

Transitional regularities for 'casual' "Okay" usages

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An understanding of "Okay" usages *in conversation* requires analytic considerations extending beyond free-standing and non-continuative deployments. Relying on previous findings on how recipients and current speakers organize such activities as phone openings and closings, the present analysis addresses a wider variety of interactional environments in establishing certain predominant and thus fundamental features. Those addressed herein include how recipients and current speakers rely on "Okay" *pivotal*, at or near transition/opportunity spaces: Decidedly in response to prior talk, yet also in transitionally relevant ('state of readiness') ways via shifts/ movements to next-positioned matters. Though recipients or current speakers may (in next turn) treat prior "Okay" usages as non-continuative, and/or move to sequentially delete the actions "Okay" was taken to be projecting (i.e., 'Okay + [fuller turn]'), just what participants appear to be prefacing or setting-up via "Okay" is recurrently (and eventually) apparent.

1. Introduction and overview

The present analysis focuses on how participants rely upon "Okay" in recognizably non-trivial, 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 1991a), 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 responsive to prior turn(s). By attending to backward *and* forward features of "Okay" usages, understandings can be generated regarding actions involving (as will become evident) a host of shift-implicative moments in conversation.

Similar to what Jefferson (1981: 5) aptly described (in terms of "Yeah") as *speaker* shift-implicative actions possessing a "topically dual-faceted character", making "topical movement transparently relevant", the questions thus

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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?

Before turning directly to inspections of data whose features allow for such questions to be answered, an overview of the following and primary three 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 upon "Okay" as partial solutions to ongoing interactional problems. The precise nature of these problems, and how participants rely on "Okay" as one means of resolving 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, 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 pivotally, in the midst of yet at precise moments of transition, by recipients and current speakers alike, across a variety of speech exchange systems (both casual and institutional), 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 what turns out to be a universal and therefore basic feature of involvement in interaction, roughly stated: In the course of organizing conversational activities, speakers and recipients are often 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, though much less frequently via "Okay" in 'casual' talk, speakership). In the ways participants can be shown to rely on "Okay" and thus design their talk so as to be responsive to prior talk, yet 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 exceeding given speakers, settings, or 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.

1 At 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'.

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

327

Second, extant theoretical concerns with 'discourse markers' *per se* (e.g., see Levinson 1983, Schiffrin 1987, Redeker 1990, Fraser 1990) have not necessarily nor systematically addressed fundamentally transitional and thus projective qualities of "Okay" usages. Conceptual definitions of 'markers' as categorical members of types of classes - discourse particles, conjunctions, connectives, interjections - that signal or reveal 'pragmatic relations' (Schiffrin 1987, Redeker 1990), 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: 31), have not emerged from decidedly user-shaped *streams* or *contingencies* of language use. Thus, just what recipients and current speakers might be orienting-to via "Okay", are occupied with, and thus treat as significant in particular turn-taking environments remains unexplicated. Nor do such conceptual definitions, with attending though infrequent reliance upon instances involving "Okay", address how participants differentially and embeddedly employ "Okay" as a means of documenting, each for the other, 'what is going on' (cf. Jefferson 1981, Wootton 1988: 238-239, Beach 1990a, 1991a,b) - within a given spate of talk and in consideration of its attending relevancies.

Third, there does exist a related and substantive basis for examining the interactional organization of particular 'acknowledgment tokens', including their consequences for particular types of activities-in-conversation, and upon which this and subsequent inquiries into "Okay" usages are demonstrably reliant (cf. Jefferson 1981, Schegloff 1982, Heritage 1984, 1990). Void of these detailed examinations of such tokens 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 very well 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, of course, quite the opposite has convincingly been shown to be the case for a broad range of activities, including: initiating, extending, and terminating topics; displaying reciprocity to ongoing tellings, and preparing the way for movement from passive reciprocity to more active speakership; 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, "Okays" emerge as devices initiating movement toward *closure* and/or as *passing* turns en route to terminating phone calls (see

instances (16)-(19) below). These are the usages most commonly cited (e.g., Levinson 1983: 316-386; Schiffrin 1987: 102, 327; Button 1987, 1990) 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 "Okays" mark movements to initial topic(s), and/or the business of the call (see instances (11)-(15) below, as well as Hopper 1992).

