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## The interactional accomplishment of action

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## CHAPTER 3

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### Getting into topic talk: a classification of topic proffers

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#### 3.1 Moving into topical talk

The previous chapter has shown that sequence plays an important rule in the process of action formation and ascription. YNDs in which the speaker formulates a belief or understanding derived from prior talk are oriented to as simple requests for (re-)confirmation. These YNDs are produced either to propose closure of some larger activity or to move back into an activity, after which another action can be produced that would otherwise be disjunctive from the ongoing talk.

Alternatively speakers can formulate a belief or understanding that has previously not been addressed, nor made salient. In that way speakers make clear that they are seeking not just confirmation, but also some form of elaboration. These YNDs can be used to challenge a prior turn or launch a new topic. While these two actions differ from each other in their turn design—challenging YNDs often have turn-initial *maar* and/or turn-medial *toch*—sequential position also plays an important role: challenging actions are next-positioned to the action they address, whereas topic-initiating actions are produced after (a proposal for) activity closure. These YNDs also differ in the type of elaboration they invite and receive: challenging YNDs are used to elicit explanations or accounts, whereas topic proffers provide the recipient with an opportunity to produce a telling.

Of these three categories of YNDs, topic proffers are the least understood. Schegloff (2007) provides a rough description, but provides few details of how topic proffers come to be designed and understood *as* topic proffers. It is also unclear how they are distinct from what Button and Casey (1985) called Itemized News Enquiries. Schegloff (2007, p. 169f.) argues that topic proffers differ in that they (i) offer a topic to the recipient (ii) without actively launching that topic. But Button and Casey (1984, p. 185) say that itemized news enquiries, being a type of topic nomination, “may present a possible topic initial to be talked to. *The current speaker does not talk to that topic in the turns but provides for the next speaker to develop the topic* [emphasis added].” So both with topic proffers and itemized news enquiries speakers merely provide recipients with a topic on which they can produce more talk.

Not only is it unclear what characterizes topic proffers as a distinct type of action, little is known about their turn design. Schegloff (2007, p. 170) states that they can be implemented with *wh*-interrogatives, yes/no-type interrogatives, and declaratives. What a speaker achieves by choosing either format is unclear. From Button and Casey (1985) it is also clear that not all topic-initiating actions are equal; there are different types of topics speakers can address and these are brought up through different means. But again, what these means are and how they show what type of topic proffer the speaker instantiates is left unspecified.

In this chapter I aim to further our understanding of how participants move into topic talk, by focusing on two grammatical formats: declaratives and yes/no-type interrogatives. Both make relevant confirmation, but they are used in different sequential environments and differ in how they characterize the social relationship between the participants (G. Raymond, 2010a). This chapter does not investigate how the linguistic design of topic proffers might contribute to these utterances being understood as such. As was shown in the prior chapter, the function of topic proffers is not grounded in their turn design, but in their sequential placement.

### 3.1.1 Coherence in interaction

One of the most basic observations about conversational interaction is that people do not just produce talk; they make their contributions coherent, both with their own talk and that of their interlocutor(s) (Sacks et al., 1974; Goffman, 1983; Chafe, 1994). The manner in which this coherence is achieved has often been sought in the concept of (*discourse*) *topic*,<sup>1</sup> that which the participants

<sup>1</sup>As I am not interested in the linguistic concept of topic vis-a-vis the focus of a sentence, or the topic of a single sentence, I will simply use topic to mean the more conventional discourse

talk about. Participants make their contributions coherent by addressing the same topic as that of the prior turn(s).

While such an analysis may make intuitive sense (Chafe, 1994, p. 121), the evidence that participants use topics to achieve coherence is less than stellar (Schegloff, 1990). One of the main problems is that topic is hard to define as an analytical concept (G. Brown & Yule, 1983; Korolija & Linell, 1996; Riou, 2015). That is not to say that attempts have not been made. Scholars have formalized topic in terms of for example propositions (Ochs Keenan & Schieffelin, 1975) or referents (Geluykens, 1993). But such analyses rely on the analyst's interpretation of what would be the central focus (G. Brown & Yule, 1983; McLaughlin, 1984), and can at best help in determining what might be topics.

For similar reasons cognitive approaches to topic are inherently problematic. The topic as an "aggregate of thoughts" (Chafe, 2015) or "center of cognitive focus" (Riou, 2015) requires an analyst's interpretation of what participants are thinking about. But the participants themselves can for their understanding of their co-participant's behavior only ever rely on that observable behavior itself. Their behavior may of course evidence and be an index of what they are focusing on, but this interactional focus cannot, should not, and need not be treated as corresponding to their cognitive focus. In order to understand how they achieve coherence in talk, we as analysts should also rely exclusively on the observable behavior, not the thoughts and intentions that may or may not be behind that behavior (Schegloff, 1996a)

So the concept of topic is already a major analytical obstacle. Capturing the topic of some stretch of talk is also tricky because participants rarely formulate what they consider the topic to be—and when they do, speakers do specific work by formulating the topic in a specific manner (Heritage & Watson, 1980). Moreover topics tend to shade from one into the next (Bergmann, 1990; Crow, 1983; Hobbs, 1990; Jefferson, 1984; Sacks, 1995; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), making it often unclear whether the participants are talking about one or multiple topics. The result of this is that the level of inter-coder reliability in marking the boundaries between topics is often pretty low (e.g., Riou, 2015; McLaughlin, 1984; Crow, 1983), and it is not necessarily clear if these are topic boundaries or more general activity boundaries (see Schegloff, 1990). Indeed, analyses such as those by Riou (in press, 2017) have a good level of intercoder reliability, but because topic is assumed to be relevant for each turn at talk, every move that looks like topic shading and any change in activity tends to be

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topic.

coded as a new topic, without evidence that the participants actually perceive such a change themselves.

An additional problem with many approaches is that they attempt to establish what the topic of a stretch of talk is *ex post facto* by taking that stretch as a whole. But topics are co-constructed in interaction; they are negotiated and re-established with each turn at talk (Button & Casey, 1984, 1985, 1988; Howe, 1991; Geluykens, 1993; Riou, 2015; Mondada, 2001; Goffman, 1983). This means that when we treat topic as the end product of a series of utterances, we come to treat conversation as a coherent text whose structure was *a priori* planned by the participants. Such an approach ignores the local contingencies that participants deal with on a turn-by-turn basis (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Sacks et al., 1974).

### 3.1.2 Topic boundaries

The various problems with using topic as an analytical concept have led many researchers to investigate not how coherence is achieved through topics, but how topics get launched and closed. Instead of focusing on what the topic is, research is aimed at describing how participants do topic talk. Researchers have focused on various aspects of topic-initiating actions. One group of researchers has investigated the relation between the topic and the participants: is it self-oriented, other-oriented, we-oriented, encyclopedic, or setting-oriented (Svennevig, 2000; Maynard, 1980; Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984). Others have focused on the sequential and linguistics practices that are used to launch topics and organize topic talk (Button & Casey, 1984, 1985, 1988; Schegloff, 2007; Geluykens, 1993; Riou, 2015, *in press*; Jefferson, 1984, 1993). Others again have dealt primarily with how speakers make clear that a topic shift is coming (Howe, 1991; Fraser, 2009).

Despite this body of work, our understanding of how topics get started is still very limited. For example, Schegloff (2007, p. 170-171) argues (i) that topic proffers are recurrently recipient-oriented, (ii) are often implemented with yes/no-type interrogatives, and (iii) that dispreferred responses are designed to be minimal, whereas preferred responses are expansion-implicative. But all question-type actions, not just topic proffers, treat the recipient as the one with authority on the subject (Heritage, 2012a). Furthermore, as Schegloff (2007) notes as well, topic proffers can also be implemented with *wh*-interrogatives and declaratives. And minimality of the response is also not an adequate criterion, because the recipient can reject a topic by demonstrating a lack of access, thereby producing a turn that is not designed to be minimal.

