

Phone Openings, "Gendered" Talk, and Conversations About Illness

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The interactional exemplars herein offer only a sketch of Robert Hopper's research, a small sampling of ordinary yet complex interactions we had the opportunity to share curiosity and concern about: phone openings, men talking about women, and conversations involving cancer. Drawn from larger sets of data, these materials provide seemingly endless analytic puzzles. These puzzles prohibit boredom while injecting regular doses of humility as the incessant search for "patterns" goes forward.

"HOW ARE YOU TODAY"

Regarding the work of "How are you today" (and variations thereof) in phone openings, and some of the interactional aftershocks of their utilization, let me provide here yet another instance for existing collections. As a backdrop, I should note that it is by no means easy to elaborate on Schegloff's (e.g., 1968, 1979, 1986, 1987) exhaustive work on phone openings; he left few stones unturned in his analyses. Yet Robert offered some useful insights on matters of how strangers and intimates display and thus accomplish for one another their "relational history" (e.g., 1989b, 1989c, 1992b; Hopper & Drummond 1992). As Robert noted (Hopper, 1992b) in both summarizing Schegloff's original work on phone openings and making a case for further research on "recognition" as an exceedingly dense and complex matter, fraught with a seemingly endless array of

conversational practices: "marked turns in telephone openings become self-explicating bits of context.... On the slippery and elusive path that meanders toward description of the planet-wide human conversation, the telephone opening plays an important role" (pp. 80, 91).

A brief overview must suffice. During phone openings "How are you's" typically occur following "greetings," within inquiry/response slots and exchanges, are typically initiated by the caller, and once completed (if they occur at all) lay grounds for launching of first topic. Further, "How are you's" are typically, though not exclusively, utilized by intimates rather than strangers. In response to "How are you," a routine "Fine. How are you" is altogether unmarked. In contrast, marked responses may indicate problems and/or "special circumstances of some sorts"-that is, divergences from routine, apparent sequential ambiguities revealing that "something is up." For example, these features may be marked by (a) pauses following "How are you's," (b) failures to reciprocate greeting/inquiry, and/or (c) premonitoring and projection of possible problems (e.g., "pretty good I guess"; see Jefferson, 1980).

In a nutshell, that's the background. Now, here's the story.' It has always stood out in my mind as a classic introduction to conversation analytic possibilities.

In the late 1970s I was working with a collection of "pre-sequencing" instances (see Beach & Dunning, 1982). I believe it was in 1980, after reading Schegloff's (1980) particularly provocative "pre-pre" paper (Robert always liked "sound rows"; see Beach 1993a; Hopper 1992a; Jefferson, 1996; Sacks 1992a) that I called him at UCLA to set up an appointment during an upcoming visit to Los Angeles. It is a reconstructed conversation, but it is all I have, so take it for what it's worth. In any case, I only remember the first few moments of the call, my version of which goes like this:²

(1) Reenacted Fieldnotes³
((Ring Ring))
M: Hello?
W: Professor Schegloff?

¹ During the panel presentation, I noted that I had only shared this exemplar with Manny Schegloff 'yesterday,' but for Robert this should be a first hearing, qualifying him as an "unknowing recipient." This instance, then, provided an appropriate display of "relational history" for the gathering we were participating in. Further, it was with some hesitancy that I employed a "reconstructed" example, noting that "of all the panels this should be the least receptive to reconstructed conversations as data!"

² I also noted, tongue-in-cheek, "that this will be historically, I believe, the one and only time where not only will Manny perform with me a reconstructed conversation, but a conversation that is allegedly 16 years old," in response to which Manny offered "Historical CA."

³ Transcription details are generated from the recorded reenactment.

M: Ye::s.
W: Hi.=This is Wayne Beach calling.
>How are you today.<
|1.8)
M: You must be from the midwest.'

Here, of course, we have two strangers on the phone, the caller (W) initiating a "How are you today." often reserved for intimates, and/or some other special work, and a recipient (M) who did not (and probably could not!) let such a moment pass: Rather than providing a reciprocal "Fine. How are you.", or one of several other typical responses, and rather than answering the question more or less directly, M offered a declarative and conclusionary "You must be from the midwest."-decidedly *not a* question.

