

Some Other “Uh(m)”s¹

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Recent work on the occurrence of “uh” and “uhm” in ordinary talk-in-interaction is concerned almost exclusively with its relation to trouble in the speech production process. After touching briefly on this environment of occurrence, this conversation-analytic article focuses attention on several interactional environments in which “uh(m)” figures in other ways—most extensively on its use to indicate the “reason-for-the-interaction’s-launching.” The underlying theme is that accounts for what gets done and gets understood in talk-in-interaction must take into account not only its composition, but also its position—not only with respect to the grammar of sentences, but also with respect to the organization of turns at talk, of action sequences encompassing multiple turns at talk, and of occasions of talk, all of which are demonstrably oriented to by speakers in their production of the talk and by recipients in their analyzing of the talk.

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What follows is meant to serve three goals. First, I sketch several main themes that have insistently informed conversation-analytic (CA) work, and can serve as a set of robust contributions to orient the study of talk and other conduct in interaction. Second, I bring these themes to bear on one common occurrence in talk-in-interaction across a broad range of linguistic, cultural, and situational settings—the occurrence of “uh” and “uhm,” which, for convenience, I amalgamate into the form “uh(m).”² Third, I suggest some consequences to which the preceding discussions point.

The status of “uh(m)” as an element of language or of *a* language, its status as a word, or as a proper element of speech or discourse is subject to some controversy. As early as her 1974 *Language in Society* article on “Error Correction as an Interactional Resource,” my late colleague, Gail Jefferson, provided compelling grounds for treating “uh” as a planned-for element of talk-in-interaction. More recently, the psycholinguists Herb Clark and Jean Fox Tree (2002) argued in *Cognition* that it is to be understood as a full-fledged word, one that projects upcoming silence—shorter in the case of “uh,” longer in the case of “uhm,” displaying imminent trouble in speaking.

There is much to be said for the understanding of “uh” and “uhm” as implicated in trouble in talking—whether in psycholinguistic terms of speech planning and speech production or in conversation-analytic terms concerned with the practices of repair. Here, however, my aim is to register and explicate several practices for deploying “uh(m)” that have little or nothing to do with trouble—at least the sorts of trouble addressed in past literature, thereby freeing up inquiry in this area by absolving it of a responsibility to address issues of “trouble” of the sort most prominent in prior work. These usages appear to serve quite different roles in talk-in-interaction and occur in different environments from those examined in past discussions. As will become clear, these different “uh(m)”s are to be understood by reference to altogether different orders of organization in conversation than the “uh(m)”s previously described, and these different orders of organization in talk-in-interaction are briefly sketched in the next section, but sufficiently to support understanding of the “uh(m)”s deployed and understood by reference to them. In this respect, this article may be viewed as a counterpart to an earlier article of mine in this journal (Schegloff, 1997)—that one concerned with other things that get done by usages associated with *other*-initiated repair in next turn, this one concerned with other things that get

²In different languages and different variants of English, this object is often rendered differently in print—for example, in British English it may be rendered as “erm.” The data addressed in what follows are taken from a variety of versions of American English. As noted in the text, I have amalgamated the two forms into “uh(m)” *for convenience*—which is to say that I do not now know whether the difference between various realizations is relevant for parties to talk-in-interaction and, if it is, how it is consequential, although there are claims about this in the literature (notably Clark & Fox Tree, 2002). Here I examine aspects of use that seem to apply to both forms.

done by one particular usage, ordinarily associated with trouble and *self*-initiated *self*-repair in same turn—"uh(m)."

SOME POINTS OF DEPARTURE FOR CONVERSATION-ANALYTIC WORK

Let me begin with some points of departure for conversation-analytic work—points of departure that have been grounded or modified over some 45 years of research, so that we now have considerable confidence in them:

1. Virtually everything in talk-in-interaction is the product of both position and composition—that is, not only *what* is said or done (composition), but also *where* it is said or done (position). So, for this project, we are in trouble if we start out asking just what do “uh” and “uhm” *mean*, or what do they *do*; because, if our past work on talk-in-interaction holds true here, what a token of either one of them does or means depends on where it is.
2. What is meant by “Where it is?” Well, past work on “uh(m),” if it has attended to this matter at all, has meant one of two things or a combination of them: One is linguistic—syntactic position; the other is *psycho*-linguistic—planning process or, more generally, speech-production mechanisms. Both of these have been profoundly individualistic and psychological; that is, they have typically referred to processes and resources that require reference only to the speaking individual.

However, talk-in-interaction involves more than the addition of a second participant or more—each doing what the single individual is taken to do (as a growing number of psycholinguists seem to be recognizing). Talk-in-interaction mobilizes a set of practices by which the conduct of the parties *relative to one another* is organized, and the second point of departure is to call to attention to some fundamental organizational tasks confronting the accomplishment of talk-in-interaction, and several organizations of practice with which these problems are managed by the parties to the interaction in real time.

I call these “generic organizations for conversation.” By that I mean that if talk-in-interaction (of which conversation is one form) is ongoing, orientation to these generic organizational problems *is being* sustained, and solutions to them are in place—for the most part, routinely. Let me name and briefly describe the half dozen most prominent of them (for a fuller account, see Schegloff, 2006):

1. The “turn-taking” problem: Who should talk next and when should they do so? There is an organization of turn-taking practices by which this contin-

- gency of talk-in-interaction is managed. Of course, this turn-taking organization affects the construction and understanding of the turns themselves—that is, the resulting organization of the speaking turn as a unit of interaction, and its component parts, which we refer to as turn-constructional units (TCUs; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1996b, and for validation across 10 languages and cultures, see Stivers et al., 2009).
2. The “sequence-organizational” problem: How are actions implemented through successive turns formed up to be “coherent” with the actions of the prior turn (or *some* prior turn), and what is the nature of that coherence? Although topicality provides one grounding of coherence and the one most favored by the literature, what gets done in turns-at-talk is more generally describable as courses of action, of which topic-talking is only one type, and surely *not* the most basic. There is an organization of practices for jointly building sequences of action in talk-in-interaction (Schegloff, 2007b) and practices that underlie the construction and recognition of bits of talk as possible actions—sequence organization and action formation, respectively.
 3. The “trouble” problem: This concerns how to deal with trouble in speaking, hearing, or understanding the talk such that the interaction does not freeze in place, such that intersubjectivity is maintained or restored, and that the turn and sequence and activity can progress to possible completion. This is the organization of *repair* in which are provided resources for speakers and recipients to register the presence of trouble and mobilize in an orderly way the resolution of the trouble (for accounts across six languages and cultures, see Clift, 2001; Egbert, 1996; Fox, Hayashi, & Jasperson, 1996; Kim, 2001; Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; Mazeland, 2007; Schegloff, 1979b, 1989, 1992, 1997; Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977; Wu, 2006; among others).
 4. The “word selection” problem: How do the components that get selected as the elements of a turn get selected, and how does that selection inform and shape the understanding achieved by the turn’s recipients? Included here are the practices for referring to persons, formulating places, characterizing actions, and so forth—that is, the practices implicated in actually composing the TCUs that compose a turn at talk out of which the sequences are progressively realized (e.g., Sacks, 1972; Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1972; for other-than-English work, see Oh, 2005, 2007a, 2007b).
 5. The overall structural organization problem: How do episodes of interaction come into being in the first place, and how are their endings made relevant and consummated (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973)? How does the overall structural organization of an occasion of interaction get progressively shaped over the course of its development, and how does placement in the

overall structure inform the construction and understanding of the talk as turns, as sequences, and so on? Although not all conversation occurs in structured episodes with discrete boundaries, a great deal does, and there is a distinctive organization of practices that shapes their trajectory.

6. One additional premise and principle of CA work needs to be made explicit, and that is the centrality of the single case, and the seriousness with which it is taken in CA work. People talking-in-interaction are the “transformers” who take the general and formal organizations of practice I have been describing and realize them in and through the particulars of the moment—for this speaker, to this recipient or these recipients, with these onlookers, in this place, at this time, at this moment in it, after what has been transpiring, and what has just transpired or *is* transpiring now, given what has just been said or done or is being said or done, with these already-anticipatable possible next developments. Speakers *construct the talk* via the generic organizations of practice as embodied in that moment’s detail, recipients *analyze the talk* via the generic organizations of practice as embodied in that moment’s detail, speakers orient to the *recipients* doing so, and recipients orient to the *speakers* having done so (see Lerner, 2003).

Our task is to describe, as best we can, both the formal general structures of practice, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, their realization—or, better, *in* their realization, in just the details we encounter in the record we have of the interaction. Each occasion of interaction, each moment, was *the* reality for those participants; they had to *make sense* of it—in both senses of “making sense:” *creating* the sense and *grasping* the sense—they had to *make sense* of it in that moment, singularly, not comparatively. Each of those moments has, therefore, to be analyzed in its own terms before being absorbed into a corpus of instances. A corpus is for us, then, not an aggregate of data *to be analyzed*, but an aggregate of data that *have been analyzed*, each in its own terms, the convergence of which yields us our best formulation of the general and formal organization of practices that we put forward.³

In adding to the “what”-ness of “uh” and “uhm” (the “*composition*” element) a “where”-ness or *positional* element, we need to go beyond syntactic structure and speech-production processes; it turns out that the conversationally *sequential* is inescapably *consequential* for understanding what “uh” and “uhm” are being used to do, both by co-participants and by investigators. This should not be a surprise. Clark and Fox Tree (2002), after all, proposed that “uh(m)” is a word, indeed an announcement, and a way of communicating. Virtually all words and

³On assembling a conversation-analytic corpus cf. Schegloff, 1996a, pp. 176–181; Schegloff, 1997, pp. 501–502.

other ways of communicating vary in import across different positions. The news here is that the loci that matter to the import of “uh(m)” extend beyond the sentence, and their import varies when examined by reference to this greater scope of loci.

The best way to support this claim is to examine some data, so I turn next to several uses of “uh” and “uhm,” each in its sequential and interactional context. The data base for the text that follows is drawn from some 15 conversations involving some 35 different participants amounting to about 2½ hr of talk. The conversations vary from 2 to 5 participants. In choosing the data for *presentation*, I have tilted toward telephone conversations over co-present ones, largely to avoid the presentational problems posed by video data. I have not, however, done so in my *preparation* of the analysis, and have no reason to believe that the matters to be discussed would come out differently were we to focus more on video data of co-present interaction.

