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Referential problems in conversation

REFERENTIAL PROBLEMS IN CONVERSATION

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In this paper, some problems related to the organization of reference in conversation are discussed. It is argued that every process of assembling features into a referential description requires referring party's analysis of recipient's background knowledge. The paper centers around cases of presumed (by referring party) or displayed (by recipient) lack of fit between referential items and recipient's background knowledge, that is, on how reference is turned from an *en passant* affair into a problem in its own right.

1. Introduction

This paper is about everyday problems of reference. These are not the famous problems treated by Russell or Frege ('referential puzzles' [1]); nor are they problems with which conversationalists are usually concerned. Conversationalists may formulate 'what they are doing' [2] as 'arguing', 'complaining', 'joking' or whatsoever, but not as 'establishing reference', although they must continually do referential work in order to 'argue', 'complain', 'joke', etc.

Sometimes in the course of conversation, participants nevertheless turn referential work into a problem in its own right. I wish to discuss various ways in which conversationalists can do so. For the sake of brevity I have limited my examples to references to persons or things. Reference to more 'complicated' entities could be treated in a parallel fashion.

2. Some features of referential work

When a conversationalist mentions an individual he or she knows to be known to his or her partner, he or she must use definite expressions (proper names,

[1] Cf. Linsky (1977) for some notes on this philosophical interest in 'puzzles'.
[2] For an analysis of formulations of conversational activities by members, cf. Heritage and Watson (1980).

pronouns, or definite noun phrases). In our culture, at least [3], it is odd to tell some person X that one has met 'somebody' from the linguistics department today, if this somebody is X's wife.

In order to capture this conversational regularity, Sacks and Schegloff (1980) have introduced a distinction between 'recognitionals' and 'non-recognitionals'. Definite expressions are recognitionals whenever they are successful in locating an individual in the recipient's background knowledge and in making it available as a commonly known element of the universe of discourse.

However, according to Sacks and Schegloff, the preference for recognitionals is counterbalanced by another preference, the preference for single reference form (which, in turn, is only a specification of a more general preference for minimization). Both preferences are compatible in the case of pronouns and proper names. If these cannot be used, i.e. if the two preferences are incompatible, then minimization is relaxed gradually.

The following analysis is concerned with this gradual relaxing of minimization. As a starting point, let us consider the speaker's problem of selecting a definite expression which will work as a recognitional. How can this be done? For any individual the speaker has in mind, there are obviously a multitude of possible, 'true' descriptions and names that could be used. But not just any of them will do. Referring parties are required to tailor their referential expressions to the perceived individual needs of their recipients. They must continuously make assumptions about the other parties' 'mental image of the world', about how they see, name, and describe the individual in question. Because all referential work is bound to such an analysis of the co-participants' 'way of seeing things', because it has to be – in Sacks and Schegloff's terms – 'recipient designed', no single definite expression can have a once-and-for-all status, independent of who the recipient is.

The seemingly trivial job of establishing reference is thus of high complexity. But the availability of multiple descriptions and the need to select the appropriate one among them also has an advantage: referential items that have been contextualized according to the principle of recipient design need not be 'complete' (unambiguous). Speakers, who design individual expressions to individual circumstances, rightfully rely on their recipients' collaboration, on their readiness and capability to 'fill in' additional features of the identificandum which they do not mention explicitly [4]. And in fact, participants have few problems in establishing reference: in the majority of cases, it is done *en passant*.

[3] Keenan and Ochs (1979: 150) present and discuss data from Malagasy conversations which seem to suggest that we are not dealing with a universal of human interaction here. Malagasy speakers seem to avoid the use of 'recognitionals' (see below).
[4] Garfinkel (1967) uses the collector term 'ad hocing' for these practices of filling in non-verbalized information.

The principle of recipient design involves uncertainties, however. It requires referring parties to assess other members' 'mental states' ('knowledge') when they select their referring expressions; and what a recipient knows or doesn't know can never be determined, but only inferred, on the basis of his or her verbal behavior. Such assessments may fail to correspond to the recipient's 'actual' state of knowledge, either by underestimating or by overestimating what he or she knows [5]. Misfits can and, in fact often will go unnoticed. The reason is that participants who 'still don't know' may rely on the 'wait-and-see-principle' [6], i.e. they may hope that the future development of the conversation will clarify things. On the other hand, participants who 'already know' may refrain from protesting against being underestimated because they don't want to interrupt the on-going sequence. In these cases, the 'actual' misfit between referring party's assessment and recipient's knowledge is inter-actionally irrelevant and of no interest to us. We are, however, interested in all cases of participants' *displays* of such misfits. These displays are the only means by which conversationalists can see if and to what degree their referential efforts were (un)successful.

Two groups of strategies to turn reference into a problem have to be distinguished. The first group are the recipient's displays of misfit between the expression offered by referring party and his or her own knowledge. But it is not only the recipient who takes part in this process of turning *en passant* reference into a problem. The extent to which a referential expression fits a recipient's background knowledge is a feature of conversation to which referring parties are oriented as well. Referring parties communicate their assessment of the adequacy of the referential items they produce by choosing particular expressions in constructing them: a referring party who tries to do *en passant* reference (whether or not he or she succeeds) obviously believes that his or her referential selection is fully adequate; a referring party who uses one out of a (second) group of techniques, available to referring parties for turning reference into a problem signals that he or she is not so contented with what he or she is about to do.