Though "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. Merritt 1984, Condon 1986). Most recently (Beach 1990b), attention was given to how a 'facilitator' of a focus group meeting relied upon "Okay" to initiate and manage such actions as closing preceding and moving to next topics, including usages as a 'pre-closing device' employed to 'close down' a given interactant while also moving to elicit comments from next (facilitator-selected) speaker. Somewhat related research on "Okay" in service-encounters (cf. Merritt 1980) and 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: 144), or by treating "Okay" (à la Goffman 1974) as a "bracketing or framing" device that "appears as decision points at which participants choose among alternatives" (Condon 1986: 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.

The scope of this investigation, then, extends beyond those previously mentioned by laying grounds for the establishment of transitional "Okay" usages occurring in more diverse interactional environments; consequently, it provides a basis upon which subsequent work might build, while also pointing to the need for yet 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. In concluding his discussion of potential contributions of 'conversation analysis' to pragmatics for example, Levinson 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." (1983: 366; last emphasis 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 will proceed in a step-by-step manner, one that gradually establishes "Okay" as responsive yet also displaying '*state of*

readiness' for movements to next-positioned matters. First, in order to understand how "Okays" are employed transitionally, it may be useful to locate non-continuative 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 pre-closing environments will be 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 turn 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. Even though "Okay" may appear as free-standing, and next speakers may treat "Okays" as non-continuative and/or closure-relevant, "Okays" 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, we briefly sketch implications for future research.

2. 'Okay' as free-standing receipt marker

Recipients often rely on 'Okay' as a short-hand display marking (a) acknowledgment and/or understanding (e.g., confirmation) of, (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/activities at hand. Thus in (1),

(1) #3: (M. Goodwin 1980:676) Sha: Your mother wants you! - Flo: Okay.

Flo's "Okay" signals *not* 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 (2),

(2) Auto Discussion: (C. Goodwin 1987: 211)
Don: I'll go get some more water. ((Leaves with pitcher)) John: Okay.

330

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

Goodwin (1987: 211) notes how Don's announcement of a departure simply "gets an answer in next turn from recipient". John's "Okay", however, is decidedly not an answer to a question nor does it indicate that Don has any trouble with the announcement. Such is also the case in (3),

(3) SDCL: CallGdps:11²
G: Let's le- (I'll) let ya talk to him for a minute.
• D: Okay.

as D (Grandson) affiliates with his Grandmother's announcement by displaying a willingness to talk with 'him' (Grandfather). In similar fashion, recipients in the next two instances, from call-waiting recordings and transcriptions of phone calls (cf. Hopper, 1989a,b, 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?³ -> B: Okay.

Finally, in (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.

2 An explanation of this data source is as follows: 'SDCL' is an abbreviation of '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 abbreviation of 'University of

Texas Conversation Library'; 'Family Phone' is the title given to this particular recorded and transcribed conversation; '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.

³As evident in (5), "Okay?" may be tag-positioned, with upward intonation/contour, and receipted with 'Okay' in next turn. These specific usages lie beyond the scope of this analysis; they possess a quite 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 insuring agreement and/or alignment from next speaker (see, e.g., segment (21)).

W. A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay usages

331

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

2.1. Third turn receipts by current speaker

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

(7) FN#6: (Davidson 1984:127)

A: You wan' me bring you anything?

(0.4)

B : No: no : nothing.

- A: AW:kay.