THE TURN AND TCU AS THE LOCUS OF REPAIR-IMPLICATED “UH” AND “UHM”

We begin with “uh”s and “uhm”s that appear straightforwardly implicated in repair—not least of all because these are most likely to be already familiar to the readership of this journal, whether from psycholinguistic work like that of Pim Levelt in 1983 and of Herb Clark and Jean Fox Tree in 2002, or from the earliest CA papers on repair (Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1979b; Schegloff et al., 1977). We initially treated “uh(m)” as, in effect, the way in which same-turn repair by the speaker of a turn-in-progress gets initiated if it is initiated while no sound is being produced, but “uh(m)” can also appear elsewhere in the repair segment than as its initiation. Extracts (01) to (03) were selected to exemplify three distinct repair operations—search, replacement, and whole TCU abandonment in favor of another.

In Extract (01), the “uh(m)” comes after a cutoff on “a-” on line 8 (the cutoff—a stop of some sort, glottal or dental, is marked by a dash or hyphen); in Extract (02), at line 8, it comes after cutoffs in two different tries—first after the “n-” in what seems designed to have been “Tuesday n-[ight],” and then changed to “la-[st night].” In Extract (03), Jon is in the process of saying, “San Clemente is always,” but abandons it before completion and produces a different TCU in its place—the shift from the former to the latter being initiated by “uh” at line 5⁴:

⁴Digitized files for data extracts are available at my Web site: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/schegloff/>

(01) Search: TG, 01

- 00 ((ring))
 01 Ava: H'lo:?
 02 Bee: hHi,
 03 Ava: Hi:?
 04 Bee: hHowuh you:?
 05 Ava: Oka:::y?hh=
 06 Bee: =Good.=Yihs[ou:nd] hh
 07 Ava: [<I wan]'dih know if yih got
 08 -> a-**uh**:m wutchimicawllit. A.: pah(hh)khing
 09 place °th's mornin'.hh
 10 Bee: A pa:rking place,
 11 Ava: Mm hm,

(02) Replacement: Chicken Dinner, 39

- 01 Nan: () fr'm ↑work you called im?↑
 02 (0.3)
 03 Shn: No: ah wz at lunch
 04 (.)
 05 Nan: Uh huh,
 06 Shn: I been (0.6) I- ruh- r'member I
 07 calledju up the other night (.)
 08 -> Toosday n-**uh** la- uh: ↑las'~night
 09 (0.2) I called you up. From work?
 10 en I wz on the'phone f'r a long ti:me?
 11 (0.5) Muh boss says ju know (1.2) watch
 12 those: (.) pers'nal phone cal[ls
 13 Viv: [uhh!
 14 Mik: Oh did'e? Yeah,

(03) TCU abandonment: NB I.1, 7

- 01 Guy: Ah'll see if I c'n t. hhh (0.6) route
 02 sump'n up Ah'll call yih back inna few
 03 minutes.
 04 Jon:-> Awright San Cle↑mente iss: always **uh** ah
 05 know darn well yih g'n get on the:re.

As it happens, none of these “uh(m)”s are followed by the delays that play such a central role in the Clark and Fox Tree (2002) account, so Extracts (04) through (06) display three instances in which the “uh(m)”s are followed by delay—including instances of the same three repair operations:

(04) Search: Joyce & Stan, 5

- 01 Joy: Why don'tchoo: go into Westwoo:d, (0.4) and
 02 go to Bullocks.
 03 (1.2)
 04 Sta:-> Bullocks, ya mean that one right u:m (1.1) tch! (.)
 05 -> right by thee: u:m (.) whazit the Plaza? theatre;
 06 Joy: Uh huh,
 07 (0.4)

(05) Replacement: Stalled

- 01 Don: A:nd.hh
 02 (0.2)
 03 Don: I don' know if it's po:ssible, but { 'hhh }/(0.2)
 04 see I haveta open up the bank.hh
 05 (0.3)
 06 Don:-> a:t uh: (·) in Brentwood?hh=
 07 Mar: =Yeah:- en I know you want- (·) en I whoa- (·)
 08 en I would, but- except I've gotta leave in
 09 aybout five min(h)utes.[(hheh)

(06) TCU abandonment: SN-4, 08

- 01 She: Who ws the girl that was outside (his door_i)
 02 (0.8)
 03 Mar: Debbie.
 04 (0.8)
 05 She: Who's Debbie.
 06 Mar: (Katz.)
 07 (0.7)
 08 Mar:-> She's jus' that girl thet: uh:, (0.2)
 09 -> 'hh I met her through uh:m::, (1.0)
 10 -> I met 'er in Westwood.=I (caught that-) (·)
 11 'Member I wenttuh see the premie:r of (0.3)
 12 Lost Horizon_i

Both sets of three are designed to show that “uh(m)” can be implicated in a variety of repair operations; in the interests of space, explication is limited to the first three exemplars. Extract (01) involves a *search*—for “a parking place.” Uh(m) might appear to be specially suited to searches (as I once believed), but Extract (02) features a *replacement*—replacing the incipient “Tuesday night” with “last night.” Extract (03) involves a replacement not of some *component* of a TCU (not a word or a phrase as in Extract (02)), but abandonment of a whole

TCU in favor of another. In Extract (03), Jon and Guy are deciding where to play golf; Guy is about to call one golf club, when Jon reassures him about the availability of another. He gets as far as “San Clemente is always” when he apparently thinks the better of saying whatever he was about to say about San Clemente, and replaces it with a whole new TCU—“I know darn well you can get on there.” I leave it to the reader to locate the same operations and “uh(m)”s in Extracts (04) through (06), at the lines indicated by the arrows.

So, we have begun on what I trust is familiar ground—at least for many readers. All of these “uh(m)”s occur somewhere in the course of dealing with some trouble in what has just been said or with something planned—and perhaps projected—to be said just up ahead, in that TCU, in that turn. The “uh(m)”s are positioned by reference not to trouble *per se*, but with reference to the practices for *dealing* with trouble, which is to say they are positioned by reference to the organization of *repair* and the various operations that get used to deal with trouble, and they are positioned either as *initiations* of the repair segment or as later components in it—all within the TCU. Finally, they can be followed by silence or other delay . . . or not.

THE SEQUENCE AS A LOCUS FOR SOME PRACTICES OF “UH(M)”

The preceding section described a deployment of “uh(m)” by reference to the organization of turns and TCUs. Here we take up several accounts of “uh(m)” positioned by reference to the unit “a sequence,” where it also has something to do with “trouble,” but a very different sense of trouble than figures in other prevalent accounts. As these practices are treated at greater length elsewhere, discussion here is limited to a single exemplar of each practice with a very few paragraphs of analysis and explication.

(Re-)Exiting a Sequence

The first of these is a use of “uh/m” as a resource for exiting—or more commonly *re-exiting*—a sequence. In this usage, “uh/m” appears in conjunction with a conjunction—“And uh(m),” “But uh(m),” or “So uh(m)” —only one of which can be taken up here.⁵ Unlike the previously encountered “uh(m)”s, these appear to *require* at least a bit of silence following them to do their work, but this silence is not itself the trouble or its tacit harbinger; absent the silence, the work of these little constructions is more problematic.

⁵For a more extended discussion, see Schegloff (2009).

In Extract (07), Marsha and Tony are a separated or divorced couple, she living in southern California, he in northern California. Their teenaged son, Joey, lives with his father, but has just spent a long weekend with his mother in the south, and was to return to his father on that day. Tony has called, and Marsha has asked if Joey has reached home (line 07), only to have Tony ask when Joey left (line 8). It dawns on Marsha that no one has told Tony about a change in the travel arrangements (lines 10–11), and she then launches into a telling of “what happened.” When Tony intervenes (lines 22–23) to ask about the fate of the car, Marsha brushes the question aside with a one-word answer to continue the telling (lines 24–41):

(07) Marsha & Tony

- 00 ((ring))
 01 Mar: Hello:?
 02 Ton: Hi: Marsha?
 03 Mar: Ye:ah.
 04 Ton: How are you.
 05 Mar: Fi::ne.
 06 (0.2)
 07 Mar: Did Joey get home yet?
 08 Ton:-> Well I wz wondering when 'e left.
 09 (0.2)
 10 Mar: 'hhh Uh:(d) did Oh: .h Yer not in on what
 11 ha:ppen'.(hh)(d)
 12 Ton: No(h)o=
 13 Mar: =He's flying.
 14 (0.2)
 15 Mar: En Ilene is going to meet im:.Becuz the to:p
 16 wz ripped off'v iz car which is tih say
 17 someb'ddy helped th'msels.
 19 Ton: Stolen.
 20 (0.4)
 21 Mar: Stolen.=Right out in front of my house.
 22 Ton: Oh: f'r crying out loud,=en eez not g'nna eez
 23 not g'nna bring it ba:ck?
 24 Mar: 'hh No so it's parked in the g'rage cz it wz
 25 so damn co:ld. An' ez a >matter fact< snowing
 26 on the Ridge Route.
 27 (0.3)
 28 Mar: 'hhh So I took him to the airport he couldn'
 29 buy a ticket.

- 30 (·)
 31 Mar: 'hhhh Bee- he c'd only get on standby.
 32 (0.3)
 33 Ton: Uh hu:h,
 34 Mar:-> [En I left him there et about:t noo:n.
 35 (0.3)
 36 Ton: Ah ha:h.
 37 (0.2)
 38 Mar:-> **Ayund uh,h**
 39 (0.2)
 40 Ton: W't's 'e g'nna do go down en pick it up
 41 later? Er somethin like . . .

The telling comes to a recognizable end at line 34. It is “recognizable” because (a) that installment of the telling reports the end of Marsha’s contact with Joey, which is the basis for her telling; and (b) that installment includes a word from the start of the telling; specifically, the word “left” from Tony’s inquiry that prompted it (at line 8)—one common practice for showing possible completion (Schegloff, 1998, 2005). So, Marsha means to be finished here, but Tony responds with another “continuer” (at line 36)—an interpolation by which a recipient displays an understanding that a multi-unit turn is under construction and has not yet been brought to completion (Schegloff, 1982). Marsha has tried to exit the telling; Tony has replied with an utterance that underwrites its continuation. At line 38, Marsha produces an “And uh,” waits about two-tenths of a second, and Tony takes over the floor to pursue his earlier inquiry about the car, which had been given short shrift on its earlier asking. This is a model of the effective use of [“and uh(m)” + silence] as a practice for re-exiting a sequence that one participant has tried, or is trying, to exit.

