Epistemics and the functions of declarative questions in Dutch talk-in-interaction

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The role of grammar in talk-in-interaction has recently become a focal point of conversation analytic research. Yet how different clause types, such as declaratives and interrogatives, contribute to action formation is still rather vague. We approach this issue by looking at three questioning actions that are designed with a declarative prefaced by a specific lexical item: *want*, *dus*, and *oh*. We will demonstrate that each action presupposes that the speaker has a high degree of certainty: *want* is used to account, *dus* to infer, and *oh* conveys a change-of-state, typically from not knowing (K −) to knowing (K +). Based on these findings, we will argue that declarative questions are used when a speaker claims a particular epistemic stance, and in turn that epistemic stance constrains the actions that a clause type can be used for.

1. The linguistic realization of questions

Asking questions is one of the most fundamental actions in talk-in-interaction. Not only do we use them for their obvious function, which is gaining new information, but they can also serve as vehicles for other actions (Schegloff, 2007); for Dutch, Englert (2010) found that there are at least six different uses for questions. This raises the question of how they can convey these activities; in terms of action formation, what resources - in particular what linguistic resources - are used to make an utterance recognizable as a question (cf. Schegloff, 2007: xiv).

Traditionally the answer has been sought, at least in part, in the syntax of utterances. In Dutch, as in most other Germanic languages (Dryer, 2013), the prototypical questioning utterance begins with a question word such as *wie* ('who'). These wh-clauses make relevant - i.e. request as an appropriate next action - a variable response, depending on the question word used, and are thus typically called variable questions or content questions. Another prototypical way to design a question is by placing the subject after the verb, making the utterance verb-initial. These interrogatives make

relevant a yes/no response and are thus typically called yes/no questions or polar questions. The final question design, and the one we are interested here, also makes relevant a yes/no response, but has what we could call default word order: the finite verb is in second position and is preceded by some other clause-internal element, typically but not necessarily the subject. These declaratives are normally associated with assertions, but are also frequently used to ask questions, possibly even more frequently than interrogatives[1] (Englert, 2010).

Although declaratives are syntactically distinct from interrogatives, the response they make relevant is similar. This does not mean they are also functionally identical. Heritage (2012a) has shown that declaratives convey a different Epistemic Stance: with a declarative the inquirer treats the content of the question as already known or established, whereas with an interrogative s/he treats the content as still in question (Raymond, 2010; for a similar proposal see Gunlogson, 2001). Because of this, declaratives are often seen to make relevant only a confirmation (Raymond, 2010, Lee, 2014).

Research has, however, shown that declarative questions, like questions with other clause types, are not just used as requests for confirmation. Schegloff (2007) views questions as a descriptive category for various actions. He demonstrates that questions can be 'double-barreled' and are used as 'vehicles for other actions' such as inviting. Steensig and Heinemann (2013) take a more narrow approach. They show that questions, even when their primary function is to elicit information, can still be further categorized in more specific types of actions such as *specification requests* or *knowledge-discrepancy question*. Our aim in this paper is to unify these approaches, by considering some of the actions that declarative questions can be used for and show how such a categorization relates to their epistemic stance.

To address this issue, we have looked at a corpus of 23.5 hours of informal telephone conversations between students and friends/family. These conversations were recorded by students at Utrecht University as part of a BA-course in 2010 and 2011. From this corpus we gathered 150 declarative utterances that were used as questions[2]. These questions were selected from 75 separate conversations, with a total of 114 different speakers. The participants talk about a wide variety of topics from everyday life. We noticed that a large number of these questions are prefaced by particular lexical items. Each of these items conveys how the question relates to the preceding talk. We made a comparison with all the interrogative questions in the same conversations and found that while some items are combined with both clause types - such as *maar* and *en* - others more strongly prefer declaratives (see table 1).

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[1] It has been claimed that a final rising pitch is crucial in making declaratives recognizable as questions (e.g. Haan, 2002). In our corpus, however, only 30% of declarative questions had a final rising pitch, counting both rise-to-mid and rise-to-high. Addressing the difference between these findings is beyond the scope of this paper.

[2] We did not stop at 150, because we took all declarative questions from every conversation we analyzed, bringing the total to 153.