Davidson (1984) treats A's "AW: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." (1984: 127)

Alternative versions of third turn receipts (cf. Schegloff et al. 1977, Mehan 1978, 1979; McHoul 1978, 1985, 1990; Tsui 1991, Heritage and Greatbach 1991) appear in (8) and (9). These "Okays" are employed not as responses to recipients' acceptance/rejection (or mitigated version) of an invitation/offer, but as an affirmation of the correctness of an understanding check in (8),

(8) HG:II:15-16: (Button and Casey 1984: 168) N: You'll come about (.)

eight. Right? = H: =Yea::h, =

- N : = Okay

and simple information query in (9):

(9) SDCL: DrksCls:9

D: Who are you gonna stay with F : Patsy

- 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 instance appears below, where A provides information as grounds for minimizing S's concerns, which S then (having been informed) treats as "Okay"

Segments (1)-410) repeatedly illustrate how "Okays", though accomplishing different kinds of actions, are adjacently placed (in second or third position), freestanding responses by recipients and current speakers alike. Each usage examined thus far is *non-continuative*, or what Davidson (1984: 127) suggests is essentially a withholding by the producer to offer a 'subsequent version'. Yet these instances, 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 case.⁴ As evident in the following discussion, "Okay" has been shown to possess fundamental 'projective' qualities.

3. 'Okay' in phone call openings and pre-closing environments

One useful means of understanding how "Okays" exceed singularized or freestanding usage is by turning to beginnings and endings of phone calls. Relying

⁴ 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 pre-closing environments, at times in apparently 'redundant' fashion (e.g., "Okay alright", "Okay good"). In the instance below, 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 and Sacks 1973: 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,

• Mary: Okhhay ghhood,

(10) SDCL: SptsTrip:6

S: There's - there's gotta be a bigger you're gonna be

(•)

Well it's:: it's you refrigerator Okay

A: refrigerator than the little one or

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

333

on the considerable research conducted on these interactional events (cf. Schegloff 1968, 1979, 1986; Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Hopper 1989a, 1992; Button 1987, 1990), "Okay" has been found to have relevance for nextpositioned matters.

3.1. Phone call openings

Consider, first, a canonical phone opening in which initial queries/responses involve "Okay":

(11) #263; (Schegloff 1986: 115)

- ((five lines deleted))
 C: How are you?
 • R: Okay..
 C: Good.=
 -+ R: =How about you.

Here it is seen that "Okay" is, essentially, both *responsive* to C's query and *preliminary* to R's reciprocal "How about you". In (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: 135)
 Marilyn: Oh HI. = How're you do:in.
 • 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 (13) notice what occurs when no reciprocal "How are you" gets produced:

- (13) #250a; (Schegloff 1986: 139)
 Marlene: Hi. this is Marlene:
 Bonnie: Hi,
 Marlene: How are you,
 Bonnie: I'm fi:ne,
 • 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 + [question]'. As Schegloff observes:

"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 begin what appears to be the reason for the call." (1986: 139, emphasis added)

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.

Just as variations from canonical greetings are not uncommon (cf. Hopper 1989, 1992), so is it the case that "Okay" is not infrequently in the 'midst of yet also 'preliminary to', what comes next. In (14), for example, T's "Oka(h)y" both initiates a new topic and prefaces a first reporting:

- (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))

And in (15), immediately following switching of speakers within an 'embedded' phone opening, D's "O:ka:y" is employed similarly immediately prior to (i.e., *en route*) to subsequent queries:

- (15) SDCL: Maligll:13
 M: Yeah (.) Wu:ll he's (.) he's umm

(2.0)
((father is talking in the background))
M: wait a minute (.) 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?=
S: =I'm gonna trade it (.) for'n eighty: eight BMW seven thirty-fi:ve=
D: Ri::ght hhh=

3.2. Pre-closings

- Just as "Okay" has been shown to mark a shift in orientation to initial topic(s) in phone call openings, so has "Okay" been evidenced as one routine component in 'terminal exchanges' (along with, for example, "Well") and,

know (0.5) it's like the si- half the size of a regular

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

335

more generally, topic closure. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) were fundamentally concerned with establishing a warrant for such claims (see also Button 1987, 1990) as evident in participants' orientations which, collaboratively, *refrain* from continuing by working toward subsequent (and often relatively immediate) closure. As with (16),