Taken together, referring parties' 'announcements' and recipients' 'displays' of misfit between referential item and recipients' background knowledge constitute problematic reference. We now have to look at these techniques in detail.

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[5] Cf. Sacks and Schegloff (1980). In their terminology, underestimation leads to 'undertalk', overestimation to 'overtalk'.
[6] Cf. Garfinkel (1961) on this 'retrospective/prospective orientation' of sense-making in con-versation.

3. Techniques for turning reference into a problem

3.1. Other-initiated repair on intended en passant reference

The first technique to be discussed here is due exclusively to the recipient who indicates that his or her state of knowledge was falsely assessed. In this case, the referring party shows no prior orientation to the problem status of the referential item, i.e., he or she attempts an *en passant* reference. Here are some data extracts [7]:

(1) (TEEVERKÄUFER 1431)

```
   01 X.:   wie der Lobkovitz des erste Mal zum Präsidenten
            when the PN(pers) the first time for president
            gewählt worden is (·) ⎡da   ham
            elected was        PERF⎢then PERF they
 →02 T.:                           ⎢wer is   Lobkovitz
                                   ⎣who is   PN(pers)
   03 X.:   des is der jetzige  (der ... drangekommen is)
            that is the present whose-C1 turn-(it)-was    PERF
            ((p))
   04 T.:   a:so   mm,
            I-see
            ((mf)
```

```
   01 X.:    when Lobkovitz was elected president for the first time –
                 ⎡they
 →02 T.:      ⎣who is Lobkovitz
   03 X.:     that's the present (the one whose ... turn it was then)
   04 T.:     I see mm,
```

(2) (T-MITTELPRACHT 823)

((context: phone call after a wedding which *X.* should have attended))
```
   01 P.:   die Benita hat gsagt khabt Herrschaft jetz wollt =
            the PN(pers)had said PERF hang-it   now wanted
            = ⎡i mal   mit = m   Xaver      redn ne⎡t,
              ⎢I once  to-the    PN(pers)   talk you-know
```

[7] The analysis is based on around 40 German conversations; obviously, only a small part of the data can be reproduced in the present paper. Transcription follows the notational system developed by G. Jefferson, but musical notation is used for indicating speed, loudness, etc. Wavy lines indicate laughter. In the interlinear translations, the following abbreviations are used: C1, C2, C3, C4 for case; F, M, N for gender; PL, SG for number; PN = proper name; PART = particle; Q = question; INF = infinitive; PERF = perfectum; REFL = reflexive (pronoun).

→02 *X.*:　⌊'h　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　⌈Ben*i*ta? (0.2) wer is das?
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　⌊PN(pers)　　　*who is that*

03 *P.*:　des　is　am: (0.2)　⌈Seppl　　sei (Frau)
　　　　　that　is　to-the　│PN(pers)　*his wife*
　　　　　((pp))　　　　　　│
04 *X.*:　　　　　　　　　　│ach = so　hm
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　⌊*I-see*　　>

⋮

11 *X.*:　häst　　　　ihr　　　sang　könn　　ich　hätt　　　　mich　auch　mal
　　　　　*have*COND　*to-her*　*say　could*INF　*I　had*COND REFL*also　once*
　　　　　ganz　gern　mit　ihr　unterhalten
　　　　　quite　like　to her　talk

---

01 *P.*:　*Benita had to me now hang it I wanted to talk to Xaver*
　　　　　after al ⌈*l,*
→02 *X.*:　　　　　⌊*Benita? (0.2) who's that?*
03 *P.*:　*that's ahn (0.2)* ⌈*Seppl's wife*
　　　　　　　　　　　　 ⌊*I see hm*

⋮

11 *X.*:　*you could have told her that I should have liked to talk to her, too.*

Analytically, theses cases of referential repair initiation share all the features of other-initiated repair in general (cf. Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977)). With regard to the temporal production of the item in question (*Benita, der Lobkovitz*), the initiation comes relatively late: recipients seem to systematically wait until the completion of the unit under production (that is, until they see that no self-repair/elaboration will follow the candidate problem item) before they display the item's inadequacy and turn it into a problematic one.

The shape of the repair-initiating item (lines 02) is noteworthy for its relative explicitness. The problem item is taken up and repeated in full length, although repair initiation by a simple question particle (*wer*, 'who') or an even more general repair initiator (*hm?, was?*, 'what') would have been possible. The reason is that such a non-specific repair-initiation may be difficult for first speaker to relate to the intended problem item. His or her choice of an *en passant* referential expression indicates that he or she expects no referential problems; the non-specific repair-initiator could therefore falsely be understood as relating to some other aspect of the utterance in question.

