

7. Pursuing a response

ANITA POMERANTZ

University of Oxford

example, unclear pronouns or unknown vocabulary. If one is focused, the speaker would offer a more understandable reference to replace the troublesome one.

2. A recipient may be confused because a speaker, in referring to a matter, presumes that the recipient knows about it when he or she does not. This type of reference problem results from a wrong assumption of some particular shared knowledge. To solve a problem of this order, a speaker would go over with the recipient the facts and information upon which he or she based the assertion.

3. A recipient may be hesitant to respond coherently because he or she does not support, or agree with, the speaker's assertion. To solve a problem of this order, a speaker may review his or her assertion, evaluating whether it is inaccurate, overstated, or in some other way wrong. If evaluated as wrong, the speaker would appropriately modify what he or she had asserted.

Clarifying, reviewing the assumed common knowledge, and modifying one's position are ways that speakers pursue responses. The success of these pursuits lies in whether the recipients subsequently voice their agreements and disagreements to the speakers' assertions. The remainder of this chapter discusses these three types of pursuits.

2. Dealing with no response by clarifying an understanding problem

The following datum is taken from a telephone call between two nurses, A and B. A is trying to persuade B to be a home nurse for a patient who has suffered a ruptured aneurism. When A identifies the nonlocal hospital and surgeon (lines 5-6), B recognizes (line 7) that she has already heard about it from another source.

1. (SBL: 1:1:10)

1 A: It's uh it is really important.

2 B: Yes. Well is it Dr. L.?

3 A: No,

4 B: Mm hm

5 A: No, uh the uh surgery was done down at UCLA,

6 Dr. D.

7 B: Oh, is this Mrs. T.?

8 A: Yes,

9 A: Have you been out there?

10 B: No, I haven't I (met) who lives in

11 Little Rock

12 A: Oh, Uh huh,

13 B: And, uh she- And I heard about it at the time.

1. Introduction

If a speaker performs an action that solicits a response, it may or may not succeed. Recipients may not hear the talk or understand it. They may ignore it and continue to be involved elsewhere or even initiate other actions. They may hear and understand the talk but withhold their responses. If a recipient does not give a coherent response, the speaker routinely sees the recipient's behavior as manifesting some problem and deals with it. He or she may abandon the attempt to get a response, may infer the recipient's response but let it remain unarticulated, or may pursue an articulated response.

This chapter examines some procedures through which speakers pursue responses to their assertions. If a speaker makes an assertion to a recipient who is knowledgeable on the matter, he or she may expect the recipient to confirm (or disconfirm) the assertion. The recipient may directly address the prior talk, for example, confirm, elaborate on, challenge, query, or disconfirm the assertion. On the other hand, he or she may look blank or questioning, or may make hesitating noises such as Uhs, Ums, and Wells. The data for the study consist of fragments of talk in which a speaker fails to get a coherent confirmation or disconfirmation from the recipient and pursues the matter further. If a recipient fails to give a coherent response, his or her behavior is accountable: The speaker makes sense of it in terms of the recipient having some problem in responding. Different types of problems have different solutions appropriate to them. Three types of problems plus solutions are described in this chapter.

1. A recipient may not understand because a reference is unclear or a term unknown. To solve a problem of this order, a speaker may review his or her assertion, scanning for any troublesome word selections, for

I wish to thank John Heritage for his helpful comments on an earlier draft.

- 14 A: Yes.
 15 B: And uh isn't she quite a young woman? Only in her
 16 fifties?
 17 A: Yes, uh huh
 18 B: Oh, how sad.
 19 B: And that went wrong.
 20 (1.0)
 21 A: Well, uh --
 22 → B: That surgery, I mean.

After telling how she came to hear about the case (lines 10-11, 13), B takes the lead in discussing it. She begins by talking about the patient's age.

1. (SBL:1:1:10)

- 15 B: And uh isn't she quite a young woman? Only in her
 16 fifties?
 17 A: Yes, uh huh
 18 B: Oh, how sad.

In this small exchange over the patient's age (as in the rest of their conversation), A's and B's respective aims bear on their descriptions of the case. In trying to convince B to work on the case, A portrays it in favorable and appealing terms. B, who does not want to take the job, gives it an unappealing and depressing cast.