(16) (Schegloff and Sacks 1973: 304) A: O.K.
B: O.K.
A : Bye Bye B : Bye

a warrant toward closure becomes available. Or, as Schegloff and Sacks 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'." (1973: 305)

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

(17) (Schegloff and Sacks 1973: 307)
A: Okay, I letcha go back tuh watch yer Daktari

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

(18) (Schegloff and Sacks 1973: 314)
- B: Alrighty. Well Ill 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 : Bye bye C: Bye.

(19) SDCL: Drkscls:21
_+ D: Ahkay urn (0.2) how bout if I give you a call like around seven thirty

- C : Okay
 D: And we'll figure out exa:ctly whenum (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: Sounds good?
 D: Okay a I'll talk to you then C: Alright b ye
 D: ¹ Bye

This is not to say that phone calls are by any means the *only* environments within which participants rely on "Okay" to close down activities/topics. In addressing how participants work to 'get off/exit' varying kinds of troubling topics in conversation, Jefferson (1984) observes 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:(ll):6

- A: Never mind it'll all come right in the end,
 ~ J: Yeh. Okay yuu go and get your clean trousers on

And 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 1991b) in (21) below,

(21) SDCL : G/S:16

- G: T O:ne > step at a time < Sissy (0.5) we'll go the one ti:me
 (0.7) that chu'u (0.4) promise me that I'll make the
 appointment
 I I
 S: T OKA::Y Alright (.) OKAY
 I'll GO n- le(t)'s just drop 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 walk
 with me tomorrow: ((continues))

S relies upon "Okay" in overlap, and as emphasis in a 'recycled turn beginning' position (cf. Schegloff 1987), to both affirm the promise G is

requesting *and* "to start the conversation afresh"; thus the name "conversation restart" (Jefferson 1984: 193).

4. 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 "Okays" project forthcoming action-sequences in the accomplishment of task-specific activities. Attention can be drawn to other kinds of interactional and thus locally occasioned environments, however, among which the following two instances are not atypical. In (22), for example,

(22) SDCL: HsReunion:8

- J: T Was he heavier than me!
 A: No- (0.2) yea he's a lot heavier than you. J: .J,Okay then he's not even

cl:ose. He said
I'm thinner I'm skinn(i)er dude

J's third turn receipt (->) follows A's answer to J's initial query; J also relies on "Okay" to preface next-positioned assessment (cf. Jefferson 1981: 39; Pomerantz 1984) about being 'thinner/skinn(i)er'. And in (23),

(23) SDCL:Bandchat:2

M: There's no way that hhh 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

C: Okay(.) that's fine

[I /
M: Ya know scratch your
°rim truck°

[I
C: My : trust me > the bed of my truck is so:: scratched and so:
dented it's not gonna matter <

C (as *recipient*) comes off as agreeing with M's prior assessment/proposal via "Okay", which is itself preliminary to an upgraded agreement ("that's fine"), both of which set-up C's next-positioned continuation - an offering of reassurance about 'scratching' the truck.

338 *W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages*

Both (22) and (23), therefore, begin to reveal how "Okay" can be deployed in turn-initial position by recipients (23) and current speakers (22), as *responsive* to prior turn and *preparatory* in movements to what is offered as relevant for ensuing talk. Each "Okay" appears to *simultaneously* 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). It is rather curious, then, that recipients' "Okay" usages of the sort apparent in (23) above may very well be understood as working toward achieving some closure or termination of the talk-in-progress (i.e., scratching the truck). In reference to the token "Yeah", for example, Jefferson (1981) suggests 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-process with participants distributed as 'speaker' and 'recipient'. It is, albeit minimally, 'responding to' prior talk and not - not quite yet, introducing something new." (1981: 36)

Moreover, as recipients' assessments have frequently been shown to precede 'topical shift' (Jefferson: 1981), so is it the case that C's final turn in (23) - an 'offering of reassurance about "scratching" the truck', also *assesses* the situation-at-hand.