As I recall, at that moment I was both astounded and perplexed: How had he proffered such a correct guess? Here I was calling from the University of Nebraska, having been born and raised in Iowa, yet had not volunteered such information. I remember thinking: "What an amazing ability to operate on the materials of the moment like that"-to discern enacted background and extrasituational knowledge-from the scenic details made available through particular sets of practices and apparent in not just any, but altogether contingent sequential environments.

MEN TALKING ABOUT WOMEN

For nearly a quarter century Robert instructed a course on "speech and gender" at the University of Texas, Austin, the latter portion of which I began teaching a course on "stories" in conversational interaction at San Diego State University. Quite independently, one set of materials we became interested in (and continually work with students on) were practices coenacted by some men during talk about women, typically nonpresent, and commonly in "demeaning and derogatory," at times "sexist" fashion (see Hopper, 2001; Beach, 2000). Conceptual terms like *demeaning*, *derogatory*, *sexist*, and *gender* are altogether problematic *analytic* terms, of course, and debates regarding interactional evidence warranting these invoked concepts (or not) cannot be reoccasioned here.⁵ Suffice it to say, however, and contrary to popular opinion and traditional

¹ At the completion of this reenactment, I turned to Robert and noted: "Robert, that performance is for you. You may never see one like it again."

⁵ One analytic problem, for example, might be stated as follows: Attributions of "sexism" tend to reflect negative evaluations rendered by external audiences, overhearers, and/or eavesdroppers,

social scientific folklore, we have both concluded that women and men are more similar than different. Or as Robert put it during a joint lecture series we were fortunate to collaborate on at my alma matter, the University of Utah (May 1997),⁶ "Men and women don't really talk different, they just listen the same."

One set of practices we both identified involves men enacting "choral performances" when describing women's physical appearance (e.g., "breasts"). Such activities might be characterized as follows: voiced, prosodically echoed moments of overlapped and finely synchronized "turn sharings" (see Lerner, 1996), often involving extended laughter, reflecting properly simultaneous and informal manifestations of coconstructed intimacy (Beach, 2000). The first instance I recognized is drawn from a video recording vernacularly entitled "Two Guys"; a short excerpt is overviewed next, followed by a brief contrast with one of Robert's extracts:

(2) SDCL: Two Guys:5-14

W: > I went out with Meli:ssa las(t) ni:ght. < _
 T: =T T'uh hu: [: h ? I
 W: [W e: w e I nt to:'u:h.(0.2) <
 In n' Out? <
 T: Uh huh
 1-> W: pt hhh An(d) uh > she's all like <
 T I'm uncomfotable in my dre:ss:
 le'me go ho:me and \$cha: [: n g : e] \$!!!
 2-> T: [\$Uh HAH HAH]
 HAH ,!- HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH HAH \$!!
 3-> . eh(h)g)? = Too: much cle:av[a g e ?]
 4 > W: \$[Y:(h)es.]
 hu: [:(mph) \$]
 5-> T: [Mm:?mm:. I

In (1-)) W's "she's all like" previews an intonationally marked and falsetto characterization of Melissa's demeanor, a hearably mocking attempt to depict Melissa as "whiny" and stereotypically picky about her clothing. At the end of his utterance, W's final and laughingly produced word, "\$cha_:ng:e\$!!!," offers an *invitation* for shared laughter (see Glenn, 1989; Jefferson, 1979, 1984a, 1985; Jefferson, Sacks, & Schegloff, 1987). Though T's acceptance to laugh (2->) occurs immediately and in overlap, as an upshot of his close monitoring of the

whereas those speakers "accused" of producing "sexist actions" are stereotypically unaware of any misconduct or wrongdoing.

⁶ This special occasion involved a colloquium on "Interaction, Sexism, and Gender" and a special working session on "Communication in Medical Interviews." Appreciation is extended to Robert Avery and colleagues at the University of Utah for their timely and thoughtful hosting of this event-in retrospect, Robert's last "lecture performance."

unfolding character of W's personification of Melissa as inherently laughable, it is also both prolonged and sonorous in its extreme loudness. Designing his response to W's prior disparaging performance of Melissa (1->), T's laughter offers a contribution in its own right: Not just accepting, but also extending W's invitation with an invitation of his own, as Melissa's "cle:avage?" (3->) is offered as having shared and recognizably special significance. In essence, T works to "sexualize" the story by providing a sexually relevant analysis of a potentially non-sexual issue (i.e., Melissa's reason for changing her dress). This coarsely intoned and marked escalation is made available to W as T envisions what Melissa's dress may have been revealing, thereby inviting W to confirm this lewd orientation.