Along with the chronological age ("in her fifties"), B gives a sense of that age relative to the age of the illness's typical victims. In relational terms, B proposes that it is a young age for a victim of that disorder ("quite a young woman" and "only in her fifties"). In characterizing the patient's age as "quite young" B portrays the event as more unfortunate or tragic than it would have been had the victim been old and soon to die anyway. In response, A confirms that B's information is correct but does not comment on it. B ends the topic of the patient's age with the assessment "Oh how sad," thus offering a reaction that is appropriate to the fact that the victim is "quite young." In this sequence, B portrays the case as sad both by reference to the "quite young" victim and with her subsequent assessment. A offers no evaluative response to this portrayal.

B then moves on to discuss what happened in the case (line 19).

1. (SBL:1:1:10)

- 19 B: And that went wrong.
 20 (1.0)

- 21 A: Well, uh --
 22 B: That surgery, I mean.

The way that B raises the topic suggests that it is somewhat delicate. First, delicate topics sometimes are talked about with terms and glosses that refer to the topic without naming or identifying it. In the above instance, what went wrong is not identified as such but is referred to with the proterm "that." Second, making a judgment or assessment of the outcome of an event, for example, that it went wrong, is a way of initiating a topic. It invites a discussion of the event: what happened, how it happened, and so on. The type of event that B refers to is an unhappy event, an event having gone wrong. When such events happen, attributing responsibility is an issue: who, if anyone, is to blame (Pomerantz 1978b). In B's topic opener, no subjects are identified as actors who are responsible for the unhappy outcome. Blame attribution is there only by implication.

In saying "And that went wrong," B would expect A who also knows the details of the case, to talk about the event that went wrong. Rather than speaking on this matter, A hesitates one second and then responds in a hesitating manner ("Well, uh --"). A has failed to join in the discussion and instead has displayed some difficulty in responding.

If a recipient manifests behaviors that indicate that he or she is having difficulty or is hesitant to respond, the speaker is in the position of guessing or inferring or determining what the trouble is. One possibility is that the recipient may not know what (or who) the speaker is talking about because an identification is not clear. Or perhaps a word is used that the recipient does not know. Or the word ordering is confusing to follow. In short, a recipient may have difficulty in understanding because of the poor construction of the assertion.

Although B may have made no further notice of her own assertion had it been successful, its lack of success engenders her reviewing it. The review seeks to locate what may have caused the trouble.

In reviewing the assertion, B locates a proterm reference that may have been unclear: the "that" referencing the surgery. The previous reference to the surgery (A's identifying the nonlocal hospital and surgeon in lines 5-6), is not just prior to "And that went wrong" but several segments back.

Clarifying a proterm reference is a solution to a recipient's problem in understanding. It therefore casts a provisional definition on what the recipient's hesitancy may have been about. It would become the ratified

definition if the clarification proved to be a success, the confusion were eliminated, and the recipient responded to the assertion.

A speaker's making an unclear reference is normatively a minor problem with a quick and easy solution. A speaker's making an offensive, insulting, silly, or wrong assertion may be more troublesome and more complicated to repair. In other words, a recipient's hesitancy may reflect different types of problems that are more or less serious to the interactants and their relationship.

Clarifying a term is a simple solution in several ways. First, the search for the problem seems to involve the relatively quick and easy operation of reviewing or replaying the words themselves for any that are unclear or inappropriate. Second, solving the problem is quick and easy in sequential terms. The speaker offers the clarification, for example identifying the unclear referent, and if the recipient responds to the assertion, the clarification is successful with no more made of the confusion. Third and relatedly, clarifying a reference usually is socially and interactionally uncomplicated. A speaker's making an unclear reference and/or a recipient's not locating the proper referent typically are not taken to be reflections of character or relationship deficiencies.

Datum 1 may exemplify a speaker's method of determining what the recipient's problem is. If there is some question as to why the recipient has not responded, a speaker may *try an easy solution first*. He or she may attempt to determine what is wrong by seeing whether the easy solution works. It may be not unlike what mechanics, doctors, and others who routinely diagnose problems do on occasion: try the least complicated and costly remedy first. Poor referencing seems to be a matter that speakers rapidly monitor for, easily remedy, and treat as minor.

3. Dealing with no response by checking presumed common knowledge

B's clarification in the preceding section did not succeed in having A join in a discussion of how the surgery went wrong. Rather, she responds to the clarification with further hesitation: a negation that she cuts off (line 23).

2. (SBL:1:1:10)

- 19 B: And that went wrong.
20 (1.0)
21 A: We'll, uh --
22 B: That surgery, I mean.