To sum up the elements of this practice, all of which appear to be necessary for the efficacy of its deployment: (a) analyzable and recognizable displays of designed closure (whether via the repeat of earlier words examined here or via other such practices) followed by an extension of the talk; (b) a conjunction projecting possible further talk in a determinate relation with what has preceded (as “and” for addition or extension, “but” for contrast, or “so” for entailment or upshot); (c) an immediately following “uh(m),” followed by (d) silence, where the talk that has been projected by the conjunction would have occurred by the canon of progressivity embodied in the preceding talk. It is this package that serves to (re-)enact the speakers’ commitment to exit the extended turn or sequence. This appears to be an “uh(m)” quite different from those implicated in same-turn repair, and the silences following such “uh(m)”s figure quite differently in this environment as well; rather than “announcing a delay in speaking”

(Clark & Fox Tree, 2002), they embody a stance that there is to be no further talking by their speaker in this turn-at-talk.

Dispreferred First Pair Part (FPP) and Second Pair Part (SPP)⁶

Just as the turn has a fundamental resource from which it is constructed—which we un-surprisingly call a TCU—so does the sequence. It is the adjacency pair. In its basic, minimal form, it is composed of two turns, by different speakers, adjacently placed (i.e., in consecutive turns); the first implementing, on its occurrence, a recognizable initiating action and the second, a recognizably responding one, with the two being recognizably from the same sequence type: offer and acceptance or rejection, request and granting or rejection, invitation and acceptance or declining, complaint and remedy or offer of remedy or co-complaint or sympathy expression or rejection, greeting–greeting, compliment and appreciation or rejection or displacement or reciprocal, and so forth. A particularly common one is question and answer (Q/A) because many of the other sequence types often get packaged in Q/A formats. These two-turn sequences can get expanded in all the logically possible places—before the FPP (“pre-expansion”), between the FPP and the SPP (“insert expansion”), and after the SPP (“post expansion”).

We need to share two more features of adjacency pair-based sequences to get on with our topic—and that is what we term *preference* and *dispreference*. When presenting common sequence types as examples of adjacency pairs in the preceding paragraph, most were composed of one FPP and several SPPs. Those several SPPs are not equivalent or equi-valent alternatives. Some are what we call *preferred*, others *dispreferred*. The terms preference and dispreference here do not refer to what the parties’ psychological dispositions are. Rather, they refer to structural features of the actions and their relation to one another. Therefore, a preferred SPP is one that advances the course of action that the FPP launched—grants the request, accepts the offer or invitation, remedies the complaint, and the like. The dispreferred ones are the ones that do not advance that course of action, but block it or in some other way interfere with its realization. A particularly common exemplar of this structure is the so-called “yes–no question”; the design of such questions regularly displays an orientation to either a positive or negative reply or an answer that is in accord with what display is preferred; if not, it is dispreferred.

Dispreferred SPPs. Preferred and dispreferred SPPs are routinely delivered in different ways by their speakers; here, I can mention only one of

⁶The first four paragraphs of this section present a minimal description of sequence organization, presented in considerably greater detail in Schegloff (2007b, especially chap. 5, pp. 58–96).

these differences (for a more extensive treatment, see Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1973/1987; Schegloff, 2007b, pp. 58–96). Preferred SPPs are generally delivered not only in the next turn after their FPP, but contiguously—that is, with no locutions or other delays between the end of the FPP in one turn and the start of the SPP in the next turn. Dispreferred SPPs are characteristically delivered *non*-contiguously—if not with whole TCUs or even sequences intervening before the SPP, then with silence or something other than a SPP intervening between the FPP and the SPP. One common instrument of intervention in this environment is “uh(m).”

In Extract (08), Stan, who participates in efforts to register citizens to vote in elections, is checking out his sister’s status in this regard:

(08) Joyce & Stan 2:23-36

- 01 Sta: [Are you registered at your new address?
 02 (0.4)
 03 Joy: No:..
 04 (0.6)
 05 Sta: You wanna be registered there? er at nine[two five oh=
 06 Joy: [N-
 07 Sta: =([)
 08 Joy: [No becuz I’m probly moving in June:..
 09 (0.4)
 10 Sta: O:kay, yeah that’s go[od.
 11 Joy: [Yihknow, an’ then I’ll
 12 just have [to:
 13 Sta: [Any changes of uh: party affiliation
 14 er °>anythin like tha(t)?<
 15 Joy:-> **Uh:** *not at this moment.* (u)When do I haftih:
 16 tell you by_i

The question (and pre-offer) at lines 13 to 14 is the fourth in a series of inquiries in apparent pursuit of “business,” for which Joyce’s response is dispreferred in that it does not provide for any business, and it is delivered *as* a dispreferred response by the delay in saying it—the delay being implemented by an “uh.”

Extract (09) is a straightforward question of fact in yes–no question format—a sequence type whose default is for agreement as the preferred response, and disagreement as the dispreferred response:

(09) Chicken Dinner 18:18-27

- 01 Nan: He’s he’s there every night Vic
 02 (0.4)

- 03 Mic: Mm hm?
 04 (1.2)
 05 Sha: °Yeah°
 06 Mic: Izzat iz w:ife'oo (.) works there sometimes too?
 07 Sha:-> Uh: *no it's no:t*. It's[another girl.=
 08 Mic: [(No.)
 09 Sha: =I'ven't seen her.
 10 (.)
 11 Sha: Ah'v never seen that girl.
 (0.3)

Here, the question at line 6 is getting a dispreferred response at line 7, and it is delayed relative to its FPP by a turn-initial “uh.” So, this is yet another type of “uh(m)” — marking a dispreferred SPP in an adjacency pair-based sequence.

Several paragraphs ago I said that we needed to share *two* more features of adjacency pair-based sequences to get on with our topic. The first was the preference structuring of alternative SPPs in relation to the FPPs to which they were responding. We turn next to the other one.

Dispreferred FPPs. Although on a much smaller scale, it turns out that there can be a preference structure as between alternative sequence types in carrying out some project, and that means preferred and dispreferred FPPs. Only one such preference pairing can be taken up here. It is that, as between my requesting something and your offering it, the preference is for your offering, if possible. One consequence is that requests are quite commonly treated as dispreferred actions.

We saw in Extracts (08) and (09) that dispreferred SPPs were regularly delayed relative to the FPP to which they were responding. Can the same be seen in dispreferred FPPs? If so, relative to what are they delayed? Extract (10) provides an answer.

In Extract (10), Stan has been asking his sister Joyce's advice on where to shop for some sandals and a hat; and at lines 1 and 2, he is proposing to bring that part of the conversation (and perhaps the conversation as a whole) to an end—a proposal with which Joyce aligns herself at line 3:

(10) Joyce & Stan 7:32-8:18

- 01 Sta: [hhhh We:ll okay: at's about all I wannid tuh
 02 (0.7) bug you with. (tod[ay)
 03 Joy: [uhhahhahh 'hh Okay Stan:,
 04 Sta: So are ↑you okay?
 05 Joy: -> Yeah, (0.4) um: (0.2) whatta ya doing like: s: late
 06 Saturday afternoo:n.=

- 07 Sta: =‘h h h h h Well late Sa- I pra- a friend a’ mine just
 08 called me a little while ago: an’ he: uh: (0.7) he
 09 wannid’a do something. <so I said well:, it’s a ()
 10 Saturday night why don’t we go: uh: you know (le’s:)
 11 catch a movie: er: ge[t something to ea:t er: ballgame=
 12 Joy: [Mm
 13 Sta: = >er somethin’ like tha[t< h h h h but S:aturday=
 14 Joy: [°Mm
 15 Sta: =a:fternoon if it’s not too: la:te I don’t
 16 think [I ()
 17 Joy: [No it’ll it’ll be like six.o’clock.
 18 Sta: Oh: why what’s happening?
 19 Joy: Because I’m going down to San Diego.
 20 (0.3)
 21 Joy: An’ I’m gonneh- fly:.
 22 (.)
 23 Joy: And so I need somebody’ta drive me to the airport.

At line 4, Stan does a pre-closing *pro forma* inquiry about Joyce’s well-being, which Joyce confirms, but with a prosodic contour that conveys that she is not finished with talking in this turn space. She lets about $\frac{1}{2}$ s of silence pass, then an “um:” and a briefer silence, and then a question (at lines 5–6): “whatta ya doing like: s: late Saturday afternoo:n.” This, of course, is not simply a question; it is a pre-expansion of some sort. Indeed it is, as can eventually be seen at lines 19 to 23—it is a barely veiled request. As was noted earlier, requests are dispreferred FPPs, and we should now be able to see that the “um” at line 5 was deployed not by reference to the question that it precedes, but by reference to the larger sequence in which that question has been deployed by its speaker as a pre-expansion—a request sequence of which this “um” is an early harbinger, and which—as a dispreferred FPP—it serves to delay.

Therefore, the answer to the question posed several paragraphs ago is, “Yes;”—the same can be seen in FPPs as we saw in SPPs. And, how is the delay managed? Relative to what? The “uh” marks the start of further talking, and thereby delays the start of further talking; the delay is managed precisely by *starting* with it. As it happens, in Extract (10), there is actually a *further* pause, but in other such sequences, there is not; indeed, the “uh” itself is often extremely brief—a sort of *pro forma* acknowledgment that what the speaker is about to do is dispreferred.

This section of the article has been focused on the sequence organization of actions and has treated three different uses of “uh(m)”—different from one another and different from the “uh”s and “uhm”s previously examined. The *turn*-initial “uh(m)”s following FPPs displayed the incipience of a dispreferred SPP.

A TCU-initial (although not necessarily turn-initial) “uh(m)” that was followed by a FPP could alert an attentive recipient that what was being launched could be a dispreferred sequence. An “uh(m)” preceded by an apparent connector or conjunction and followed by silence serves at the other boundary of the sequence to register a (so-far unsuccessful) move to sequence closure. What discriminates these “uh”s and “uhm”s is not their composition; it is their positioning, and the order of organization that they invite and require a hearer to employ to figure out what they might be doing—namely, a sequence. Ordinarily, of course, the “hearer” is a party to the interaction, but prepared academic overhearers can avail themselves of the same guidance once alerted to how to listen.

THE OVERALL STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION OF THE UNIT: “A SINGLE CONVERSATION”

As was noted earlier, previous work on “uh(m)” has set it in the context of “trouble” in turns at talk-in-interaction—whether approached interactionally or psycholinguistically. In the preceding section, we very briefly examined three deployments of “uh(m)” whose relevant locus is the sequence—its launching (dispreferred FPP), its responding (dispreferred SPP), and its (re-)exiting. In this section, we focus on “uh(m)” as an event to be understood (by interlocutors and, therefore, by disciplined inquiry) by reference *most centrally* to the overall structural organization of the unit, “a single conversation.” In doing so, we find it necessary to analytically locate it by reference to sequence organization, turn organization, repair, and word selection; but the “uh(m)”s we will be examining have in common what they are being used to do *vis-à-vis* the overall structural organization of the conversation. It will, therefore, be useful to expand a bit more than has already been done in the preceding paragraphs about this order of organization.

