY

III GO n- le(t)'s just dW it for t'night

okay? (.) I don't wanta talk about it anymore.

(1.5)

S: hh hhhh I'm exhausted I havta work tomorrow
are you still gonna go iIk with me tomorrow:
((continues))

S relies on "OKA::Y/Alright" in overlap, and as repeated emphasis in a "recycled turn beginning" position (cf. Schegloff, 1987c), to both affirm the promise G is requesting and "to start the conversation afresh; thus the name "conversation restart" (Jefferson, 1984, p. 193).

Addressing the Dual Character of "Okay"

From even an initial sketch of phone call openings, closings, and moving-out-of-troubling topics, it becomes apparent that participants rely on "Okay" in a dual fashion: to facilitate closing down some prior action(s), and, by so doing, to make possible the projection of and thus movement toward accomplishing some forthcoming and relevant activities. However, the dual character of "Okay" usages is apparent across a considerably more diverse set of interactional, and thus locally occasioned, environments than previously identified. Although routine and often taken for granted, such moments add to the richness and texture of everyday life affairs. Understanding the situated character of such moments, including

what is "at stake" for the participants, is tantamount to grasping how and when "Okays" are recruited for accomplishing specific kinds of actions.

Consider the embedded "Okay" usages in Segments 22 and 23—two instances that are not atypical yet nevertheless deserve some close inspection. For example, in Segment 22, a canonical and even classic three-part "perspective display sequence" (cf. Maynard, 1989) takes place:

(22) SDCL:HsReunion:8

- J: T Was he heavier than me!
 A: No- (0.2) Ma he's a lot heavier than you.
 -4 J: I Okay then he's not even close. He said
 I'm thinner I'm skinn(i)er dude

Here, J first queries and solicits an assessment from A regarding a matter worthy of some caution: the comparison of J's weight with that of a high school classmate observed at a recent class reunion. Although A initially comes off as providing a disaffiliative reply or opinion, A quickly self-repairs and confirms what J next reports as, essentially, being in agreement with some other source ("He said"). In so doing, J relies on the third-turn "Okay" receipt in a way treating A's answer as sufficiently completed. The way is now made clear for J's subsequently achieved report. Clearly, a position is constructed by J confirming A's opinion via a next-positioned assessment (cf. Jefferson, 1981; Pomerantz, 1984) about being "thinner/skinn(i)er dude," yet in an upgraded fashion. By taking A's utterance into account in this manner, J relies and builds on prior opinion in ways reinforcing (perhaps even exploiting) an issue J initially queried and invited discussion about: that a particular high school classmate was, in no uncertain terms, "heavier than me!"

In Segment 23, C (as recipient) initially comes off as agreeing with M's prior assessment and proposed solution regarding packing "the van":

(23) SDCL:Bandchat:2

- M: There's no way that it'll fit
 .hhh I know it won't fit in the va::n
 (°)
 M: It's gonna need an open spot
 (.) and we'll just put like a quilt?
 > in the back so it doesn't <
 .hhh scratch it up

- 1-a C: Okay (.) that's fine

 M: Ya know scratch your
 °rim truck°
 |)
 2-a C: M y : trust me > the bed of my
 truck is kQ:: scratched and jo: dented
 it's not gonna matter <

C's "Okay" in Line 1-a is not an isolated attempt to display sufficiency toward M's prior turn, but is employed in unison with "that's fine" as one form of sequence-closing assessment—one collaborative means of marking a no-problem orientation to what M displayed concerns about (e.g., scratching). Yet as M overlaps to reiterate and further specify °rim truck° as a focal point of concern, so does C in Line 2-. make explicit what "Okay (.) that's fine" left unstated: that "it's not gonna matter," and need not be attended to further. It is in this environment that C's "trust me" is best understood as a third attempt by C (i.e., "Okay -4 that's fine -- trust me") to close down M's prior matters, eventuating in what is now seen as C's elaborated offering of reassurance about scratching the truck. But what might be said about where C may have been headed (i.e. some next-positioned matter C may have been en route to had the offering of additional reassurance not been occasioned)? Due to the contributions put forth by C in responding to the *interactionally generated* character of M's overlapped talk, and thus the additional and unanticipated efforts required by C to add closure and reassurance to this particular issue at hand, what C may have been *moving toward* following the "Okay" usage remains unclear (as fuller inspection of the longer transcript reveals). These sorts of contingencies, involving "Okay" usages in turn-transitional environments, inevitably shape the trajectory of speech exchange, and are addressed more fully in subsequent sections of this chapter.