3.2. Establishing reference as a prefatory activity

The second way of achieving problematic status for a referential item we want to discuss is exclusively the referring party's responsibility. In this respect it is

the opposite of the type discussed above, where this responsibility was shouldered by the recipient alone. An effective way to show that reference is problematic is for the speaker to treat it as a matter that has to be settled *before* more 'substantive' things can be approached (for instance, a new topic or sub-topic can be initiated). By being introduced in a prefatory sequence, reference is displayed as a prerequisite for the 'activity proper'. A standard formula for such a prefatory treatment of reference to individuals is *kennst du X* 'do you know *X*', where *X* is the referential item problematized by its very production. In the following extract, this formula is used as a 'pre' for a new subtopic:

(3) (ENGLAND 1334: 1–2)

```
06 N.:  jeder        sacht was   ich alles machen soll;
        everybody    says  what  I   all   do     shall
07 X.:  hmh   ⌈ 'h
08 N.:        │ einschliesslich meiner Querflötenlehrerin.
              ⌊ including       my     flute-teacher–F
09      joah!  = das =  ich ne Stunde am   Tach = irgendwo ne
        yeah     that   I   an hour   a    day    somewhere a
        Plätzen    finde wo    ich dann  ⌈ sch schtonaten spiele =
        little-place find where I   then  │    shtonatas   play
10 X.:                                    │ (...) draussn im Wald
                                          ⌊       out     in-the wood
11 N.:  = ja = ja  ge  ⌈ nau (0.2) 'h
        yes  yes   ex  │ actly
12 X.:                 ⌊ h
13 N.:  klar  hat   se   gesacht = hat = se = me =   also    wirklich
        quite PERF  she  said PERF     she meC3  PART really
        enorm        viel (gegeben).
        enormously   much (gave)
→01 N.: kennst du kennst du  die Telemann    methodischen Sonaten.
        know   you know   you the PN(pers)C1 methodic     sonatas
        ((piu f))
02      (1.0)
03 X.:  was  für    ⌈ Sonaten?
        what kind-of sonatas
04 N.:              │ von Telemann; w- die  heissen: ((etc.))
                    ⌊ by  PN(pers)      they are-called
```
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```
06 N.:  everybody tells me what to do;
07 X.:  hmh ⌈ 'h
08 N.:      ⌊ including my flute teacher.
```

```
09        oh yes! that I'd find some little place for one hour a day
          where I could ⎡play sonatas =
10  X.:                 ⎣(...) out in the forest
11  N.:    = oh yes exa ⎡ctly (0.2) 'h
12  X.:                 ⎣h
13  N.:    quite! she said = and = she gave me really enormously much
→01 N.:    do you do you know the Telemann Methodic Sonatas.
02                       (1.0)
03  X.:    what ⎡sonatas?
04  N.:         ⎣by Telemann; h- they are called ((etc.))
```

Unlike the referring parties in extracts (1) and (2), *N* indicates that she is very unsure about the adequacy of her referential work for the purpose of identifying an item in the universe of discourse; she even doubts that such an item is known to the recipient at all.

Whenever the *kennst du X*-format is used after the activity to which it should have been prefatory has already been begun, it is marked as misplaced (mostly shown by a syntactic breakdown signalling self-interruption and 'deletion' of the sentence). Thus, it is not the fact that the format is overwhelmingly used temporally prior to the activity proper which shows it to have the status of a prefatory activity, but the fact that 'improper' placement, although it occurs, is specifically *treated* as exceptional:

(4) (PRÜFERIN 113)

```
01 Tu.:  dann is      da     n Film  vorgef- vorgeführt worden der also (0.2)
         then PERF    there  a film  pro     projected  was    which you-see
→02      äh: (0.2) kenns du die Sendung        vor Ort (0.2)
         eh         know you the transmission  'on the spot'
03 Tu.:  vom WeDeEr? (0.2)
         on    PN(station)
04       im      dritten Progra⎡mm da⎤  könn die   immer so  selbst      so-
         on-the  third   progra⎢mme there can  they  always so themselves so
05 X.:                         ⎣n jaja⎦
06 Tu.:  da          warn Leute  da;
         thereof     were people there
```
((report continues))

```
01 Tu.:  then a film was pro- projected there which well (0.2)
→02      eh: (0.2) do you know the programme 'on the spot' (0.2)
03       on WDR? (0.2)
04       on netwo ⎡rk III where they can always themselves-
05 X.:            ⎣nyeah
06 Tu.:  of this (programme) some people were there
```

As intended *en passant* reference may be rejected for overestimating the recipient, so the *kennst du X*-format – and indeed any 'elaborate' referential item – may be rejected for underestimating him or her. (That this is rarer than the first case is obviously due to the importance of having referential links established for the 'message' to be conveyed, whereas underestimating is 'only' relevant on the level of 'politeness' (Brown and Levinson (1978)). In a very dramatic way this is the case in the following extract where underestimation is displayed mainly by the use of quickly repeated, prosodically marked continuers:

(5) (KÖLN 1009)

```
   01 N.:   du    kennst = ja diese/ diese Lampen diese Arbeitslampen
            you   know         these  these lamps   these work lamps
 →02 B.:   jaja
            yesyes
   03 N.:   die man so in son (0.2)
            which you in   sort-of
 →04 B.:   jaja
            yesyes
            ((higher, faster))
   05 N.:  ⌈ Halter reintut und die man ⌈schwenken kann ne,
           | holder put-in    and which you| rotate       can   TAG
 →06 B.:  ⌊ (ja)                          | hm hm hm hm hm
                                          ⌊((high pitch))
   07 N.:  ⌈ 'h ⁰un ne⁰
           |    and TAG
   08 K.:  | sie weiss Bescheid   (0.2) hh
           ⌊ she knows
   09 N.:  ⌈ ja  oke
           | yes all right
   10 K.:  | h h h h h h h h h h h
   11 B.:  ⌊ h h h h h h h h h h h ho
   12 N.:   nur damit  wir vom    selben reden ne,
            only that  we  of the same   talk  TAG
```