The aim of this chapter is to move towards a more concrete understanding of how topic matters to conversational participants. To achieve this I focus on topic proffers of past and future events, thereby adding to Button and Casey's (1985) work on ongoing events. I argue that topic proffers are implemented with one of three practices. First I show that speakers can presuppose that the recipient has news to tell, and reveal a belief of what that news will be. I call these Other's-News Announcements. Second, I show that speakers can presuppose that there is news, without claiming to already know what the news will be. I call these News Requests. Third, I show that speakers can implement what I call an Agnostic News Inquiry. With these inquiries speakers do not presuppose that the recipient has news to tell, but simply provide a topic on which there might be news.

### 3.2 Data

The data used in this chapter consist of the 21.5hrs of recorded phone conversations that were discussed in chapter 2, section 2.2 on page 66. As I used strict selection criteria for determining which cases would be studied, it was necessary to gather data from the entire corpus to develop an analysis.

Following Button and Casey (1984, 1988) I initially looked for topic-initiating inquiries in two sequential environments where participants either had to (re-)launch a new activity or move towards conversational closure. Environments, in order words, where sequence-initiating, expansion-implicative actions would be necessary to sustain the interaction. As I was interested in topic proffers, I only considered those inquiries in which the nominated topic was clearly recipient-oriented, meaning I excluded inquiries that were recognizable as pre-tellings or pre-announcements; for example, *Heb ik je nog verteld dat . . .* ("Have I told you that . . .") (Terasaki, 1976/2004; Schegloff, 2007).

First, I considered the first inquiry after the opening sequence of the call (see Schegloff, 1968), what Schegloff (1986) calls the "anchor position" (see also Couper-Kuhlen, 2001a). This is the position for a first topic to get launched. I take a somewhat different view of this position though. Schegloff (1986, p. 116) characterizes the anchor position as the first position after an exchange of *how are yous*, but most conversations in my data were launched with only a reciprocal greeting sequence (see table 3.1). I therefore treated the first pair part of an adjacency pair with which the participants recognizably moved out of opening as the anchor position.

Second, I considered inquiries that were asked in environments that were

Table 3.1  
*Frequencies of conversational openings*

Structure	Frequency	
Greetings only	144	(61.5%)
Reciprocal ‘how are you’	45	(19.2%)
Non-reciprocal ‘how are you’	41	(18.5%)
Summons-Answer only	4	(1.7%)

recognizably closure-implicative. That means I looked at inquiries following extended silences (Maynard, 1980; Hoey, 2015; Sacks et al., 1974; Couper-Kuhlen, 2004); minimal uptake or recipient commentary (Jefferson, 1993; Svennevig, 2000); (summary) assessments (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987, 1992; Stivers, 2008; Jefferson, 1993), summary-formulations (Schegloff, 2011; Heritage & Watson, 1980; see also chapter 2) repetitions, generalizations or reformulations (Svennevig, 2000); figurative expressions (Drew & Holt, 1998); shared laughter (Holt, 2010); and closing-implicative particles like *oké* (‘okay’) (Beach, 1993; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) and stand-alone *dus* (‘so’) (Local & Walker, 2005; G. Raymond, 2004).

I also included inquiries that were designed to recognizably launch a new activity. Speakers achieve this either by using a misplacement marker (see Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) or using the preamble of a turn to either formulate the new topic as in (1) or foreshadow that the speaker will launch a reciprocal topic as in (2) (Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984; Svennevig, 2000):

(1) GB2-02:46.1-03:02.1

01 Egb -> en je ↑knie dan. heeft die het een beetje  
*and your knee then has that it a little*  
 02 gister gehouden of\_  
*yesterday kept or*  
**and what about your knee. did it hold up a bit**  
**yesterday or\_**

(2) BN1-01:05.2-02:06.5

01 Sus -> [hee] en ↑jij; e:::h >was het nog leuk bij  
*hey and you.SG was it yet fun at*  
 02 de bock<.  
*the Bock*  
**[hey] and you; e:::h >was it fun at the bock<.**

From the resulting selection I removed one case where the quality of the recording was insufficient. The final selection consisted of 98 topic proffers: 23 Other's-News Announcements, 35 News Requests, and 40 Agnostic News Inquiries.

### **3.3 Topic-initiating actions**

The aim of this chapter is to begin exploring the various practices that participants in talk-in-interaction use to implement topic proffers of past or future events. I understand topic proffers here in a very broad sense: any initiating action in which the speaker nominates a recipient-oriented topic (Schegloff, 2007; Button & Casey, 1985) as a means of launching topic talk. The projected response is for the recipient to embrace the topic by providing news, a telling, or in a general sense bring the speaker up-to-date on past or future events or experiences.

I argue that all 98 topic proffers in my collection can be categorized as follows. Speakers can use practices in which they presuppose that the recipient has news to tell. If speakers make such a presupposition they can implement either what I call an Other's-News Announcement or a News Request. If speakers do not presuppose that there is news to tell, they implement what I call an Agnostic News Inquiry.

First I discuss Other's-News Announcements. These are topic proffers that are recurrently, although not exclusively, implemented with declarative word order—21 out of 23 cases. When dealing with a past event, the speaker “headlines” (see Button & Casey, 1985, p. 21) some recipient-oriented news, thereby inviting the recipient to provide the news. With upcoming activities on the other hand, speaker formulate that activity thereby inviting the recipient to talk about their plans for it.

Subsequently I discuss News Requests. These are topic proffers that are almost exclusively implemented with polar interrogative word order—34 out of 35 cases. The speaker provides a candidate assessment of a past or upcoming activity of the recipient, thereby inviting the recipient to confirm and elaborate on that assessment.

Finally I discuss Agnostic News Inquiries. Like News Requests they are implemented with polar interrogatives, but instead of providing a candidate assessment, the speaker inquires whether the recipient has done or will do some activity. In cases of a preferred response, the recipient should provide a report of the activity.

### 3.3.1 Other's-News Announcements

I begin my analysis by discussing what I call Other's-News Announcements. This is a type of topic proffer in which speakers demonstrate knowledge of a recipient-oriented event either by providing the headline of a past event, or by formulating a recipient's upcoming event. In doing so speakers invite the recipient to confirm and elaborate.

First, consider a prototypical case of an Other's-News Announcement of a past event. Prior to extract (3) Johan has been telling about an upcoming trip to Amsterdam. After both have done a pass (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 304) Aron repeats in line 2 that Johan will have to get up early using a soft voice, thereby orienting to sequence closure. He then moves to a new topic, articulating that he heard that Johan schooled<sup>2</sup> Jacco, a mutual friend. Johan embraces the topic by confirming emphatically in line 7, and telling the details.