The name is a long name, but for a fairly simple set of observations. If we ask where greetings occur, we know commonsensically, and can verify empirically, that they come *at the start*—not of turns, and not of sequences, but of occasions of interaction or conversations. Some conversational events are composed of turns and are made up of sequences, but those turns and sequences are positioned by reference to the unit, “a single conversation.” Greetings are not alone in this; “bye bye”s are positioned as ending sequences or terminal exchanges (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), again positioned by reference to the unit a single conversation.

As remarked before, not all conversation occurs in bounded units of this sort, but those that do often involve a purposefully initiated occasion of talk—a call to someone on the phone, a knock on their office door, or the door of a neighbor at home. Conversations started in this way commonly (although not

invariably) have a reason for the contact, and recipients of an initiation of this sort orient to whether, on that occasion, there *is* a reason for the contact and, if so, what it is (Sacks, 1992–1995, Vol. 2; Schegloff, 1967). Initiators of such conversations are, in turn, oriented to their interlocutors' scrutiny. As the data that figure in this analysis are taken (with one exception, at Extract (18)) from telephone calls, I refer from now on to callers and recipients, and to "the reason for the call."

In the United States, land-line phone calls, which are from place to place (unlike cell-phone calls, which are from person to person), have had (before the introduction of "caller ID") a recurrent default or unmarked form for their opening (Schegloff, 1986). The phone's ring and recipient's initial "Hello" constitute a summons–answer sequence, establishing contact and an open channel of communication, and mobilizing reciprocal availability (Schegloff, 1968, 1970/2002, 1970/2004). Two sequences follow—sometimes separate, sometimes intertwined: a greeting sequence and one or more sequences establishing the parties' identities (Schegloff, 1979a, 2007a). Once successfully completed, these are followed by an exchange of "howareyou" sequences (Jefferson, 1980; Sacks, 1975). After the "howareyou" sequences are completed, the interaction has come to what has been termed "the anchor position"—the routine or default place for the caller to give the reason for the call if there is one, or for the call recipient to invite—or at least make room for—the caller to do so.

Of course, many conversations do not follow this course. For example, one or the other of the parties may use a turn in the opening to preemptively launch a topic—the caller indicating its urgency or importance by doing so or the recipient grabbing the initiative that would otherwise be the caller's by doing so; or, a caller may withhold the reason for the call after the exchange of "howareyou"s—they may "owe" the recipient a not-for-a-reason call (Sacks, 1992–1995). Their reason may be a delicate, sensitive, or an otherwise problematic one. All of this is to say that there is a basic form of organization, but there are also resources for the parties to deploy the practices of openings to fashion a particular conversation's start, with this particular interlocutor, on this particular occasion, to accomplish a particular sort of opening; which is to say that, on any given occasion, a call recipient cannot rely on *getting* the reason for the call at a particular moment, nor can the caller rely on having the chance to *deliver* it at a particular place. They will realize this particular opening of this particular conversation turn-by-turn, sequence-by-sequence—needing to analyze what they have just been given by the other, and needing to produce something that the other will be able to analyze in the way its speaker means it to be understood. Of course, in many more formal organizational calls, the openings are co-constructed by the participants to suit—indeed, to *constitute*—the genre; there is no exchange of "howareyou"s, and there may be no greetings or identifications, as in calls to the police or other emergency numbers.

All of this is meant to lead up to the observation that one recurrent deployment of “uh(m)” is to mark the “reason for the call.” Although it occurs someplace in a turn, and someplace in a sequence, these “uh(m)”s are deployed and are, in the first instance, (to be) understood by reference to the overall structural organization of a single conversation. This is also to say that these “uh(m)”s are not announcing delay or trouble, and they give little or no evidence of there being trouble.⁷

“Uh(m)” and the Reason for the Call

The discussion of reason for the call “uh(m)” is divided into three sections. The first two deal with variations in the locus of reason for the call within the overall structural organization in the conversation. The third takes up variations in the sequence-organizational locus of reason-for-the-call “uh(m).” This allows us to discriminate between “reason for the call” and “first topic” as the locus for “uh(m),” in point because, as noted, reason for the call regularly (but not invariably) occurs as first topic, or in first-topic position.

Reason for call at or before anchor position. Extract (11) is a virtually canonical case. Marcia calls Sue; lack of voice recognition suggests that the women do not know each other, although they know *of* each other. They go through mutual identification and greeting sequences (at lines 00–5a), and then reciprocal “howareyou” sequences (at lines 5b–7), which end up with the next turn being for the caller—that being the anchor position for reason for the call (Schegloff, 1986, 116ff.):

(11) Susan & Marcia, 1 (#1)

- 00 ring
 01 Sue: H’llo:
 02 Mar: Hi: ’s Sue there?
 03 Sue: Yeah, this is she;
 04 Mar: Hi this’s Ma:rcia.
 05 Sue: ↑Hi Marcia, how’re you:.=
 06 Mar: =Fine how’re you:;
 07 Sue: =Fi:ne;
 08 Mar:-> **Uh::m**: We got the tickets, [and’a ()] put them in=
 09 Sue: [Oh go:d.]

⁷Not all reasons for the call are marked by “uh(m),” and it is not yet clear what differentiates those that are so marked from those that are not. The absence of “uh(m)” does not preclude a turn appropriately positioned and composed from being taken as the reason for the call; its presence in the positions described in the text makes it a strong candidate for being so understood by interlocutors.

- 10 Mar: =envelopes:: >y'know with everybuddy's name on em< =
 11 =(in-)/(en-) a- big manim- manila envelope is hangin on
 12 thee uh {hhh/(0.8)} Phraterian bulletin board.=
 13 Sue: =Oh: that's great.
 14 (·)
 15 Mar: So they'll be there by s- y'know before
 16 noon tomorrow we'll gettum up there.
 17 Sue: O:kay, that sounds goo:[d.
 18 Mar: [Okay:?
 19 Sue: ↑Okay, thanks so mu:ch.
 20 Mar: Okay. Buh bye.
 21 Sue: Bye.

There it is at line 08, launched with an “uhm,” which gives no indication here of uncertainty, reluctance, hesitation, trouble, or the like. She is reporting success in the completion of some assigned task, to appreciative uptake by her recipient. Everything is in order, and the call is over, 26 s after it began.

Extract (12) is taken from a conversation between two members of a self-help network of young women seeking employment in the Hollywood film industry. Fran has called Charlene with information about a rumor of a possible job opening; Charlene has put the phone down for a moment after the opening exchange:

(12) Brun-Cottan, Tape IV #1 (Ch. 4:43, & n.7) (#22)

- 01 (12.0)
 02 Fra: You there?
 03 Cha: Hi I'm here.=
 04 Fra: =O[kay.
 05 Cha: [I went to get my coffee.
 06 Fra:-> **Ah::mm** George Litto is not looking.
 07 Cha: He isn't looking=
 08 Fra: =N::o.
 09 Cha: Okay.

As soon as resumption of the call has been established and checked out (lines 2–5), Fran goes straight to the news that has prompted her call—and marks it with a turn-initial “uhm.”

In Extract (13), Guy has called John about the possibility of playing golf. John's wife has called him to the phone (data not shown), and the two men go through the usual opening sequences (lines 1–7), here elaborated (at lines 8–12) by a tongue-in-cheek exchange of appreciations of one another's appearance (to which they have no access):

(13) NB I.1, 1 (#37)

- 01 Jon: Hello:?
 02 Guy: Johnny?
 03 Jon: Ye:h.
 04 Guy: Guy Detweiler.
 05 Jon: Hi Guy how you doin.=
 06 Guy: =Fine.
 07 (.)
 08 Jon: Yer lookin [goo:d,
 09 (G): [(.hhh)
 10 Guy: ↑Grea:t.hhhSo`r you:hh-hh °Grea:t. Gotta° nice smile on
 11 yer face [ˈn ɛrri] th'ng.
 12 Jon: [°()°] ↓Ye-ah.hh
 13 Guy:-> .hh.hh.hhh ↑Hey uh,hhwhhkh My ↑son`u.`law's down`n:d
 14 uh:↓::,hh thought w'might play a li'l golf:: ↓eether this
 15 af`ernoon er duhmoruh wouldju like tuh [(0.3).hhh (0.3)]
 16 git out? uhh
 17 (.)
 18 Jon: Well this af`noon'd be alright but I don't think ah'd
 19 better to↑morrow,

Then (at lines 13–16), Guy describes the planned golfing outing and invites John's participation, and marks this as the reason for the call with his “uh” at line 13.⁸

Much the same marking of the reason for the call can be observed in data from institutional or work contexts as well (cf. Zimmerman, 1984, 1992; among others). In such contexts, however, the opening sections of the conversation commonly omit exchanges of greetings, of mutual identifications, and of “howaryou”s. In the several calls to several different police emergency numbers (in the 1960s, before the installation of 911 services) presented here, these three sequence types are not included in the conversation, which accordingly comes to its anchor position after the police self-identification:

(14) CPD, 39

- 01 Dis: Radio, Hubbell,
 02 (0,8)

⁸Some might propose that the “uh” is placed before the main business of the call, not before the reason for the call, which was absent. In conversation-analytic treatment of the overall structural organization of the unit, “a single conversation,” however, the reason for the call is what is presented by the initiator of the contact as its main business; the point in this section of the article is that “uh(m)” is one resource—indeed, is one practice—for doing this “presenting.”

03 Cal:-> **Uh**, send a s- an ambulance to uh fifteen oh four
 04 Ferry Street. A kid hit by a car.
 05 Dis: Fifteen oh four Fer[ry
 06 Cal: [Yes, that's between King and uh
 07 Eighth. On Ferry.

(15) CPD, 19 (#34)

01 Dis: Radio?
 02 Cal:-> **Uh** could you send an emergency squad out to
 03 fourteen sixty one east Mound street please,
 04 (0.8)
 05 Acl: Right away,
 06 Dis: What's th' problem,
 07 Cal: Uh the girl- a girl cut herself up.
 08 (0.4)
 09 Cal: She's blee::din to death.
 10 (0.8)
 11 Dis: How'd she cut herself.
 12 Cal: Uh she de- tried to commit suicide.
 13 Dis: Mm hmm. (1.2) Alright we'll be out,
 14 Cal: Ok, g'bye..