Table 1: *Frequency of* maar, en, oh, want, *and* dus, *in the preface of interrogative and declarative questions*

	Interrogative ($n = 321$)		Declarative ($n = 153$)		Significance
Maar	30	(9.0%)	27	(17.6%)	$X^2(1) = 6.75, p < 0.01$
En	16	(5.0%)	24	(15%)	$X^2(1) = 15.3, p < 0.001$
Oh	10	(3.1%)	30	(19.6%)	$X^2(1) = 36.5, p < 0.001$
Want	2	(0.6%)	13	(8.5%)	$X^2(1) = 18.5, p < 0.001*$
Dus	0	(0.0%)	23	(15%)	$X^2(1) = 50.7, p < 0.001$
Total	58	(18.1%)	117	(76.4%)	

*Yates' correction

These findings are in line with earlier research by Beun (1990). He argued that *dus* and *oh* - he did not discuss *want* - are used to make declarative utterances recognizable as questions: they link a declarative utterance to prior talk by the addressee, and thereby s/he is marked as having primary epistemic status. Beun's analysis, however, does not account for why some of these items more easily combine with interrogatives than others. We will attempt to shed some light on this issue.

In this paper, we will give a general description of the function of declarative questions prefaced by *want*, *dus*, and *oh*[3]. We will show that declaratives prefaced by *want* are used to account for other actions, an action of either the speaker or his/her co-interactant, and that declaratives prefaced by *dus* are used to convey the speaker's understanding of prior discourse. Both conjunctions are thus used to achieve mutual understanding, but where *want* deals with the course of action, *dus* addresses content. We will then show that *oh*, like its English counterpart (Heritage, 1984), is used to convey a change of state. Finally, we will argue that because all these functions presuppose certainty on the part of the speaker, their preference for declaratives is in line with Heritage's proposal on Epistemic Stance (Heritage, 2012a).

2. Data

In the selection of our data we followed the definition of question put forward by Stivers and Enfield (2010). Our primary criterion was whether a declarative utterance was a functional question. Which means that it had to effectively seek to elicit information, confirmation, or agreement (p. 2621). Because the underlying format of fragment clauses is not always straightforward, we only selected full clausal declarative utterances with an overt element preceding the finite verb. An utterance

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[3] A detailed comparison between interrogatives and declaratives unfortunately falls outside the scope of this paper. But we believe based on the distribution in table 1 that the functions discussed are exclusive to declaratives. *Dus* does not preface interrogatives, and *want* only does in two exceptional cases. Although *oh* prefaces interrogative questions more frequently, it is still far more frequent with declaratives.

like *met de kinderen* ('with the children') in response to an informing declarative utterance about who came to visit could be parasitical on the format that preceding turn. However, without assuming some specific syntactic theory, there is no way to definitively prove that it is not an elliptical interrogative: 'kwam ze met de kinderen' ('did she come with the children') - assuming there is an underlying structure. Declaratives containing the turn-final particle *hè* ('right?'), which cannot be turn-final for an interrogative, were treated as tag questions, i.e. not as declaratives[4]; e.g. 'maar sommigen beginnen maandag al hè' ('but some already start on Monday, right?').

3. Function of declarative questions

In our analysis we have ascertained that there are (at least) three functions of declarative questions: they can be used (i) to account for other actions, (ii) to convey a formulation, (iii) or to signal a change of state. All three functions are conveyed by specific lexical items, but these do not contribute to action formation in the same way. Whereas an account is an action on its own, a formulation can be used for different, albeit related, actions. As Heritage (1984) has shown, there are at least ten actions to which a change-of-state token can contribute. It can even be combined with an account or a formulation. We can only show some of these functions, but our claim is that all functions share the general feature that they presuppose a small knowledge gap between speaker and addressee, what Heritage and Raymond (2012) call the epistemic gradient. We will discuss the functions of *want*, before we move on to the more general functions of *dus* and *oh*.

3.1 Mutual understanding of actions

Declarative questions prefaced by *want* are done either following an action by the same speaker, or following an action by the co-interactant. In both cases the utterance is treated as a polar question, but it also functions as an account for that prior action. The function of these declarative questions is to achieve mutual understanding about the course of action; why the prior action was done and how it should be addressed (Nielsen, 2009). The following excerpt is a case in point. Ilse and Daantje are talking about a friend of Daantje's who recently moved into a new house. After an appreciative assessment, Ilse redoes an earlier question (Mazeland & Huiskes, 2001), immediately followed by a *want*-prefaced declarative question in line 4.

Excerpt 1
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01    I      =wo:w; dass echt rela:xt.
             =wo:w; that's really rela:xed
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[4] Although *toch* in turn-final position can also only follow a declarative, we did include it in our corpus, because as an epistemic modifier it does appear in interrogatives, just not in turn-final position.