(3) MK1-06:15.6-06:43.7

```

01 Aro   .hhh
02 Joh   jaha,=
         yea:h,=
03 Aro   °(al) (.) al      zo vroeg ↑opstaan°,
         already already so early get.up
         °(already) (.) already get up ↑so early°,
04      -> en ik heb gehoord dat je jacco les hebt
         -> and I have heard that you Jacco lesson have
05      gegeven_
         given
         and I heard that you schooled jacco_
06      (0.4)
07 Joh   jaha en heel hard.=ik heb e::h (0.2) .hhh vijf één
         yeah and very hard I have          five one
08      met >poolen verslagen<,
         with pool beat
         yeaheah and big time.=I have e::h (0.2) .hhh beat
         him >playing pool< by five one,
09      (0.3)
10 Aro   nice,
         nice,
11      (1.0)
12 Joh   en ook nog: vier één met ↑darten.=dat was wel:
         and also yet four one with darts that was ADV

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<sup>2</sup>*Les hebt gegeven* translates more literally to 'taught a lesson'. It is translated as 'schooled', however, since what is conveyed here is not so much punishment, but humiliation, and 'schooled' when used as slang conveys precisely that (see Urban Dictionary entry for *schooled*: <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=schooled>).

13           verbazingwekkend.  
               *surprising*  
               **and also by four one at darts.=that was surprising.**

In line 4 Aron formulates a partial report of a past event, thereby suggesting that there is more to tell, that is, he headlines recipient-oriented news (Button & Casey, 1985). By providing a partial report, Aron both reveals his belief that Johan has news to tell while also claiming to know what the news is, at the least the main thrust of the news.

Aron provides this partial report after possible sequence closure, meaning that in order to keep the conversation going, Aron will have to use his turn to launch a new activity or re-open the previous one (Button & Casey, 1988). Both practices he uses—articulating a partial report and doing so after possible sequence closure—make his turn recognizable as not just requesting confirmation, but as a topic proffer: Johan should respond by providing a telling (Schegloff, 2007). Johan also treats Aron's turn as a topic proffer by first emphatically confirming in line 7, saying he beat Jacco resoundingly, and immediately elaborating. He embraces the topic (Schegloff, 2007).

As the news is Johan's to know and tell, Aron encroaches on Johan's epistemic domain (Stivers & Rossano, 2010). By formulating his proffer as hearsay (Pomerantz, 1980)—*ik heb gehoord dat . . .* ("I heard that . . .")—Aron deals with this breach: he knows because he was told by a third party. But formulating his knowledge as hearsay is not just a way for Aron to license his knowing stance: it is a way of licensing the topic in general. Aron need not have been told by Johan that he was planning to hang out with Jacco. The event may even have been unplanned. If Johan did not tell Aron that he planned to hang out with Jacco, Aron is accountable for knowing about it. This means that even had Aron taken a relatively unknowing stance with an interrogative—for example, by asking *Did you have fun playing pool with Jacco?*—he may still have needed to show how he knew that Aron played pool with Jacco. Hearsay thus not only licenses his knowing epistemic stance, but also his knowing about the event at all and thus his topic proffer.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Goffman (1983, p. 31) proposes that this is a general interactional problem that participants have to deal with. He gives as an example that two friends may go to see the same movie independently of each other. If they see each other at the theater, they can simply ask the next day what the other thought of the movie. But if the seeing was not reciprocal, then they will have to do some interactional work first. One has to state first that he or she saw the other at the theater, before asking what the other thought of the film. Formulations such as *I heard that* are thus not only used to mitigate a knowing stance, but as an evidential (Chafe, 1986; Kärkkäinen, 2006).

We find evidence for this analysis by studying cases where speakers do not use a hearsay formulation in their topic proffer. Consider for example excerpt (4). Mark is completing a reciprocal *how are you* sequence lines 1–3, saying that despite being busy he cannot complain. After a 1.2s silence, Klizan proffers a new topic in lines 5–6: Mark losing his wallet.

- (4) DK1–00:20.7–00:37.6
- 01 Mar een beetje druk #maar e:h#  
*a bit busy but*  
**a bit busy #but e:h#**
- 02 (0.6)
- 03 nou.=mag ↑niet klagē.  
*well may not complain*  
**well.=can't complain.**
- 04 (1.2)
- 05 Kli -> e:h mAAR: e:h je was je (.) portemo↑nEE:  
*but you was your wallet*
- 06 -> verloren offe[:h  
*lost or*  
**e:h bUt e:h you had (.) lost your wallet**  
**or e:[:h**
- 07 Mar [.hr hrm
- 08 (0.2)
- 09 ja: klopt. (.) .h was e:h afgelopen::n  
*yeah right was last*
- 10 vrijdag? (0.5) was ik in de STAD,  
*Friday was I in the city*  
**yeah that's right. (.) .h was e:h last**  
**Friday? (0.5) I was in the CITY,**
- 11 (0.3)
- 12 wA:n[t  
*because*  
**be:cau[se**
- 13 Kli [vrijdag de DERtiende ook nog hē  
*Friday the thirteenth also PRT TAG*  
**[friday the THIRteenth too right**

Klizan's topic proffer is similar to Aron's in (3): it conveys a belief that Mark has news to tell, as well as a headline of what that news is. He invites Mark to tell about a topic, by showing what he already knows about it. But unlike Aron, Klizan does not use a hearsay formulation to show how he knows that Mark lost his wallet. Instead he begins his turn with *maar* ("but"), which functions as a sequential conjunction (Mazeland & Huiskes, 2001): it resumes talk that was abandoned earlier, in this case talk from a prior conversation.<sup>4</sup> By

<sup>4</sup>*Maar* can also be used as a locally contrastive conjunction. Mark's assertion that the can't

using *maar* in this way and no other practices to convey how he knows, Johan implies that he knows because Mark told him that he lost his wallet, and he interactionally assumes that Mark will remember this.

These examples—(3) and (4)—show that participants keep track of what they know about their interlocutors, and what their interlocutors know they know. Speakers can license their knowledge claim as in (3) to convey that they have knowledge about their recipient, but that they did not gain that knowledge from that recipient. By not using a hearsay formulation but simply formulating what they know about their recipient, speakers tacitly convey that what they claim to know they were told by that recipient. They can make use of additional linguistic tools to make this more explicit, as Klizan does in (4), but this is not a consistent practice in my data. The design of Other's-News Announcements thus evidences what (Heritage, 2012a, p. 25) calls “an epistemic ticker”.<sup>5</sup>

In both cases shown the speaker implements the Other's-News Announcement with declarative word order. This is unsurprising as with Other's-News Announcements speakers claim to know at least part of the news and declaratives are generally used to take a knowing stance (Heritage, 2012a; G. Raymond, 2010a). But I also found two cases where the Other's-News Announcement is implemented with an interrogative yes/no-type initiating action, what G. Raymond (2003) calls a yes/no-type interrogative (YNI). In these cases the YNI is not used to take a less knowing stance (cf. Heritage, 2012a; G. Raymond, 2010a), but to convey for example surprise.

The following excerpt is a case in point. Bart is treasurer for a student organization. When taking over from his predecessor, he noticed that a large sum of cash had gone missing. He is now calling his parents to tell them he has found the money. Prior to the data shown, he has already informed his mother, and he is now talking to his father, Chris. In line 1 Chris is closing talk on Bart's

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complain is not in line with having lost his wallet, and thus with Klizan's understanding of how Mark must be doing. Klizan, however, does not design his turn as a counterfactual: speakers in Dutch recurrently use the adverb *toch* when designing counterfactuals (Foolen, 1994, see also the discussion in chapter 2). Moreover Klizan uses turn-final *offeh* (“or uh”) as an epistemic downgrade (Drake, 2015), also suggesting that he is asking and not challenging (see Heinemann, 2008).

<sup>5</sup>Studies have long shown that starting at a very young age children keep track of what they expect others to know and not know, based on shared audio and visual experiences (e.g., Moll, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2007, 2014; O'Neill, 1996). In fact, the Social Brain Hypothesis posits that human brain size and our capacity for language evolved to facilitate social grooming with groups that are large relative to other primates (Dunbar, 2003). The capacity to keep track of what we know of others and share with others, which surfaces in social interaction in various ways, thus seems a fundamental aspect of human sociality.

exams and he proffers the new topic with a TCU-initial *maar*. Here *maar* is not used to resume talk that was abandoned earlier, although its function is similar. The missing cash was the reason for call and that has been displaced by other news, namely that Bart passed an exam. With *maar* Chris takes up that reason for call (see also Schegloff, 1986).

## (5) KR1-04:42.34-05:31.1

- 01 Chr -> hè dan e:h haal >je nog iets. =maar wat ho-<  
*PRT then pass you still something but what*
- 02 -> eh wat hoor ik e:h.=^hebben jullie nog ergens  
*what hear I have you.PL still somewhere*
- 03 -> geld gevon[den^?  
*money found*  
**then you'll at least pass something.=but what hea-  
eh what is it that I hear e:h.=^did you find money  
somew[here^?**
- 05 Bar [ja: dat geld zat gewoon eh dat- omdat  
*yeah that money sat simply because*
- 06 we: vol- e::h omdat we die l- (da-) die kast  
*we because we that that cabinet*
- 07 zo e::h heen en weer hebben geschud zeg maar, .hh  
*such back and forth have shaken say so*
- 08 was die d'r blijkbaar d'r achter gevallen of  
*was that there apparently there behind fallen or*
- 09 uit 't l- uit de la: ofzo.  
*from from the drawer or something*  
**[yea:h that money was simply eh that- because  
we full- e:h because we that d- (th-) shook that  
cabinet back and forth you know, .hh had that  
apparently fallen behind it or out of the d- out  
of the drawer or something.**

Chris proffers the topic that Bart found the money using a hearsay formulation and a YNI. While he could use the format of his hearsay formulation—*wat hoor ik* (“what do I hear”)—to implement an actual request for information—there could be a noise that he cannot identify and Bart might be able to—it is used here as a type of rhetorical question; it displays his surprise at the news. Chris shows this by latching on the actual topic proffer, instead of for example a candidate answer of what he could be hearing.

The proffer itself is implemented with a YNI. But because it is preceded by the hearsay formulation—and because Chris can be expected to have overheard the news—the YNI is not used to take a relatively unknowing stance. Instead Chris treats the news as surprising. Bart shows why it is surprising: they—the *we* in line 6 means him and his father—had turned the cabinet in which they

were supposed to find the money upside down. In other words, they had already done a thorough search and not found it.

This case shows that speakers can use a polar interrogative to implement Other's-News Announcements, even if the declarative is the more conventional format. The word order is thus not necessarily indexical of some epistemic stance. In other words, while speakers tend to use declaratives as those reinforce the knowing stance they take with an Other's-News Announcements, they can use alternative practices in order to deal with the local contingencies of the sequence, in the case of (5) surprise.

In the Other's-News Announcements discussed so far the speaker proffers a past event. The practice works very similarly for upcoming events: by displaying their knowledge of an upcoming recipient-oriented event, speakers invite the recipient to talk about that event. Consider for example excerpt (6). Richelle has been telling Loeka about a mutual friend who has decided to break up with her boyfriend, a development both Richelle and Loeka are very happy about. Loeka re-assesses the news in line 2, before moving to a new topic in lines 3–4: Richelle's date with Lennie later that day.

## (6) DV1-04:52.4-05:14.6