It is curious, then, that although "Okay" usages of the sort apparent in Segments 22 and 23 are usefully understood as recruited components for treating some prior talk as sufficient and/or working toward achieving some closure or termination of the talk-in-progress (e.g., scratching the truck), additional actions are also transpiring. These instances and more begin to reveal how "Okay" can be deployed in turn-initial position by recipients (Segment 23) and current speakers (Segment 22), as responsive to prior turn and preparatory in movements to what is frequently offered as relevant for ensuing talk (even though, as with Segment 23, such movements are not always forthcoming). Each "Okay" appears to simulta-

neously resolve the problem of attending to what was projected in prior turn (e.g., acknowledging/affirming), and paving the way for next-positioned matters (e.g., reassuring, assessing). By means of contrast, and in reference to "Yeah," Jefferson (1981) suggested that:

The token is observably, albeit minimally, "on topic"; observably, albeit minimally, attending to the rights and obligations entailed by the fact of talk-in-progress with participants distributed as "speaker" and "recipient." It is, albeit minimally, "responding to" prior talk and not-not quite yet, introducing something new. (p. 36)

Moreover, because recipients' assessments have frequently been shown to precede topical shift (Jefferson, 1981), C's final turn in Segment 23—an "offering of reassurance about 'scratching' the truck"—again assesses the situation at hand following the insufficiency of "Okay (.) that's fine" to put such matters to rest.

Concurrent Operations: Backward- and Forward-Looking Features. When one considers the dual character of "Okay" usages, "Okay" is decidedly more than recipients' displayed attentiveness to topics or activities having already transpired; it is also essential and preliminary to what Heritage (1984), in analyzing the work of "Oh" as a "change-of-state" token, described as "additional components that achieve other tasks made relevant by the sequence in progress" (p. 302). Such insertions and movements are repeatedly achieved by first attending to (however minimally and in transitory fashion) what was taken to be projected in prior speaker's turn. Just as Heritage substantiated how "Oh" strongly indicates that its producer has been informed as a result of the immediately prior news, announcement, informing, and so on, so might "Okay" be understood as indicating that its producer agrees with, affirms, and/or understands what was projected prior—and perhaps even treats that talk as significant.⁶ *But having so accomplished these objectives via "Okay," the way is now open to what is deemed relevant through additional turn components.*

Hence, a wide variety of "Okay" usages are designed by participants to be neither backward nor forward in character, but are conjugal in the ways

⁶There is a wider variety of relationships among "Oh" and "Okay" than described here—most notably the ways in which interactants receive particular types of prior turns with "Oh okay" (and versions thereof). Although an extended collection of segments, including "Oh + Okay," is undergoing analysis, a case for such specialized markings (e.g., "change-of-state + confirmation/ affirmation/agreement, etc.) is not made herein. However, Heritage (1990) examined other types of "Oh-prefaces" as turn-initial responses having consequence for a variety of activities (e.g., treating prior inquiries and/or questions as inappropriate).

they are wedded to ongoing activities. Such dual-character usages are not vacillating displays of decisioning, as if speakers are noticeably weighing or otherwise struggling with prior-next comparisons and their relevance to ongoing talk.⁷ Rather, it is the lack of ambiguity made apparent in such "Okay" usages that readily, and altogether contingently and momentarily signals a *state of readiness* for moving to next-positioned matters. In this sense, "Okay" might best be likened neither to a firearm's bullet nor the marksman's placement of the finger on the trigger mechanism, but to the work involved in the careful "squeezing" of the trigger immediately prior to the firing and release of the bullet (complete with trajectory/aim).

