Ways of doing understanding through 'oh'-prefaced declarative questions[1]

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0 Declarative questions and common ground

- Declarative questions (DQs) are a remarkable category:
    - only type of question that is in Dutch not syntactically marked as a question;
    - yet it is very frequently used (Englert 2010).
- Function as questions because they address something that is in the domain of the interlocutor (Heritage 2012, see also Beun 1990, 1994, Gunlogson 2001, Labov & Fanshell 1977, Geluykens 1987).
- Differ from interrogative questions and *wh*-questions in their epistemic stance; DQs convey high degree of certainty or strong expectations about the answer (Heritage 2012: 7):
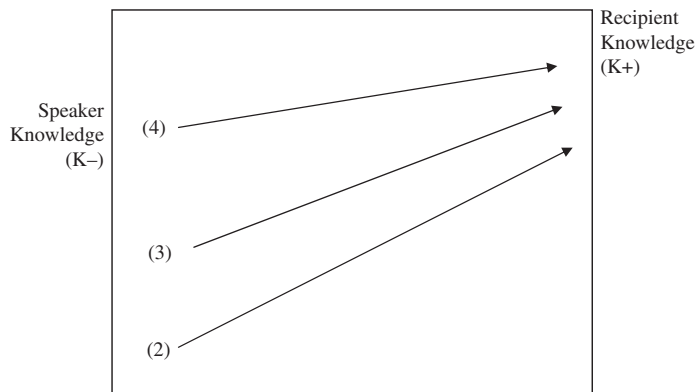
- Frequent use of certain lexical items such as conjunctions and certain adverbs in DQs (Beun 1990).
- One of these lexical items is the interjection/particle 'oh'.
- A DQ prefaced by 'oh' constitutes a specific practice where:
    - 'oh' claims a change-of-state (Heritage 1984a); and
    - the DQ conveys what type of change-of-state 'oh' claims.

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[1]An earlier version of this paper was presented at the EMCA doctoral network meeting at the University of Edinburgh in 2014.

- We find that DQs prefaced by 'oh' can broadly speaking be used for at least two functions:
  1. A sort of news receipt (Couper-Kuhlen 2012), what Heritage (1984a) calls 'highlighting'; and
  2. to initiate repair on some epistemic incongruence (Hayano 2011), what Heritage (1984a) calls 'realization claim'.
- In this talk we will focus on the second function; we'll demonstrate various types of epistemic incongruence that can be addressed.
- Work in progress.

1 Data

- 6.5 hours of non-institutional phone conversations between family and friends.
- 30 cases of 'oh'-prefaced declarative questions.
  - 16 cases of highlighting
  - **14 cases of repair**
- Transcription according to conventions by Jefferson (in Atkinson & Heritage 1984) and some aspects of Reed (2011).

2 Negotiating intersubjectivity

- Intersubjectivity is central issue for participants in interaction; "how the actors grasp the subjective meaning of one another's action" (Heritage 1984b: 57).
- Without direct access to each other's minds, interactans have to make assumptions about what the other knows and/or intents (Schutz 1967/1932, Clark 1996, Stalknaker 1978).
- Intersubjectivity will thus have to be interactionally negotiated with visible actions. Usually unproblematic.
- Violations of epistemic obligations are however made and interactants can hold each other accountable (Stivers, Mondada & Steensig 2011).

2.1 Interlocutor incorrectly treated speaker in knowing position (K+)

- In designing any action an interactant conveys assumptions about what his/her interlocutor already knows; recipient design (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974).
- The design of the action can incorrectly presuppose that something is already known to the interlocutor.

- Realization claim is used in part to address this issue.

Excerpt 1 - 74DI1/1

```
1    S        nee ja dus (.) ↑die heef:t ie >dus uiteindelijk< nie:t,
              no yeah so (.) he eventually didn't buy that one,

2             maar ik had echt <zoiets van> ↑hmm
              but I was really <like> ↑hmm

3             en: Petra OOk, dus
              and: Petra as well, so

4    J        ↓oh (.)
              ↓oh (.)

5    →        oh petra was ook  mee:
              oh petra was also along
              oh Petra had also come along:

6             (0.9)

7    S        ja: heel de familie was er.
              yeah: the whole family was there.

8             (0.6)

9    J        whauw huhuhu (0.3) [huhu↑hu    ]
              whauw huhuhu (0.3) [huhu↑hu    ]

10   S                           [fami- fami]lie[uit-    (   )    ]
                                 [fami- fami]ly [out-    (   )        ]

11   J                                          [(wat uitjes) met] de
                                                [(some outings) with] the

12            hele familie
              whole family
```

- Realization claims can be used to show that
  - the addressee had incorrectly claimed that the speaker was in a K+ position about some information in the epistemic domain of that addressee and
  - that the information that was treated as known was in some way worthy of notice in its own right.