```

01 Ric .pt joa::[h
      yeah
02 Loe .pt yea::[h
      [↑jA jo:h; oh ^↑goed nieuws^;
      yeah man oh good news
      [↑yEAH ma:n; oh ^↑good news^;
03 -> ^en: (.) vanavond danne::h zie jij lennie weer
      and tonight then see you Lennie again
04 -> ↑toch^? hh
      PRT
      ^an:d (.) tonight there::h you'll see Lennie again
      ↑right^? hh
05 (0.2)
06 Ric .H JA VANMID↑DAG; ikkeh [ik moet even m'n]
      yeah this.afternoon I I have.to just my
07 Loe [ o::h ]
08 Ric onderz( )je <afmaken>? m'n theoretisch kader
      research finish my theoretical framework
09 ben ik nu aan het e:h afmaken; en dan ga
      am I now on it finishing and then go
10 ik (.) vanmiddag, want hij is aan 't
      I this.afternoon because he is on it
11 verhuize::, en z'n kamertje aan het inrichten
      moving and his room on it furnish
12 enzo, dan ga 'k 'm even he[lpen e]n .hh

```



enough corpus, we would not find cases for Dutch as well.

I have shown so far that recipients of Other's-News Announcements treat them as topic proffers by not just confirming, but also elaborating. Doing only confirming, a minimal response, would not adequately deal with the first action. In cases where recipients do provide only confirmation, elaboration is pursued; it is treated as noticeably absent (Schegloff, 1968). As an illustration, consider (7).<sup>7</sup> Marie has been complaining to her mother, Anne, about an event she had to organize for her rowing club, an event she thought was nonsense. She moves towards sequence closure in line 2 with *maar ja* and Anne provides an affiliating closing assessment in line 3. She subsequently proffers a new topic: Marie's planned date with Jan Klaas the next day.

(7) DK2-12:09.5-12:27.4

- 01 Ann ja  
**yeah**
- 02 (.)
- 03 Mar maar ja: .hhh [( )]  
*but yeah*  
**but yea:h .hhh [( )]**
- 04 Ann [na:h ] das waa:r.=  
*well that's true*  
**[we:ll] that's true:.=**
- 05 -> =en eh ↑morgen heb je met jan ↑klaas nog  
*and tomorrow have you with Jan Klaas still*
- 06 -> je afspraak?  
*your date*  
**=and eh tomorrow you still have your date with  
 jan klaas?**
- 07 (0.4)
- 08 Mar >jA<  
*yeah*  
**>yEAH<**
- 09 (1.7)
- 10 Ann o:ké; [ j]A is ook gezellig.=  
*okay yeah is also fun*  
**o:kay; [ y]EAH is also fun.=**
- 11 Mar [(ja)]
- 12 =>jā ja ja<. [ d]a- da- fdat weet ik nietf,  
*yeah yeah yeah that know I not*  
**=>yeah yeah yeah<. [ t]ha- tha- fthat I don't  
 knowf,**
- 13 Ann [ja]  
**[yeah]**

<sup>7</sup>A more extensive discussion of this excerpt is provided in chapter 2.

- 14 Mar fdat zie ik welɸ. ghuhu  
*that see I ADV*  
**fI'll wait and seeɸ. ghuhu**
- 15 (0.2)
- 16 Mar? .h
- 17 (0.3)
- 18 Ann nou ja ↑goed dat zou gezellig kunnen  
*well yeah fine that could fun can*
- 19 zi[jn.  
*be*  
**well yeah fine that could be fun**
- 20 Mar [fhet [zou gezellig kunnen wo]rden jaɸ.  
*it might fun can become yeah*  
**[fit [might maybe become] fun yeahɸ.**
- 21 Ann [ °(< >)° ]
- 22 Mar ghuhaha[ha
- 23 Ann [°ja°  
*yeah*  
**[°yeah°**

Marie responds in line 8 to Anne's topic proffer with only the response particle *ja*, thereby doing confirmation. This is followed by a hearably long silence of 1.7s. Here Anne orients to Marie as needing to do more; by not taking up Marie's answer, she treats it as incomplete. When she finally receipts Marie's answer in line 10, she goes on to do a second attempt by providing an assessment, but Marie resists yet again. By doing a multiple saying (Stivers, 2004) in line 12 she resists Anne's course of action, and by subsequently saying that she'll have to wait and see, she claims inadequate access to comply with Anne's topic proffer (see Schegloff, 2007). In lines 18–19 Anne provides a third, and what turns out to be final, attempt by providing the same candidate assessment, but this time merely as a possibility. But Marie resists yet again by providing only confirmation.

This case confirms that as Other's-News Announcements are topic proffers, a preferred response consists of more than confirmation. When a recipient does not elaborate, that elaboration is noticeably absent, and can be pursued. It thus also shows that the dispreferred response is one that is designed to be minimal, what Sacks (1995) calls an answer-length response, and that it can be accounted for by claiming a lack of access (Schegloff, 2007).

I have argued in this section that participants can implement topic proffers by doing what I call an Other's-News Announcement, an action with which speakers (i) presuppose that the recipient has news to tell and (ii) claim to know the news. When introducing past events, speakers articulate a description of what the recipient did or a headline of what happened to the recipient, thereby

eliciting a more detailed telling of the news. When introducing upcoming events, speakers articulate a description of the event, thereby eliciting some telling on that event. In both cases speakers elicit a telling by revealing what they already know about a recipient-oriented topic.

### 3.3.2 News Requests

In the prior section I have shown that when doing an Other's-News Announcement speakers reveal their belief that the recipient has news to tell and claim to know what that news is. But speakers can also presuppose that there is news without claiming prior knowledge about it. That is, speakers only reveal a belief that the recipient has news to tell, not what the news will be. This is routinely, although not exclusively, achieved by using a yes/no-type interrogative with which speakers provide a candidate assessment. Depending on the type of activity being inquired about, this assessment can be one of either enjoyment (e.g., 'did you have fun?') or success (e.g., 'did it work out?'). Or from another perspective: by using a specific type of candidate assessment speakers categorize the activity they inquire about as either leisure or work.

Excerpt (8) is a case in point. Anne and Fabienne have been talking about how great the weather was the previous day. Anne has said that it must have been God's work and Fabienne agrees in line 1 by providing a full repeat with decreased loudness, thereby seemingly orienting to sequence closure. Anne then indeed moves to a new activity, by inquiring whether Fabienne had fun with Timo<sup>8</sup> at a party both she and Fabienne attended.

(8) VS2-01:06.0-01:26.7