When the callers deliver their reason for the call, they routinely (although not invariably) launch it with a turn-initial "uh," as in Extracts (14) and (15). When callers do self-identify, that self-identification is marked not as an opening "identification sequence," but as part of the reason for the call by beginning with the reason-for-the-call "uh," as in Extract (16):

(16) IPD ND, 2 (#30)

01 Dis: P'lice Desk,
 02 Cal:-> 'hhh **uh:m**, this is Evelyn Grinsby I live at seventeen
 03 eleven east Ohio, and this's trick-or-treat night
 04 y'know, an' 'hh[hh there's a-
 05 Dis: [Oh is that right!
 06 Cal: Yea:h. [An' there's a man up here on the corner of=
 07 Dis: [(hhh)
 08 Cal: =Ohia-I mean of-yeah, Ohia, an' Walcott. An'
 09 th'p'lice've been out here two or three times,='n
 10 he's got an ol' uh white- black an' white Boston
 11 bull dog, 'n that thing is mean. 'hhh an' uh I
 12 wuh-had my little girl wz out trick'n'treatin' 'n
 13 one of them dropped (a)/(her) sack, j's-right there

- 14 on the corner? (0.5) The corner on the edge of the
 15 yard? an' when she started to pick up her stuff to
 16 put back in the sack, that blame dog grabbed her, an'
 17 'hhh tore a great big (place) of meat off her hand.
 18 (0.5)
 19 Dis: Oo:-o:~oh. Where are you?

Finally, in this initial display of the use of “uh” and “uhm” to mark the reason for the call, consider Extract (17)—another call to a police department in the early 1960s in the American Midwest:

(17) IPD ND, 1 (#29)

- 01 Dis: P'lice Desk,
 02 Cal:-> **Uh**, could you *uh* go to *uh* leven twenny five Broadway,
 03 Opr: Yes, please,
 04 Dis: We're talking operator, go ahead sir,
 05 Cal:-> **Uh** could you go to leven twenny five Broadway
 06 Apartment five, and uh tell the lady that answers
 07 the door that uh (1.4) this is uh her husband
 08 (uh)/(en) (0.5) he's been uh,(0.2) I've been picked
 09 up by the state police, (0.2) no tail lights on the
 10 truck, (1.5) and uh (0.8) be home late. Wouldja-couldja
 11 give 'er that message?
 12 Dis: Where are you now.

The police dispatcher answers and, as we have seen to be common in these calls, the caller starts right in with his business. Note that at line 2 there are three “uh”s—the first in boldface, the other two in italics. As it happens, the switchboard operator breaks in and interrupts the call (line 3), and the dispatcher dismisses her and asks the man to go on (line 4). The caller now repeats his turn at line 2 at line 5 (and continues). Note, then, that the two intra-turn “uh”s at line 2—apparently repair-implicated—are now gone on the second saying, apparently dispensable (Schegloff, 2004), but the turn-initial “uh”—the one marking the reason for the call—is treated differently and is retained in the repeat. It marks not “trouble,” but “reason for the call,” and that is part of what is to be repeated.⁹

⁹It is worth mentioning here convergent evidence from a different institutional setting, operating on a different aspect of talk-in-interaction, but also organized by reference to reason for the call. Couper-Kuhlen (2001) examined data from radio call-in shows—a special, institutional setting with its own mandates about what should and should not occur in the openings. She showed that high-pitch onset is a feature of talk being offered by callers as the reason for the call, with other modes of delivery being employed otherwise.

Before closing this section, I offer for examination one exemplar of its phenomenon drawn from co-present interaction, as at least token evidence that what is being described here is not telephone-specific. Four “senior citizens” who live in a “retirement home”—Betty, Hank, Rich, and Tom—are sitting and having afternoon coffee and chatting. In the course of their conversation, their table is approached by another “resident” of the home—Bonnie—and an interaction lasting about 75 s transpires (starting at line 07), after which Bonnie leaves and the other four continue their chat. Here is how it begins:

(18) Coffee Chat 12:10-13:11

- 01 Tom: But um (0.7) what's ↑worse iz we got
 02 Tom: poli↑ticians[es thet do(h)n't kno(h)w(h)=
 03 ???: [(heh)(heh)(heh)
 04 Tom: =what* th'ey're do[ing.]=
 05 Bet: [(Me an uh)]=
 06 Tom: =[.hh heh heh .hh
 07 Bon: =[Innerrupt yuh for uh minute.
 08 (0.3)
 09 Tom: [.hh
 10 Bon:-> [U:m (.) Bill (.) Davis wanted me to draw a
 11 picture of his do:g. Of his son's dog for 'im,
 12 (.)
 13 Bon: So he could send it lto him for uh ca:rd,
 14 ((Card to Rich--->))
 15 (0.4)
 16 Rich: ↑EY:↓[_:::=hh
 17 Bon: [So
 18 Bon: ([)
 19 Rich: [D=↑jou drew ↑that?
 20 Bon: Ye:ah:.
 21 (.)
 22 Tom: [Oh: that's ↑Beauti°ful.°]
 23 Bet: [Let me see it. Let me see how] good a drawer
 24 she is_ O[h that's very ni(c)e. ↑Very ↑n[ice.
 25 Ric: [Th-This lady: [This
 26 [lady iz u]hm
 27 Bon: [I's uh DOG,]
 28 Bet: Yes SIR,
 29 (.)
 30 Bon: You can tell it's uh Do:g hu[h?
 31 Bet: ((#-reading)) [#Hey Matt_wanna go

- 32 for a walk?#
 33 Bet: <I like [it*? h=heh heh heh heh [heh h[eh hih
 34 Bon: [h=heh heh (heh) heh [
 35 Ric: [h e [h heh
 36 Bon: [That's what
 37 he wa(h)nted on 'ere, s[o he got (it.)
 38 Ric: [Th[at's pretty ↑go]od.
 39 Bet: [I like it.]
 40 Ric: YEAH:.

That much of the exchange lasts about 30 s; it continues for another 45 s, talking about their respective pets and how much they miss them, and then Bonnie is gone. After Bonnie's opening “interruption” at line (07)—which is *not* “uh(m)”—marked—she delivers (at line 10) the reason for her doing so—her “reason for the contact”—which *is* “U:m”-marked.

Reason for call with “uh(m)” delayed by expansion in opening. Although it is common for the sequences that compose an ordinary opening to run off one after the other in what can appear to be a mere ritual, the sequences operate to allow one or another party to preempt the opportunity to launch a sequence or topic before the anchor position, and before their interlocutor does so (Schegloff, 1986). When one or both of the parties exploit these opportunities, the opening section can get substantially expanded, deferring the anchor position until later in the call (or, on occasion, preempting it altogether). In such circumstances, marking the reason for the call with “uh(m)” is less obviously redundant with its being “first topic,” or with the positioning of the sequence in anchor position because of the deferral of the anchor position, as can be seen in the several exemplars that follow.

Extract (19) is taken from one of a number of calls Alan is making to invite people to a surprise birthday party for a mutual friend. In this call, before he has a chance to introduce his reason for the call, Mary preemptively launches a first topic that gets talked about for more than 1 min (a bit over 2 pages of transcript), which ends at lines 1 through 12:

(19) Kamunsky 3, 3 (#17)

- 01 Ala: So. I don't know if Bruce is all- Bruce, (·)'s gonna
 02 talk t'Marcie anymore he doesn' wanna even see 'er
 03 anymore.
 04 (0.6)
 05 Mry: Whell at's good, [et least it's (o:[:fen.)
 06 Ala: [So 'e [
 07 Ala: [eeYeah. Fin'lly.=

- 08 Ala: =At[s w ' t I-]
 09 Mry: [(Close) the]su₂bject,
 10 Ala: Th's w't hhIhh tol'm I go "It's ab(h)out t(h)i:me."
 11 Yihkno[w].
 12 Mry: [Go:::[:::[: d]
 13 Ala:-> [hhh[Ok]ay Well the reason I'm calling=
 14 Ala: =There[is a reason b'hind my madness.
 15 Mry: [°().
 16 Mry: Uh-huh,
 17 Ala:-> **Uh** nex'Saturday night's a s'prize party here fer p-
 18 Kevin.
 19 (0.2)
 20 Ala: 'p! End if you c'n make it.
 21 Mry: OH RILLY::: =
 22 Ala: =Yeah.
 23 Mry: Izzit iz bir'da:y?
 24 Ala: e-hyihh-hih- No:: we're j(h)is(h)g(h)iving to 'm-
 25 'hhhhh suhprize birthday p(h)arty fer the
 26 h(h)el[I'v it.] =
 27 Mry: [O H : ,].=

After closure of the preemptive first topic, Alan literally announces he is about to launch the reason for the call (lines 13–14), and then does so—complete with a turn-initial “uh” (line 17).

Extract (20) includes an even longer expansion of material introduced as part of the conversation's opening, and in this instance initiated by the caller (not the call recipient, as in Extract 19); there is, then, a first-topic sequence launched by caller and sustained for quite a long time, but brought off as *not* the reason for the call—a feature that *is* marked at line 27 (and note that it shows that reason-for-the-call launching need not be in turn-initial position in its turn):

(20) Wong, 1984 (Li Hui Ying) (#23) * is NNS

- 01 5 rings
 02 *Hui: Hello.
 03 Jan: Tch hi is Li Hui Ying there please?
 04 (0.2)
 05 Hui: Uh-yeah::
 06 Jan: Li Hui- this is Joan Wright.
 07 (0.4)
 08 Hui: Oh::: oh: Joan::]
 09 Jan: [e(h)hih-(h)hih] 'h Hi howare you.
 10 (0.2)

- 11 Hui: Oh:: (0.2) hen hao ((Mandarin -> English= “very good.”))
 12 Jan: ‘hh I: tried tuh leave you two:: notes tuhday jus
 13 tuh try(h) duh(h) git your phone number (h)[hih-hih=
 14 Hui: [Yeah
 15 Jan: =‘h I left you one an’ uh [(0.2) ‘h TESL department an’ one-
 16 Hui: [Yeah
 17 Hui: Well jus uh two hours ago I went to::
 18 Jan: (h)hih-huh-[huh-huh
 19 Hui: [uh:: Harry’s office
 20 Jan: Oh really!
 21 (0.2)
 22 Hui: Yeah.
 23 (0.3)
 24 Jan: Oh::
 25 (0.5)
 26 .
 27 -> . ((eight pages (166 lines) of developments out of the opening))
 28 .
 29 Jan:-> ... been very nice. ‘hh **um::** I’d- I wannid tuh ask you I’m
 30 takin’ ‘hh a course this quartuh with um Professor Brown?
 31 Two twenty K?
 32 (0.3)
 33 Hui: Yes.

