

RATIFYING AND REJECTING LISTENER ASSESSMENTS IN THE COURSE OF MULTI-UNIT TURNS

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This article investigates the effects listener assessments can have on the course of a multi-unit turn. Specifically, listener assessments can elicit responses from the primary speaker and thus generate talk in their own right. The primary speaker may orient to the content of listener assessments and respond to them in various (positive or negative) ways, suspending the multi-unit turn in progress to comment or altering the direction of the turn. Shared assessments can lead to higher involvement and increased rapport with consequences for subsequent interaction between the participants. Rejections of listener assessments are much less frequent than ratifications: rejection of a listener assessment expresses the teller's refusal to have it count as part of the overall evaluation of the multi-unit turn in progress.

KEYWORDS: assessments, conversation, evaluation, listener responses, multi-unit turns

1 INTRODUCTION

Tellers are not alone responsible for the outcomes or evaluations of the narratives they initiate. Listeners help shape the trajectories of conversational stories through various forms of listenership, differential interest, responses tokens, signals of belief/disbelief, questions, and evaluative comments. Tellers in turn react to these recipient behaviors in nuanced ways. In this article, the focus of attention will be on listener assessments and how their ratification or rejection by the primary speaker affects the course of the multi-unit turn in progress.

The influence of recipients on the trajectory of the conversational storytelling performance is fairly well documented. Tannen (1978) shows how listener assessments can prompt a storyteller to extend a story, trying to give it a clearer or more salient point. Schegloff (1992) describes the effects of listener behaviors on sequentiality in multi-unit turns at talk, while C. Goodwin (1986a) investigates in particular the influence co-tellers can exert on the trajectory of a narrative through their differential interest and competence in the details of talk. M. H. Goodwin (1997) details the significance of diverse forms of listenership toward various elements of a story, focusing on instances of by-play during the telling of a story. Listener involvement in a story can turn into full-fledged co-narration, as explored by Falk (1980), Quasthoff (1980), Norrick (1997, 2004, 2005) and others. Listeners comment on stories also by becoming next tellers through the deployment of response stories to extend the themes

and ratify the evaluations in foregoing stories (see Sacks 1992 on second stories, Ryave 1978 on achieving a series of stories, and Norrick 2000 on response stories). However, research has not as yet focused on the evaluations listeners offer of the action described in a story or the uptake of these evaluations by storytellers. Further, there is a body of research on how parents guide their children in producing stories (Michaels and Cook-Gumperz 1979, Ochs et al. 1989, Blum-Kulka 1993, Blum-Kulka et al. 1993) along with suggestive research on how professional interviewers influence the stories their interviewees tell (Bell et al. 1994, Fairclough 1995, Lauerbach 2006, Norrick 2010), but here again no special attention has been given to evaluations nor any mention made of their ratification and inclusion into the ongoing storytelling performance.

There has been considerable research on evaluation in stories from Labov onwards (Tannen 1984, Polanyi 1985, Fleischman 1986, Toolan 1988, Linde 1993, Daiute et al. 1997, Wennerstrom 2001, among many others), but very little has been written about the evaluation supplied by listeners, and nothing about how storytellers respond to listener evaluation, in particular how they ratify and incorporate listener evaluations into their ongoing story performance or, in some cases, reject them. C. Goodwin (1986b) explores assessments by comparison with neutral continuers as listener responses to multi-unit turns. Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) investigate how participants in talk in interaction come to concurrent assessments of the same assessable, and their conclusions about how similar evaluations work to reveal parallel alignments hold *mutatis mutandis* for ratifying and incorporating assessments in a storytelling performance, as described in the paragraphs to come. Other writers on listener responses such as Gardner have followed C. Goodwin (1986b) in treating assessments as similar to classical continuers like *uh-huh* and *mbm* in signaling the current primary speaker to continue with the multi-unit turn in progress. It is the purpose of this article to show that assessments as responses can also attract the attention of the primary speaker and initiate a sequence in their own right.

In an initial example, Anne has placed a long-distance phone call to her old friend Betty, and she is telling a story about a memorial service, when Betty produces the assessment *oh how nice* in line 5. Initially Anne proceeds with her story saying *and then* in line 6, before she breaks off to address the assessment directly, as if the force of the assessment becomes clear to her only after she has resumed telling. Not only does Anne concur with and ratify the assessment proposed by saying *yeah* in line 7, she goes on to elaborate the assessment in saying *it was beautiful* rather than simply *nice*.