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- 23 A: I don't--
24 B: Isn't she the one who-- I think I heard about it--
25 the daughter in law told me-- Wasn't she playing
26 golf at the Valley Club?
27 A: Yes, that's the-- That's the one
28 B: --and had an aneurism.
29 A: Yes
30 B: --suddenly.
31 A: Mm hm
32 B: They thought at first she was hit with a golf (1.0)
33 ball or bat or something, but it wasn't that.
34 A: [[Uh huh
35 B: [[It was a--a ruptured aneurism, and uh-th--they
36 didn't want Dr. L. at M. They took her down to UCLA.
37 A: Yes. Uh huh.
38 → B: And it-- and it left her quite permanently
39 → damaged I suppose.
40 A: Apparently. Uh he is still hopeful.

In saying "I don't," A shows that she still is having trouble responding to B's assertion. As clarifying the referent apparently has failed, B tries a different tack next. A may be offering no response because she does not know that the surgery went wrong or has a different version of what happened.

B may determine if A knows what B had presumed she knows and if they have the same version of events by checking each of her facts with A. In her responses, A indicates what she knows and does not know, what she confirms and what she disputes. B engages in laying out, bit by bit, a description of the event that, in the end "went wrong." With each description, she leaves room for A's response. By allowing for successive confirmations, B is providing for the end-product to be a mutually endorsed version of what happened.

After a brief identification of the case ("wasn't she playing golf at the Valley Club," "and had an aneurism," "suddenly"), B describes two events that support her assertion that something went wrong. The first is that the initial diagnosis was wrong: "They thought at first that she was hit with a golf (1.0) ball or bat or something, but it wasn't that" (lines 32-33). The second and more consequential event is that apparently after the proper diagnosis was made "they" (inferredly the family members) decided against a local surgeon in favor of one quite a distance away. The trip would have meant several hours' delay before the surgery was started.

With "they didn't want Dr. L. at M. They took her down to UCLA," B describes "just the facts." B is most cautious about indicating her view of the family members' decision to take the patient to UCLA for the

surgery. Though she implicates her disapproval of their handling of their case, she does not state it explicitly. She gives as the explanation of their taking the patient to UCLA "they didn't want Dr. L. at M." By saying "they didn't want," she portrays it as their decision, a matter of choice or judgment rather than, for example, necessity.

In describing the action, "They took her down to UCLA," B does not give any account of how this action affected the outcome of the case — it going wrong. The issue of how long it took to get there and hence the delaying of the surgery is not referred to.²

In reporting just the facts, speakers rely on the recipients' seeing the import of the facts for the issues at hand. If she were receptive to B's line that the surgery went wrong, A might have commented on how taking the patient to UCLA bore on the outcome of the case, that is, the poor condition of the patient. Rather than commenting on or giving the import of the decision to have the surgery done at UCLA, A merely confirms (line 37), thereby acknowledging that this is her version, as well, of what happened.

As A has not commented on the event, B offers her comment. Her comment consists of giving a *consequence* of the event, "And it — and it left her quite permanently damaged I suppose" (emphasis added). Although B does not name the delay in surgery, as such, as responsible for the permanent damage ("it left her . . .," emphasis added), the delayed surgery is a reasonable inference, given her description. Her sense, then, of the event is that it is unfortunate that the family members made the decision to have the surgery done nonlocally because the delay caused permanent damage. B has portrayed an event in which the family members (not so named) are responsible for delaying (not so formulated) the surgery, which in turn led to the condition, "quite permanently damaged."

The condition of the patient matters with respect to what sort of job it is for a home nurse. In general, the more damage suffered, the harder and perhaps the more unpleasant and depressing the work is. Likewise, the damage being permanent projects a job with no natural end other than the patient's eventual death.

When B gives the prognosis, "and it left her quite permanently damaged I suppose," A is notably resistant. She confirms it but with the weak term "Apparently." She then adds a contrary prognosis "still hopeful." In reporting the contrary prognosis, she does not report it as an objective fact, for example, "No there is hope of recovery," or as an authoritative source's opinion, for example, "Dr. L. is hopeful." Rather, she gives the husband's opinion ("he is still hopeful"), which is rather

weak and unconvincing. With her interest in convincing B to take on the case, she gives what seems to be her best argument against the case being hopeless and depressing.