```

01 Fab °('t) kan bijna niet anders nee:.°=
      it can almost not otherwise no
      °(it)'s almost impossible otherwise no:.°=
02 Ann -> =^en was 't nog gezellig met [timo^_
      and was it still fun with Timo
      =^and did you still have fun with [timo^_
03 Fab [°echt°)
      really
      [(really)
04 (1.0)
05 Fab °ja hee:l gezellig°. maar hij had dus >de hele
      yeah very fun but he had thus the whole

```

<sup>8</sup>Fabienne's relation to Timo is unclear. She quotes herself as accusing him of chasing girls (data not shown), which suggests that he is not her boyfriend, but the use of *gezellig* does suggest to me that there is some romantic interest.

- 06 tijd< (zo'n) ban:dje in z'n haar: weet je nog:?=  
*time such.a band in his hair know you still*  
**°yeah ve:ry fun°. but so he had >the whole time<**  
**(like a ban:d in his hair: do you remember:?=**
- 07 Ann =.pt Q:h ja ja:? die ↑bloemen. °band°. *oh yeah yeah that flower band*  
**=.pt Q:h yeah yea:h? that flower. °band°.**
- 08 (0.6)
- 09 Fab ja: en dat was dus van fleur baran:. >maar op  
*yeah and that was thus of Fleur Baran but at*
- 10 gegeven moment<, [had ik dus gezegd van  
*given moment had I thus said like*  
**yea:h and so it was fleur baran's. >but so at one**  
**point<, [I had said like**

Fabienne provides an emphatic confirmation in line 5, providing both a type-conforming (G. Raymond, 2003) *ja* (“yeah”) and an upgrade to *heel gezellig* (“much fun”) stressing *heel*. She subsequently tells an anecdote about her and Timo from that night, where she asked him for his headband, which she subsequently lost. In her response she thus embraces the topic proffered by Anne, and they continue talking about Timo and the headband for about a minute.

With her candidate assessment Anne reveals her belief that Fabienne spent time with Timo and can provide some talk on the matter. But she does not formulate what that talk might consist of: she uses a YNI to take a unknowing stance (G. Raymond, 2010a; Heritage, 2012a) and uses no other evidential markers that might suggest otherwise (cf. example (5)). She implements what I call a News Request, projecting that there is news to tell, without conveying prior knowledge of what that news will be.

Another way speakers do News Requests is by inquiring whether some planned activity has been—or will be—successfully completed. In the following extract Richelle has just finished telling extensively about her date—this excerpt takes place about two minutes after excerpt (6)—and in lines 3–4 proposes moving to a new topic by inquiring what Loeka is doing. Before Loeka can answer, Richelle does a News Request, asking if Loeka succeeded in making a recording.<sup>9</sup>

(9) DV2–06:55.3–07:13.7

- 01 Ria =en wAt ben jIJ al[lemaal aan het d]oe:n;  
*and what are you all on it doing*

<sup>9</sup>She is probably asking about one of the recordings Loeka made for the same class for which she recorded this conversation.

**=and what have yOU [been up t]o:;**

02 Lan [ ( ) ]

03 Ria -> is het nog geLUkt met het ge↑spREK opnE:men  
*is it all succeed with the conversation record*

04 -> #van e:h#  
*of*  
**did it work out recORding the conversation**  
**#for e:h#**

05 Lan ↑jA::; (0.2) ik had met ↑ton nog een e:h  
*yeah I had with Ton still a*

06 >gesprek opgenomen enzO:< en eerst toen  
*conversation recorded and.such and first then*

07 klapte die helemaal di:ch:t, (.) .HH (.) en  
*shut he completely closed and*

08 toeh::n WAS >die helemaal< .Hh zEnuwachtig  
*then was he completely nervous*

09 gew#orde:n#; en: (.) mAAr het kwam echt helemaal  
*become and but it came really totally*

10 goe:d.  
*fine*

05-10 ↑yEA::h; (0.2) I had >recorded a conversation<  
**with ton you know< and at first he completely**  
**shut dow:n, (.) .HH (.) and then he was >totally<**  
**.Hh nervous; an:d (.) bUt it really worked out**  
**quite well.**

Richelle's News Request is syntactically incomplete—that is, she does not produce what might be called a complete clause. Instead she uses a trail-off (Local & Kelly, 1986) *van e:h* (“of e:h”), signaling the relevance of turn transition. Loeka provides a type-conforming response in line 5 and then tells about what happened while making the recording, thereby orienting to Richelle's inquiry as a topic proffer. In her New Request Richelle displays her belief that Loeka was planning to make a recording, but not whether Loeka succeeded. She thus conveys a belief that Loeka has news to tell, but not whether the news is good or bad, that is, what the news will be.

So far I have focused on News Requests of past events, but as with Other's-News Announcements, News Requests are also used for upcoming events. These are implemented in a manner similar to (8) and (9). Consider extract (10). Karel has been telling Loes that his parents only experienced minor damage to their caravan after a storm, which they both positively assess. Karel launches a new topic in line 2, inquiring whether Loes is looking forward to her mother's birthday.

## (10) BM1-03:25.2-03:37.7

01 Loe JA: [ ↑NOU:. ]  
 yeah PRT  
**YEA:H [ WELL:. ]**

02 Kar -> [(heb je) al] zin in je moeders  
*have you already desire in your mother's*  
 03 -> verjaar:dag?  
*birthday*  
**[(are you) al] ready looking forward to your**  
**mother's birth:day?**

04 (0.2)

05 Loe .Hh JA:h eh e- effe kijken want e::h jij komt  
 yeah just see because you come  
 06 ook ↑hè zaterdag. als ze 't vier:t.  
*also PRT Saturday when she it celebrates*  
**.Hh YEA:h eh j- just see because e::h you're also**  
**coming right on saturday. when she celebrates it.**

07 (0.8)

08 Kar jA >↑tuurlijk<.  
 yeah of.course  
**yEAH >'fcourse<.**

09 Loe jA leu- nee leu:k inderdaad.=en ik zat te denken  
 yeah no fun indeed and I sat to thinking  
**yeah fu- no fu:n indeed.=and I was thinking**

Karel implements his topic proffer in lines 2–3 with a YNI, providing a candidate assessment for Loes to confirm. In this way he reveals a belief that Loes can provide talk on the matter, but not what that talk might be. And indeed, the talk Loes subsequently provides was clearly not projected or anticipated. After confirming that she is looking forward to the birthday (line 5), she verifies that Karel comes to visit on Saturday (lines 5–6), subsequently proposes he actually comes on Friday and spends the night (line 9 and onwards), and then talks about the gift she is planning to buy (data not shown).

In all cases shown, in fact in 34 of 35 cases, the News Request is implemented with a YNI. The one exception can be seen in (11), where the speaker uses a YND. Inge is a bridesmaid for a wedding the following day and responsible for the wedding cake. In lines 1–2 Marjo introduces that topic by inquiring whether it all worked out with the cake. Inge confirms and explains that her parents took care of it, after which some more talk on the topic ensues.

## (11) ZV2-03:48.5-04:06.5

01 Mar -> o:h ləkker.=hee en die taart? dat e:h >dat is  
 oh nice hey and that cake that that is  
 02 -> allemaal gelukt<?=  
 all that cake was made

- all*            *succeed*  
**o:h nice.=hey and that cake? that e:h >that all worked out<?=  
 03 Ing =JA: ↓dat e:h (.) j<sub>a</sub>    dat e:h dat- m'n ouders  
           *yeah that*            *yeah that*            *my parents*  
 04 hebben hem gemaakt dus ik ga zometeen    kijken  
           *have it made*        *so I go momentarily see*  
 05 wat ik e:h  
           *what I*  
           **=YEA:H that e:h (.) yeah that e:h that- my parents  
           made it so I'm going to see in a moment what I e:h**  
 06 Mar oh dan kun je hem ↑leuk gaan [↑make:n;]  
           oh then can you it    nice go        make  
           **oh then you ↑can go and [make it ↑nice];****

By using a YND Marjo conveys a belief that Inge has news to tell: Whether or not it worked out with the cake. But note that she does not claim to know how it worked out with the cake, that is, she conveys an expectation of what the news will be, not a belief. This distinction is very subtle, and while it may seem stipulative and therefore relevant only to the analyst, there are some signs that it is also of importance for the participants themselves—not in the least because participants can and are allowed to be protective of their epistemic domains (Stivers et al., 2011; Heritage, 2012c, 2018).

First consider Inge's response. Although she uses the positive polarity particle *ja* with increased loudness, she does not seem to be doing confirming. In her elaboration she says that her parents made the cake and that she has to go and see what she still has to do. Marjo also takes this to mean that Inge still has to decorate the cake.<sup>10</sup> In other words, Marjo's question is in a way disconfirmed as she inquired if it all worked out. Inge's *ja* may only be a way to accept the topic, and not to do confirmation.<sup>11</sup>

Second Marjo puts the topic in the preamble of her turn. I have only seven other cases in which the speaker uses the preamble of a turn to introduce the topic and in each case the speaker subsequently takes a relatively unknowing stance in the topic proffer. While this is too limited a sample to generalize about where and when speakers use the preamble, it is clear that the preamble is parasitical on the prior talk, more so than any turn inherently is. Preamble

<sup>10</sup>Inge says that her parents made the cake, which suggests it's done. But she still plans to decorate it (data not shown). The status of the cake is thus not entirely clear, but it seems that Inge's parents made the base for her to decorate.

<sup>11</sup>Dutch *ja* is far more versatile than English *yeah/yes*. It is used to do confirming, and can be a type-conforming response, but it is used for a whole range of other actions as well, and even in response to *wh*-interrogatives.

TCUs consist of either phrases or even single lexical items; their actions have to be understood in relation to the ongoing course of action. Here Marjo is inquiring about the wedding day, and resumes that topic after a short interlude. Prefacing her turn with *en* (“and”) makes it recognizable as a next item on that agenda (Button & Casey, 1988; Heritage & Sorjonen, 1994).

Both points provide some evidence that Marjo is not doing an Other’s-News Announcement in which she already knows that it worked out, but that, for whatever reason, she is confident that Inge is going to provide a confirming response. She thus expects there to be good news, and indeed conveys a strong expectation, but does not claim to know that Inge will provide good news.<sup>12</sup>

In all the cases I have shown so far the recipient responds by bringing the speaker up to date on the requested news, thereby orienting to the YND as a topic proffer and providing the preferred response. But now consider excerpt (12) from the start of a phone conversation. Benthe has called to talk to her sister, but her niece, Hanneke, answers the phone. After reciprocal *how are you*s, the closure of which can be seen in line 1, Benthe provides what looks like a News Request in the anchor position, by asking if Hanneke enjoyed dinner with her grandparents.

(12) GR1-00:21.0-00:28.9