Transcript 1: En_6314 F 63

- 1 Anne *yeah.*
- 2 *John and uh uh Elizabeth*
- 3 *and Maureen*
- 4 *all did a reading*
- 5 Betty ***oh how nice***
- 6 Anne *and then-*
- 7 ***yeah it was beautiful.***
- 8 *and then Kevin did the eulogy*

2 CORPORA

The corpora investigated for the current research represent American English conversation in a wide range of contexts with a wide range of speakers. In particular, I began my investigation with the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE), my own Saarbrücken Corpus of Spoken English (SCoSE), and the CallHome Corpus from the Linguistic Data Consortium. This CallHome Corpus consists entirely of long-distance phone calls between friends and represents a very rich source of personal stories with lots of evaluation. These small corpora all provide access to the original audio files along with the transcriptions, so that the full acoustic record with paralinguistic cues like intonation, pitch, tempo and pauses was available for analysis. My research with these three relatively small corpora proceeded in the usual way, that is: I first found narrative passages and then inspected them for assessments by listeners responding to multi-unit turns.

In a second research step, I had recourse to a much larger corpus in order to expand my data base and ensure coverage of all the usual types of assessments: I investigated the Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus (LSWEC) containing nearly 2.5 million words of transcribed American English conversation, searching for assessments and responses to them wherever they appeared, then scrutinized the concordances thereby generated for narrative passages in particular. The transcription conventions in the excerpts cited are based on those utilized in the SCoSE corpus and summarized below; excerpts from other corpora have been adapted in various ways to these conventions: see the note on *Data Sources* at the end of this paper.

3 RESPONSE TOKENS, CONTINUERS, ASSESSMENTS

Certain items in conversation, in particular *uh-huh* and *mhm*, are specialized for BACK-CHANNEL activity in the sense of Yngve (1970), that is for the function of signaling listenership and passing the turn back to some other participant in the conversation who holds the floor. Related notions like CONTINUER and RESPONSE TOKEN have been discussed by Schegloff (1982), Gardner (1998, 2001) and McCarthy (2003). Thus, neutral continuers like *uh-huh* and *mhm* as well as most occurrences of *yeah* generally just show reciprocity without provoking any specific response, as in the two examples below.

Transcript 2: LSWEC-AC (119201)

- 1 Mary *but anyway, I did it from memory.*
- 2 Sabina ***uh-huh.***
- 3 Mary *and I, I surprised myself.*

Transcript 3: LSWEC-AC (164801)

- 1 Ted *and I was in plays fairly solidly all year.*
- 2 Ashley ***mhm.***
- 3 Ted *and so I would come home at really weird times.*

In both examples here, the primary speaker neither orients to the response tokens with acknowledgement nor with comment, simply ignoring this input from the listener and proceeding with the multi-unit turn in progress.

Schegloff (1982) addresses listener activity, response tokens or continuers in the sense intended here, and demonstrates their importance in the turn-taking system of everyday conversation. He writes:

The usage of “uh huh”, etc. (in environments other than after yes/no questions) is to exhibit on the part of its producer an understanding that an extended unit of talk is underway by another, and that it is not yet, or may not yet be (or even ought not yet be) complete. It takes the stance that the speaker of that extended unit should continue talking, and in that continued talking should continue that extended unit. (1982: 81)

Jefferson (1984: 200) discusses *mbm* in terms of passive reciprocity: its user proposes that a “co-participant is still in the midst of some course of talk, and shall go on talking”. Items such as *uh-huh* and *mbm* with a fall-rising intonation contour can be seen as prototypic continuers, in that they are least likely to be followed by same speaker talk, and they are least likely to attract attention or elicit ratification from the primary speaker.

Pomerantz (1984) explores the sequential structure of assessments, in particular how recipients respond in the following turn. She discusses SECOND ASSESSMENTS by which one participant in talk agrees or disagrees with an assessment produced by another, but she was not concerned with assessments in response to multi-unit turns like stories. Her second assessments agree (or disagree) with those in the foregoing turn in representing a parallel assessment, whereas my focus will be on explicit agreements or disagreements with listener assessments in the form of terms like *yeah* and *I know*.

Within the framework of their investigation of interactive organization of activity systems and the participation frameworks they include, Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) analyze how participants come to concurrent assessments by making projections, including a case where such a projection turns out to be inaccurate. They write: “In essence, with their assessments the participants show each other that, on this issue at least, their minds are together” (1992:166). Their observations regarding concurrent assessments extend naturally to the incorporation of assessments into story evaluations as described below.

C. Goodwin (1986b) studies assessments as listener responses, distinguishing continuers like *uh-huh* from assessments expressing emotional involvement with a multi-unit turn in progress like *wow* and *gosh*. Both continuers and assessments occur within ongoing talk of another, but assessments provide evaluation; they may even serve to bring a storytelling performance to an end, as Goodwin points out. Other writers on listener responses such as Gardner have followed Goodwin in viewing assessments as similar to classical continuers like *uh-huh* and *mbm* in signaling the current primary speaker to continue with the multi-unit turn in progress. It is the purpose of this article to show that assessments as responses can also attract the attention of the primary speaker and initiate a sequence in their own right.