02	D		hmhm,
			hmhm,
03	I		•h (.) maar w- hoe ging het met der ↑stu̲die;=
			•h (.) but w- how were her studies going;=
04		→	=want dat was ↑toch e̲erst best wel lasti:g
			because that was PRT first quite PRT difficult
			=because those were quite difficult at first
05			(0.6)
06	D		•h (.) ja: ze b- (.)
			•h (.) yeah: she b- (.)
07			ze wist niet zo ↑goed
			she did not really know that well
08			wat ze nou (0.4) moest,=
			what she PRT (0.4) had to do,=
09			=dus ze heeft verschillende s:tudies geprobeerd, en zo?
			=so she tried out various programs, and stuff?
10			•hhh <maar uiteindelijk>
			•hhh <but eventually>
11			nu doet ze >volgens mij< ie- iets van l- mè- e:h
			now she does >I believe< so- something like l- me- e:h
12			evenementenmanagementachtig iets,
			something event management like,
13	I		↑oke [:.
			↑okay[:.
14	D		[op de:h
			[at the:h
15			°op° haa kaa ((biep)) uu:,
			°at° HK((beep)) U:,
16			(0.9)
17			en da vindt ze:eh (ha)-
			and that she:eh enjoys (ha)-
18			vindt ze hartstikke leu:k,
			she really enjoys,
19			het bevalt dr goed,
			it is to her liking,
20			ze haalt goeie cijfers=
			she is getting good grades=

Daantje addresses both questions, one after another. She begins with the second question by providing a confirmation in line 6, thus treating it as a polar question, and she then expands on the specifics of what was so difficult. After line 15, she moves on to the first question, saying that her friend enjoys the new program and is doing well. Both answers are separated by a pause of 0.9 seconds, and Daantje treats them as separate answers by prefacing her second answer with *en* ('and') in line 17; she addresses a list of questions, albeit a short list. But Daantje does not answer the questions in this order simply for reasons of contiguity (Sacks, 1987), where her second answer is independent of the first. The first answer provides a context in which the second answer is to be understood: her friend is not just doing well, she is doing

well after having overcome difficulties. In this way, Daantje conveys her understanding of the declarative question as an account for the general news inquiry (cf. Button & Casey, 1985). It demonstrates why the main question has been asked and thus should be addressed first so as to provide a context for a response to the news inquiry.

Now bear in mind that by asking the question Ilse conveys that she considers it a relevant action. In other words, her request for a status update is relevant based on the premise that Daantje's friend had troubles to overcome, which means that Ilse conveys a strong belief in the truth of line 4. Thus the epistemic gradient of her declarative question is very shallow. At the same time Ilse demonstrates only limited access by not naming the specifics of the problems. So with respect to those specifics, she conveys a rather steep epistemic gradient, which makes relevant an explanation of those problems by Daantje (cf. Heritage, 2012b).

We see that with the *want*-prefaced declarative question Ilse changes her main action. The question in line 3 is designed as a general news inquiry, but because of the account in line 4 it requests a very specific news update. The declarative question not only demonstrates that Ilse's first question is a relevant action, it also conveys what a response must deal with.

In the previous cases an interactant provided an account for his/her own action. However, in 4 out of the 13 cases in our corpus, an interactant provides an account for his/her co-interactant's action. This account is then treated as a candidate account, rather as the account, and the co-interactant can still reject it. The following excerpt is a case in point. Lennie and Evelien began their conversation with an attempt to schedule a movie night, but they did not agree on a definitive plan. After some intervening talk Evelien has resumed the topic. In line 1-2 Lennie suggests to plan the night before the summer holiday, but Evelien argues that they could also plan it during the summer. Lennie follows with a *want*-prefaced declarative question in line 11.