```
01 Ben      =[moo:i zo- ja (.) pr:i:ma.=geweldig,=
              good      yeah   fine   great
              =[that's good- yeah (.) fi:ne.=great,=
02      -> =heb je: ^↑gister   nog   l@kker bij opa   en
              have you   yesterday still tasty with grandpa and
03      -> oma      gegeten^?
              grandma eaten
              =did you have ^a nice dinner with grandpa and
              grandma yesterday^?
04          (0.5)
05 Han      jA   hoo:r.=
              yeah PRT
              sure.
06 Ben      =o:h #mooi zo#. .slh is eh mama in de ↑buu:rt?
              oh   good so      is   mommy in the neighborhood
              =o:h #that's good#. .slh is eh mommy aroun:d?
```

<sup>12</sup>In this light it might be relevant to consider the distinction G. Raymond (2010a) finds between YNIs and YNDs when used by health visitors. Both are used to address issues about which the visitor does not have any knowledge, but while YNIs can be used to show an interest in the mother’s well-being, YNDs are used to treat questions as merely part of a form they have to fill in.

If indeed Benthe implements a News Request, it is not embraced by Hanneke who responds with only a confirmation *ja hoor* ('yeah PRT'). Furthermore, this minimal response is not treated as dispreferred by Benthe who responds with an *oh*-prefaced assessment as a move towards sequence closure (Heritage, 1984a; Schegloff, 2007), and she subsequently makes a switchboard request (see Schegloff, 1979). It thus seems that despite her turn being designed as a News Request and coming in the anchor position, neither participant orients to it as one. In other words, this seems a deviant case.

While I cannot provide a definitive account of this excerpt, there are at least two possible explanations. First, this is not a deviant case. Notice the turn-final *hoor*. This particle is recurrently used in environments that are expansion-implicative as a means of resisting that expansion: "it is heard as declining doing more talk on the topic" (Mazeland & Plug, 2010, p. 184). In other words, Hanneke's use of *hoor* might reveal her understanding of Benthe's inquiry as not just a request for confirmation, but as a topic proffer, but one on which she is not going to provide more talk. This resistance in combination with the 0.5s delay before her answer might be why Benthe does not make a second attempt.

This account is, however, not entirely satisfactory. First, there is no evidence in the data other than our a priori assumptions about *hoor*—although they are supported by prior research—that either participant understands Benthe's inquiry as a topic proffer. In fact, only the 0.5s delay could suggest that Hanneke provides a dispreferred response. But Benthe latches her uptake in line 6, suggesting that nothing dispreferred is going on. Furthermore, in a similar case, Seuren et al. (2015) found that the recipient of a topic proffer did provide a telling after a *ja hoor*. It was argued there that because the *hoor* has falling intonation it is both affiliating and aligning (see Mazeland & Plug, 2010)—the same applies in (12)—and is thus not produced as a means of resisting a topic proffer.

An alternative account might be that utterances have the potential to be treated as topic proffers, but that this is an interactional accomplishment. As Sacks (1995, volume II, p. 567) puts it: "They [topical sequences] blow up out of a pair." Hanneke could have provided some elaboration, but because she did not, she provides Benthe with a choice between doing pursuit and doing closing. Benthe might be moving towards closure here, because she has called for her sister, not her niece. There is of course no way of knowing. Interaction emerges incrementally, turn by turn, and since no utterance has a fixed meaning or a fixed force—indeed as was argued in chapter 2, topic proffers can be done to avoid accountability (see also Sidnell, 2017b)—participants can change their action on the fly, without necessarily being seen to be doing so. Whatever is

going on, cases such as (12) show that plenty more work remains to be done before we have a clear grasp on topic proffers.

I have shown in this section that speakers can implement News Requests as a type of topic proffer in which the speaker reveals a belief that the recipient has news to tell, but does not claim to know what that news will be. These News Requests overwhelmingly take the form of a candidate assessment, but one that is fitted to the type of activity the speaker is inquiring about. The speaker can categorize the activity as one of leisure by using assessment terms like *leuk* or *gezellig*, or as a chore or task that has to be completed by using for example the verb *lukken*. As the speaker does not convey a belief about what the news will be, almost all News Requests are implemented with YNIs, with which the speaker takes a relatively unknowing stance towards the candidate assessment.

### 3.3.3 Agnostic News Inquiries

In the previous two sections I have shown that speakers when doing a topic proffer can presuppose that the recipient has news to tell. But in a large number of cases (40/98) speakers use a topic proffer in which they do not reveal a belief that the recipient has news to tell. I call these Agnostic News Inquiries: the speaker takes an unknowing stance with regard to the issue of whether there is news. If there is news, the recipient should not only confirm, but also provide the news.

Consider extract (13). Lies and Pam are two elderly women. Pam has called to ask if Lies received an invitation for a mutual friend's sixtieth birthday. The sequence ends with an exchange of passes (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 304), two of which can be seen in lines 1–2. Pam then launches a new topic by asking if Lies has worked on the puzzle, presumably the newspaper crossword. In the design of her topic proffer, Pam takes an agnostic stance: she does not presuppose that Lies has made any attempts with the puzzle.

(13) GF1–02:10.8–02:37.6