By comparison, McCarthy (2003) seeks to describe responses in a broader sense, including listener tokens as a limiting case, but centering on lexical items such as *perfect* and *brilliant*. McCarthy defines responses based on their relation to foregoing talk, whereas listener activities, continuers and response tokens have always also been defined in terms of their functions and what they elicit in the next turn. This means that McCarthy takes little notice of the responses TO the responses he inspects, although he does mention Pomerantz' notion of second assessments. By contrast, in this study, I always inspect utterances to see what sorts of talk listener activities provoke, even if they do not challenge the right of the current speaker to continue to hold the floor. Consider the example below, where *oh god* elicits an immediate ratifying response of *I know* from the previous speaker.

Transcript 4: LSWEC-AC (128702)

- 1 Patti *Connie's gonna be in junior high school.*
- 2 Janet ***oh GOD.***
- 3 Patti ***I know.***
- 4 Mary *seventh grade?*
- 5 Patti *yeah.*

Patti's *I know* responds directly to the assessment force of *oh god*. In general, too little attention has been paid to the sorts of responses elicited by listener responses. This article seeks to take an initial step in rectifying this situation.

4 INFORMATION STATE TOKENS

By contrast with continuers, information state response tokens such as *yeah*, *oh*, *really* and *so* are much more likely to attract the explicit attention of the primary speaker elicit responses of their own. Evidentials like *oh* or *hm* index receipt of and/or failure to assimilate new information, and can thereby elicit specific responses from the primary speaker engaged in a multi-unit turn. Information state tokens produced by listeners and their sequential implications are the primary focus in Norrick (2010), where it is shown that storytellers may orient to and construct their following turns in response to them.

Oh is the prototypical information state token. Heritage (1984:299) characterizes *oh* as a particle "used to propose that its producer has undergone some kind of a change in his or her locally current state of knowledge, information, orientation or awareness." He says *ohs* "provide a fugitive commentary on the speaker's mind" (1984:300) and cites Goffman (1978) as saying they "are taken to index directly the speaker's state of mind." This places *oh* among the standard means of expressing evidentiality rather than simple reciprocity. In the same vein, Schiffrin (1987) describes *oh* as a discourse marker within the participation framework of information state, again placing it within the domain of information - on beyond simple reciprocity and as opposed to emotion.

Though continuers and assessments do not generally elicit direct responses, recipients regularly respond to the information state token *oh* with clarifications or

modifications of their previous utterance. This occurs in the passage below, where a free-standing *oh* from the listener Cam in response to the primary speaker's statement about the lack of hugging in his family elicits a lengthy account about his family's behavior patterns in greetings.

Transcript 5: SBC044

- 1 Lajuan *my family's not very much hugging.*
- 2 Cam **oh.**
- 3 Lajuan **I mean,**
- 4 *my whole life,*
- 5 *we've never been very,*
- 6 *you greet someone,*
- 7 *you don't s- hug them.*
- 8 *you're just like "hi",*
- 9 *how are you,*

Cam's *oh* elicits a reaction directly oriented to its own force, in which Lajuan explains that, in his whole life, hugging has been avoided in favor of standard verbal greeting formulae. *I mean* constitutes a typical initiation for accounts in response to information state tokens expressing doubt.

Heritage states *oh* is "routinely used to receipt information, its sequential role is essentially backward looking. Specifically, the particle does not invite or request further information" (1984: 311). Recipients do regularly react to *oh* with clarifications and accounts, as in the previous example and again in the excerpt below.

Transcript 6: SBCSAE (043)

- 1 Alice *(H) she's gonna [take over] her practice.*
- 2 Annette **oh.**
- 3 Alice *cause their their therapy styles,*
- 4 *are quite similar.*
- 5 Annette **oh.**
- 6 Alice *a:nd uh,*
- 7 *y'know,*
- 8 *all these patients w-*
- 9 *since the death was so sudden,*
- 10 *all these patients were just kinda left*

Each *oh* from Annette elicits a direct response from Alice, who seems to be attempting to justify her initial statement. Clearly, *oh* can attract the attention of the primary speaker and elicit some sort of response in the next turn. As such, it is definitely less neutral (and less polite) than the classic continuers *mm* and *uh-huh*.

The information state token *hm* more forcefully provokes a response than *oh*. In the extract below, Arlene is describing the course of a birthing process, when Doris directly expresses her doubts about the claim that they *held her back* in line 6. As the

teller Arlene develops her account of the events, Doris twice deploys *hm* as an information token in lines 8 and 10 to express her uncertainties with regard to the procedures described in Arlene's response, and each time Arlene introduces hedges and accounts like, for instance, the phrase *a little bit* in line 9, and the elaboration beginning with *it depends* in lines 11-12.