4.1. Concurrent operations: Backward and forward-looking features

When considering the 'dual character' of "Okay" usages, "Okay" is decidedly *more* than recipients' displayed attentiveness to topics/activities having already transpired; it is also essential and preliminary to what Heritage (1984: 302), 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". 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 (1984) has substantiated how "Oh" strongly indicates that its producer has been informed as a result of the immediately prior news/announcement/informing, etc., 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. I *But once one has accomplished these objective s*

⁵ There are a wider variety of relationships among "Oh" and "Okay" than described here, most notably the ways in which interactants receipt particular types of prior turns with 'Oh okay' (and versions thereof). Though an extended collection of instances 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. Heritage (1990) has, however, examined other types of 'Ohprefaces' as turn-initial responses having consequence for a variety of activities (e.g., treating prior inquiries and/or questions as 'inappropriate').

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

339

via "Okay", the way is now open to what is deemed relevant through additional turn components.

A wide variety of "Okay" usages, therefore, are designed by participants to be neither backward nor forward in character, but are *conjugal* in the ways they are wedded to ongoing activities. Such dual-character usages are most often *not* vacillating displays of decisioning, as though speakers are noticeably weighing or otherwise struggling with prior/next comparisons and their relevance to ongoing talk.⁶ Rather, it is the *lack* of ambiguity made apparent in such "Okay" usages that is readily, altogether contingently and momentarily, signalling a 'state of readiness' for moving to next-positioned matters. In this sense, "Okay" might best be likened neither to a firearm's bullet itself, nor even to 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 (24) below,

(24) SDCL: Drkscls:14

D: Would you want to go with me? C : T No not really

⁶ Yet at times there appear to be particular usages of "Okay" that convey 'special meaning'. These include displays such as the following, where G's "O::ka:y?" treats S's prior response as something like 'over-responding' or 'coming on too strong', and the like - perhaps as one means of 'feigning' surprise, deference, or even contempt - with the position taken by S:

SDCL: CapPun:11

G: But do you think there's h:ope at T a:ll
for a- any of these people that (ha)ve
been cha:ir:ed or: (0.4) (lo:od) ox.
sho:t er
(0.7)

S: ° T What do you mean hope.' get (th)em
off the planet don't rele:ase (th)em
an(d) have (th)em kill other people
(1.2)

-+ G: O :: k a:y?

S: (I)f they can't ha.- (I)f T they can't handle reality (.)
the:n: get the fuck out 'ya know* T get outta tow: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, notice that G's "O::ka:y?" does eventually lead 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 eating C : Um

2-+ D: You feel like ta:co's anywhere (1.0)

D's first "Kay" (1-+) acknowledges C's justification for an invitation refusal. Yet when C withholds speaking in the following (0.4) (transition relevant) pause, D's second "Umkay" prefigures a re-do (and more general) invitation (cf. Davidson 1984, Drew 1984;). And in (25),

(25) SDCL: Drkscls:15

C: I guess the ba:nd starts at ni:ne D : Oh really

C: Ya from what Jill told me

1 - D : Okay when's Jill gonna go

C : Same time (0.2) we're gonna meet her there

2-+ D: Okay um (0.5) so you wa:nt to take your car C: We can take your car if
you wa:nt D: hhh hhh \uparrow I meant you want- you wanna

have your car there so you can le:ave C: Yeah I think that'd be a
better idea

3-+ D: Okay

(0.5)

4-+ D: Okay hhhh well what what

time is it now I don't have my watch on^o C: Six o'clock

it is apparent that D's first two "Okays" mark acknowledgment of prior information and then preface additional information queries in separate turns.⁷ But in (3-+) and (4-+), D first receipts C's agreement to the clarification offered and then, with a similar "Okay" following pause (and thus C's withholding), shifts attention to "what time is it".