That T's laughter and "cle:avage?" in (3->) invited crude reference to Melissa is evident in (4->): As W overlaps with a coarse and resounding "\$Y:(h)es. hu:[:(mph) \$]," he displays his momentarily willingness to collaborate as a vulgar coparticipant by demonstrating his understanding of T's proposed "impropriety" (see Jefferson, et al., 1987, p. 168). Finally, and in upgraded fashion, T's "[Mm:?mm:]" (5->) offers a flavorful assessment of the sexual project W and T have now, though momentarily, produced together. And the story proceeds next as W shifts back to reconstructing his experiences with Melissa whereas T, as story recipient, continues to pursue increasingly sexual projects and W's involvements in them.

A similar example collected by Robert appears in Example 3:

(3) UTCL: L17.3 (Hopper, 2001)

Jeff: Leslie Leslie with the big- whangers.
 (0.4)
 Dan: Yeah.
 Jeff: [A:w.
 Dan: |Yeh-uh (.) up in two o four? The bi- you
 know two o four.
 Jeff: Big girl, bi:g.=
 1-> Dan: =We're talking big everything's big on her=
 2-> Jeff: big
 3-> Dan: =O:h Lord-
 4-> Jeff: =huh heh heh huh huh huh
 |huh huh huh huh huh
 3-> Dan: |How sweet, how sweet.
 5 > Jeff: Inde:d, indee:d a:h yes: your- your type for
 sure.
 5-> Dan: Yes.

Briefly, following Jeff's initial pronouncement regarding "Leslie with the big-whangers," in (1-> & 2->) Dan and Jeff simultaneously enact, with emphasis, "big/Big." This is immediately followed by Dan's postenactment assessments

(3-*) of their coorientation in the midst of Jeff's extensive laughter (4-*), including Dan's savory "How sweet, how sweet." And in (5--*) Jeff escalates by proposing Dan's unequivocal affinity with Leslie-as-described, a possibility Dan quickly affirms.

Excerpts 2 and 3 above provide a beginning collection of storyable moments where men collaborate in addressing, envisioning, and even savoring women's "cleavage/whangers." At key moments these coenactments emerge as voiced and prosodically resonant "turn sharings," that is, "choral performances" enlivening their disparagements and creating opportunities for shared intimacy, yet without specifically treating one another's actions as inappropriate or (and excuse the pun) tasteless. From examining interactions such as these, insights into *Gendering Talk* (Hopper, in press) can begin to be realized by anchoring our concerns in real time, everyday communication processes.

TALKING ABOUT AND THROUGH CANCER

It has recently been observed that "one out of every three families in the Western world is touched by cancer" (Baider, Cooper, & De-Nour, 1996, p. xvii), and that "Each year, over 1.2 million Americans learn they have cancer.... The American Cancer Society estimates that approximately 565,000 Americans die each year from cancer-related causes" (Haylock, 1998, pp. 171-172; see also Landis, Murray, & Bolden, 1998).

Each contributor to this volume, and no doubt many readers as well, have spoken with one another (and perhaps also, at some point in time, with Robert) about his "cancer journey" (see Kristjanson & Ashcroft, 1994; see also my chap. 10). Clearly, as most persons have directly known or know about others adversely impacted by a cancer diagnosis, and fewer though significant numbers of individuals are themselves cancer patients, talking about and through cancer is seemingly omnipresent and thus omnirelevant in everyday life. But if by chance any given individual has not been affected in some way by cancer diagnoses, daily life is replete with talk about other maladies that qualify equally well: For though cancer is predominant* it is only one of a myriad of passing, chronic, and/or terminal conditions receiving (at times demanding) our attention.