Transcript 7: En_4310 F 47 18

- 1 Arlene *then but they kind of held her back.*
2 *I think the baby would've born,*
3 *been born sooner*
4 *but the doctor didn't get there till around three.*
5 *so*
6 Doris *so I thought once it was induced there was like no stopping it.*
7 Arlene *no they can hold you back*
8 Doris **hm.**
9 Arlene *a little bit, you know.*
10 Doris **hm.**
11 Arlene *once,*
12 *depends how much stuff they give you.*
13 Doris *how much stuff they give you.*
14 *yeah.*
15 Arlene *stuff.*
16 *but anyway I think they were holding her back a little bit*
17 *because they wanted the doctor there.*

The two women finally agree that *holding back* the birthing process sounds plausible depending on *how much stuff they give you* (line 12). Notice the ameliorative repetition of *how much stuff they give you* by the recipient Doris in line 13, as well as Arlene's repetition of both *stuff* in line 15 and the paraphrase of her initial claim in the form *holding her back* in line 16, as if to confirm its presence in the story in progress.

The more processing difficulty or doubt a response token expresses, the more likely it is to attract a response of its own in the next turn. Since *hm* signals a greater degree of doubt or challenge than *oh*, it is generally more likely to elicit an immediate response and a more involved explanation from the primary speaker. As our example has demonstrated, it may require considerable effort by the speaker responsible for the doubtful utterances to substantiate their validity and significance for the current narrative.

5 RESPONSES ASSESSMENTS ELICIT

Listener responses can not only signal recognition that another participant is engaged in a multi-unit turn and encourage that person to continue or indicate processing difficulty or doubt, they can also express involvement in the ongoing performance and/or an emotional reaction to it. Evaluative comments in the form of assessments often

generate a response of their own from the primary speaker and thus initiate a trajectory in their own right. In particular, such assessments may elicit agreement, as in the passage below. Here the storyteller Bill orients directly to the listener response instead of carrying on with his story: Bill explicitly ratifies the assessment *oh my god* from line 6, and even embellishes on it by commenting on his acquisition of gray hair in lines 7-8.

Transcript 8: En_4485 M 29 21

- 1 Bill *oh, oh, worse,*
2 *it was like,*
3 *it was like as bad as Middlebury at its most intense,*
4 *but i- it lasted all year,*
5 *it wasn't over in nine weeks. {laugh}*
6 Allen ***oh my GOD.***
7 Bill ***H. I know I'm,***
8 ***I have so much gray hair.***

Instead of carrying on with the story, the primary speaker Bill orients directly to the listener response, ratifies it and even embellishes on it by commenting on his acquisition of gray hair. Here *I know* in line 7 clearly registers agreement with an assessment as opposed to shared knowledge. Note how the teller Bill agrees with the interjection *oh my god* in line 6 just as he might with a clausal statement, although the interjection *oh my god* has no specific propositional meaning as such. Whether it is the presence of an assessment, as opposed to a pure continuer like *uh-huh*, or the particular formula *oh my god* that triggers the response, the point is that the primary speaker breaks off and addresses the response as such.

In the next excerpt, the primary speaker Ben uses *yeah* in response to two assessments in a row: the first assessment *oh no* in line 4 shows the listener's dismay at the report linking behaviour on the golf course with a particular form of cancer, and *yeah* confirms this negative evaluation; Arthur's second assessment *oh man* in line 9 again signals a negative stance toward more explicit information about the disease in question, and the *yeah* from Ben in line 10 again ratifies it.

Transcript 9: En_4415 M 33 17

- 1 Ben *a::nd golfers tend to,*
2 *when th- after they tee off*
3 *they stick their golf tee in their mouth?*
4 Arthur ***oh no.***
5 Ben ***yeah,***
6 *well they think that this cancer developed from the the bug spray*
7 *and the weed killer*
8 *that they put on the the grass.*
9 Arthur ***oh man.***
10 Ben ***yeah,***
11 *so I I saw Barn-*
12 *I was back in the States in March.*

Arthur's initial response *oh no* comes as a reply to the first indication of the negative report to follow, with the teller's *yeab* as a brief ratification, while the second assessment *oh man* serves to close the narrative, as we see in Ben's response *yeab* followed by his initiation of a new story with *so I saw Barn* in line 11.

In the passage below, the primary speaker Anita ratifies the listener's *oh my goodness* assessment of her story from line 4 by repeating this phrase at the beginning of her next turn in line 5. Presumably the listener Judith says *oh my goodness* in reaction to the specific reported fact that the painkiller was already wearing off, while the teller Anita uses the phrase *oh my goodness* with reference to the day as a whole, but the identity of the repeated phrase resonates as a parallel assessment incorporated into the ongoing narrative just the same.