At times, these dual functions are explicitly marked with two "Okays" by same speaker in consecutive turns: one for prior and one marking orientation to next. In Segment 24,

(24) SDCL:Drkscls:14

D: Would you want to go with me?
C: TlyQ not really

⁷Yet at times there appear to be particular usages of "Okay" that convey "special meaning." These include segments such as the following, where G's "Q::ka:y?" treats S's prior response as something like "overresponding" or "coming on too strong," and the like—perhaps as one means to "feign" surprise, deference, or even contempt—with the position taken by S:

SDCL:CapPun:11

G: But do you think there's hope at T x 11
for a- any of these people that (have)
been ch&U:ed or: (0.4) (lo:od) o:r.
sho:t er-
(0.7)
S: ° T What do you mean hope.' get (th)em
off the Planet don't release (th)em
an(d) have (th)em kill other *people*
(1.2)
-4 G: Q::: k a:y?
I I
S: (I) if they can't ha- (I) f T they
can't handle reality (.) the:n: get the
fuck out °ya know° T get Q_Wta low:n
(1.2)
+ G: > Right but < d- does that still give us
the right to:- to- T to kill (th)em
(1.5)

Even on this occasion, however, G's "Q::ka:y?" eventually leads to a fuller turn, as evident in G's next "> Right but <".

- D: hhh Why not
 C: 'Cuz I don't like Taco Bell
 1-+ D: 'Kay
 (0.4)
 2-~ D: Umkay_ you might feel like gating
 C: 11M
 2-+ D: You feel like ta:co's anywhere

and specifically Line 1-9, D relies on "Kay" to acknowledge C's justification for an invitation refusal, and does not immediately pursue another option. Yet when C also withholds speaking in the following (0.4) (transition relevant) pause, D's second "Umkay" prefigures a redo (and more general) invitation (cf. Davidson, 1984; Drew, 1984) to eat tacos somewhere else. In Segment 25, C and D are similarly engaged in discussing upcoming activities, but the focus has now shifted to postdinner entertainment:

(25) SDCL:Drkscls:15

- C: I guess the ba:nd marts at ni:ne
 D: Oh really
 C: Ya from what Jill told me
 1-+ D: Okay when's Jill gonna go ,t
 C: Same time (0.2) we're gonna meet her there
 2--, D: Okay um (0.5) sQ you wa:nt to take your car
 C: We can lake your car if you wa:nt
 D: hhh hhh T I meant you want- you wanna
 have your car there so you can Jg:ave ' t
 C: Yeah I think that'd t& a meter idea
 3--, D: Okay
 (0.5)
 4+ D: Okay.hhhh well what- what time is it now
 °I don't have my watch on°
 C: Six o'clock

It is apparent that D's first two "Okays" are employed to acknowledge and treat prior information as sufficient: C's citing Jill as a source that the band starts at nine; that Jill will leave at the same time and meet them there. The "Okays" in Lines 1-a and 2--, also function to preface and segment addi-

tional information queries in separate turns.^s In Line 3-a, D then receipts C's agreement to the clarification offered. With prior misunderstanding about the car now remedied, and following a (0.5) transition-relevant pause (similar to Segment 24), D's next "Okay" shifts attention to "what time is it now."

In Segment 24, Line 2-p and Segment 25, Lines 1-4,2->, and 4- "Okay" signals varying degrees of on-topic/activity shift (as is discussed in more detail in subsequent sections). It is worth noting, however, that such "Okays" are not necessarily disruptive or competing with the ongoing development of these topics and activities. Although they display a general (albeit momentary or transitory) state of readiness for moving to next matters, they do not typically appear to be set up via other kinds of tokens. This is in contrast to Jefferson's (1981, 1993) illustrations of how "Mm-hmm -* Uh-huh -, Yeah" may (but not always; cf. Beach & Lindstrom, 1992; Drummond & Hopper, 1991) mark progressive movements from "passive reciprocity" to "speaker readiness" in preparedness to shift topic and/or speakership. Although "Okay" may clearly function in activity shift-implicative ways, tokens such as "Um-hmm" or "Uh-huh" have not, in the materials examined herein, appeared as prerequisite to "Okay" placement.