However, little is known about the distinctive features of illness-related conversations, occurring predominantly outside of the clinic, though not infrequently about clinical matters (e.g., what the doctors told you, or passing on what someone told you that the doctors told them, etc.). Research on conversations in the midst of cancer predicaments was under way prior to

Robert's diagnosis,' a project Robert has been aware of from its inception because (and perhaps not coincidentally) the phone call materials comprising this corpus were collected by a student we both mentored. Representing the first natural history of a family conversing about a loved one's (wife/mother/sister/daughter-in-law, etc.) cancer, from diagnosis until death, the corpus consists of 57 calls over a 13-month period, between six family members and over a dozen additional interactional participants.

Analysis is presently focusing on a subcollection of over 100 "news delivery sequences" (see Beach, 2001; Maynard, 1997; Maynard, in press), often delicately produced moments wherein family members initiate, deliver, and assimilate news (see Beach, in press). Aside from determining the interactional organization of these specific moments, attention is also being given to how news gets updated over time, longitudinally, throughout the course and progression of cancer, as the family tracks Mom's condition. For example, determining how (or if) the family moves from treating the diagnosis as a highly technical and extraordinary set of events, to an accepted and taken-for-granted feature of their dilemma, is of particular interest. Similarly, other key activities emerge as an upshot of members' preoccupations with them, such as the *interactional* achievement of "lay diagnoses," "uncertainty," "social support," "hope," and "grieving." Taken together, findings revealing the distinct ways these activities are treated as potentially "dreaded issues" (Perakyla, 1995), including their relevance to acclimatization and prognosis as routine family matters, are only beginning to emerge.

One brief instance must suffice (but see chap. 10). In the opening moments of the first phone call in the corpus, and prior to the first delivery and receipt of diagnostic news, Dad (D) and Son (S) coenact an extended phone opening revealing hesitancy to move directly to "the news," for whom D was the "bearer" and S the "recipient" (Jefferson, 1984a, 1984b). Though clues were provided by D that the as yet unarticulated news was bad, his premonitorings (Jefferson, 1980) of forthcoming trouble did not lead him to announce the news without S's assistance. And although S did not outrightly "guess" what the news

⁷ The inception of this research project was motivated not by personal experience, but by the uniqueness and richness of the interactions remaining to be examined. However, since beginning work on these materials my mother was diagnosed and died from cancer, and including Robert, numerous friends and family members have undergone cancer treatment. This raises a host of important issues, not the least of which are ways the intersection of personal and research involvements find their ways into scientific inquiry (and/or are noticeably absent from them), including both positive and potentially negative consequences.

⁸ The continuation of this research has been made possible through generous support provided by the American Cancer Society (Grant #ROG-98-172-01).

might be, a common feature of conjecturing in the midst of bad news (see Schegloff, 1988), he was complicated (see Maynard, 1992) to ask about "it" in Line 19 below:

(4) SDCL:Malignancy#1:1-2
 19 -4 S: What's up.
 20 |0.6)
 21 D: pt(hh) They ga:me ba:ck with the::: hh needle
 22 biopsy
 23 results, or at least in part:
 24 S: Mm hm:
 25 D: hh The tum:or::: that is the::: uh adrnal gla:nd
 26 tumor tests 2ositive.=It is: malignant.
 27 -3 S: O:kay? =
 28 D: = hhh a::hh(m)=
 29 -4 S: = That's the one above her kidney?

Much can be said about the differential knowledge S brings to bear on this sensitive news environment. In Line 19, the emergent and hearably serious tone of S's "What's yp.", one instance of an "itemized news inquiry" (Button & Casey, 1995) soliciting information about specific rather than general news, reveals S's foreknowledge that indeed "something was up". And it requires another discussion altogether (Beach, in press a, b) to address the sources of S's displayed knowledge, namely, the immediately prior phone opening with D and/or his ongoing monitoring of Mom's experience of ongoing health problems including impending "biopsy" tests. Similarly, many details inherent to Lines 20-24 are extremely important to address that cannot be adequately raised here, including how D hears S's "What's W." as asking for a diagnostic update, and his recognizably "biomedical" (e.g., technical, jargon-filled) orientation to the news delivery. What might be observed, however, is that S's "O:kay?" plus "That's the one above her kidney?" (Lines 27 & 29) are frequently commented upon by those inspecting Malignancy #1 for the first time as (more or less) a somewhat strange, oddly "stoic" reaction (see Maynard, in press) for a son to having just heard that his monk-, was diagnosed with a malignant tumor. For whatever reasons, people have described to me an inherent expectation that an immediate "Oh my God!" or "Oh no!" is "normal." And so it would seem, at least until analysis makes clear that D's disinclination to move directly to the news achieves other noteworthy actions: displaying himself as a central character impacted by the news, yet constraining the impulse for stronger reaction (e.g., indignation and/or anger; see Jefferson, 1988; Maynard, in press); orienting S as recipient of the news to the need for tracking the likely and soon-to-be reported trouble, yet providing for negotiable and collaborative possibilities in determining whether or not the trouble will even be addressed, and if so, just "whose trouble it is and, thus, how it will be talked about" (Jefferson, 1980, p. 166).