```
   01 N.:   you surely know these / these lamps these work lamps;
 →02 B.:   yes yes
   03 N.:   which you (0.2)
 →04 B.:   yes yes
   05 N.:  ⌈ put in one of these holders and which⌈you can turn no,
 →06 B.:  ⌊ y(es)                                 ⌊hm hm hm hm hm
```

07 *N.:* ⌜ *'h yes*
08 *K.:* │ *she's got it* │ (0.2) *hh*
09 *N.:* ⌜ *yes alright* ⌝
10 *K.:* │ *h h h h h h* │ *h h h h* ⌝
11 *B.:* ⌊ *h h h h h h* ⌋ *h hh* ⌊ho
12 *N.:* ⌜ *it's only to make sure that we are talking about the same thing*

3.3. Indexicality marking

Up to now, we have considered four possibilities to (try to) establish reference which are the result of two dimensions: on the side of the referring party, the dimension 'positive or negative evaluation of appropriateness of referential item used', and on the side of the recipient, the dimension 'display of fit/misfit between referential item and background knowledge', as shown schematically in table 1.

However, such a dichotomized system of participant techniques would seem to be far from optimal. Remember that for referring parties the interactional problem it is supposed to handle is the fact that, in order to refer, it is necessary to assess the recipient's background knowledge, and that this background knowledge is only indirectly accessible. Based on inferences, the referring party's assessment is quite unlikely to result in yes-or-no decisions, as represented by the two alternative ways of referring available in the dichotomized system given above, i.e. intended *en passant* reference on the one hand and the treatment of establishing reference as a prefatory activity on the other hand. A dichotomized system would result in many cases of 'overtalk' or 'undertalk', as assessing co-participants' knowledge is a more-or-less affair. Both, however, are unpreferred events: 'undertalk' because it shows a disregard for the principle of recipient design, 'overtalk' because it may threaten recipient's 'face' by 'treating him as an incompetent person'. In addition,

Table 1

Speaker / Recipient		evaluation of referential item	
		positive	negative
display of	fit	*en passant reference*	'overtalk' (= underestimation of recipient); example (5)
	misfit	'undertalk' (other-initiated repair); examples (1), (2)	reference as a 'pre' leading into referential repair; examples (3), (4)

kennst du X-formatted questions (by obliging recipient to orient to the problem character of the referential item explicitly) are rather clumsy conversational objects: they require at least an answer and are therefore not flexible enough to be revised interactionally in the case of underestimation.

We are looking then for intermediate reference organizing techniques which show the referring parties' orientation to the possible problem status of the referential item under production but at the same time give recipients a chance to 'cancel' this status without doing much conversational work. Such techniques would allow a referring party to signal that he or she is not referencing *en passant*, but would also enable a recipient to *treat* such a 'marked' item as *en passant*. In short, such techniques would make the status '*en passant*' itself a locally negotiable matter.

Intermediate techniques for introducing referential items reflect the more-or-less character of assessing another participant's background knowledge. They will be treated under the heading of indexicality marking [8] here. The most important German marker is the demonstrative article *dies-* (including the variants *der ... da, dieser ... da, dieser eine ... (da), der eine ... (da)*). We can describe its interactional use as follows: The speaker's use of the simple definite article indicates to the recipient that the referential item is intended to refer to an individual in the universe of discourse, presupposing that the referential description given will be adequate for such practical purposes. The demonstrative, on the other hand, marks explicitly the (implicitly, i.e. in an unnoticed way, always present) necessity to fill in features of context. It treats indexicality as a noticed property of the item to which it is attached. The speaker underlines that what he or she says verbally is not enough and that additional information has to be taken from the context. It is not the fact that such contextualization is not necessary when the definite article is used, which constitutes the interactional meaning of *dieser* in this case, but the fact that such a necessity is 'pointed to' by the speaker by the use of the demonstrative [9].

Compared to the English demonstratives *this / these* and *that / those,* German *dieser* seems to have a more restricted (and certainly not identical) meaning. Following Sacks (Lecture 5, Fall 1971), Engl. *this* + NOM is primarily used as a non-recognitional; at least in the case of *that* + NOM, some of his data (p. 13, same lecture) also suggest a recognitional, indexicality marked

[8] The term 'hedge' (Lakoff (1972); Hewitt & Stokes (1975)) can be treated as a rough equivalent. Sacks and Schegloff's 'try marker' (1979) would seem to be a special case of indexicality marking (i.e. the use of an upward intonation contour on the critical item). In the German data analyzed here, such 'try marking' was very rare.

[9] For a discussion of *dieser* as an indexicality marker, cf. Auer (1981). The demonstrative may also have a pejorative reading although this is of no relevance in the extracts discussed here. A discussion of the relationship between this pejorative reading and referential work can be found in a lecture by Harvey Sacks (November 22, 1971, pp. 9ff).

reading. In contrast, it is not possible to use *dieser* in order to refer to individuals not known to the recipient (in this case, only *ein* 'a' may be used), i.e., whereas in English *this man* ... can imply 'you won't know him', *dieser Mann* ... must have a correlate in the background knowledge (including the physical and linguistic context) of both participants.

Indexicality marking by using the demonstrative foreshadows a referential repair sequence which may follow. A recipient's possibly following repair initiation by e.g. *wer* 'who' or *was* 'what' cannot be seen as non-expected by a first speaker as in the case of intended *en passant* reference (extract (6)). On the other hand, indexicality marked referential items do not 'oblige' their recipients to respond. They can choose to disregard them and thus 'decline' the invitation to treat reference as a problem (extract (7)).

(6) (ANS WERK 1752:1)
```
    01 Ta.:  was hast          n (dann)     gelesn (0.2)
             what PERF-you PART-Q then      read
    02 X.:   (ja)   diesen Aufsatz von dem Olson
             well   that   paper   by   the  PN(pers)
    03                     (1.5)
→   04 Ta.:  was isn           des  für    einer (0.4)
             which is-Q-PART that  ϕ     one
    05       ach so: (0.2) von  dem hab   ichimmer noch nix     mitgekriegt
             I   see      about that PERF  I still   yet   nothing heard
```