```

01 Pam      ((snuift)) [°nee:°.
                no
                ((sniffs)) [°no:°.
02 Loe      [°°(hè)°°
                PRT
                [°°(right)°°
03 Pam -> he' je nog wat aan de puzzel gedaan, hh=
                have you still something on the puzzle done
                did you still work a bit on the puzzle, hh=
05 Loe      =ja:: ik heb maar één woor:dje joh,<en .h (0.2)

```

yeah I have just one word INT and  
 06 <maar ik heb er ↑één:tje>, daar moe'je me straks  
 but I have there one there have.to.you me later  
 07 eens mee helpen,=die kom:' uit 't aa dee:, .hhh (.)  
 just with help that comes from the AD  
**=yea:h I have only one wor:d,<and .h (0.2) <but I  
 have on:e>, you have to help me with that later,=it  
 is from the AD, .hhh (.)**

In her response Lies confirms that she has worked on the puzzle, and elaborates that she has only found one word, before talking about a puzzle from the AD, a national newspaper. She thus not only confirms that she has news to tell, but also provides the news. And we see this pattern in all cases where the speaker takes an agnostic stance in their topic proffer: if there is news to tell, the recipient responds by not only confirming that there is news, but by providing it as well, thereby also orienting to the Agnostic News Inquiry as a topic proffer.

In almost half of the cases (17/40) there is no news to tell. Interestingly, these are some of the clearest cases of Agnostic News Inquiries. Excerpt (14) is a case in point. Trudy has called Roos to congratulate her on her birthday. After talking about her birthday, Roos asks in lines 1–2 whether Trudy's offer, presumably for a house, has been accepted.

## (14) MS1–02:21.3–02:38.0

01 Roo -> [.hh ^hee en is jullie e:h^ bod  
 hey and is your.PL offer  
 02 al geaccepteerd.  
 already accepted  
**[.hh ^hey and did your e:h^ offer  
 get accepted yet.  
 (0.2)**  
 04 Tru e- NEE. (.) ^nog niet^? ^we hebben nog niks  
 no not yet we have still nothing  
 05 gehoord vandaag dus e:[hm:^ ] 'k hoop dat we  
 heard today so I.hope that we  
 06 Roo [°(oké)°]  
 okay  
 07 Tru ↑morgen wat horen.  
 tomorrow hear something  
**04–07 e- NO. (.) ^not yet^? ^we still haven't heard  
 anything today so e:[hm:^ ] I hope that we'll  
 06 Roo [°(okay)°]  
 Tru hear something tomorrow.  
 08 ??? .hh  
 09 Roo ja: ↑spannen[d.**

*yeah exciting*  
**yea:h** ↑**exciti**[ng].  
 10 Tru [dus. ↑**maar:** komt wel goe- ja komt  
   *so but come PRT yeah come*  
 11 wel goed °*joh*°. *PRT good INT*  
   [**so.** ↑**but it'll work ou- yeah it'll**  
   **work out.**

Trudy provides a disconfirming response in line 4, showing with *nog* (“yet”) that she expects that a response to their offer is still forthcoming. She thus has no news to tell. The topic is kept alive for a few more turns, but lacking news, there is little for the participants to do. And in lines 10–11 Trudy recognizably moves towards sequence closure by saying that it will work out, using a reassuring turn-final *joh*.<sup>13</sup>

Roos in her topic proffer reveals some knowledge about Trudy: namely that Trudy has made an offer on a house. She also reveals an expectation that there might be news to tell. By asking the question she treats it as possible that the offer has been accepted, which would be news. But she does not actually reveal an expectation that there will be news, only the possibility thereof. This is what makes her turn an Agnostic News Inquiry as opposed to a News Requests. When using the latter, the speaker reveals a belief that there is news: A confirming response typically conveys good news and a disconfirming response bad news.<sup>14</sup> But the disconfirming response by Trudy conveys a no-news situation. Good news would mean their offer had been accepted, bad news would be that their offer had been rejected—although neither participant seems to treat that as a relevant possibility. Agnostic News Inquiries thus address one of the primary means in which recipients account for dispreferred responses to topic proffers: whether the recipient can provide extended talk.

As with Other’s-News Announcements and News Requests, Agnostic News Inquiries can also address upcoming events. Their design differs only slightly from inquiries about past events: instead of using the past tense, speakers use an auxiliary verb to make clear that they are inquiring about a potentially upcoming event. Consider for example (15) in which Lisa asks her father if he and her mother are planning to go boating the coming weekend.

<sup>13</sup>*Joh* is an untranslatable address term. Its function depends strongly on its context of use: here it is hearably doing reassuring, because the rest of the turn is designed to do reassuring. But see excerpt (13) where in line 5 it is used in a display of disappointment. It can for example also be used to display something like annoyance: *Hou eens op, joh!* (“Stop it!”).

<sup>14</sup>Like medical questions in acute primary care, News Requests are optimized for good news outcomes (see Boyd & Heritage, 2006).

(15) KM1-00:48.9-01:07.5

01 Lis -> >gaan jullie nog< varen volgend weekend.  
           go you.PL still boating next weekend  
           **>are you still< going boating next weekend.**

02 (0.2)

03 Sim ja: we gaan wel varen. =als 't beetje mooi weer  
       yeah we go ADV boating if it bit nice weather

04 is °( )°.   
       is  
       **yea:h we will go boating.=if the weather is a  
       bit nice °( )°.**

05 (0.5)

06 Sim [('ksta) net eh bij de haven om d'r  
       I'm.standing just at the harbor to there

07 Lis [oké.  
       okay

08 Sim weer ↑nieuwe >benzine in te gooien<? Uhu  
       again new gas in to throw

06-08 [(I'm standing) just eh at the harbor >to fill it up

07 Lis [okay.  
       Sim with more gas< again? Uhu

Simon confirms that depending on the weather conditions they will go boating and that he is actually making preparations just then. While Lisa might be thought to ask her query because she wants to join and not as a topic proffer, such an ulterior motive does not become apparent in the interaction. They simply close the sequence after Simon has brought her up to date on the state of the boat (data not shown). Both participants thus orient to her utterance in line 1 as a topic proffer, in which she takes an unknowing stance with regard to whether Simon has plans he could tell about, that is, as an Agnostic News Inquiry about an upcoming event.