Excerpt 2

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01     L        [in ieder geval] voordat het blok is afgelopen
                [in any case   ]before the end of the semester
02              in ieder geval
                in any case
03              (0.7)
04     E        uhuh[uhuhu                    ]
05     L            [dat lijkt me dan wel zo  ] handig,
                    [that seems PRT to me so] handy,
06     E        o:↓:h
                o:↓:h
07              ja en anders doen we het
                yeah and otherwise we can do it
08              in de zomervakantie hnog een keer
                during the summer vacation another time
09              dat kan ook
                that's also possible
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10              •Hh
11    L  →    ja: want      da[n ben] je  toch in groningen toch↑
              yeah because then are  you PRT  in Groningen PRT
              yeah: because the[n you]  will also be in Groningen right↑
12    E                       [(     )]
13    L       >of nou ↓assen groningen dichtbij<
              >or well ↓Assen Groningen nearby<
14            (0.3)
15    E       e::::::h,
              e::::::h,
16            ik ↑denk vooral in schoor↑ol
              I ↑think mostly in Schoor↑ol
17            maar (.) dan kan je daar gewoon
              but (.) then you can come and
18            lekker komen log↑eren.
              stay there.
19    L       ↑j:a=
              ↑y:eah=
20            =↓das wel mooi
              =that's PRT nice
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Lennie sets the agenda of her question with her increment in line 13: the question is not whether Evelien is going to be in Groningen, but if is she is going to be nearby. But Evelien disconfirms, as she is going to be in Schoorl, which is a few hours away from Groningen and Assen. Evelien's response is, however, not yet complete at the point where she has disconfirmed the propositional content of Lennie's question. She explains that it will be possible for Lennie to come and stay in Schoorl and she thus treats the agenda of the declarative question as how easy it will be for them to get together during the summer. If Evelien is far away, that would obviously be a problem if all they want to do is go see a movie, but if Lennie can come over, Evelien's proposal in line 7-9 is a relevant action. In other words, Evelien provides an account for her action in line 7-9, and in that way treats Lennie's declarative question as a candidate account. And as with excerpt 1, Lennie claims a shallow epistemic gradient with her account. Instead of challenging Evelien's proposal, she accepts it as a relevant action with *ja* and suggests a reason for its relevance.

So we again see that a *want*-prefaced declarative question is used to account for a prior action. But as it is used to account for another's action, it only provides a candidate account, and the co-interactant can still reject it. It also differs from excerpt 1 in that Lennie's account is about problem resolution; she treats Evelien's proposal as not definitively relevant, whereas Ilse's account was about problem prevention by showing why a no-news response by Daantje would be problematic.

We have shown in this section that interactants use *want*-prefaced declaratives as questions and at the same time as accounts for other actions. The addressee has primary epistemic access to the information addressed, but the speaker claims a shallow epistemic gradient. The accounts are not used because another action, or lack of another action, is morally accountable (Heritage, 1988), but because the speaker

seeks a mutual understanding about the course of action; either by conveying the 'why that now' of his/her own action or by seeking the 'why that now' of another's action (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

3.2   Mutual understanding of content

In the previous section we have shown that *want*-prefaced declarative questions are used to seek mutual understanding on a course of action, that is, why some action was done. *Dus*-prefaced declarative questions are also used to seek mutual understanding, but they are concerned with the content of preceding turn(s), not its conditions. This practice is typically called a formulation (Heritage & Watson, 1979). Unlike *want*-prefaced questions, formulations are not usually done to achieve mutual understanding per se; their function varies between conversational genres (Drew, 2003; see also Antaki, 2005; Sliedrecht & Van Charldorp, 2011). In some settings a formulation can be used to transform an utterance, or series of utterances, into a form that is relevant for the local context; e.g. a psychiatrist can use a formulation to put a patient's story in medical terms (Deppermann, 2011). Such functions are obviously less likely to be found in casual conversation.

   Although the functions of formulations vary, they all share a few basic features. First, with a formulation a speaker claims that the proposed knowledge has been inferred from what his/her interlocutor has just said; it conveys the speaker's understanding of those preceding utterance(s). In this way the speaker makes the information his/her own, while the addressee still has primary epistemic access to it. Second, the preferred response is usually a minimal confirmation. A dispreferred or transformative response would signal a problem with the question (Stivers & Hayashi, 2010), which would be all the more problematic because that would imply that the speaker was not paying enough attention to achieve a correct understanding.

   Because a minimal confirmation, such as *yes* or a similar particle, is the relevant second pair part, formulations are closure implicative (Schegloff, 2007). Consider the following excerpt. Tatjana has called her grandmother, Hennie, to ask how she is doing. Since the previous day was Mother's Day, Tatjana nominates it as a topic very early in the conversation.