By recruiting "O:kay?" as a resource for momentarily placing D's elaborated news delivery on hold (see Beach, 1993b; 1996), S's move to "That's the one above her kidney?" displays his prior knowledge about Mom's condition but also his willingness to clarify his understandings of the news in relation to D's delivery of it. Here S's actions coauthor and thus shape both how the news gets initially delivered *and* that he shares knowledge and concerns, even though he is not the bearer of the updated news.

It is from these kinds of moments that "family" can (in part) be understood as practical achievements, especially in the ways news is not simply initiated and delivered, but also altered in its course as recipients rely on their knowledge of an incident to shape just what "the news" eventually amounts to.

FUNDAMENTAL SCHOLARLY COMMITMENTS

What follows is an overview of Robert Hopper's fundamental scholarly commitments and a characterization of his distinct *spirit of inquiry*, signatures or fingerprints exceeding yet complimenting his theoretical and methodological priorities, distinguishing features through which his work continues to touch and positively influence so many persons' lives and careers.

There are, of course, other distinguishing features of Robert's work extending well beyond the interactional materials summarized earlier-varied and important contributions Robert made within the communication academy, and beyond, uniquely qualifying him as a founding member of language and social interaction divisions and as a role model to emulate-scholarship encompassing a diverse range of critical topics from speech errors and self-repairs to cultural universals, acknowledgment tokens to possibilities for quantification, hedging disclaimers in Cancer Information Service phone calls to displays of relationship history (or lack thereof) in telephone openings, ethnography to conversation analysis, and a pioneering concern with performance studies and "poetics" (see Beach, 1993a, Hopper, 1992a; Jefferson, 1996)-only one of many instances where Robert sought connections rather than artificial dichotomies, community rather than pockets of isolated priorities, deconstruction of scholarly "cocoon" otherwise preventing the exchange of ideas and worldviews.

In short, Robert has consistently offered a reasoned voice on debatable and current issues throughout this critical evolution of the field and emergence of LSI studies, several clear themes of which appear as follows:

- A distinct preoccupation with theory, persistently working with and through the assumption that theories should be designed to enhance insight, not

replace it. These wideranging discussions were centered around two recurrent themes: (a) a debunking of theory/method bipolarization, and (b) an avoidance of premature/armchair theorizing promoting underspecification of phenomena.

- The inseparability of "micro/macro" concerns when situating theoretical concerns within conversation analytic priorities, such that any concerns with culture, power, status, role, or gender, for example, might ultimately be grounded in participants' concerted actions indigenous to rather than separated from the occasions in which they gather (e.g., as with speech act "theory").
- An early and seemingly constant preoccupation with methods as related to theory, addressing issues and approaches germane to "social psychology," "speech act theory," various modes of "discourse analysis," and "background/extrasituational knowledge" as clues in our search for reasonable and empirically warrantable solutions-in shifting from "methods" as tools researchers possess to "methods" as resources participants in interaction use and rely on to systematically and altogether contingently organize social occasions (see, e.g., Hopper, 1988, 1989a, 1991).