After closing this extended sequence with an assessment (at line 29), Joan’s TCU-initial “um” alerts the recipient to the possible ensuing start of a new sequence as the reason for the call (and the “I wanted to ask you” without a complement projects the possibility that the reason for the call is a request).

Although Extract (21) may seem quite different on the face of it, it allows us to widen the horizon of what can properly be understood by participants as “reason for the call.” The call is answered by Stan, not the person (it turns out) that Jack had called to speak with; the phrase “Jack had called to speak with” formulates in a more general way his reason for the call. Rather than simply entering a so-called “switchboard request” to speak with his intended interlocutor (referred to at line 28 as “the guy”), Jack engages Stan in a brief episode of light banter that goes beyond the sequence types that ordinarily compose the opening. When one of these has been brought to recognizable completion, Jack asks to speak to “the guy”—the reason for his call—and the request is marked with turn-initial “uhm”:

(21) Two Guys, 1 (#13)

01 (ring)

- 02 (0.5)
 03 Jac: 's the tape movin'?'
 04 (1.0)
 05 Bil: °Mm ^hm°
 06 (0.5)
 07 Sta: Hello::,=
 08 Jac: =.hh ^Hi there:.
 09 Sta: [> Hello < ?]
 10 Jac: [This is Jack.]hh
 11 Sta: \$Hi: Ja:ck.\$
 12 Jac: How're the bo:xes,hh=
 13 Sta: =He::y we're assemblin' he^re h
 14 Jac: He:y it sounds that way.Sounds like a real factory.
 15 Sta: ^Ye:s. It is a factory.
 16 (0.4)
 17 Jac: Who's there.
 18 Sta: .hh uh:: (. Leo:?h an' Lore:n?h an' Ro:n?h an' Cindy:.
 19 (0.3)
 20 Sta: An' Ca:thy is expected.
 21 (1.0)
 22 Jac: Er: as opposed to expecting.
 23 (.)
 24 Sta: Hm: I don't think she's expecting.
 25 (.)
 26 Jac: gGoo:d.
 27 (0.2)
 28 Jac:-> .hhh ^Uh::m can I talk to the: (.) to the guy.
 29 Sta: Sho^urehh ^Hold [on.
 30 Jac: [^Thanks.

The end of the preceding sequence is the place at which the caller properly does the reason for the call, but here his reason for the call requires a different interlocutor, and asking “to talk to the guy” conveys that this is a precondition for actually initiating the reason for the call; and this, it turns out, itself qualifies for marking as “reason for the call.”

Reason-for-the-call “uh(m)” in pre-expansions of sequences. In virtually all the previously displayed extracts in this section, the “uh(m)” is in TCU-initial position for the TCU that launched the sequence being marked as the reason for the call—“launched” in the sense that it is the TCU that enacts the sequence-identifying action or, more technically, the base FPP. In Extracts (11), (12), and (18), this is an announcement, display, or report; in Extracts (13)

and (19), it is an invitation; in Extracts (14) through (17), (20), and (21), it is a request (although in Extracts (14)–(17), this is the business of the recipient of the call, which is different from what might be termed “private requests”).

However, there are also instances where this is not a satisfactory account—the previously examined Extract (20) among them. In these instances, the reason-for-the-call “uh(m)” is deployed in a TCU that launches the sequence being marked in a different sense of “launched.” Rather than being the locus of the main, sequentially implicative action (the base FPP), these TCUs launch pre-expansions: either (a) “pre-sequences” such as pre-invitations, pre-requests, or pre-tellings that project the contingent production of some sequence type’s FPP depending on the response to the pre-sequence; or (b) “pre-pre”s—pre-expansions that also project the production of some type of FPP, but make room for preliminary talk to establish pre-conditions for that action to be done or to introduce material relevant to its understanding (hence, the term pre-pres, short for “preliminaries to preliminaries”; both pre-sequences and pre-pres are discussed in Schegloff, 2007b, pp. 28–57).

First, I discuss pre-sequences. In Extracts (22) and (23), the caller is calling to invite someone to a party—a surprise birthday party in Extract (22) and a New Year’s Eve party in Extract (23). As is common in invitation sequences (Schegloff, 2007b, pp. 29–34), the invitation itself is preceded by a sequence to establish availability, so as to avoid issuing an invitation foredoomed to rejection. In Extract (22), this pre-invitation is at lines 18 and 19 (its connection to the invitation is made explicit at lines 27–32); in Extract (23), the pre-invitation is at line 18, and its recipient, Jim, displays his understanding of that utterance as a pre-invitation at line 29¹⁰:

(22) Kamunsky 2, 1 (#16)

01 Sha: Hello?hh
 02 Ala: Hi Shaw:n?
 03 (0.2)
 04 Sha: Mm:hm,=

¹⁰Regarding the second of these two exemplars, one might ask whether this “um” (line 18) could be accounted for instead as a dispreferred first pair part (FPP)—that is, that Bonnie wants to display tentativeness in introducing the pre-invitation. There are several reasons for not adopting such a line, of which only two are mentioned here: First, ordinarily, invitations are not done as dispreferred FPPs; unlike requests (the closest FPP “relative”), for example, they are rarely reserved until late in the conversation (unless generated in the course of the conversation) or otherwise delayed. But, second, that does not preclude, in particular cases, an invitation being done “with reservations”—that being displayed by an “uh(m)” delay, as might be conjectured. One of the points of this article is to make available to research colleagues a range of practices of talking in which “uh(m)” can figure and which a recipient has to “solve” in grasping the interactional import of a turn, the response to which they will have to supply directly on that turn’s completion.

- 05 ALA: =Alan hHowareyuh.
 06 (0.4)
 07 Sha: 'I: Alan=
 08 Ala: =khh::hhih-hh*ih*=
 09 Sha: =t'hh[hh
 10 Ala: [hhh[hhh
 11 Sha: [Ga::h.
 12 Ala: Yeh I know never[heard me 'efore on the pho:ne:h[hhh
 13 Sha: [°() [_____
 14 Sha: [Whe:ll,
 15 (0.3)
 16 Sha: Very,hh (·) long time si:nce, [(I uhh)
 17 Ala: [Yeah,hh
 18 Ala:-> **Uh:m**, whuz I gunnuh say. (·) u-Wuddiyih doeen this
 19 c'ming Saturday after rehearsal,
 20 (0.6)
 21 Sha: This coming Saturday.a[fter re]hears'l=
 22 Ala: [Y e a h]
 23 Sha: =That's right we've gotta rehearsal.[d o n't w e.]
 24 .
 25 . ((Digression of about 50 lines of transcript re the rehearsal))
 26 .
 27 Ala:-> =Yeh 'e s(h)ure is. t'hh Well anway if yer not doing
 28 anything af:ter uhm rehearsal I'm having a s'prize
 29 birthday party fer Kevin he:re,
 30 (0.7)
 31 Al?: p't!
 32 Ala: If y'wanna co:[me,
 33 Sha: [Et yer house.
 34 Ala: Yah!
 35 (0.4)

(23) New Year's Invitation, 1 (#19)

- 01 ((dial tone rings, twice))
 02 Ans: Hel:lo.
 03 Bon: .hhh hello may I speak ta Jim please?
 04 Ans: Just a minute.
 05 (2.0)
 06 Ans: ((off the line)) JIM.
 07 (7.0)
 08 Jim: Hello,
 09 Bon: Hello Jim?

- 10 Jim: Yea[h
 11 Bon: [It's Bonny.
 12 Jim: H-
 13 Bon: 'hhh Hi=how are yuh.hhh
 14 Jim: Fine¿ How a' you¿
 15 {(1.0)}
 16 Bon: {'hhh} Oh:::=okay I guess.
 17 Jim: ↓Oh okay hhh
 18 Bon:-> **uhm**:(0.3) what are you doing new year's eve?=
 19 Jim: =hhh (0.5) whatever I can.=Whhy,
 20 (1.8)
 21 Bon: Whaddya mean whatever you can,
 22 (0.8)
 23 Jim: uhh:: hhh h
 24 (3.0)
 25 Bon: Oh.
 26 (0.6)=
 27 Jim: =[W:hy?]
 28 Bon: =[O k a]y:.
 29 Jim:-> =[Throw a par]ty?
 30 Bon: =[a n d ya-]
 31 Bon: Yeah.
 32 (0.9)
 33 Jim: hhh
 34 (0.3)
 35 Jim: Try an get over there. (.) huh
 36 (.)
 37 Bon: Well (0.8) ahm:: (0.5) I kinda=na- (0.7) ya know
 38 need ta know in advance. If ya can get over here.

In these two instances, and in the other types of pre-sequences to follow, the reason-for-the-call “uh(m)” is deployed at what turns out to have been the start of the sequence—its first appearance—and not at its core organizing action.

Extract (24) is another conversation related to the surprise birthday party that figured in Extract (19), but this one is not an invitation sequence:

(24) Kamunsky 1, 1 (#15)

- 01 Ans : He:llo,
 02 Ala: Hi.=Is Karen there?
 03 Ans: Yea just a minute please=
 04 Ala: =Mhm
 05 (14.2)

- 06 Kar: Hello?
- 07 Ala: Karen Baxter?
- 08 Kar: Yea?
- 09 Ala: Yer not busy are yuh_ç
- 10 (0.3)
- 11 Kar: Well yeah, I a:m.
- 12 Ala: Well this'll be qui:ck I mean it's nothing
- 13 (·)
- 14 Ala: t h[hhh
- 15 Kar: [Keh
- 16 Ala:-> Okay **uhm** (B- dih jid)/(did-B-didya) Bruce leave you a
- 17 no:te_ç
- 18 Kar: nNo.
- 19 Ala: Oka:y. The party is on fer Saturda:y,
- 20 Kar: Mmhm=

Clearly, the “uhm” at line 16 is not marking the inquiry about Bruce’s note as the reason for the call. It is, rather, in the first instance, a pre-telling (Schegloff, 2007b, pp. 37–44); having established that Karen had not received a note from Bruce, he proceeds to tell her that the party will, in fact, take place.¹¹ As it

¹¹The text that follows focuses on the trajectory that may come between the “uh(m)”-marked pre-expansion and what follows, eventuating in the key action (the base first pair part) that was pre-monitored by the “uhm.” But, how about turns that precede the “uhm”-marked pre-expansion? Might not turns preceding that also have been pre-expansions for the eventual reason-for-the-call “business?” Might one not, for example, treat line 09, “Yer not busy are yuh,” as a pre-expansion to the eventual reason-for-the-call turn?; and if so, why is it not marked by a reason-for-the-call-alerting “uh(m)”?