Transcript 10: En_4844 F 25 13

- 1 Anita *by the time we got to the dentist*
- 2 *it was already wearing off.*
- 3 *I took it at eleven o'clock.*
- 4 Judith ***oh my goodness.*** ((laugh))
- 5 Anita ***oh my goodness*** *what a day,*
- 6 *and then just that day,*
- 7 *everyone, we had this whole thing at work,*
- 8 *my sister only used to stay late everyday*
- 9 *and she deci-*

As Goodwin and Goodwin (1992) show for concurrent assessments by separate participants in talk in interaction generally, repetition of a listener assessment by the primary teller during the course of a story signals analogous appraisal of the events described. Verbatim repetition of a formula signals parallel alignment regarding the topic at hand.

The next excerpt illustrates a whole range of strategies whereby a storyteller appropriates evaluations from her listener and weaves them into her narrative in progress. The listener assessment *refreshing* from line 4 reappears as *very refreshing* in the teller's own words in line 5; the listener's phrase *good for the soul* articulated as a joint production in line 14 recurs as a teller assessment *really good for the soul* in line 15; and the assessment *oh that's wonderful* from line 11 echoes in the teller's evaluative comment *it was really great* in line 12. Thus can listener assessments become integral parts of an ongoing storytelling performance.

Transcript 11: En_4822 F 46 18

- 1 Bea *it was just so great to be outdoors.*
- 2 *with all these sort of you know,*
- 3 *nice people and arty people and,*
- 4 Ally ***well that was refreshing.***
- 5 Bea ***it was very refreshing.***
- 6 *and then it went into the night.*

- 7 *so I was out there at night wi-*
8 Ally *yeah.*
9 Bea *stars and the moon.*
10 *and we had a campfire and singing and all that.*
11 Ally ***oh that's wonderful.***
12 Bea ***it was really great.***
13 ***it was very,***
14 Ally ***good for the soul.***
15 Bea ***yeah really good for the soul.***
16 Ally *yeah.*

Particularly the assessment *very good for the soul*, jointly constructed in lines 13-14 and ratified through repetition in Bea's next turn, shows how teller and recipient can arrive at a common assessment. Goodwin and Goodwin argue that participants come to concurrent assessments by making projections, and such projection is also amply clear in the case of the genuine joint production here. With their coordinated production and congruent assessments "the participants show each other that, on this issue at least, their minds are together" (1992:166).

We have seen that storytellers also sometimes simply acknowledge assessments by recipients with *yeah* or *I know* as well as repeating them. All of these moves illustrate teller strategies for ratifying and incorporating listener evaluation into their stories. Of course, storytellers may also simply ignore the assessments their listeners offer, but listener assessments often affect the progress of the storytelling performance, prompting tellers to give a more detailed account of the events described or to extend the story by way of explanation.

Moving on now to more elaborate assessment sequences, in the fragment below, we see two responses to two back-to-back assessments. During a long story on searching for an apartment, Brianne ratifies an initial listener assessment with *yeah* in line 506, but the listener Addie goes on to produce a second assessment *oh wow* in the next line, which elicits a response of its own from the storyteller. Addie even responds minimally in line 509 with *oh* to the second response by the primary speaker before the story continues.

Transcript 12: SCoSE (Addie and Brianne)

- 499 Brianne *you know.*
500 *and upwards from there- I mean.*
501 *a- around our area ubm,*
502 *an apartment like a one bedroom or something [like that=]*
503 Addie *[ub-buh.]*
504 Brianne *=goes for seven or eight hundred.*
505 Addie ***oh my god.***
506 Brianne ***yeah.***
507 Addie ***oh wow.***
508 Brianne ***I know.***
509 ***it's .. crazy.***

- 510 Addie **oh**
511 Brianne *we found this place though*
512 *uhm we just found this about a week ago*
513 *and .. it's really close by*
514 Addie *uh-huh*
515 Brianne *practically on campus*

Addie produces the assessment *oh my god* in line 505, and Brianne immediately ratifies this assessment with *yeah*. A second, stronger assessment *wow* by Addie comes in line 507, and Brianne responds, also more strongly than the first time with *I know* and then an assessment of her own *it's crazy* in line 509. Addie receives this assessment with the information token *oh*, perhaps as much to get the narrative back on track as anything else. Note how the teller Brianne agrees with the interjections just as she might with a clausal statement, as if such interjections had a specific propositional meaning.