Excerpt 3

01	T	ja: heb je leuke ↑moederdag gehad gister;
		yeah: did you have a nice Mother's Day yesterday;
02	H	<u>ja</u> hoor ja hoor
		yeah PRT yeah PRT
03		(0.3)
04	T	↑ja
		yeah
05		(0.6)
06	H	j:a ↓hoor (.)
		y:eah PRT (.)
07		•h e:h wieneke is ge↑weest

		•h e:h *Wieneke came by*
08		(.)
09	T	↓oh wat gezel↑lig (.)
		↓oh how nice (.)
10		↑met de kinderen, of ↓niet
		↑with the children, or ↓not
11		(0.4)
12	H	>met k<u>i</u>nderen en met d<u>a</u>ryl<
		>with children and with Daryl<

<<20 lines omitted about Mother's Day>>

32		en toen zijn ze weer <naar huis gegaan>.
		end then they <went home again>.
33		(0.7)
34	T	↑oh nou wat ge↑zellig
		↑oh well how nice
35	→	>dus je heb< (.) gewoon een hele leuke
		s*o you have simply a very nice*
		>so you have< (.) simply had a very nice
36	→	moederdag gehad;=
		mother's.day had
		mother's day;=
37	H	=ja: hoor↓ ja <u>ze</u>ker (0.6) ja
		=yeah: PRT yeah absolutely (0.6) yeah

In response to Tatjana's news receipt (Couper-Kuhlen, 2012) in line 4, Hennie gives an account of what she did on Mother's Day. At the point where her telling is possibly pragmatically complete - her visitors had gone home - Tatjana gives an assessment prefaced by *nou* ('well'). In this position, *nou* conveys that her assessment is oriented towards sequence closure (Pander Maat, Driessen & van Mierlo, 1986). She follows her assessment with a formulation that summarizes and assesses Hennie's telling (cf. Jefferson, 1983). Hennie's response is minimal: she confirms emphatically with *zeker* ('surely'), but adds no new information. Afterwards, Tatjana launches a new topic (data not shown).

The formulation contains both features we just discussed: it is a summary of Hennie's telling, thus conveying Tatjana's understanding of it, and a minimal confirming response is treated as the requested second pair part. Notice furthermore that the formulation largely recycles Tatjana's topic nomination from line 1, and that by doing it as a declarative, it takes the form of a candidate answer. By recycling the topic nomination in this way at a position where the topic is possibly complete and directly following the *nou*-prefaced assessment, Tatjana is moving towards closure of the topic. In other words, she is verifying whether a mutual understanding of the topic content has been achieved, because if so, it is possible to close the topic. Hennie's

response is also oriented towards closure: *ja hoor* in this sequential position and with a low-level intonation contour is closure-implicative[5] (Mazeland & Plug, 2010).

A very different function of formulations can be found in excerpt 4, where it still conveys an inference, but is not oriented towards topic closure. Marco has failed an exam and Egbert inquires whether Marco will soon get another chance. After getting a transformative answer (Stivers & Hayashi, 2010) that denies the presupposition of the question that there is a fixed date, Egbert uses a formulation in line 14 to ask the same question.

Excerpt 4

01	E	maaruh: w[anneer heb je dat,]=
		buttuh: w[hen do you have that,]=
02	M	[(maar bij)]=
		* [(but with)]*
03	E	=[binnenkort weer of duurt dat w]eer effe;
		=[soon again or will that take] a while;
04	M	=[(super) (( ))]
		=[(super) (( ))]
05		(1.1)
06		↑HE?
		↑HE?
07		(0.3)
08	E	heb je dat b<u>i</u>nnenk<u>o</u>rt weer,
		do you have that again soon,
09		of duurt dat nog effe;
		or will that PRT take a while;
10		(0.5)
11	M	ja nEE ik moet dat zelf allemaal <u>aa</u>nvragen °enzo° e:h
		yeah nO I have to apply for all that myself °and stuff° e:h
12	E	hmke
		hmke
13		(1.7)
14	→	dus dat is ↑niet: over twee dagen w<u>ee</u>r °ofzo°;
		so that is not over two days again or.something
		so that is not again in two days or something;
15		(0.8)
16	M	NEE: >nee nee<; dat moet je zelf wel aanvragen=
		NO: >no no<; you have to apply for that yourself=
17		=moet je eerst <u>b</u>ellen enzo
		=you have to call first and stuff

With the formulation Egbert conveys that he can infer the answer to his first question from Marco' response in line 11. But by checking that inference he claims that it was

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not communicated beyond all doubt; Marco has to (dis)confirm it. The response Marco provides is very different from Hennie's response in the previous excerpt. Although he produces a preferred second pair part, he treats the question as inapposite (Stivers, 2004) and repeats part of his earlier answer. In this way Marco treats the formulation as a redoing of a question he has already answered, and he holds Egbert accountable for a violation of his epistemic responsibilities.