More accurately, a straightforward bid for speakership seldom accounts for what "Okays" seem to be closing down and working toward (i.e., next-positioned matters) in casual interactions? It is apparently uncommon for such "Okays" to be employed by speakers (in free-standing fashion) as *only a* means to signal "passive reciprocity" (e.g., by working to retain the rights and privileges of current speaker/storyteller; cf. Beach, 1991c; Beach & Lindstrom, 1992; Mandelbaum, 1989). However, some instances have been located (e.g., see Segments 18 and 19) where "Okays" are placed so as to facilitate current speaker's actions (e.g., closing a phone call). In fact, what frequently *appear* to be free-standing "Okays" are routinely not designed to display "passive reciprocity," so as to retain the rights and privileges of whatever action(s) current speaker might be en-

^s"Okay"-prefaced queries such as these, although not addressed in this present analysis, have been found to be predominant in two particular sequential environments: (a) during planning activities in "casual" talk; and (b) throughout a variety of "institutional" activities, where those "institutionally responsible" for an occasion's focus and purpose (e.g., doctors, lawyers, counselors/therapists, 911 or cancer hotline call receivers/dispatchers) deal with contingencies in the midst of what Sorjonen and Heritage (1991) and Heritage and Sorjonen (1994) referred to as "agenda-based nextness" (see Beach, 1993).

⁹In contrast, ongoing examinations of "institutional" interactions suggest that those responsible for an occasion's focus and purpose routinely rely on "Okays" not only in bidding for speakership, but also in shifting to markedly different topics or activities.

gaged in. Instead, such "Okay" usages can be identified as both closure-relevant and momentary, "on hold" prefigurings of movements toward next matters.

I turn now to an elaborated discussion of issues surrounding turn-transitional relevancies of "Okay" usages, many of which occur in environments where "next speakership" is at question, often involving overlaps and their resolution.

Next-Speaker Treatments of "Okay" in Turn-Transitional Environments

As apparent in the analysis thus far, and of particular relevance to the ensuing discussion, are ways in which "Okay" usages not only work to initiate closure for some prior actions, *but in so doing make possible and thus project continuation toward some next matters*. **For this and related reasons, Schegloff and Sacks (1973) put forth "Okays" as only:**

Possible pre-closings because of this specific alternative they provide for.... Clearly, utterances such as "O.K.," "We-ell," etc. (where those forms are the whole of the utterance) occur in conversation in capacities other than that of "pre-closing." It is only on some occasions of use that these utterances are treated as pre-closings, as we have been using that term.... It should be noted that the use of a possible pre-closing of the form "O.K.," or "we-ell" can **set** up "proceeding to close" as the central possibility, and the use of unmentioned mentionables by co-participants as specific alternatives. That is to say, the alternatives made relevant by an utterance of that form are not symmetrical. Closing is the central possibility, further talk is alternative to it; the reverse is not the case (an asymmetry hopefully captured by the term "possible pre-closing"; "possible topic re-opener" would not do). Unless the alternative is invoked, the central possibility is to be realized. (pp. 310, 312)

In attempting to open up the possibility of moving from phone openings, of initiating phone call closings, as well as across varied other conversational activities, speakers routinely rely on "Okay" to facilitate such closures and make possible the transition to some next matters by prefacing or prefiguring a fuller turn. In orientation to such actions, however, and in the ways coparticipants treat "Okay" as a closure relevant, alternative attempts may nevertheless be made by next speaker to complete, elaborate on, and, at times, even sequentially delete the closure and movement "Okay" was taken to be projecting. Coparticipants routinely design their actions in precise orientation to, almost in anticipation of, and even as replacements for forthcoming and fuller turns of "Okay" producers. One useful example is provided by Jefferson (1986), who drew attention to the occurrence of overlaps at possible transition or completion points:

(26) SBL:3:3:R:5 (Jefferson, 1986, p. 155)

Milly: O:kay *that's all* ah wan'duh know-
I thought *it w z mu Lh*
(I I I
Keith: Y a h w' l I I
we we J' know how much is
T In: I come h°ere though,

As Jefferson noted: "Again, here are a couple of cases where I take it that the recipient has particularly good warrant to treat an utterance as completed or transition-ready.... Somehow, 'Okay that's all I wanted to know' has a strong sense of finality about it. But, no, one can perfectly well go on with more" (p. 155).

In still other cases, recipients and/or current speakers may continue or even initiate a new turn, as if orientation is not given to the placement of "Okay" as closing, projecting, or transitioning. This is evident in Segment 27, where Vic's "Okay" might easily appear as free standing, at least in transcribed form:

(27) (Jefferson & Schegloff, 1975, p. 18)

Vic: It's, the Attitude of people!
(1.0)
Vic: Oka X
I
Mike: Y' didn't getta holda-
Vic: duh soopuh.