In the passage below, Nancy produces an assessment *ooh. oh, neat* in lines 26-27 in response to the information that the couple in the story adopted twins, and Margaret initially proceeds with her story, saying *and so* in line 28, but then breaks off to agree with the assessment, saying *yeah, very nice, yeah* before returning to the story with *well, because Robert, that's his* in line 30. More than simply influencing the evaluation of the story, Nancy's assessment apparently prompts Margaret to go into more detail than she would have otherwise about the father Robert and his status as a twin. Thus, storytellers incorporate listener assessments not only into the evaluation of their tales, but into the informational content as well.

Transcript 13: LSWEC 111401

- 1 Margaret *but she's a nice gal, real nice.*
2 *uh, like I said,*
3 *Aunt Marie had two daughters,*
4 *Katherine and Margaret Ann,*
5 *but Katherine died of cancer*
6 Nancy *mm.*
7 Margaret *the oldest one ... her son still lives in,*
8 *uh, in, uh, in Washington.*
9 *he's married.*
10 *he married a gal that worked,*
11 *uh, that worked in the same office as he did,*
12 *but she came from some island off the coast of,*
13 *of, uh, South America somewhere,*
14 *I can't remember the name of the island,*
15 *but she's*
16 Nancy *mbm.*
17 Margaret *a little mixture of breed, you know,*
18 *she's got a different breed in her*
19 Nancy *mbm.*
20 Margaret *and, uh, but wonderful person,*

21 *but then they never had any children*
22 *so finally, uh, she went back*
23 *and, uh, to the island*
24 *and they adopted twins,*
25 *a boy and a girl*
26 Nancy **ooh.**
27 **oh, neat.**
28 Margaret *and so,*
29 **yeah, very nice, yeah.**
30 *well, because Robert, that's his,*
31 *the father's name,*
32 *he was a twin, too,*
33 *but, uh, his other twin died at birth.*

The story continues on as in the following excerpt. Margaret recalls another related set of reportable (*that was funny though*) events about the twins she mentioned. This sub-plot also elicits an apposite assessment *that's strange* from Nancy in line 42 below.

34 Margaret *that was funny though,*
35 *the twins, uh,*
36 *one was kind,*
37 *one was quite ill.*
38 *and the other one was healthy.*
39 *and the healthy twin died.*
40 *and Robert was the ill one,*
41 *and he lived.*
42 Nancy **that's strange.**
43 Margaret **so isn't that odd?**
44 Nancy *yeah.*
45 Margaret **yeah,**
46 **I think that's so funny yeah,**
47 *but, uh, well, of course,*
48 *we got well acquainted with 'em*
49 *because every three years they'd come back here.*
50 Nancy *mbm.*
51 Margaret *used to have to come by train but,*
52 *I mean, they'd come back here,*
53 *but I visited out there quite a few times so I,*
54 *and they've sent me the Arizona Highways,*
55 *that's a monthly magazine from there.*
56 *they've sent me that for over forty years.*

In the sequence beginning at line 42, we again see a response *so isn't that odd?* to the assessment *that's strange*, which itself attracts a response *yeah* from the listener, before the primary speaker again agrees with *yeah* and produces yet another assessment *I think that's so funny yeah* in line 46, before she continues with the story. That is, the primary

speaker Margaret orients to a listener assessment and integrates it into her narrative in the following turn; the listener then concurs with this assessment by the storyteller, whereupon the teller deploys another token of agreement and a further assessment. Thus an assessment puts the progress of the narrative on hold for a total of four turns. Again note *but, uh, well, of course* to transition from commenting on the comment back into the narrative, in particular.

We have seen so far that primary speaker may respond to listener assessments in various ways. They may ratify a listener assessment as an external evaluation of their turn with a cursory *yeah* or *I know*; they may repeat the assessment with or without expansion; they may re-phrase or extrapolate from the assessment in an evaluative move of their own. Any of these moves may eventuate in a more elaborate sequence of evaluative turns.

6 REJECTING LISTENER ASSESSMENTS

To round out the picture of responses to assessments, we turn now to cases where storytellers disagree with assessments by their listeners. Disagreements with listener assessments are difficult to find in naturally occurring storytelling performances. This dearth is not surprising, given the clear preference for agreements with assessments generally, as demonstrated by Pomerantz (1984). Nevertheless, the examples of rejected assessments in my data do not bear many markers of dispreferred turns.