2.2 Speaker incorrectly claimed unknowing position (K–)

- In designing any action an interactant conveys assumptions about what s/he already knows.
- A question makes various claims about the epistemic status and stance:
  - The speaker does not know the answer to the question;

- With the design of the question a speaker can convey how likely s/he considers a particular answer.
- Epistemic incongruence arises when a speaker has made an inadequate claim for the local epistemic context.

2.2.1   Remembering

Excerpt 2 - 138JA2/2

```
 1   La     y:es ↑zeker
            y:es certainly
 2          •h hee met wie doe jij het take home tentamen;
            •h hey with whom are you going to do the take home exam;
 3          (want) wie ga jij overleggen;
            (because) with home are you going to consult;
 4          (0.8)
 5   Li     E:h jA
            E:h yeah
 6          >ik heb wel sAmen met< (.) ↑mia en e::hm
            >I have together with< (.) Mia and e::hm
 7          (0.8)
 8          mer↑lijn (.) over↑legd=
            Merlijn (.) consulted
 9   La →   =Oh ja   jullie gingen toen meteen    deraa-
             Oh yeah you.PL went    then right.away there.on-
            =Oh that's right you went to work on it-
10     →    aa:n eh zitten.=
            on   eh sit
            right eh away
11   Li     =ja
            =yeah
12          m:eteen daarnA °hebben we gewoon [eh°]
            immediately afterwards °we have simply [ eh°]
13   La                                     [jA ]
                                            [yeah]
14          (1.5)
15   Li     >en dan:< (.) jA we zouden het dan m:orgen nog
            >and then:< (.) yeah tomorrow we were going to
16          doorsturen naar elkaar misschien,
            send it to each other maybe,
17   La     ja. oke.=
```

```
            yeah. okay.=
  18        =nEE ik ga met charlot er nog eventjes naar kijken,
            =no I am going to look at it with Charlot,
  19        •hh mAAr is wel prima dan.
            •hh but is fine in that case.
  20        maa:r als >je me nog iets< wil vrAgen
            bu:t if >you still want to< ask me something
  21        >of als ik iets< jou nog iets wil vrAgen danne:h

            >or if I want< to ask you something thene:h
  22        •h dan mail ik anders wel;
            •h then I will send an email;
  23        (.)
  24        wat jij e:h wat jij hebt of zo
            what you e:h what you have or something
```

- Questions claim that a speaker does not know the answer.
- A DQ in 3rd position prefaced with *oh ja* instead of just *oh* the speaker shows that s/he now remembers – i.e. that the claim was incorrect[2].
- Using a DQ and not just *oh ja* is a way of displaying knowledge as opposed to just claiming knowledge[3].

2.2.2   Reconsidering

Excerpt 3 - 27BO1/4

```
  1   K    [   °(                    )   (la]stig)°
            [   °(                    )   (dif]ficult)°
  2        (0.3)
  3   L    wat zEI je?
            what did you say?
  4        (0.2)
  5   K    ↑hè?
            ↑hè?
  6        (0.4)
  7        hij heeft alleen nog geen tele↑foo:n °dus°
            he does not have a phone yet though °so°
  8        tgaat niet heel °°↑makkelijk°°
            it is not very °°easy°°
```

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[2]Comparable to English *oh right* (Heritage 1984), Danish *nåja* (Emmerson & Heinemann 2010), German *achja* (Betz & Golato 2008) and Finnish *ai nii(n)* (Koivisto 2013).