(¹)
Mike: Listen man.

~ Vic: I Freak it. He's a hitch he didn pud
in duh light own dih sekking flaw, hh=
Mike: =Y'couldn't gitta ho 1-

~ Vic: Man tell im.

(.)
Mike: Jim wan' home uh what.

I
Vic: Y' kno:w?

But as Jefferson and Schegloff (1975) observed, Vic (as turn occupant) can be understood as having produced "a single, coherent utterance," beginning with "Okay," just as Mike (as turn claimant) worked to revise his question throughout an environment of "competitive continuous utterances." Such environments clearly reveal how the import of "Okay" usages is by no means determined by isolated "Okay" producers.

Quite the contrary is the case. For example, in Segment 28, B's free-standing "Okays" (see Lines 1-+ - 3-+) are clearly preparatory to "Okay + [fuller turn]" Yet what these turns eventuate into (i.e., the ways they may or not achieve some closure and/or move to some next actions) is mitigated and thus shaped by matters pursued by next speaker (see A in Segment 28):

(28) SbCL:Study ((simplified transcript))

- A: =I couldn't get over after that anyway
I've got so many errands and stuff to run=
1-+ B: =okay=
A: =that's perfect=
B: =okay well just ha:ve uh:m
A: Are you gonna have her pick you TUR
or what ()
[]
B: We'll see: I: don't know I think
I'll probably just go home by myself because
I have this appointment. but why don't you have
her call me tonight. Is she gonna be home tonight?
A: I would hope so=
2-+ B: =Okay=
A: =I guess I'm gonna be leaving here at six to go
back to school >I've got a class tonight.<=
3-+ B: =Okay=
A: a::nd so all I can do is- you know if I- if I
don't talk to her before I leave I'll just leave
her a note- message to call you tonight.=
B: Okay and do you remember how to get here? or do
you want me to give you direc (tions)
[]
A: She: gave me
some instruction.

Notice that each of B's free-standing "Okays" is placed precisely at potential completion points by prior speaker A (i.e., at the end of turn-construction/syntactic thought units B treats as transition ready). In Line 1-+, as is common (Jefferson & Schegloff, 1975), A's tagged "that's perfect" was clearly unanticipated by B; upon its completion, B moves to fuller turn (see Line *-*, with the conjunction "Okay well...") to "ha:ve uh:m" do something that remains unspecified due to A's continuation and next query. After responding to A's query, it is apparent that in Line (**-+), B address's and systematically raises the previously unspecified (and thus momentarily put-on-hold) matter: "have her give me a call tonight." In both Lines 2-* and 3-4, B withholds [fuller turn] as A continues. This eventuates in "Okay + [two queries]" (Line *-+), which apparently were matters that B did not abandon, but was keeping "on hold" and working toward all along.

From Segment 28, it becomes especially clear that speakers may be preoccupied with somewhat different concerns involving very similar matters (e.g., getting together to study). What is particularly interesting for analysts is how speakers' preoccupations are implicated within the resources invoked to coordinate specific kinds of emerging actions: How do coparticipants tailor their talk to the very circumstances they are caught up in, and thus occupied with (cf. Beach, 1993a)? In terms of what appears to be B's predicaments in Segment 28, "Okay" usages were recruited as attempts at closure, as well as momentary solutions to problems associated with achieving next-positioned matters in precise unison with next-speaker continuation. In these ways, B's actions are not best understood as standing in opposition to A's stated concerns (or vice-versa), but rather as delicately tailored to the "spontaneous combustability" of the moment. Although the "Okay" usages are important as resources for initiating closure and raising next-positioned matters, they only represent a portion of the complexities and competencies of everyday language users.