' "Okay"-prefaced queries such as these, though not addressed in this present analysis, have been found to be predominant in two particular sequential environments: (1) During *planning* activities in 'casual' talk; (2) Throughout a variety of 'institutional' activities, where those 'institutionally responsible' for an occasion's focus and purpose (e.g., doctors, lawyers, counselors/therapists, emergency or cancer hotline call-receivers/dispatchers) deal with 'contingencies' in the midst of what Sorjonen and Heritage (1991) refer to as 'agenda-based nextness'.

In (24, 2-i) and (25, "Okay" signals varying degrees of ontopic/activity shift (as will be 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/activities. While they do 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) illustrations of how the tokens "Mm hmm -+ Uh huh -+ Yeah" may (but not always, cf. Drummond and Hopper 1991, Beach and Lindstrom 1992) mark progressive movements from 'passive reciprocity' to 'speaker readiness' in preparedness to shift topic and/or speakership. While "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 pre-requisite to "Okay" placement.

More accurately, a straightforward bid for speakership infrequently accounts for what "Okays" seem to be working toward (i.e., next-positioned matters) in 'casual' interactions.⁸ It is much less common for such

"Okays" to be employed by speakers (in free-standing fashion) as *only* a means for signalling 'passive reciprocity' (e.g. by working to retain the rights and privileges of current speaker/storyteller, cf. Mandelbaum 1989, Beach 1991c, Beach and Lindstrom 1992). However, such instances have been located (e.g., see (18) and (19) above) where "Okays" are placed so as to facilitate current speakers's actions (e.g., closing a phone call). In fact, what frequently appear to be free-standing "Okays" are routinely *not* designed to display 'passivereciprocity' so as to retain the rights and privileges of whatever action(s) current speaker might be engaged in. Instead, such "Okay" usages can be identified as momentary, 'on hold' prefigurings of movements toward nextmatters.

We now turn 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.

5. 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 are *both closure-relevant and continuative*. For this and related reasons, Schegloff and Sacks (1973) put forth "Okays" as only

⁸ In 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/activities.

342

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay usages

"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." (1973: 310)

Of course, such a qualification may be equally applied to utterances where "Okay" prefaces or pre-figures a fuller turn (as may occur in phone openings), not just to free-standing "Okays". Such is the case even though recipients/current speakers, in next turn, may *treat* "Okay" as closure-relevant, and/or *sequentially delete* "Okay" as though it is not prefacing forthcoming and fuller turn. One useful example is provided by Jefferson (1986) in drawing attention to the occurrence of overlaps at possible transition or completion points:

(26)

SBL:3:3:R:5 (from Jefferson 1986: 155) Milly: O:kay that's all ah wan'duh

know I thought it w z mu c h

I]]]

Yahw'l]]]

w e w e don' know how much is T In: J, come h^oere though,

As Jefferson (1986) notes:

"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." (1986: 155)

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

(27) (Jefferson and Schegloff 1975: 18)

- Vic: It's, the attitude of people!
(1.0)
- Vic: Oka y
I
- Mike: Y' didn't getta holda
[]
- > Vic: duh soopuh.
(•)

W. A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

343

- Mike: Listen man.
[]
- Vic: Freak it. He's a bitch he didn't pud in duh light own dih sekking flaw,
hh=
Mike: =Y'couldn't gitta ho l
[]
 - Vic: Man tell im.
(•)
Mike: Jim wan' home uh what. []
 - Vic: Y' kno:w?

But as Jefferson and Schegloff (1975: 18) observed, Vic (as Turn Occupant) can be understood as having produced "a single coherent utterance", beginning with "Okay", just as Mike (as Turn Claimant) works to revise his question throughout an environment of "competitive continuous utterances".