```
    01 Ta.:  what did you read then (0.2)
    02 X.:   well that paper by Olson
    03                     (1.5)
→   04 Ta.:  which one is that (0.4)
    05       oh I see: (0.2) I still don't know anything about that one
```

(7) (MITTAGESSEN 135)

```
                                                        ↙
    01 X.:   was isn                 eigentlich       mit diesem: Haus-
             what happened-Q-PART I-am-wondering   to   that   internal
             telefon was     mir immer khabt ham;
             phone   which   we always  had    PERF
    02 N.:   des  haut   nimmer  hin,
             that works  no-more  V-PREF
```

```
                                              ↙
    01 X.:   I'm wondering what happened to that internal phone
             we used to have;
    02 N.:   it doesn't work any more,
```

It should be noted here that indexicality marking via the demonstrative *dies-* is not restricted to common nouns; the structure *dies-* + proper noun can also be found:

(8) (KOPFSTAND 200)

```
01 T.:  was haste      denn   gelesn?
        what PERF-you PART read
02                     (1.0)
                                                       ↙
02 R.:  mm jetzt = hab = ich =grad = über =  das – 'hh – dieshe: mm
            now PERF   I   just   about  the          that
04      van Dijk oder = wie = die =  heisst     die    se    da erschossn
        PN(pers) or   how    she    is-called   whom   they  there shot
05      ham    in Nürnberg, –
        PERF  in PN(city)
06 T.:  des hab    ich noch nich gelesn
        this PERF I    not   yet  read
```

```
01 T.:  what did you read then?
02      (1.0)
                                         ↙
03 R.:  mm just now I read about the – 'hh – tha:t mm
04      van Dijk or what she's called the one they shot
05      in Nürnberg –
06 T.:  I haven't read that yet
```

An alternative, less language-specific way of try marking a referential item is the use of short pauses, repeated onsets, lengthening of sonorants, repetition of articles or other techniques for displaying 'hesitancy' (extract (9)). Frequently, both try marking techniques are observed in combination.

(9) (ANS WERK 1822:1)

```
                    ↙                        ↙
01 Ta.:  also der: (0.2) der Micha un der: (0.2) Kurt       = die   sehn me-
         well the         the PN(pers)and the      PN(pers) them  see   we
         die sieht ma jetz ⁰ unh-⁰      ⌈ziemlich viel
         them sees one now incr-         │rather   often
02 X.:                                   │Micha?
                                         │PN(pers)
                                         ⌊
03 Ta.:  Micha; (des) is  dieser    den du gut findest; (0.2)
         PN(pers) that is that(one) why you well like
04 Ta.:  den find ich inzwischen       auch ganz    gut,
         him like I   in-the-meantime  too  quite   well
```

```
05 X.:    ach     der Amnesty
          I-see   the amnesty
```

```
                 ✓                      ✓
01 Ta.:  well ah:(0.2) Micha and ah: (0.2) Kurt = we see- one sees them
         now incred- ⌈rather often
02 X.:                ⌊Micha?
03 Ta.:  Micha; (that)s that guy you like; (0.2)
04       in the meantime I quite like him, too
05 X.:   I see, the amnesty (guy)
```

The way in which 'doing being hesitant' (cf. Good (1978)) invites a recipient to see the referential item as potentially problematic is different from the use of the demonstrative. By using various hesitation techniques, the speaker displays a process of mental search for the appropriate referential item. It is interactionally irrelevant if this searching is cognitively 'real' or only 'put on' for the recipient; in any case, it hints at the speaker's problems to formulate what he or she wants to formulate. Thus, while demonstratives give the instruction to look 'somewhere outside the verbal expression' for help in identifying the *identificandum*, hesitation phenomena prepare a referential problem by indicating 'cognitive problems' in finding the 'right words' which would permit *en passant* reference. There are other techniques for speakers to introduce referential items as likely problematic ones. Particularly, self-elaboration (i.e. same turn repair) is relevant. However, because of the difficulties to differentiate self- and other-initiated repair on the basis of audio-tapes alone, we shall not discuss this technique here.

3.4. Intermediate techniques for recipients

In the last paragraph, it was shown that referring parties make use of intermediate techniques between (intended) *en passant* reference (corresponding to a definitely positive self-evaluation of the appropriateness of referential item) and reference as a preparatory activity (corresponding to a definitely negative self-evaluation of the appropriateness of referential item). These are more adequate for handling the interactional task of assessing recipient's background knowledge than a dichotomized system. We now turn to the recipient's techniques for signalling misfit or fit between his or her own background knowledge and the produced referential description or name. The original schema provided only two possibilities: either initiating repair in the case of misfit, or ratifying *en passant* reference by not orienting to referential problems at all. Here, too, however, intermediate strategies can be observed:

explicit orientation to referential problems in the case of fit and avoidance of explicit orientation to referential problems in the case of misfit.

In the following extract, we notice referring party's orientation to the potential problem status of his referential noun phrase *dieses Buch von Brett und noch irgendjemand* 'this book by Brett and somebody else' by the use of the demonstrative *dieser* and various hesitation phenomena:

(10) (RRR 858)