To summarize, in the face of A's not coherently responding to B's assertion that the surgery went wrong, B checks whether A does in fact know about the surgery. B tells A her own version of the events leading up to the surgery. If A acknowledges B's information as correct, then B has succeeded in having A support the version that the family members are at least partially responsible for the present condition of the patient, which is that she is quite permanently damaged.

A speaker may check the presumed common knowledge if a recipient does not coherently respond and the source of the trouble is unclear. By going over the facts as he or she knows them, the speaker can see what, if anything, is not established and accepted as fact. These matters, then, may or may not be subsequently resolved.

In their conversation, the two nurses have opposing aims. The descriptions that each of them offers foster their respective aims. In resisting A's appeal to be the home nurse, B reports a depressing and unfavorable prognosis. In persuading B to take the case, A offers a more optimistic prognosis. Although their aims bear on which descriptions they ratify or challenge, the official terms of reference are whether the descriptions properly and validly represent the facts of the case. Giving the facts or one's basis for an assertion often is done when persons have different versions of events and/or different interests, as in both informal arguments and formal judicial disputes (Pomerantz forthcoming a).

4. Dealing with no response by changing one's position

As discussed earlier, if a recipient is hesitant or displays a difficulty in responding to an assertion, a speaker reviews his or her assertion to find the source of the trouble. In the first illustration, the speaker finds a problem reference that may have been unclear, and she clarifies it by identifying the referent. In the following illustration, the speaker locates the source of the trouble not in the construction of her assertion but in what she asserted. She solves the problem by asserting a different position.

In the datum below, C and M are members of a club. They are engaged in selling fruitcakes as a club fund-raising activity. C tells M of a practice that she has adopted, that is, selling halves of fruitcakes. Her account is somewhat defensive: she presents it as what she is having to do and specifies that she does it only with people that she knows (lines

1-2). M reacts to C's information with surprise (line 4). C explains or justifies her selling halves by showing how badly the customers react to the price of a whole fruitcake (lines 6-8). M responds by complaining about the unreasonableness of the customers (lines 9-11).

3. (SBL:3:1)

- 1 C: Anyway I'm ha- ah what I'm having to do to people
 2 I know is cut them up and sell them 'hhhh uh a
 3 pound and a half for a dollar sixty five.
 4 M: Oh you're doing that,
 5 C: 'hhhhh Well I'm doing it to the few people I
 6 know because ever'time I say three twenny five
 7 they look at me like 'hh (.) you must be nuts
 8 woman, (.) You know,
 9 M: Well I don't know what's the
 10 matter with them because fruitcake is not cheap
 11 and that's not an awful lot of fruitcake.
 12 (1.0)
 13 → M: Course it is a little piece goes a long way.
 14 (.)
 15 C: Well that's right
 16 (0.7)
 17 M: Cause we don't eat an awful lot and I'm we Mark
 18 and I are the only ones who eat on this one

Complaints and counter-complaints frequently are made with relational terms. M is countering what she takes to be the customers' complaints: that a whole fruitcake is too expensive, and that it is too large an amount. With relative measures, for example, "too expensive" and "too much," speakers propose that the amount is more than (or less than) what is the right amount. A relative measure may be used to justify a course of action, namely, one that leads to having the right amount.

In saying, "fruitcake is not cheap" (line 10), M suggests that the customers are unjustified in complaining about its price. It is not priced too high because fruitcakes generically are "not cheap." In subsequently describing the amount of fruitcake as "not an awful lot" (line 11), M suggests that the customers also are unjustified in complaining about the amount of a whole fruitcake. If a whole fruitcake were "an awful lot," that would justify the customers buying the right amount, for example, half. B denies the legitimacy of the complaint by simply asserting its negation: "that's not an awful lot of fruitcake."

In countering what might have been the customers' arguments for buying only halves, M is soliciting C's concurrence and support. C's immediate response is silence (line 12). C's delay in responding may be

seen by M as being hesitant or having difficulty responding. The delay gives M both a chance and a motive to reflect on what she has just said. M reviews her assertions to find the source of the problem and perhaps repair it.

During the one-second silence, M comes to reconsider what she said and to reverse her position. It may be that this kind of rapid and complete reversal of position has to do with a speaker's seeing an implication or consequence that he or she had not considered when saying it. (This may be different from modifying one's position in the course of an argument as a way of making concessions.)

Recall that C was telling M in a somewhat defensive manner about selling halves of fruitcake. M does not directly comment on C's practice either positively with a show of support or appreciation, or negatively with a reprimand or warning. Rather, she treats the practice as customer-instigated and complains about the unjustified demands and complaints that customers make. However, if C sees herself implicated and responsible for the practice, she would hear it as a criticism of herself.