I have shown in this section that in addition to implementing a topic proffer by revealing a belief that the recipient has news to tell, speakers can also implement a topic proffer by taking an unknowing stance towards the existence of news. Although speakers inherently reveal an expectation that a recipient could have something to tell by doing a topic proffer, that does not mean speakers belief—or do not belief for that matter—that there is news to tell. And this is made clear in the response. Where a disconfirming response to a News Request would convey bad news, a dispreferred response to an Agnostic News Inquiry conveys that there is no news.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that when speakers nominate a recipient-oriented topic—that is, when they implement a topic proffer—of a past or future event they make use of one of three practices. First, they can reveal a belief that the recipient has news to tell as well as a belief of what that news will be. They do so by using what I call Other’s-News Announcements. This term shows that they are both similar to but different from News Announcements in which speakers announce their own news (see Button & Casey, 1985). Second, speakers can reveal a belief that the recipient has news to tell, but only an expectation of what the news will be. I call these News Requests, because speakers request of the recipient that they provide the news. Third, speakers can proffer a topic without presupposing that there actually is news. I call these Agnostic News Inquiries, because like Itemized News Inquiries they nominate a recipient-oriented topic, but speakers take an agnostic stance as to whether there is news.

All three types of topic proffers are double-barreled (Schegloff, 2007, p. 76): speakers use a yes/no-type initiating action (G. Raymond, 2010a) as a vehicle to do topic proffers (see also Sacks, 1995, p. 566ff.). And this is also how they are taken up: recipients generally begin their response by confirming with a yes/no-type particle, before providing some form of telling. In this way recipients show that they are willing and able to provide sustained talk.

The three types of proffers are strongly associated with specific syntactic practices: Other’s-News Announcements are implemented primarily with declarative word order (21/23), News Requests are implemented primarily with interrogative word order (34/35), and Agnostic News Inquiries are even exclusively implemented with interrogatives (40/40). This association seems to arise because in all but a few cases speakers use the syntactic design of their proffer to take a certain epistemic stance. The declarative word order is typically used to take a knowing stance, to treat something as a foregone conclusion (G. Raymond, 2010a; Heritage, 2012a), which makes it a fitting practice for Other’s-News Announcements as speakers use these to claim that they already know the news. Similarly, the polar interrogative word order is typically used to take an unknowing stance, to treat something as still in question (G. Raymond, 2010a; Heritage, 2012a), which makes it a fitting format for News Requests and Agnostic News Inquiries as speakers use these to claim that they do not know the news or if there even is news. But this relation is not deterministic: there is no one-to-one correspondence between form and function. Every topic proffer is designed to fit the local exigencies of the interaction (Mazeland, 2013; Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 1988a, 1988b); its context, the recipient, the sequential

environment, and so on. And indeed examples (3) and (11) show that Other's-News Announcements can be implemented with YNIs whereas News Requests can be implemented with YNDs, and that these formats can be used differently on different occasions.

### **3.5 Discussion**

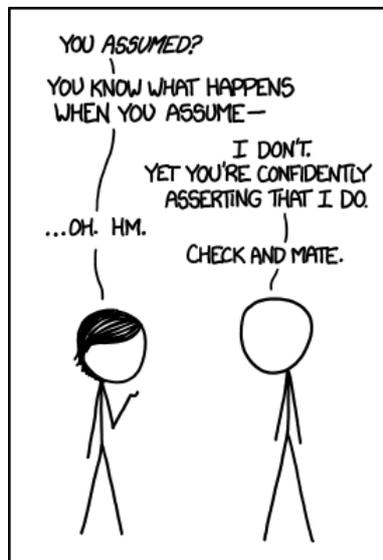
My focus in this chapter has been exclusively on topic proffers that (i) were produced in environments of activity closure (see Button & Casey, 1984, 1988), or that were marked as disjunct with misplacement markers such as *trouwens* ("by the way") (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973); (ii) were implemented with a request for confirmation as their vehicle, that is, either with a yes/no-type interrogative or a yes/no declarative (see G. Raymond, 2010a); and (iii) dealt with activities that had either been (potentially) completed or were (potentially) upcoming.

The reason for this limited scope was three-fold. First, unlike actions and activities, topics are typically not clearly marked and transitions are done as not to be recognizable as topic shift (Crow, 1983; Hobbs, 1990; Jefferson, 1984; Sacks, 1995; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). I thus focused on sequential environments in which participants would either have to launch a new activity or move to conversational closure (Button & Casey, 1988). Second, by focusing only on requests for confirmation as vehicles, I could more easily compare if and how the syntax was employed differently between the two typical formats: declaratives and polar interrogatives. Third, Button and Casey (1985) had focused extensively on topic nominations of (potentially) ongoing events, and my initial investigation suggested that most of my Dutch data was in line with their analysis.

It should be clear that I have not been able to cover the entire spectrum of topic proffers in this chapter, nor that I have come close to exhaustively analyzing the practices I did discuss. For example, I did not discuss a very common practice for topic proffers: *wh*-interrogatives. I expect that they are used similarly to polar interrogatives, but at the same time they are clearly distinct and further research should address what participants achieve by choosing one format over the other.

What I did show is that doing topic talk is an important part of social interaction. Conversation Analysis has since its inception touched upon it very infrequently (i.a., Button & Casey, 1984, 1985, 1988; Maynard, 1980; Riou, 2015; Svennevig, 2000), partly because determining what the topic is and more importantly, showing that the analyst's perception of what the topic is aligns

with that of the participants, is inherently problematic. While participants in each next action display their understanding of what the prior action was doing, thereby providing us with evidence for action formation and ascription (Sacks et al., 1974), we lack a proof procedure for topics. Furthermore, topic was historically considered from the perspective of coherence (e.g., Chafe, 1994; Geluykens, 1993; Ochs Keenan & Schieffelin, 1975), and Schegloff (1990) convincingly argued that participants achieve coherence through sequences of actions, not topics. But as an activity topic talk takes up a large chunk of talk-in-interaction, and as Schegloff (2007; see also Sacks, 1995) points out, it does not fit the sequential structure of many other activities. To adequately grasp talk-in-interaction it is thus necessary to understand how participants do topic talk. Topic is a subject both worthy and in need of further study.



*You know what happens when you assert—you make an ass out of the emergency response team.*