One source of disagreements with listener responses is the form of information tokens such as *you're kidding* and *no way*, which express disbelief and appeal to the primary speaker for assurance that she is speaking factually. Thus, in the passage below, the speaker gives a *no* response in line 4 to the listener's *you're kidding* before continuing with her story. Far more normal, as we have seen, is the positive ratification of the paraphrase *he's good* in line 10 following the information token *really?*

Transcript 14: En_5866 F 43 12

- 1 Franzl *H. and uh* (laughing)
2 *dad and I we fired our other attorney.*
3 Vera ***you're kidding.***
4 Franzl ***no,***
5 *we got us a new one.*
6 *we got Kindrick of Kindrick and Owens.*
7 Vera *uh-huh.*
8 Franzl *and this guy is sharp.*
9 Vera ***really?***
10 Franzl *he's good.*
11 *he's good.*
12 *he I think he's really going to fight for us.*

Of course, formulae like *you're kidding* and *really?* do not usually signal genuine disbelief on the part of the listener, but rather confirm the reportability of what the primary speaker is saying. Still, they often elicit rebuttals or affirmations from the primary speaker nevertheless. Note that there is no explicit marking of dispreference in the simple *no* response.

The next example with *no way* is roughly parallel: the primary speaker responds to the response *no way* in line 4 with the positive *yeah*, thereby confirming that she is reporting the facts as she sees them. The primary speaker Brianne, engaged in a multi-unit turn, breaks off to address a listener response before continuing with her story. Here *no way* might be taken either as a genuine information state token or as a formulaic assessment. *No way* literally expresses disbelief or at least processing difficulty, but, like *you're kidding* just above, it expresses interest and ratifies tellability at the same time. Thus, the teller's *yeah* may be heard as responding to the literal force of *no way* qua information state token or concurring with the assessment.

Transcript 15: SCoSE (Addie and Brianne)

- 1 Brianne *and uhm* (1.5) *sh-*
- 2 *he swore that it was her.*
- 3 *riding in the car.*
- 4 Addie **NO WAY.**
- 5 Brianne ((laughs)) **yeah.**
- 6 *and uhm I guess he said to Alison-*
- 7 *cause Alison uh-*
- 8 *he asked her- Alison if she could stay a little later.*
- 9 *and she said no.*

Even if *no way* is a formulaic phrase which routinely acts as a response token, its literal force may attract a direct reaction from a current floor-holder engaged in a multi-unit turn. Notice the *and uhm* phrase to re-start the story as such; see Local (2004) on *and-uh(m)* as a back-connecting device. Again the simple *yeah* shows no signs of dispreference.

Finally, assessments can sometimes provoke genuine disagreements, as in the extract below. In this example, the speaker rejects the assessment *oh great* from line 3 with her hedged reply *well it isn't* in line 4. This disagreement apparently signifies that the job itself is not especially desirable, although the listener's assessment really comments on the fact that *he* of lines 1-2 has a job rather than on the quality of the job as such. Even after this disagreeing response, the listener maintains her positive stance toward the situation reported, saying *I bet your mom is thrilled*, thus producing a second positive assessment.

Transcript 16: En_4628 F 30 19

- 1 Eileen *he has a job.*
- 2 *he got one after we came here.*
- 3 Diana **oh great.**
- 4 Eileen **well it isn't.**

5 Diana *I bet your mom is thrilled.*

Here only the initial *well* can be seen as a marker, albeit a rather weak one, of a dispreferred response. If agreement and ratification through affirmatives like *yeah* and *I know*, repeats and paraphrases exemplify ways of incorporating listener assessments into an ongoing story performance, then a negation of this sort certainly counts as a rejection of the listener evaluation it represents: that is to say that the teller rejects this listener assessment as part of the overall evaluation of her narrative in progress.

7 CONCLUSIONS

We have investigated some effects listener assessments can have on the course of a multi-unit turn. Listener assessments can elicit responses from the primary speaker and develop trajectories of their own; they are too often seen only as continuers or end points rather than as turns which can generate talk in their own right; we have traced some of these trajectories. Interjections as assessments are not just heard and responded to as positive or negative affect alone, but rather as full propositions one can agree or disagree with.

Speakers engaged in a multi-unit turn do not simply hear response tokens/minimal responses as signals of attention and cues to continue, they sometimes orient to their content and respond to it in various (positive or negative) ways: they may suspend their turn in progress in order to comment, and they may alter the direction of their multi-unit turn as well. Listener assessments can have larger effects on multi-unit turns in progress than simply registering emotions and judgments: shared assessments can lead to higher involvement and increased rapport with consequences for subsequent interaction between the participants.

Genuine disagreements with listener assessments are much less frequent than ratifications: rejection of a listener assessment expresses the teller's refusal to have it count as part of the overall evaluation of the multi-unit turn in progress.