As with Segment 28, it is within these and related sequential environments that free-standing "Okays" may prefigure movements toward fuller speakership and the articulation of next matters. In addition, turn-initial "Okays" preface what is soon (and more specifically, as with the "Kay but. . ." incompletion marker below) to be revealed as a next topical matter (e.g., catching a bus or trolley):

(29) SDCL:TwoCops:1

M: So the bik .h the bites can
probably can claim self defense

(1.5)

D: Who knows

- D: But uh
 | |
 M: Okay
 D: I imagine it won't even go
 to court
 (0.8)
 *-> M: 'Kay but if some- for some reason
 it does (.) then I < ca:n > the::n
 catch a::: (0.6) b:us downtown
 | |
 D: ((clears throat))
 M: (.) or the trolley.hh do hh do you
 have any cash at all? (.) like
 enough for the trolley?

In one sense, "Okays" can be recycled to reinitiate additional tasks that, due to overlap with D's continuation, failed to emerge following M's initial "Okay." Similar cases are not uncommon:

(30) SDCL:Drkscls:14

- D: And then um (0.5) and > I was just gonna wait
 for them to talk to you <
 C: 'Kay=
 D: => But I figure if I go about nine Larz is gonna
 go and his friend Eric's comin- Eric's gonna go
 with Larz I guess <
 -- C: 'Kay
 (0.5)
 *-4 C: > Well I was thinking more (.) a little
 earlier than: tha:t <
 D: Like when
 C: Cuz (0.2) they start charging cover after
 Bight thirty

In Segment 31, following M's preemption ("Mm: ye:s uh huh"), C relies on "Qkay" both as third-turn receipt and as an initiation of "getting back on track" with the telling at hand. Notice, however, that C did not immediately continue due to the overlap of M's "I liked it" assessment:

- (31) SDCL:Bandchat:5
 C: Did you ev e r s ee tha t
 | | | | | | |
 M: Mm: y uh huh
 -a C: Q Kay
 | |
 M: I liked it
 (0.2)
 -a C: UH::M:
 (1.0)
 *-> C: They have ha:d over five hundred order;, from
 the magazine for=tho:se uh (.) video- tapes

Overwhelmingly, then, an understanding of what "Okays" appear to be prefacing or setting up (see Line *-4) is recurrently (and eventually) apparent, even within overlapping environments resulting from next-speaker collaborations:

(32) SJ:I:6:1-2 (Schegloff, 1980, p. 137)

- Pete: Yer havin a g'rage sale,
 Hank: Yeah.hh
 Pete: Well fer cryin out loud.
 Hank: If I c'n possibly get away I'll he do:wn.
 Pete: We:ll h okayw-
 | |
 Hank: If li ey eno ugh other h.Q:lp so I
 don'have t'stay here.
 -5 Pete: Oh I see, hh h
 |
 Hank: But u h
 |
 Pete: We:ll we just tryin tuh
contact everybody t' see if they're=
 |
 Hank: Yeah.
 Pete: =gonna show up down there

(33) SDCL:Mavmolca:7

A: => It's- it's < a polish (.) ah:: nail har(d)ner
and polish dryer=

K: =Ugh hu(g) h:

A: [It- it does the sam e th-

K: [A n: that's
ba:sically the same thing.=

A: = T Ugh hugh=

--+ K: =Ok ay-

A: [Th at's right(.) its the °same thing°

*-+ K: [See
I think i- that's so: hot (.) to have
something that you can spray on like that.

A: [Ss:::
(imitating spraying))

Clearly, speakers employing "Okay" are not necessarily daunted by having "Okay" overlapped, or left as momentarily free standing or "dangling" as a result of next speaker's continuation and/or shift of activity. In fact, "Okays" (alone and/or in recycled fashion) may signal the likelihood, and even persistence, of subsequent movements to next-positioned matters.

Interjective Continuations by Current Speaker. It is an overstatement to suggest that the free-standing placements of "Okay," and/or various versions of "Okay + [well]" (as a topic initial lexical item), necessarily guarantee forthcoming and fuller turns designed to ensure that matters of importance get addressed. Although "Okays" may clearly prefigure upcoming actions (as in Segments 28-33), they nevertheless eventuate in momentarily withheld, as well as failed attempts to gain the floor. Therefore, the opportunity to make next-positioned matters explicit is therefore, at least for the moment but often indefinitely, passed by. In these cases, participants' "Okays," and whatever trajectories they display, are "interjectively" deleted.