```
              ↙                              ↙
02  X.:   dieses Buch von Brett un:d h (0.4) noch irgendjemand h (0.4)
          that book by PN(pers) and else someone
03  S.:    ⁰⁰'hja'⁰⁰
          yeah
04  X.:   des  hab   ich  ma      mal   gekauft,
          that PERF  I    me-C3   once  bought
```

```
              ↙                       ↙
02  X.    that book by Brett and h (0.4) someone else h (0.4)
03  S.:   yeah
04  X.:   I bought it,
```

The proposed problem status of the noun phrase does not lead into a referential repair: recipient *S* is quite capable of identifying what *X* is talking about. However, this is shown not by simply disregarding the indexicality markers and producing a thematically coherent next utterance, but by orienting to them by a 'continuer' *hja* (cf. Schegloff (1982)). The recipient acknowledges referring party's marking, and at the same time signals recognition of the *identificandum*.

Here, then, we observe a sequential format beyond the level of turn-taking: it relates, not turns, but lexical items (or hesitation phenomena) and continuers. Just as in the case of turn-level formats such as offer/acceptance or question/answer, the second component of the format has an important function for the negotiation of meaning: the recipient's continuer assures the referring party that the orientation to the potential problem contained in his or her utterance has been seen and that the 'problem' is at least said to have been solved. But the indexicality marker/continuer format is also different from formats such as question/answer in that it does not involve an exchange of the floor (which is obligatory in the case of turn-level formats), and in that the second component of the format is optional.

The use of continuers qualifies as an intermediate strategy for the recipient. On the one hand, it is not possible any longer to speak of *en passant* reference in this case: by positioning a continuer in such a way that it relates to a

referential item, this referential item is given 'a little bit more attention than necessary'. On the other hand, the use of continuers is sequentially unobstructive: it does not challenge the existing attribution of the floor to the present speaker and is therefore much less interruptive for the sequential development of the conversation than for instance a repair marker such as *was* or *wer*.

Although the placement of continuers after referential items is optional even if these referential items are indexicality marked, there are ways for first speakers to prompt their use. An important and interesting one is the turn-internal positioning of the referential item. Let us introduce the notion of *scope* at this point: the scope of a conversational item is that part of the preceding or following context which is of immediate relevance for its interpretation – it may be anything from a word to a sequence of sentences or turns. As a negotiable feature, an item's scope is a function of its relative position with regard to the elements of the preceding/following turn or utterance. However, it is not only the speaker of an utterance who defines its scope by producing it in a certain position, but also the preceding speaker who may provide space and opportunity for doing so. One of the strategies with which a speaker may influence a subsequent item's scope therefore is syntax: as a set of procedures for producing grammatical sentences, it defines *loci* where other speakers can 'come in'.

If a continuer is to have a referential noun phrase, i.e. a relatively small unit of conversation, as its scope, then the problem is to exclude wider scopes, above all to exclude the whole turn containing the referential item. The likelihood of getting a recipient's feedback concerning the referential item increases if this item fits as unambiguously as possible into the continuer's scope. Otherwise, the relationship between the two is vague, and the internal cohesion of the format relating them is endangered. A referring party who wants to prompt a recipient's response can therefore do so by creating space in the proper position, either by pausing turn-internally as in extract (10), or by putting the noun phrase as near as possible to the next transition relevant space [10]. In this position, a continuer immediately preceded by a referential noun phrase is preferentially related to it (above all if it is indexicality marked), and not to the utterance as a whole:

(11) (KÖLN 3156)

```
01 B.:   da      kann = ma also    überall      was         findn       ne, =
         there can       one PART everywhere   something    find       you-see
```

[10] Of course, turn-internal construction does not determine or preclude a recipient's recognition signal. Even if placed unfavourably, a referential item can be selected as the scope of a recognition signal, for instance by the use of a more elaborate continuer (e.g. *ich weiss, wen du meinst*, 'I know who you are talking about'), or by simultaneous talk immediately after the critical item.

```
02        zum Beispiel diese aä:: Verzögerungsphänomene
          for instance  those      hesitation-phenomena
03        zum Beisp    diese äh und: sowas        ⌈was ma letzte Mal
          for inst     those eh and something-like-that what we last time
          ((prestissimo))                          |((acc.))
→04 C.:                                            ⌊mm
  05 B.:  g ⌈emacht ham ne        das  sind das is also     auch
          dd│id       PERFyou-see that are that  is PART also
  06 T.:    ⌊m
  07 B.:   besonders  häufig  in den Sätzen
           especially frequent in the sentences
```

