Ways of doing understanding through ‘oh’-prefaced declarative questions
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AWIA Symposium, October 3rd, 2014

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 \textit{wh}-questions in their epistemic stance; DQs convey high degree of certainty or strong expectations about the answer (Heritage 2012: 7):

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Epistemic stance of (2)–(4) represented in terms of epistemic gradient.}
\end{figure}

• 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.

\footnote{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, interactants 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.
Rea|lization claim is used in part to address this issue.

Excerpt 1 - 74DI1/1

1 S nee ja dus (.) die heef:t ie >dus uiteindelijk< niet: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 O0k, dus and: Petra as well, so
4 J oh (.)
5 oh petra was ook mee: oh petra was also along
6 oh Petra had also come along:
7 (0.9)
8 S ja: heel de familie was er. yeah: the whole family was there.
9 (0.6)
10 J whauw huhuhu (0.3) [huhu] whauw huhuhu (0.3) [huhu]
11 S [fami- familie[uit- ( ) ]]
12 J [(wat uitjes) met] de
13 S [fami- familie] [out- ( ) ]
14 J [(some outings) with] the
15 S 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
    "yes certainly"

2  •h hee met wie doe jij het take home tentamen;
   "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
    "yeah"

6  >ik heb wel sAmen met< (. ) ↓mia en e::hm
   >"I have together with< (. ) Mia and e::hm

7  (0.8)

8  merlijn (.) overlegd=
   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  → a:n eh zitten=  
    on  eh sit
    right eh away

11 Li  =ja
    =yeah

12  "meeteen 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 morgen nog
    >and then:< ( . ) yeah tomorrow we were going to
    doorsturen naar elkaar misschien,
    send it to each other maybe,

16 La  ja. oke.=
• 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

|   | K   | ¦(     )    | (la)stig)°
|---|-----|------------|------------
|   |     | ¦(     )    | (dif)ficult)°
| 2 | L    | wat zEI je? | what did you say? |
|   |     | (0.2)      |
| 5 | K    | ;he?       | ;he?       |
|   |     | (0.4)      |
| 7 | hij  | heeft alleen nog geen telefoon °dus° | he does not have a phone yet though °so° |
|   |      | tgaat niet heel °°;makkelijk°° | it is not very °°easy°° |

²Comparable to English oh right (Heritage 1984), Danish nája (Emmerson & Heinemann 2010), German achja (Betz & Golato 2008) and Finnish ai nii(n) (Koivisto 2013).
³For a similar distinction with respect to understanding, see Koole 2010.
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

4Stivers (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

...
S •hh en hoe was het ↑zondag ↑no:tg  1
•hh and how were things on sunday
met die ou ↓ders van daan  2
•hh with Daan’s parents
W::hm > oh dat is niet =<
=hm >oh that didn’t go through<=
s::hm > Job en Elle kwamen toch of niet;=
s[   ] (da) helemaal niet doorgegaan
][ (   ) (tha) didn’t go through at all
W ja dat is wel doorgegaan, 8
yeah that did go through
alleen ik ging ik ging smiddags high
↓ tea en he?
it’s just I went I went for high tea in the afternoon right?
S (o:h) >ja ja ja< (et) ja
[o:h] >yeah yeah yeah< (et) yeah
W [and eh] 17
[ and eh ]
S [(is da)] niet doo:rgegaan=
[(did tha)] not go through=
W =nee: want toen (wa-) 9
=no: because then (wa-)
ik was pas veel ste laat thui:s
I was home far too late
(0.5)
hm hmm >terug<.
hm hmm >back<.
<<49 lines omitted about Wendy’s trip to high tea>>
•hh toen zAg ik dat het jasmin was
•hh then I say that it was Jasmin
en toen ja dat was (. ) was echt super leuk.
And then yeah that was (.) was really super fun.
(0.5)
S → •h oh dus je ↑ tea is wel doorgaan;
•h oh so your high tea is PRT go.through
•h oh so your high tea did go through;
(1.0)
W >ja: ja ja<
>yeah: yeah yeah<
(0.6)
maar da [bij die ouders van daan niet.]
but tha [with the parents of Daan did not.]
S [oh maar d- de ou]ders
[oh but t- the pa] rents
van daan niet.
of Daan did not.
W ja
yeah
(0.7)
S •h o:h de (. ) high tea is (te) laat geworden
•h o:h the (. ) high tea had gotten (too) late
om nog naar de-
to still go to the-
nou snap ik het •hh
now I understand •hh
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.

\(^5\)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.
References