It may be that during the one-second silence M realizes that her criticism of the customers' buying halves implicates C as well. Moreover, she may realize that she has just devalued the fruitcake by shrinking its size, so to speak. After the silence, M reverses her position and defends the legitimacy of the customers' buying halves. Perhaps realizing in the silence that her assertion is either undiplomatic or offensive, M rapidly reverses her position. It would not be enough to assert simply a negation of the previous position; she would need to show that it is a credible position and that she believes it. She supports the newly affirmed position with a consumer's aphorism ("a little piece goes a long way") that expands the amount in a fruitcake. She further supports the new position by describing her own circumstances in a way that would justify her buying a half.

5. Concluding remarks

If a speaker expects a recipient's support or agreement and instead the recipient displays difficulty in responding, the speaker would be motivated to figure out what went wrong and to remedy it. In this chapter, three types of remedies have been discussed.

One type of remedy-pursuit is a clarification. Clarifying apparently is directed toward a recipient's being confused or not following what was said because of an unknown term or unclear reference. The remedy is to

done when a speaker says or does something, for example, offends or insults a recipient, that was not intended.

Notes

1. Speakers describe "just the facts" in a variety of situations. One situation is if a speaker is concerned with being held accountable, for example, for criticizing a friend or making a libelous statement. A speaker may suggest a state of affairs by giving evidence for it without explicitly advocating the position. In this datum (illustration [2]) what B does not explicitly state is who or what is responsible for the surgery having gone wrong.
2. One may contrast presenting just the facts, as is done in "They took her down to UCLA" with presenting the facts plus the speaker's position, as was done in (1). Recall B identifies the patient's age with factual information ("in her fifties") and gives a sense or interpretation of the age ("quite a young woman"). By giving the sense of the age with a relational term, B portrayed it as more of a tragedy than if it occurred to, say, an old person. Also, giving a sense of the facts provides for an appropriately matched assessment or reaction to be given, for example, "Oh how sad." In this segment, including an analogous sense of the fact might have been something like, "They took her down to UCLA. It took them quite a long time to get there."
3. This observation would be supported by circumstances in which errors one way or the other are made. Persons complain that they are not being given enough credit when they really disagree but are thought to have not understood. Conversely persons defend themselves by saying that they are not being critical; they really do not understand.

clarify the confusion by supplying a different reference term to replace the prior one.

Seeing a recipient as not understanding what was said is a different order of social event than seeing a recipient as disagreeing. Disagreeing typically is a more emotionally laden action than not following some talk. In not following, the recipient may be cast as inattentive or not too competent; in disagreeing, he may be seen as critical.³ Speakers may search for understanding problems as an initial means of resolving difficulties not only because such pursuits are generally unproblematic in interpersonal terms but also because such features as unclear references seem to be simple to scan for and repair.

Another type of remedy-pursuit is to check out the facts. This remedy apparently is directed toward a problem caused by a speaker referencing, as events known in common, events that are either not known or not accepted as such by the recipient. To find out where the breakdown occurs, a speaker can present to the recipient each relevant fact upon which he or she based the assertion. They may find that they have different versions of events. On the other hand, a recipient may be unable to deny convincingly or disclaim knowledge of the facts as presented. By laying out the grounds or the basis of an assertion to a recipient, a speaker may determine whether the recipient's difficulty in responding is based on rational grounds, for example, having different information, or is based on other grounds such as conflicting interests or some emotional commitment.

A third type of remedy-pursuit is for the conversant to take a different position from the one he or she had just asserted. This remedy apparently is directed toward a problem caused by the speaker having said something that was wrong. If a speaker suddenly reverses his or her position, he or she may have just seen an implication that had not been considered before. For example, it may be that, though the intended object of a criticism is not the recipient, the criticism may apply to the recipient as well. If a speaker suddenly realizes that what he or she had asserted is insulting or offensive to the recipient, he or she might modify the assertion in the direction of being less insulting or offensive. Part of the job would be to be convincing, to present the different position as a credible one.

Regarding remedy-pursuits, the remedy offered should not be taken necessarily to reflect the conversant's analysis of the problem. Clarifying may be done as a first thing to try even when something is only remotely unclear. Checking the facts may be done when a recipient is hostile, or has different interests from a speaker. Changing one's mind may be