```
  01 B.:  well you can find something everywhere you see, =
  02      for instance those eh: hesitation phenomena
  03      for inst those eh and: something like that⌈what we did
→04 C.:                                             ⌊mm
  05 B.:  ⌈last time you see that is well especially frequent in
  06 T.:  ⌊m
  07 B.:  the sentences
```

B's turn has reached a transition relevant space from both syntactic and semantic points of view in line 03 (after *und: sowas*). As the referential noun phrase *diese äh und: sowas* 'those ehs and something like that' is placed at the end of the utterance unit (syntactically, it could also have been produced in the position of *was*, line 1, from where it is 'dislocated'), it is the preferred scope of the immediately following *mm* (line 04).

End positioning is therefore capable of underlining the effect of indexicality marking. In general, it seems to hold that the terminal position is especially designed for items which may be prone to be problematic. This is the case because such items are most accessible to the next speaker. Because nothing intervenes, he or she can directly and without any special retrieval work take up the terminal expression. (Compare the 'hidden' referential items in extracts (1) and (2) and the very explicit repair initiations found there, to the much simpler *was* which would be sufficient in the place of *mm* in extract (11)).

The sequential implicativeness of end positioning transcends referential work. We might mention in passing another conversational environment in which it is of relevance: the production of second assessments [11]. First assessments are often followed by other party's second assessments. In order to find out if a first utterance was produced as an assessment, the second party can use various clues – for instance, if the preceding utterance contains an

[11] Cf. Pomerantz (1975); Auer and Uhmann (1982).

evaluative lexeme. Of secondary (and subsidiary) importance, however, is the placement of that lexeme in the turn; the less accessible it is, the less likely it is to be followed by a second assessment. Cf.:

(12) (KÖLN 907) (end-positioning; subsequent 2nd assessment)

```
01 T.:   ich find das Geräusch  so brutal
         I   find the  noise     so brutal
02 K.:   ah:! eklich                        ↖
         oh   disgusting
```

```
01 T.:   to me the noise is so brutal
02 K.:   oh: it's disgustingi     ↖
```

(13) (RHEINUFERBAHN) (embedded, no 2nd assessment)

```
01 K.:   es gibt     Strecken die    werden na:ch: (0.2) Strassenbahn-
         there are   lines    that   are          according-to tram
         vorschriften gefahren nach              der sogenannten Betriebs-
         regulations  run      according-to      the so-called    plant
         ordnung           fü(r) Strassenbahn 'h und die Überland-
         regulations       for   trams          and the long-distance
         strecken die     von e Rodnkiechn was    ja           auch
         lines    those   from PN(city)     which as-you-know  also
         jetz leider Gottes zu Köln      eingemeindet worden ist 'h
         now unfortunately to PN(city) incorporated  has      been
         und 'h e: kur(z)     vor      Bonn     die werdn nach
         and     shortly    before    PN(city)  they are   according-to
         der (0.2) Eisenbahnbetriebsordnung gefahren =
         the       rail-operation-regulations   run
02 E.:   = du liebe Güte und wie kann  ei(n) Fahrgast das lern
         dear me           and how can a     passenger that learn
```

```
01 K.:   there are lines that are run according to tram regulations
         according to the so-called operation regulations for trams 'h
         and the long-distance lines from Rodnkiechn which as you
         know has now unfortunately been incorporated into Cologne
         too and ah shortly before Bonn, they are run according to
         rail operation regulations =
02 E.:   = dear me and how can a passenger learn that
```

In the second extract, it is the very unaccessible position of the evaluative *leider Gottes* that makes it difficult for recipient *E* to produce a second

assessment especially directed to that 'side remark'. She does give an assessment in line 02, but its scope is the whole preceding utterance/explanation.

Referring parties, so we have shown, may prompt recipients' production of a continuer by positioning the referential item at the end and/or pausing. Both strategies provide space for a minimal response specifically oriented to reference. Here, another point can be made which brings us back to the status of continuers as an intermediate technique in the negotiation of reference. If it is true that continuers acknowledging referential items are not placed at random, but are especially likely to occur adjacent to such items, then the absence of continuers for which space has been provided, and the proper scope prepared, can be interpreted by first speakers as a notable absence: one which signals non-recognition of the *identificandum* [12]. In such cases, then, we may get another treatment of referential repair which is highly efficient and highly unobstructive for the sequential development of the conversation. It consists (a) of an indexicality marked and end-positioned referential item (referring party's orientation to a potential problem status), (b) recipient's withholding of a continuer (implying non-identification), and (c) referring party's elaboration/clarification, usually after a short silence [13]:

(14) (ANS WERK 1931)

```
      01 Ta.: wo     wart   er   denn      gewesen h h h h 'h
              where had     you PART-Q    been
(a) 02 X.:    ach in dieser Pizzeria   da
              oh  to  that  pizzeria   there
(b) 03                       (0.2)
(c) 04        warn wa da       nich auch scho     mal  in (Litzelstetten)
              were we there    not  also already  once in PN(town)
      05 Ta.: ach: in de:r
              oh   in this-one
```

---

[12] According to Schegloff (1982: 88), 'it is not that there is a direct semantic convention in which "uh huh" equals a claim or signal of understanding. It is rather that devices are available for the repair of problems of understanding the prior talk, and the passing up of those opportunities, which "uh huh" can do, is taken as betokening the absence of such problems'. Although this is correct for continuers in general, 'uh huhs' in the specific environment discussed here have a stronger potential for being used (not as claims or proof, but) as signals of identification of the individual referred to, and in their absence, as signals of non-identification.

[13] This silence is therefore more than just the outcome of the usual 'wait-and-see' principle. Note that its production is the joint achievement of both parties: referring parties pause in order to create space for the production of a continuer, recipients withhold this continuer. The format stands in contrast to an 'immediate' (unsolicited) self-repair in the case where referring party continues through a (syntactic, but not prosodic) transition relevant space. On the use of silence to prompt other parties' utterances, cf. Erickson & Shultz (1982: 125).