Consider also the following two examples, positions that may be obvious in our current research practices but, I can assure you, were formidable hurdles to overcome during the last two decades and remain currently problematic:

- Moves away from early and ongoing utilization of ungrounded "coding schemes"-replete with a priori, exhaustive "categories" and indexical decision rules-toward a "reflexivity of coding" more closely aligned with recordings, transcriptions, and unmotivated listening sessions (see, e.g., Beach, 1990; Hopper, 1988, 1989a).
- Moves away from "individuals" as units of analysis, designed to articulate the usefulness yet inevitable limitations of self-reported and exclusively ethnographic field data. Understanding "communication" as a pooled collectivity of individual perceptions overlooks coauthored social actions, and there appear to be marked differences between reporting about versus engaging in real-time, collaborative involvements of choice and action. The alternatives included a superb collection of audio- and video-recorded interactional materials, and carefully produced transcriptions of these events, made available to a wide variety of scholars representing diverse interests and backgrounds (e.g., the University of Texas conversation library).

ON SPIRIT OF INQUIRY: AND THE JOURNEY CONTINUES ...

Extending well beyond Robert's productivity was *a spirit of inquiry* he brought to his work and play, perhaps ethereal and difficult to articulate, but nevertheless an enacted demeanor through which countless persons continue to be swayed and inspired through his example. Only a handful of identifying features are summarized as follows:

- A poetic interest in all topics, marked by a twinkle-of-the eye, elflike curiosity, supportive and open, that is uniquely and embryonically Robert's own craft and handiwork.
- A stubborn and demanding commitment to conversation analytic and ethnomethodological concerns, to the study of everyday life activities and actions on their own merits, and to the warrantability of claims regarding naturally occurring interactions.
- A well-spring of energy, directed not just to self-advancement but unselfishly to the common good, where work and play not only coexist but often cannot be discerned one from the other.
- A brainstorming partner par excellence: a champion of what might be characterized as "omnipresent and omnirelevant dialectics."
- An amazing ability to get things done on time.⁹

In approximately 300 A.D., it was reported that St. Augustine heard a voice in Latin, and in the imperative mode, "*toile lege, tolle lege*"-"pick it up and read it, pick it up and read it." As a recommendation for Robert's work, I can only echo this proclamation.

As this chapter is brought to a close, however, I would be remiss not to mention that Robert was an individual with whom I shared many mountaintop experiences, all well worth the climb, where views were expansive and spirits soared. Whether walking through dense urban terrain, or during hikes and multiple skiing adventures, it is clear that these and similar occasions were

⁹ In fact, I've even wondered whether or not "procrastination" was ever really a burr in Robert's side! One project he was not able to complete, however, was a special issue of *Text* he was asked to edit on "something medical" (as his illness progressed he became, not surprisingly, increasingly interested in the close examination of a variety of medical/health interactions). Two months prior to his death, Robert asked if I would take on the responsibility of moving the project forward, which I have, resulting in a special issue (published 2001) focusing on "lay diagnosis" in both medical interviewing and family communication contexts.

indispensable for giving birth to ideas and creating forums for their dissemination. All such gatherings transformed "work" into playful but no less substantive excursions:

- Across conferences throughout the 1970s, the 1981 summer conference at the University of Nebraska, specialty conferences such as those at Temple, Michigan State, Santa Barbara, and far too many Speech Communication Association (now, National Communication Association), International Communication Association, and Western Communication conferences to remember.
- Equally important are the literally hundreds of informal data sessions, far more than can possibly be recounted here, gatherings that have gradually moved from hotel rooms to events such as the now decade-long Open Data/Listening Sessions (which Robert and I coorganized from the outset for the Western Communication Association, and which were celebrated in February of 2000 at the Sacramento conference), and the Conversation Analysis Master Class for the National Communication Association (which Jenny Mandelbaum organized).

To this day Robert remains a joyful and courageous presence. Even in the midst of his own suffering he embraced a deep and abiding faith, rooted in a clear-cut recognition that our "crucial business" reveals, more often than not, "the folly of human wisdom": a constant and critical reminder not to take ourselves too seriously, to fully utilize the many gifts we have been blessed with, and to appreciate journeys traveled together as boundless opportunities for fellowship.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This chapter is an edited version of a presentation made during a Language and Social Interaction (LSI) panel, devoted to honoring Robert Hopper's scholarship and diverse contributions, at the 1996 International Communication Association conference in Chicago. Additional panel participants included John Heritage, Jenny Mandelbaum, Bud Morris, and Manny Schegloff.

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