So whereas the formulation in excerpt 3 was used to convey the speaker's understanding of a preceding telling, and was thus closure implicative, in excerpt 4 it conveys that the agenda of the preceding question has not yet been clearly addressed. But while Hennie both aligns and affiliates with the proposed course of action, Marco only aligns(Stivers, 2008): he claims that the agenda has been addressed by repeating his answer. In both excerpts, we also see that the formulation is used to claim certainty. Both Egbert and Tatjana claim access to their interlocutor's epistemic domain, and in both cases their interlocutor holds them responsible for possessing that knowledge: Hennie with emphasis on *zeker* and Marco with the repeated *nee*. The declarative, and not an interrogative, is the format they use to convey this certainty, and we see this pattern with all formulations in our corpus. Each time *dus* is used, it introduces a formulation with which the speaker conveys his/her understanding of the preceding discourse. So as with *want*, the function of *dus* presupposes that the speaker has a large degree of certainty and the declarative question is the chosen format for that function.

3.3 Change-of-state

We have so far shown that *want* and *dus*, when they preface a declarative question, presuppose that the speaker is reasonably certain of the addressed information. In this section we will show that a similar line of reasoning can be put forward for *oh*. Although no previous analysis has been done on *oh* in Dutch, we will assume that its function is similar, if not identical, to its English counterpart, and our analysis supports that assumption.

In English, *oh* conveys a change in the speakers "locally current state of knowledge, information, orientation or awareness" (Heritage, 1984: 299). The prototypical case is where *oh* is used as a response to an informing utterance to convey that the news has been understood; the interactant has gone from a state of not knowing (K $-$) to knowing (K $+$). This proposal inherently presupposes that the speaker is certain, or almost certain, of any knowledge that might be addressed in an *oh*-prefaced questions. We will demonstrate two functions of *oh*-prefaced declarative question. First we will show one way in which they can be used to initiate repair after a breakdown of intersubjectivity. This is the most frequent function in our corpus; 23 out of 30 cases are used for repair. Second we will show that they can also be used to highlight a particular piece of information.

Oh-prefaced repair initiation can be used to address misunderstandings in fourth position, which is the final place where a problem can be addressed. Beyond that, it

might never become relevant again and could persist indefinitely (Schegloff, 1992; see also Ekberg, 2012; Wong, 2000). When repair is done in fourth position, each interactant has at least once made the wrong assumption about their mutual understanding. After three turns in which no problem was made relevant an addressee can initiate fourth position repair (NTRI stands for Next Turn Repair Initiation):

T1	A:	Q1					
T2	B:	A1	or	NTRI (T1)			
T3	A:	Q2	or	NTRI (T2)	or	Repair 3rd (T1)	
T4	B:	A2	or	NTRI (T3)	or	Repair 3rd (T2)	or	Repair 4th (T1)
T5	A:	Q3	or	NTRI (T4)	or	Repair 3rd (T3)	or	Repair 4th (T2)
T6	B:	A3	or	NTRI (T5)	or	Repair 3rd (T4)	or	Repair 4th (T3, 1)

(Schegloff, 1992: 1327)

The renewed understanding that has been achieved needs to be conveyed in order to repair the misunderstanding, and this is typically done with an *oh*-prefaced declarative question. The following excerpt is a case in point. Sandy has asked Wendy about a date Wendy was supposed to go on over the weekend with her boyfriend, Daan, and his parents. Wendy did not go on the date, but Sandy initially misunderstands and later demonstrates this misunderstanding.

Excerpt 5

01	S	•hh en hoe was het ↑zondag ↑no:g
		•hh and how were things on sunday
02		met die ou↓ders van daan
		with Daan's parents
03		(1.0)
04	W	e::hm >↑oh dat is niet ↑doorgegaan<=
		e::hm >oh that didn't go through<=
05	S	=job en elle kwamen ↑toch of niet;=
		=Job and Elle were supposed to come or not;=
06	W	[=ja]
		[=yeah]
07	S	[( )] (da) helemaal niet doorgegaan
		[( )] (tha) didn't go through at all
08	W	ja dat is wel d<u>oo</u>rgegaan,
		yeah that did go through
09		alleen ik ging ik ging smiddags high↓teaen he?
		it's just I went I went for high tea in the afternoon right?
10		(0.6)
11	S	•hh
12		(1.1)
13	S	wa ging je ↑doen smiddags?
		what did you do in the afternoon?
14	W	highteaen met eh anne en[e:h]
		high tea with eh Anne and[e:h]

15	S	[o:h] >ja ja ja< (et) ja
		[o:h] >yeah yeah yeah< (et) yeah
16		(0.8)
17	W	[en eh]
		[and eh]
18	S	[(is da)] niet doo:rgegaan=
		[(did tha)] not go through=
19	W	=nee: want toen (wa-)
		=no: because then (wa-)
20		ik was pas veel ste laat thui:s
		I was home far too late
21		(0.5)
22		hm hmm >terug<.
		hm hmm >back<.