```
    01 Ta.:  where did you go then h h h h 'h
(a) 02 X.:   oh we went to this pizzeria
(b) 03              (0.2)
(c) 04       we went there too didn't we in (Litzelstetten)
    05 Ta.:  oh this one
```

The relationship between (a), (b), and (c) is a non-determining (although recurrent) one: a recipient is not obliged to respond to a referring party's indexicality marking; nor is the non-production of a continuer necessarily to be interpreted as a notable absence. The recipient may 'ignore' the referring party's orientation to the potential problem status of the referential item, that is, he or she may choose not to acknowledge it; the referring parties may 'ignore' the recipients' non-response by treating it as non-implicative [14]. Both parties are thus equally taking part in the negotiation of the problematic or *en passant* status of the referential item.

The use of continuers is a strategy for the recipient which mediates between explicitly initiating repair and letting a referential item pass, for two reasons. In the case of an 'actual' fit between the description or name offered by the referring party and the recipient's background knowledge, the production of a continuer indicates fit and prevents the referring party's 'overtalk'. In the case of an 'actual' misfit, the withholding of a continuer can (especially *post* indexicality marking) suggest misfit and prompt the referring party's elaboration/clarification without having to explicitly initiate repair. Recipients will often find it useful to find a compromise between the need to make out what the speaker is talking about, and the smooth running of the conversation which is interrupted whenever referential repair leads into a side sequence. Continuers are an apt technique for such compromises.

4. Summary and conclusions

Our initial schema now has to be revised in the way shown in table 2.

Note that the existence of intermediate techniques both on the side of the referring party and on the side of the recipient dissolves the clear-cut distinction between other-initiated and self-repair as proposed by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977). A referring party who prepares for a problem treatment of his or her referential item by indexicality marking it gives to a possibly following 'who' or 'what' a different status than that of an 'unexpected'

[14] This is why the withholding of continuers must not be confounded with the withholding of second pair parts, for instance, of answers following questions. Second participants are not free to ignore the implicativeness of questions, but they are free to ignore the implicativeness of try marking.

Table 2

Recipient \ Speaker			Evaluation of referential item		
			clearly positive	inter-mediary	clearly negative
implicit	DISPLAY OF	fit	*en passant* reference	indexicality marking, not acknowledged; ex. (7), (8)	
explicit			intended *en passant* reference acknowledged by continuer	indexicality marking + continuer; ex. (10), (11)	'overtalk' reference as a 'pre'; ex. (5)
implicit		misfit		indexicality marking, with-held continuer + elaboration; ex. (14)	notable absence of positive answer to *kennst - Du - X -* type 'pre'
explicit			'undertalk': other-initiated repair; ex. (1), (2)	indexicality marking + explicit repair initiation; ex. (6), (9)	reference as a 'pre' leading into referential repair; ex. (3), (4)

other-initiation; similarly, recipients' withholding of a continuer gives to a possibly following elaboration/clarification by first speakers a different status than that of a self-repair in the same turn. The intermediate techniques discussed in this paper turn other-initiation and self-repair into prototypes, or polar ends of a continuum; they should not be regarded as an exhaustive classificatory system.

In the preceding paragraphs, only one aspect of referential repair has been discussed: how reference as a taken-for-granted issue is turned into an interactional problem by co-participants. Neither the organization of the referential repair sequence itself, nor its termination, have been analyzed. One final observation has to be added at this point, though. Up to now, we have been talking about conversationalists' techniques as if the sequences we discussed were only and exclusively directed towards the aim of establishing reference. This is not always true. In some contexts, referential repair work is only superficially about reference; take the following extract:

(15) (LINGUONIKOLAUS 1523)

```
  01 Sol.:   i find (0.2) i find   diese-  der Nikolaus     der muss     die
             I think      I think  that    the Santa Claus  he ought to  the
             Sprüche     ziehen (.......)
             wisecracks  deliver
→02 Sog.:   ⁰was denn     für      Sprüche⁰,
             what Q-PART sort-of   wisecracks
  03                                (0.75)
  04 Sol.:   m über die Lehrenden ⌈(.......)
                about the staff    ⎢
  05 Sog.:                         ⎢ ach du lieber (Vater)
                                   ⎣oh    dear me
```

```
  01 Sol.:   I think (0.2) I think that that- Santa Claus ought to make some
             wisecracks
→02 Sog.:   what sort of wisecracks
  03                                (0.75)
  04 Sol.:   well about the staff ⌈(.....)
  05 Sog.:                        ⎣oh dear me
```

Lines 02-04 constitute a typical referential repair sequence; but also note that 01 and 05 combine into a statement-of-opinion/disagreement sequence to which 02-04 is a side sequence. Now it is known that disagreements are conversationally dispreferred activities (cf. Pomerantz (1975)). They are systematically delayed by subsequent speakers in order to provide an (additional) opportunity for the first speaker to mitigate or revise his or her statement-of-opinion. There are good reasons to see the referential repair sequence in this extract as a method to delay the dispreferred disagreement. This side sequence then is subsidiary to other, higher level activities, not (only) in the semantic sense of establishing referential links necessary for understanding the activity proper, but in a sequential sense, for delaying its production.

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