Such is also the case with (28), where **B's** free-standing "Okays" (1-*3-•) are in essence preparatory to 'Okay + [fuller turn]' (*_+):

(28) SDCL: 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 Tup or what ()
[We:ll]
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. =

344

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

- A:
some instruction.
((call moves to closing))

B: Okay and do you remember how to get here? or do you want me to give you direc (tions)

[I

S he: gave me

Notice that *each* of the free-standing "Okays" above are placed *precisely* at potential completion points by prior speaker (A), i.e. at the end of turnconstruction/syntactic thought units B treats as transition-ready. In (I --+), as is not uncommon (Jefferson and Schegloff 1975), A's tagged "that's perfect" was clearly unanticipated by B; upon its completion, B moves to fuller turn (*-+). In both (2-+ & 3->) B withholds [fuller turn] as A continues, eventuating in 'Okay + [two queries]' (*--+) that, apparently, B was keeping 'on hold' yet working toward all along.

In these and related sequential environments, free-standing "Okays" may not only pre-figure movements toward fuller speakership and the articulation of next matters, but turn-initial "Okays" themselves preface what is soon (and more specifically) to be revealed *as* a next topical matter (e.g., catching a bus or trolley):

(29) SDCL: TwoCops:1

M: So the bite h the bite:r can
probably can claim self defense
(1.5)

D: Who knows
(1.8)

D: But uh
[I

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 < can:n > the::n
catch a:: (0.6) b:us downtown

[I

D: ((clears throat))

M: (.) or the trolley hh do hh do you
have any cash at all? (.) like
enough for the trolley?

In a sense, "Okays" can themselves be recycled to re-initiate additional tasks that, due to prior speakers' continuation, failed to emerge upon initial attempts:

W. A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

345

(30) SDCL: Drkscls:14

And then um (0.5) and > I was just gonna wait for them to talk to you < 'Kay=

=> 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 <

'Kay (0.5) > well I was thinking more (.) a little earlier than: tha:t <

Like when

Cuz (0.2) they start charging cover after eight thirty

Or with (31) below, following M's pre-emption ("Mm: ye:s uh huh"), C relies on "Okay" both as third-turn receipt *and* as an initiation of 'getting back on track' with the telling-at-hand:

(31) SDCL: Bandchat:5

C: Did_ you ev e r see that
[I [I

M: Mm: ye:s uh huh

-• C: O Kay
 [I
 M: I like it
 (0.2)

-> C: UH::M:
 (1.0)

*~ C: They have ha:d over five hundred orders: from
 the magazine for=tho:se uh (.) video- tapes

Overwhelmingly, then, an understanding of what "Okays" appear to be prefacing or setting-up (*->) is recurrently (and eventually) apparent. Clearly, speakers employing "Okay" are not necessarily daunted by having "Okay" overlapped, or in other ways left as free-standing or 'dangling' as a result of next speaker's continuation and/or shift of activity:

(32) SJ: 1:6:1-2 (Schegloff, 1980: 137)
 Pete: Yer havin a g'rage sale, Hank: Y_eah.hh
 Pete: Well fer cryin out loud.
 Hank: If I c'n possibly get away I'll be do:wn.

346

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

- Pete: We:ll h o k a y w
 Hank: [I
 If I: ey eno ugh other he:lp so I
 don'have t'stay here.
- 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 same 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))

5.1. 'Interjective' continuations by current speaker

Yet 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. Certain instances have been identified where, even though "Okays" may clearly pre-figure upcoming actions as in (28)-(33) above, they nevertheless eventuate in not just

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

347

momentarily *withheld* but *failed* attempts to gain the floor; 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 may or may not be understood as displaying, are 'interjectively' deleted. Two examples appear below, 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)
- ~ D: Mmkay
 B: Cuz it felt right hhh pt. (.) a::nd
- > D: Well how (long-) how long
 [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
 [I
 Y: That it's: proof rea:d and all that stuff
 [I
- ~ X: Okay well we
 [
- Y: And I'll call Beverly da- u:h ((continues))