<<49 lines omitted about Wendy's high tea>>

69		•hh toen zAg ik dat het jasmin was
		•hh then I say that it was Jasmin
70		en toen ja dat was (.) was echt super leuk.
		And then yeah that was (.) was really super fun.
71		(0.5)
72	S →	•h oh dus je high ↑tea is wel doorgaan;
		oh so your high tea is PRT go.through
		•h oh so your high tea did go through;
73		(1.0)
74	W	>↑ja: ja ja<
		>yeah: yeah yeah<
75		(0.6)
76		maar da [bij die ouders van daan niet.]
		but tha [with the parents of Daan did not.]
77	S	[oh maar d- de ou]ders
		[oh but t- the pa]rents
78		van daan niet.
		of Daan did not.
79	W	ja
		yeah
80		(0.7)
81	S	•h o:h de (.) high tea is (te) laat geworden
		•h o:h the (.) high tea had gotten (too) late
82		om nog naar de-
		to still go to the-
83		nou snap ik het •hh
		now I understand •hh

Early in the sequence we can already see signs of the misunderstanding that is to follow. Sandy challenges Wendy's initial answer in line 5 and asks in lines 7 and 18 which event did not take place. After Wendy has for the first time mentioned her high tea in line 9, Sandy asks if that could not go through. Even though it did, Wendy

affirms Sandy's question[6], thereby conveying that she missed the high tea and went on her date. At least, this is how Sandy later conveys to have understood it.

The misunderstanding is addressed by Sandy in line 72, where she asks again if Wendy's high tea took place. She conveys in various ways that she addresses a misunderstanding and that it has just been resolved. First, she prefaces the question with *dus*, conveying that she has locally inferred it, and that her turn is an understanding check (see section 2.2). Second, with emphasis on *wel* she conveys that she had earlier understood the exact opposite. Third, she explicitly states that she had misunderstood in line 83. Finally, by prefacing the question with *oh*, she claims that the change in understanding has taken place here and now. Wendy's response also shows that the repair is very late. By doing a 'multiple saying' (Stivers, 2004) in line 74, she holds Sandy responsible for knowing the questioned information.

In the second case we wish to discuss, *oh* is primarily used to highlight some information that the addressee thereby treats as particularly interesting. In the following excerpt Brenda is explaining her thesis project to her friend Christine; she is studying propaganda the Nazis used to draft Dutch citizens for the armies that fought on the Eastern Front.

Excerpt 6

01	B	=en ik ga kijken naar welke klachte er zijn,=
		=and I'm going to look at what complaints there are,=
02		>want ik heb in het niod<
		>because at the Niod I found<
03		heel veel klachtebrieve gevonden,=
		a lot of complaint letters
04	C	=↑oh.
		=↑oh.
05		(0.5)
06	B	en (0.2) en dan eh
		and (0.2) and then eh
07		ga ik dus
		I'm thus going
08		naar die twee persone die in den bosch e:h
		to those two persons that I have in Den Bosch e:h
09		(0.3)
10		nu al gefixt heb,
		already arranged
11		(0.2)
12		en dan e:h moet ik er ↑zijn=
		and then e:h I should be there=
13		=>en dan een< conclusie,
		=>and then a< conclusion,
14		en dan ↑klaar
		and then done

---

[6] She has most likely misheard the question; the recording is also unclear at this part of the conversation.

15			(0.2)
16	C	→	oh; maar ze ze ze name dus wel
			oh but they they they took thus PRT
			oh but so they did accept
17		→	↑klachtebrieve aan in wee oo twee.
			complaint.letters on in double.u oo two
			complaint letters during World War II.
18			(1.4)
19	B		>ja ja ja;<
			>yeah yeah yeah;<
20			(0.2)
21			((l[acht)) (j]a) datte:h=
			((l[aughs)) (y]eah thatte:h=
22	C		[((lacht)) <u>nou</u>]
			[((laughs)) well]
23	B		=der zijn een <u>aan</u>tal van inderdaad,
			=there is indeed a number of those,
24	C		v[:alt me weer m<u>ee</u>.]
			t[hat's not so bad.]
25	B		[nou jaa heel pak]k<u>e</u>t °trouwens°,
			[well yeah whole bo]x °by the way°,

When Brenda's explanation is possibly pragmatically complete - she says when she will be done with her thesis in line 14 - Christine does not give a general response to the telling, but asks about something specific Brenda mentioned: that the Nazis registered complaints. Her question is initially treated as serious by Brenda. It is, however, not intended as such, which Christine demonstrates with her remark in lines 24; despite everything the Nazis did - the Holocaust, launch World War II, manipulate people to fight their war for them - they at least listened to complaints. Brenda affiliates with the non-seriousness of Christine's question with her laughter in line 21.