[3]For a similar distinction with respect to understanding, see Koole 2010.

```
 9              (.)
10    L         <<h> oh hij heeft nog geen tele↑foon> uhuhuhu;
                <<h> oh he does net yet have a phone> uhuhuhu;
11              (1.0)
12              ↑nee dat maakt het wel moeilijker dan om af te ↑spreken;
                no that makes it a bit more difficult to meet;
13    K         hehe [ ja] precies; h[ hh]h•
                hehe [yeah] precisely; h[    hh]h•
14    L              [↑hm]            [ja;]
                     [ hm ]              [yeah;]
15              (0.4)
16    K         (e[h]        ]
                (e[h]        ]
17                [(doe je–)] (.) vIA internet of zo;
                  [(do you–)] (.) by the Internet or something;
18              (1.7)
19    K         e:::h nee khad em gebeld op zn huistelefoon
                e:::h no I called him at his home.phone
20              (0.3)
21    L         O::h ↑dan hij is nu–
                O::h then he is now–
22    →         <<h>↑Oh HIJ Is nu  natuurlijk ook  gewoon bij  zn  ouders>;
                     Oh he  is now of.course  also simply with his parents
                <<h>Oh he is simply staying with his parents now of course>;
23              (0.6)
24    K         ↑ja: daa↓rom
                yeah that's why
```

- With the design of the question an interactant can convey his/her expectations about the likely answer (Heritage 2012).
- The interactant can also show how s/he might have come to that candidate answer (Pomerantz 1988).
- By using an 'oh'-prefaced DQ in 3rd position that contains the adverb *natuurlijk* ('of course') the speaker shows that:
  - s/he had access to the information in the DQ prior to the question in 1st position; and
  - s/he did not consider that information when asking/designing the question in 1st position.[4]

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[4]Stivers (2011) argues that *of course* and *natuurlijk* in second position claim that a question was

2.3   Speaker incorrectly claimed understanding

- After an action has been done, the addressee conveys his/her understanding of that action by giving an appropriate response.
- The speaker in turn can convey his/her understanding of the response by acknowledging it.
- This does not mean the addressee has actually understood the initial action. Interactants occasionally, if rarely, claim that there has been a misunderstanding (Schegloff 1992, see also Wong 2000, Ekberg 2012).

Excerpt 4 - 20BO1/1

```
1    S      •hh en hoe was het ↑zondag ↑no:g
            •hh and how were things on sunday
2           met die ou↓ders van daan
            with Daan's parents
3           (1.0)
4    W      e::hm >↑oh dat is niet ↑doorgegaan<=
            e::hm >oh that didn't go through<=
5    S      =job en elle kwamen ↑toch of niet;=
            =Job and Elle were supposed to come or not;=
6    W      [ =ja ]
            [=yeah]
7    S      [(    )] (da) helemaal niet doorgegaan
            [(    )] (tha) didn't go through at all
8    W      ja dat is wel doorgegaan,
            yeah that did go through
9           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)
```

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unaskable for moral reasons. Although it seems to be the case that in 3rd position as well it deals with the askability of the question, there seems to be no moral issue. Heinemann, Lindström, and Steensig (2011) make a similar case for *jo/ju* in Danish and Swedish.

```
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 trip to 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;
              •h 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
```

```
84    W      <<h> ja snap je het?>
             <<h> yeah do you understand?>
85           (0.6)
86    S      jha uhuhu ik dacht dat je gewoon te
             Yheah uhuhu I thought that you had simply
87           (.)
88           te lang had geslapen of zo
             slept too long or something
89           weet ik veel,=
             I don't know,=
90    W      =ohn[ee    hh•    ]
             =ohn[o hh•         ]
91    S          [(doordat die)] niet doorging maar
                 [(because that)] did not go through but
92           (0.4)
93           •h oh ↑nice
             •h oh nice
```

- Realization claims done by an interlocutor after a second pair part can be used to show that
  - an earlier claim of understanding was premature; and
  - that the initiator of the repair has (possibly[5]) misunderstood his/her interlocutor.
- The realization claim is then used for what Schegloff (1992) calls fourth position repair.

3   Outlook

Small corpus with a lot of variation. Cases are often very complex and don't allow for a straightforward analysis. Plenty left to do:

- Increase corpus size – 20 hours available – to get a more detailed picture of the various types of realization claims.
- Make comparison with 'oh'-prefaced interrogatives – very rare[6].
- Prosodic analysis of *oh* in the various functions; different practices?
- Look for more, possibly alternative cases of fourth position repair; refine sequential analysis.
- Compare to realization claims in institutional interaction.

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[5]Our data shows one case where the initial understanding was correct.
[6]We have found only 10 cases in 321 IQs compared to 30 cases for 152 DQs.

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