Continuations of this sort are successful for two basic reasons. First, because current speakers refrain from treating recipients' "Okays" as uncontestable

348

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

'clues' signaling movement, i.e. as 'bids' for extensions and shifts that must be aligned with, abided by, and/or deferred to. And second, recipients producing 'Okay + [movement toward fuller turn]' themselves withhold fuller pursuit toward a given matter (again, at least until a later moment in the interaction, and

perhaps indefinitely).

Throughout (26)-(35) above, "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 (1987), extended turns evidence *some* kind of achievement. Yet when these achievements are overlapped or otherwise deleted as non-continuative, immediately following an "Okay", there exists some form of structural constraint on the minimization of turn size. Such constraints indicate that, even though "Okay" may be employed as preliminary to fuller turn, others may nevertheless treat/delete "Okay" as free-standing/non-continuative and proceed accordingly, themselves completing prior or initiating new turn components. These 'junctures' are similar to the kinds of interactional work evident at 'transition spaces' described by Jefferson (1986), as well as what Button (1987) has coined 'opportunity spaces' as speakers move out of closings by expanding prior or initiating new topic(s) (see also Lerner 1987, 1989).

6. Summary and implications

Examinations of a rather diverse set of interactions begin to suggest that "Okays" can be employed - by *recipients* and *current speakers* alike - in ways having relevance to both prior and next-positioned matters. Though "Okays" routinely and differentially appear as free-standing/non-continuative 'response tokens', used and relied upon by participants to display numerous orientations to what was taken to be meaningful in prior talk, there are projective consequences to a considerable variety of "Okay" placements.

Having illustrated and established basic and sequential features of "Okay" in 'casual' interactions, and several kinds of contingencies participants appear to get caught up in during the course of organizing social activities, we can now focus our attention more fully on what might be referred to as 'Okays and their *consequences*': What is it that participants are moving *toward*, i.e. 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 next-positioned 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 in passing throughout the present

W.A. Beach / Regularities in 'casual' "Okay" usages

349

analysis, ongoing investigations rest with such usages as upward-intoned and tag-positioned "Okays?", specially and phonologically marked versions (e.g., 'Q::kɑ:y?', "T Q::kɑ:y."), conjugal employments (e.g., "Oh okay"), and 'Okays-in-a-series' (e.g., in *doing* getting off troubling topics). And finally, as a means of tracking and pursuing understandings of cross-situational usages of "Okay" in the accomplishment of task and setting-specific activities, attention can also be focused on universal and particular contrasts among participants' "Okay" usages within 'casual' and 'institutional' occasions.

Appendix: Transcription conventions

The transcription notation system employed for data segments is an adaptation of Gail Jefferson's work (see Atkinson and Heritage 1984: ix-xvi, Beach 1989: 89-90). The symbols may be described as follows:

- Colon(s): Extended or stretched sound, syllable, or word.
- Underlining: Vocalic emphasis.
- (.) Micropause: Brief pause of less than (0.2).
- (1.2) Timed pause: Intervals occur within and between same or different speaker's utterance.
- (()) Double parentheses: Scenic details. () Single parentheses: Transcriptionist doubt.
- Period: Falling vocal pitch. ? Question

- marks: Rising vocal pitch.
- T1 Arrows: Marked rising and falling shifts in intonation.
- Degree signs: A passage of talk noticeably softer than surrounding talk.
 - Equal signs: Latching of contiguous utterances, with no interval or overlap.
- [] Brackets: Speech overlap. [[Double brackets: Simultaneous speech orientations to prior turn.
- ! Exclamation points: Animated speech tone.
- Hyphens: Halting, abrupt cut off of sound or word.
- > < Less than signs: Portions of an utterance delivered at a pace noticeably quicker than surrounding talk.

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