First of all, as was noted earlier (see footnote 7), not all reasons for the call are marked by “uh(m),” and it is not yet clear what differentiates those that are so marked from those that are not. Therefore, the absence of an “uh(m)” has, at present, no probative value; its absence is not its “missing-ness.”

Second of all, we investigators have access to the way the conversation unfolded; the parties to the interaction did not. We can entertain the possibility of line 09, “Yer not busy are yuh,” as a pre-expansion to the eventual reason-for-the-call turn. For the participants, the eventual reason-for-the-call turn had not yet occurred. Therefore we have to ask: as Alan says, “Yer not busy are yuh” after what has just preceded it, what might he analyzably be doing and how might Karen analyze what his turn-in-context might be doing? Although it *turns out*, with the wisdom of hindsight, to have had prospective relevance, its *prima facie* rationale on its occurrence is as a possible account of the long delay in the call target’s coming to the phone (at line 5) and its bearing on how he (Alan) should proceed. Its negative construction is designed for a “no” response, but gets a dispreferred one instead—delayed by both a gap and a “well,” and that prompts his pre-reassurance of brevity at line 12 and his launch of the reason-for-the-call sequence, which is “uh(m)”-marked.

Finally, not only are they oriented to the talk forward in real time rather than in retrospect, but we have to figure that they are *not* attending to the talk specifically with reference to “is this marking the reason for the call,” as we investigators writing and reading this article are. They are oriented to “what is this spate of talk doing here?”—for all the orders of “here-ness.”

happens, this leads, in turn, to an assignment of what to bring to the party (data not shown), but the reason-for-the-call marker is deployed at the start of the series of sequences that will compose “the reason.”

The linkage that (in Extract (24)) relates the factual question (at lines 16–17) to the telling (at line 19) to the request–assignment of things to bring to the party should serve to alert us to the possible “distance” between the “uh(m)” marking, the TCU to which it is attached, and what that TCU is doing, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the TCUs which are made to follow from that TCU—“distance” both in turn-location terms and in action terms. Being alert to these “distance” issues is required for seeing what is going on in Extract (25):

(25) BB Gun, 1-4 (#14)

- 01 ring ring
 02 Jim: H'llo,
 03 Bon: H'llo Jim?
 04 Jim: (Hi-)/(Hah-?)
 05 Bon: Hi.
 06 (.
 07 Bon: It's Bonnie,
 08 (.
 09 Jim: Yeah=I know
 10 (0.3)
 11 Bon: °oh yeah: yih know°
 12 (0.2)
 13 Bon:-> U::mhh tch! are you going to the meeting t'nigh(t)?
 14 (0.5)
 15 Jim: Is it t'night?
 16 (0.4)
 17 Bon: Yu:h it's t'night,
 18 (0.4)
 19 Jim: Oh wow. I jus' got u:p. off the cou:ch.
 20 (.
 21 .
 22 . ((Brief digression re Jim's headache, etc.))
 23 .
 24 Bon:-> But- (1.0) Wouldju do me a favor? heheh
 25 Jim: e(hh) depends on the favor::, go ahead,
 26 Bon: Didjer mom tell you I called the other day?
 27 Jim: No she didn't.
 28 (0.5)

- 29 Bon: Well I called.(.) [hhh]
 30 Jim: [Uhuh]
 31 (0.5)
 32 Bon: .hhh 'n I was wondering if you'd let me borrow your gun.
 33 .
 34 . ((2 1/2 minutes & 82 lines later, he agrees to give her the gun))
 35 Jim: [Y]eah:, you can use 't,
 36 (0.4)
 37 Bon: .hh Ca:n?
 38 Jim: »Yeh-«
 39 Bon:-> .hh 'dju bring it to the meeting?
 40 (.)

Bonnie and Jim are mid-teenagers, on-and-off boyfriend–girlfriend (for more extended treatments of this transaction, cf. Schegloff, 1990; and Schegloff, 2007b, pp. 111–114). Here, Bonnie is calling Jim to ask whether she can borrow his BB gun. One might never have guessed that if, in keeping with the proposal of this article, one took the “uhm” at line 13 to be an instance of the phenomenon being discussed; and one might have figured that if there were to be a reason-for-the-call “uh(m),” it would be at the start of line 24 or, failing that, at the start of line 32—neither of which is the case. However, note that Bonnie’s first “item of business” (so to speak) about going to the meeting resurfaces at line 39 in Extract (25), although it is many minutes and lines of transcript later. In fact, it turns out, Bonnie’s reason for the call was indeed being served by that first, post-opening exchange; she was providing in advance for delivery of the requested item, supposing that her request would, in fact, be granted. She was right, and the “uhm” turned out to have been related to her agenda (without specifying it) from the outset.

The other type of pre-expansion that can be the locus for the reason-for-the-call “uh(m)” is the pre–pre. Pre–pres most often are implemented by action-projections, question-projections (e.g., “Can I ask you a question?”), or request-projections (e.g., “I have a big favor to ask you,” or “Would you do me a favor,” as in Extract (25) at line 24).

Extract (26) offers a case in point. Lila is an elderly woman who has been called by a neighbor (“Alice” at line 8) whose husband has suffered a stroke while they were traveling in a distant city. Alice has asked Lila to prepare their home in preparation for their return—seeing to the purchase and installation of a hospital bed, wheel chair, and so forth. Lila has called Reginald, the son of the stricken man (Alice is his second wife and is, therefore, the stepmother), to solicit his input on some unspecified details but is uncomfortable about having been called upon to make these arrangements herself, rather than Reginald having been called upon:

(26) MC II, 2:1-2 (#28)

- 01 Reg: Hello?
 02 Lil: Oh Mr. Alley.
 03 Reg: Yes?
 04 Lil: Say this is Lila Bentley.
 05 Lil: Say, uh-Reginald, I uh I'm in a kind of a(hh) 'hh hh a
 06 little(hh) unhappy position but nevertheless I'll go
 07 -> ahead 'n make the best of it. 'mh^hh **uh:m** -what I wan'duh
 08 -> ask you about='h^hh **uh:** b-uh-Alice wrote me en a:sked me
 09 if I would order a hospital bed, .h^hh and a chai:r. For her.
 10 hh Becuz she wannid me tuh be here, .hh to accept it 'n make
 11 the arrangements for her. 'hm^hh I im^uagine thet she felt thet
 12 probably ih 'would save you some trouble.
 13 (-)
 14 Lil: having t'come up here en have somebuddy (0.5) have'm put it
 15 where it belo:ngs.
 16 Reg: [Mm hm,
 17 Lil: ['hm^hh Now. 'hh uh, tuh [make-
 18 Reg: [You have the keys to the place?
 19 Lil: Yes I do_ɪ
 20 Reg: (Mm hm, o[kay)
 21 Lil: [And um-I-I called um (0.8) I hadtuh call 'er long
 22 distance buh-cause she didn't make .hh specify properly about
 23 this wheelchair and this bed. 'hm^h And, in doing so, I ve:ry
 24 stupidly asked- forgot tuh ask her what roo:m she expected tuh
 25 -> putcher father in. 'hmm^hh^h Now dz she- d'you think she expects
 26 -> tuh put im in that back bedroom where he was before?

The pre-pre here is at lines 7 and 8: “mh^hh uh:m -what I wan'duh ask you about”; and it serves to make room for the extended telling that begins right after it on line 8 (“Alice wrote me . . .”) and lasts (with interpolations) until the question is actually asked at lines 25 and 26: “hmm^hh^h Now dz she- d'you think she expects tuh put im in that back bedroom where he was before?”

Extract (27) presents an even more transparent exemplar. Joan is calling a number of fellow students to help in collecting data for an academic project (Extract (20) is taken from the same dataset):

(27) Wong, 1984 (Su Jen) (#24) * is NNS

- 01 *Sue: Hello?
 02 Jan: Tch hi, Su Jen?
 03 Sue: Hi.

- 04 Jan: Hi, this iz Joan Wright.
 05 (0.2)
 06 Sue: Oh hi!
 07 Jan: How are you?
 08 Sue: Fi:ne (h)(h) ((smile voice))
 09 Jan: (h)hih-huh[(h)hih
 10 Sue: [(h)hih
 11 (0.2)
 12 Jan: Workin' on your thesis?
 13 Sue: Uh huh
 14 Jan: (h)heh-(h)huh=
 15 Sue: =(h)heh-(h)huh
 16 (0.2)
 17 Jan: Ve:::ry goo::d
 18 (0.4)
 19 Jan: When're you presenting.
 20 (0.4)
 21 Sue: When?
 22 Jan: Yeah.
 23 Sue: Uh:: the sixth week.
 24 Jan: Sixth week.
 25 Sue: Yeah.
 26 Jan: Not too: ba:d huh?
 27 Sue: Uh huh.
 28 Jan: Yeah. (·) Dihya have any othuh courses
 29 tuh take this quarter?
 30 Sue: No.
 31 (0.4)
 32 Jan: Oh::!
 33 (0.4)
 34 Jan: ((sniffle)) Wow! Nemma chingsong ah! ((“How relaxed!”))
 35 Sue: (h)yeah(h) hao chingsong ((“very relaxed!”))
 36 (h)huh-huh-huh-huh
 37 Jan: (h)huh-huh-huh-huh-huh-huh
 38 (0.2)
 39 Jan:-> 'h **um::** 'hh have a (0.2) question (0.2) I wuz wonderin'
 40 whethuh you could help me I'm 'hh taking Marianne's Two
 41 Twenty K? Materials Development?
 42 Sue: Uh huh.

Here, the pre-pre is at lines 39 and 40: “h um:: 'hh have a (0.2) question (0.2) I wuz wonderin' whethuh you could help me,” and it is followed not by

the question or request, but by the preparatory material for which the pre-pre was making room. Note, by the way, that, although there are two breaks in progressivity in the talk at line 39, neither of them is in the immediate vicinity of the “um::,” which underscores the deployment of the “um” as not *trouble-related*, but *reason-for-the-call-related*.