Two examples appear next (Segments 34 and 35), both involving current speakers' (B,Y) continuations, regardless of recipients' (D,X) attempts to move toward [fuller turn]:

(34) SDCL:Detox:12 ((simplified transcript))

B: I see- I see thee: a: (0.2)
> this road < ? I take it an I
turned arou::nd and I di'n know
where the hell 'wz (.) so I
did > a bunch °a fucki:n u turns*
.hhh < I tried to < pa.hhh (.)
trace back and all this. > fin:ally
I said fuck it < take Linda Vista hh
(0.2)

-a D: Mmkay
B: Cuz it felt right hhh pt. (.) a::nd
D: Well how (long-) how long
[I [I
*-+ B: Really TLinda Vi sta at thee
end ? (.) war (wrr) I'm sposed t'hook up
(continues))

(35) UTCL:J66.4

Y: U:m (1.0) eh- hopefully I'll be able to get
with the printer and it'll just take you
following up to make sure they're
(1.2)

X: For what we intended them to be

Y: [That it's: proof rea:d] and all
that stuff

X: [I I
Okay well we

[And I'll call Beverly da- u:h
(continues))

Continuations of this sort are successful for two basic reasons. First, current speakers refrain from treating recipients' "Okays" as uncontested clues that signal movement (i.e., as "bids" for extensions and shifts that must be aligned with, abided by, and/or deferred to). Second, recipients producing "Okay + [movement toward fuller turn]" withhold fuller pursuit toward a given matter (again, at least until a later moment in the interaction, and perhaps indefinitely).

Throughout Segments 26-35, "Okay" is preliminary to additional turn-construction components; the result is an extended turn type. As originally exemplified in Sacks et al. (1974), and more recently made apparent in Schegloff (1987a), extended turns evidence some kind of achievement. Yet when these achievements are overlapped or otherwise deleted as noncontinuative, immediately following an "Okay," some form of structural constraint exists on the minimization of turn size. Such constraints indicate that, although "Okay" may be employed as an initiation of closure, such usages are preliminary to fuller turns achieving alternative actions (e.g., making a phone call, giving directions, catching a bus, making plans, continuing a telling, etc.). Yet, as noted previously, coparticipants may nevertheless treat "Okay" as free standing/noncontinuative. Thus, they may proceed accordingly, completing prior or initiating new turn components, at times effectively deleting the closing-opening work speakers' "Okay" usages were designed to accomplish. These junctures are similar to the kinds of interactional work evident at "transition spaces" described by Jefferson (1986), as well as what Button (1987) coined "opportunity spaces," as speakers move out of phone closings by expanding prior or initiating new topic(s) (see also Lerner, 1987,1989).

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Examinations of a rather diverse set of interactions suggest that "Okays" can be employed by recipients and current speakers alike to achieve a wide variety of actions. Although all talk-in-interaction is meaningfully constructed, and thus temporally situated only in reference to some prior-next environment, "Okay" usages do not appear randomly, but are recruited by coparticipants to achieve particular kinds of actions at specific moments of involvement. It has been shown that "Okays" routinely and differentially appear as: (a) free-standing/noncontinuative response tokens, used and relied on by participants to display numerous orientations to what was taken to be meaningful in prior talk; (b) predominant resources for initiating closure of some prior talk and action; and (c) projection devices revealing recurrent transitional movements across a variety of "Okay" place-

ments. Even when recipients or current speakers may (in next turn) treat prior "Okay" usages as noncontinuative, and/or move to sequentially delete the actions "Okay" was taken to be projecting (i.e., "Okay + [fuller turn]"), what participants appear to be prefacing or setting up via "Okay" is recurrently and (eventually) apparent, unless, of course, speakers subsequently refrain from moving to next-positioned matters that prior "Okay" was relied on to set up.