Christine's *oh*-prefaced question functions as sort of a delayed formulation. With *maar* she goes back to something Brenda said earlier (Mazeland & Huiskes, 2001), namely that she found complaint letters, and with *dus* Christine conveys her inference that it were the Nazis who registered these complaints. She had already acknowledged this information after Brenda presented it in lines 1-3 with *oh*[7], and she is held responsible by Brenda for knowing it with a multiple saying. But by giving a joking evaluation in third position, she shows that her understanding check served primarily to highlight a specific piece of information, in this case because she considers it funny. This contrasts with the misunderstanding that was addressed by Sandy in excerpt 5.

Both cases discussed in this section show that an *oh*-prefaced question is used when the speaker is reasonably sure about the response. The addressee of these questions of course has primary epistemic access, and can thus still reject the understanding, but the

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[7] Although *oh* claims a change of state here and now, there is no actual change at the moment of speaking. As noted by Bolden (2006: 673), *oh* serves as an interactional resource, not an index of a mental state.

knowledge can be inferred from the local sequence. The functions discussed are not the only ones that *oh*-prefaced declarative questions are used for (Seuren, Huiskes & Koole, 2014), but in all cases the speaker can be said to have strong epistemic access to the addressed knowledge, and thus be responsible for knowing it. Although a comparison with *oh*-prefaced interrogatives is certainly needed, we feel confident based on the evidence shown, that the general function of declaratives in all cases is to convey certainty or a strong belief.

4. Discussion & conclusion

In this paper we have shown some of the functions that declarative questions are used for in Dutch talk-in-interaction. Our aim was to demonstrate that these functions are constrained by the epistemics of their syntactic design. We demonstrated that questions prefaced by *want* are used to account for other actions, while *dus* and *oh* have broader functions: they convey an inference or a change-of-state respectively. These functions are primarily combined with declarative questions, which means that they are rarely if ever done with interrogative questions.

These findings can be explained by Heritage's proposal on Epistemic Stance (2012a), where a declarative conveys a shallow epistemic gradient. Some proposals have been made to show why declaratives claim certainty. Raymond (2010) argued that declaratives treat their content as known or established, whereas interrogatives (and by extension *wh*-clauses) treat their content as unknown. In his view declaratives should for that reason not even be considered questions. Gunlogson (2001) made a similar proposal, arguing that declaratives are biased: their content is added to the speaker's or addressee's public commitments, and can only be used if the content is entailed by the addressee's public commitments. Interrogatives on the other hand are neutral and can be used at all times.

Both proposals have merit and are supported by our analysis; all three functions we discussed presuppose that the speaker is certain or almost certain about the content of the question. An account demonstrates that the action is relevant and worth doing. So by giving an account after an action, a speaker conveys his/her belief that the action was worth doing for the reason given in the account - i.e. s/he expects the account to be true. A formulation conveys the speaker's interpretation of the preceding talk. Since it is the speaker's own interpretation, and since we can assume that a speaker trusts in his/her own reasoning skills, s/he conveys the expectation that the represented understanding is correct. Finally, a change of state from not knowing or not understanding ($K-$) to knowing or understanding ($K+$) by definition conveys that the speaker beliefs the represented content to be correct.

But not all cases fit the general pattern; both an account and a change of state are occasionally realized through an interrogative, albeit far less so than with a declarative. If these functions presuppose certainty, why do they not always take a declarative? This is a critical question, both for the line of reasoning presented in this paper, and for

our general view of epistemics, but one we cannot yet answer. The distribution of *dus*, *want*, and *oh* does show that the epistemics of the various clause types in Dutch are not just related to the response they make relevant: they constrain the actions that these clause types can be used for. The current view on epistemics is only on its relevance in distinguishing between assertions and questions. Our research thus suggest that we need a more refined view of grammar, epistemics, and how they contribute to action formation. In our view, the logical course of inquiry is to strive for a unified approach, for which we have here laid the foundations.

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