This article has focused on the ratification or rejection of explicit listener assessments during multi-unit turns by a single teller, but there are many other possibilities, including cases of genuine co-narration involving more than one teller and one or more listeners. The data examined here derive from mostly dyadic conversations between friends, many of them telephone conversations, and they illustrate fairly high involvement with a general orientation toward concord: Many other less egalitarian, less harmonious contexts for the incorporation (or rejection) of listener evaluations are easily imaginable, from service encounters to political debate or even institutional settings such as the court room. Moreover, recipient evaluation is certainly not restricted to assessments, just as ratification and incorporation by primary tellers of stories need not be limited to the fairly straightforward strategies of agreement, repetition and paraphrase described above. There are presumably also multiple parallel strategies for putting off and rejecting undesired evaluations of various kinds not described here. This range of subjects presents obvious avenues for future research in this area.

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APPENDIX

DATA SOURCES

The data used in this investigation derive from four different corpora: First, the Saarbrücken Corpus of Spoken English (SCoSE), an extensive collection of audio and video recordings of free conversation and conversational interviews, involving a wide range of speakers from the United States. Notes on our transcription conventions and on participants in the recordings, along with steadily increasing numbers of transcribed excerpts from the SCoSE are available online at:

<http://www.uni-saarland.de/fak4/norrick/sbccn.htm>

Second, the CallHome Corpus from the Linguistic Data Consortium, consisting of long-distance phone calls between friends:

<http://www ldc.upenn.edu/Catalog/CatalogEntry.jsp?catalogId=LDC97L20>

Third, the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (SBCSAE)

<http://www.talkbank.org/media/conversation/SBCSAE/>

Fourth, the Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus (LSWE) , developed for the *Longman grammar of spoken and written English*, by Douglas Biber, Stig Johansson, Geoffrey Leech, Susan Conrad, and Edward Finegan (Harlow: Pearson Education, 1999), and the *Longman student grammar of spoken and written English*, by Douglas Biber, Susan Conrad, Geoffrey Leech (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2002). Examples derive in particular from the section containing American English conversation (329 texts, 2 480 800 words); the section containing British English conversation (3 929 500 words) was used only for comparison. I gratefully thank Doug Biber for the opportunity to access this rich data source at his *Corpus Linguistics Research Program* at Northern Arizona University in the spring of 2007.

For the sake of consistency, excerpts from the CallHome corpus, the SBCSAE and the LSWE have been adapted to the transcription conventions of the SCoSE summarized below.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Each line of transcription represents spoken language as segmented into intonation units. In English, an intonation unit typically consists of about four to five words and expresses one new idea unit. Intonation units are likely to begin with a brief pause and to end in a clause-final intonation contour; they often match grammatical clauses. Each idea unit typically contains a subject, or given information, and a predicate, or new information; this flow from given to new information is characteristic of spoken language (Chafe 1994). Arranging each intonation unit on a separate line displays the greater fragmentation inherent in spoken language (Chafe 1982).

Capitalization is used for the pronoun *I* and proper names. Otherwise, capitalization, punctuation and diacritics mark features of prosody rather than grammatical units. Non-lexical items, for example pause fillers like *eh* and *um*, affirmative particles like *aha* or surprise markers like *oh* are included in transcripts. The specific transcription conventions are as follows.

Chart 1: Transcription conventions

she's out.	Period shows falling tone in the preceding element.
oh yeah?	Question mark shows rising tone in the preceding element.
nine, ten	Comma indicates a level, continuing intonation.
DAMN	Capitals show heavy stress or indicate that speech is louder than the surrounding discourse.
°dearest°	Utterances spoken more softly than the surrounding discourse are framed by degree signs.
says 'oh'	Single quotes mark speech set off by a shift in the speaker's voice.
(2.0)	Numbers in parentheses indicate timed pauses.
..	A truncated ellipsis is used to indicate pauses of one-half second or less.
...	An ellipsis is used to indicate a pause of more than a half-second.
ha:rd	The colon indicates the prolonging of the prior sound or syllable.
<no way>	Angle brackets pointing outward denote words or phrases that are spoken more slowly than the surrounding discourse.
>watch out<	Angle brackets pointing inward words or phrases spoken more quickly than the surrounding discourse.
bu- but	A single dash indicates a cut-off with a glottal stop.
[and so-] [why] her?	Square brackets on successive lines mark beginning and end of overlapping talk.
and= =then	Equals signs on successive lines show latching between turns.
H	Clearly audible breath sounds are indicated with a capital <i>H</i> .
.h	Inhalations are denoted with a period, followed by a small <i>b</i> . Longer inhalations are depicted with multiple <i>bs</i> as in <i>.bbb</i>
h	Exhalations are denoted with a small <i>b</i> (without a preceding period). A longer exhalation is denoted by multiple <i>bs</i> .

()	In the case that utterances cannot be transcribed with certainty, empty parentheses are employed.
(hard work)	If there is a likely interpretation, the questionable words appear within the parentheses.
((stage whisper))	Aspects of the utterance, such as whispers, coughing, and laughter are indicated with double parentheses.
bold	Bolding marks the particular item at issue in an example.

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