From the empirical analysis of "Okay" usages offered in this chapter, it becomes possible to gain a partial understanding of how talk amounts to action, how actions are inevitably consequential in shaping interactional environments, and how talk too easily assumed to be "messy and chaotic" is, in the first instance, meaningful for participants and, in just these ways, quite delicately organized. Such displays of organization are not inherent, a priori features of "Okay" per se, but consequences of how "Okays" are consistently employed by coparticipants as momentary solutions to certain kinds of interactionally generated problems. For conversation analysts, the ongoing task is to reveal the methodical ways that everyday language users create and resolve ordinary problems, not to disembodiment people from their commonsensical predicaments. By relying on recordings and transcriptions of naturally occurring (not contrived or idealized) conversations, analysts report, describe, and construct explanations for data so as to invite readers' critical inspections of scenic and collaborative activities. Gaining access to the meaningful nature of participants' actions emerges from direct observations of real-time interactions, and is not necessarily facilitated by a priori theoretical starting points: explanations rooted in reflections, musings, readings, and/or indirect observations of communicative behavior. Moreover, the activities of social life are shown to be best understood not by invoking causally determined and structured a priori forces (e.g., personality variables, culture, sociodemographic background; cf. Beach & Lindstrom, 1992), but as participants' locally occasioned, consistently updated, and practically achieved orientations to context.

This is not to say that conversation analysis treats as irrelevant, or otherwise loses sight of, actual concerns with history or tradition. On the contrary, in the precise ways that participants must rely on, invoke, and adapt to degrees and types of knowledge (cf. C. Goodwin, 1984,1987; M. Goodwin, 1990; Sacks, 1975, 1985), and as embedded within recurring modes of action (e.g., stories, teases, accusations, excuses, nicknames), evidencing and earmarking particular kinds of meaning for those relationally involved, history and tradition are distinct forms of practical achievement. Treating such phenomena as occasioned and consistently updated here-and-now actions, rather than entities somehow removed

due to matters of past origin and nature, draws attention to how interaction transcends temporal boundaries in the course of its construction.

Having illustrated and established basic and sequential features of "Okay" in casual interactions, and several kinds of contingencies that participants get caught up in during the course of organizing social activities, attention can now be more fully drawn to a related set of concerns we might formulate as "Okays and their *consequences*": What is it that participants are moving *toward*, that is, what specific *actions* do "Okays" precede by both recipients (e.g., topically extended and "mitigated" continuations, queries, and the work they achieve) and current speakers (e.g., story continuations and planning activities)? Examining ways in which "Okays" are consequential for prior and unfolding actions does not, of course, dismiss the importance of understanding how participants use and treat "Okays" themselves as meaningful. Toward these ends (and as mentioned only in passing throughout this chapter), ongoing investigations rest with such usages as upward-intoned and tag-positioned "Okays?", specially and phonologically marked versions (e.g., "Q:::ka:y?", T Q:::ka:y."), conjugal employments (e.g., "Oh okay"), and "Okays-in-a-series" (e.g., in *doing* getting off troubling topics). Finally, as a means to track and pursue understandings of cross-situational usages of "Okay" in the accomplishment of task-and setting-specific activities, attention is also being given to universal and particular contrasts among participants' "Okay" usages within "casual" and "institutional" (e.g., legal, medical, classroom, therapy/counseling) occasions.

APPENDIX

The transcription-notation system employed for data segments is an adaptation of Gail Jefferson's work (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Beach, 1989). The symbols may be described as follows:

Colon(s):	Extended or stretched sound, syllable, or word.
OKay	<i>Underlining/Italics</i> : Vocalic emphasis.
(.)	<i>Micro pause</i> : Brief pause of less than (0.2).
(1.2)	<i>Timed Pause</i> : Intervals occur within and between same or different speaker's utterance.
(())	<i>Double Parentheses</i> : Scenic details.
()	<i>Single Parentheses</i> : Transcriptionist doubt.
Period:	Falling vocal pitch.
?	<i>Question Mark</i> : Rising vocal pitch.

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T .L	<i>Arrows</i> :	Marked rising and falling shifts in intonation.
	<i>Degree Signs</i> :	A passage of talk noticeably softer than surrounding talk.
	<i>Equal Sign</i> :	Latching of contiguous utterances, with no interval or overlap.
[]	<i>Brackets</i> :	Speech overlap.
[[]]	<i>Double Brackets</i> :	Simultaneous speech orientations to prior turn.
!	<i>Exclamation Point</i> :	Animated speech tone.
-	<i>Hyphen</i> :	Halting, abrupt cut off of sound or word.
> <	<i>Less Than/ Greater Than Signs</i> :	Portions of an utterance delivered at a pace noticeably quicker than surrounding talk.

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