Action-projections are, on occasion, deployed not to make room for preliminaries, but to project that what is upcoming is delicate—hence, “pre-delicates” (Schegloff, 1980, pp. 131–134)—and this usage can also be the locus for a reason-for-the-call “Uh(m),” as in Extract (28):

(28) Erhardt 8, 1 (Schegloff 1980:132) (#41)

- 01 Vic: Yeh is Pam there?
 02 (O.7)
 03 Mar: Uh: (1.5) Yes she is, C'n I tell her who's calling.
 04 Vic: Yeh this is Vicky.
 05 Mar: Hang on please?
 06 Vic: °°Okay,°°
 07 (8.2)
 08 Pam: H'llo::,
 09 Vic: Hi:. Vicky.
 10 (0.4)
 11 Vic: You ra:ng?
 12 Pam: Oh hello there yes I di::d.
 13 -> 'hh um I nee:d tuh ask you a questio:n?
 14 (0.4)
 15 Pam: en you musn't (0.7) uh take it personally or kill me.
 16 (0.7)
 17 Pam: I wan to kno:w, (0.7) whether you: will(b) would be free:;
 18 (.) to work o:n um tomorrow night.
 19 (0.4)

Pam (who is apparently Vicki's supervisor at work) had called earlier, and Vicki is now returning the call. Pam is called to the phone and, as initiator of the contact, although not of this call, it is Pam who is the person responsible for the reason for the call. This can be seen at line 10: After Pam picks up the phone and answers, Vicki greets her, self-identifies, and waits for her to deliver the reason for her earlier effort to initiate the contact; when Pam does not pick up on this, the silence at line 10 develops, and Vicki ends it by reminding her (at line 11) that she (Pam) had called earlier—serving to invoke Pam's responsibility for supplying a reason for the contact. At line 13, Pam begins delivering the reason for the call with an “um,” followed by an action-projection whose sequel makes

clear that it was doing the work of marking the delicateness of the reason for the call, not to make room for a preliminary.

SOME DATA-CONTROLLED CAUTIONS, CONJECTURES, AND CONCLUSIONS

Although it is certainly the case that “uh” and “uhm” frequently occur in the environment of trouble in talking, it is also the case that not all of its occurrences are so positioned, and that those that are not so positioned are not, on that account, arbitrary or random occurrences. The preceding pages have meant to show that several quite distinct positionings of “uh(m)” —so deployed by speakers and so understood by recipients— are to mark the “reason-for-initiating” an episode of interaction, that a dispreferred response is upcoming, that a dispreferred sequence is being launched, or that a sequence’s ending has resisted consummation and is being tried again. The broadening of our understanding of this common element in talk-in-interaction is a consequence of identifying instances not only by their composition, but also by their position; in this context, that “position” has involved position in TCU; position in sequence; and, most extensively, position in the overall structural organization of the unit, “a single conversation.”

Several cautions and conjectures are in order before concluding this article:

1. Although there are good grounds for the claim that “uh(m)” can be used to mark “reason for the call,” it is clearly not the case that all “reasons for the contact” are marked with “uh(m).” We do not yet know whether its presence or absence marks something as, for example, of special import (upgrade) or of lesser import, whether an “uh(m)” marking or its absence is the default, and so on. What has been discussed in this article was undertaken as one of several points about “uh(m),” —not about reason for the call or overall structural organization—and there are, therefore, limits on what can be concluded or even claimed about the latter. The same reservations hold for the other lines of inquiry presented here: Not all dispreferred SPPs starts with “uh(m)”; in fact, not all of them are delayed. However, those that are not are thereby marked with a hint of defiance. The same reservations hold for the other claims put forward in the preceding text.
2. In some instances to which the analysis developed here would appear to apply, it may not be the “reason for call-ness” that “uh(m)” marks, but the dispreferred-ness of what is to be done in the turn, even if it is not generically dispreferred. Consider, for example, Extract (29):

(29) Trip to Syracuse

- 01 Ile: Hullo:,
 02 (0.3)
 03 Cha: hHello is eh::m:: (0.2) 'hh-'hh Ilene there?
 04 Ile: Ya:h, this is Ile:[ne,
 05 Cha: [hh Oh hi this's Charlie about
 06 th'trip teh Syracuse?
 07 Ile: Ye:a:h, Hi (k-ch)
 08 Cha: Hi howuh you doin.
 09 Ile: Goo:[d,
 10 Cha:-> [hhhe:h heh 'hhhh I wuz uh:m: (·) 'hh I wen' ah:
 11 (0.3) I spoke teh the gi:r- I spoke tih Karen.
 12 (C): ('hhhh)/(0.4)
 13 Cha:-> And u:m:: (·) ih wz rea:lly ba:d because she decided of
 14 a:l weekends fuh this one tih go awa:y
 15 (0.6)
 16 Ile: Wha:ti
 17 (0.4)
 18 Cha: She decidih tih go away this weekend.
 19 Ile: Yea:h,
 20 Cha: 'hhhh=
 21 Ile: = 'kh[h
 22 Cha: [So tha:[:t
 23 Ile: [k-khhh
 24 Cha: Yihknow I really don't have a place tuh sta:y.
 25 Ile: 'hh Oh::::hh
 26 (0.2)
 27 Ile: 'hhh So yih not g'nna go up this weeken'i
 28 (): (hhh)/(0.2)
 29 Cha: Nu::h I don't think so.

Here, Charlie has called Ilene (whom he apparently does not know well, as he fails to recognize her voice, and his asking to speak with her at line (03) is not treated by her as a problem) to tell her that the car trip to another city on which she was going to get a ride is being cancelled. After the opening sequences have been completed at line 09, Charlie's launch of first topic is beset by “uh(m)”s—two at line 10 and another at line 13. This is clearly the reason for the call—both as it is occurring and by the quick ending of the call after the “business” of this sequence has been completed (for a fuller treatment, cf. Schegloff, 2002). It thereby invites straightforward treatment as another exemplar of the phenomenon treated in the preceding

pages, but such a treatment may well be both correct and incomplete and, therefore, inadequate. The reason is that these “uh(m)”s figure not only in the reason for the call, but that the sequence that constitutes the reason for the call is an announcement of bad news, and bad-news announcements are problematic. Although “announcements” as a class of actions are not dispreferred, announcements of bad news—by *this* teller, to *this* recipient, at *this* time—that is, particular announcements—are one sort of sequence earlier termed dispreferred (cf. Schegloff, 1988); and, thus, another locus by reference to which “uh(m)”s are positioned is provided by sequence organization.

3. One payoff of the analyses we have developed should be that they can instruct us how to be empirically skeptical; we should be able to use our findings as a control on other claimed or possible findings or as a help in establishing them or even in finding them. For example, once we have seen that a turn- or TCU-initial “uhm” followed by a FPP can invite analysis as the reason for the call, as in Extract (11) (“we got the tickets”), we can ask whether that is what Joyce is doing in Extract (10) (“whatta ya doing like: s: late Saturday afternoon”)—especially since dispreferred sequence types (most notably requests) can get *really* delayed—even until the very end of the call. However, we know that Joyce was *not* the caller; *Stan* was, so this cannot have been a reason for the call. Still, this was an informed skepticism (and we might note that Joyce’s “move” is being made *here*—at this moment—again by reference to overall structural organizational considerations; namely, just after Stan’s launching of the closing section of the conversation).

Now run it the other way. We know from Extract (10) that an “uhm”-prefaced FPP can convey dispreferred-ness and that a request can be a dispreferred FPP. Reviewing the data presented on “uh(m)” in reason for the call or contact, we might notice that in quite a few of those exemplars (Extracts (20), (21), and (25)–(28), not to mention the institutional calls), the reason for the call was a request; might the “uh(m)”s be marking their dispreferred-ness as requests, not their reason for the call-ness? That might well be the case; there is no relation of mutual exclusivity at work here. Certainly, in Extract (25) (Bonnie wanting to borrow Jim’s BB gun), both are relevant—it *is* the reason for the call, and it *is* a request, and both can be the case. Given all these cases in which both seem to be involved, is the reason for the call finding just a by-product of the dispreferred character of the “business” to be undertaken? One of the things that makes Extracts (11) through (13) (and others that cannot be displayed here) so valuable is precisely that they show empirically that the “uhm” is *not* restricted to marking dispreference; that is what allows us the finding that such an “uhm” can mark the reason for the call; and, having found that, it allows

the finding that, even quite late into a conversation, an “uhm” need not be pre-monitoring dispreference; it can be announcing the upcoming reason for the call.

4. All the reason-for-the-call and preference-related “uh(m)”s were, we found, turn- or TCU-initial. Actually, a more precise description would be “pre-positioned to their TCU” (and to their turn, if the TCU was itself the first in the turn), so as to hold as well for Extracts (13) and (24) in which the “uh(m)” is preceded by another pre-positioned element—“hey” in (13) and “okay” in (24). So far, leaving aside repair-implicated “uh(m)”s, none have been found in the TCU’s course and, although that finding seems robust enough, we do not yet fully understand its import. But, can there not be “uh(m)”s in the course of a TCU that have interactional import other than repair?

One way to proceed is to exploit the evidence we have already seen in which reason-for-the-call turns can take pre-positioned “uh(m)”s, and examine reason-for-the-call turns for otherwise-positioned “uh(m)”s. However, we cannot look at a turn that looks like a reason-for-the-call turn and take any “uh(m)” in it as an indicator of reason for the call or as occurring there by virtue of the turn “housing” reason for the call. Therefore, in Extract 26, not all the “uh(m)”s in the reason-for-the-call turn are to be so understood. Which ones are? (a) TCU pre-positioned ones—that is the first finding; and (b) “uh(m)”s that are not in initial position may count as relevantly in a reason-for-the-call turn if they precede the mention of the activity being broached or some intendedly positive or problematic feature of that activity.

In Extract (30), Stan has called his sister Joyce. After an abbreviated opening, he launches a “before what I called about” topic—how Joyce has dealt with a traffic ticket she had received. Then the talk moves to registering people to vote (an apparent civic activity of Stan’s), whether Joyce is registered, friends who engage in this activity or have stopped doing so, and so forth. Then, at about 2¼ min into the conversation the following is discussed:

(30) Joyce & Stan, 3 (#8)

- 01 Stn: [ˈhɦɦɦ [Well the main reason I called ya up Jess was ta
 02 -> as:k yer **uh::** advice on two little matters:**uh.**
 03 (0.4)
 04 Stn: I might be goin’ shopping either tomorrow er Saturday an’ I’m
 05 what I’m lookin’ for is a couple a things.=>I thought maybe you
 06 might have some< suggestions where I could find it.
 07 Joy: O:kay,

08 Stn: First of all: I'm lookin' for: a: pair a sa:ndles:, (0.7)
 09 and a hat.

Here, the reason for the call is announced in so many words, and there is no “uh(m)” in the TCU-initial position. However, there is an “uh::,” and it is in the turn-medial position, but that is not the analytically relevant way of formulating it. It is positioned just before the word that directly describes what Stan has called for—“advice.”

Extract (31) lends support to this possibility. Vicki has called her sister Karen, and the conversation begins with an awkward registering of the coincidence that Karen had just been talking about Vicki (line 04), a report that apparently makes Vicki uneasy (lines 6–9), and this leads to the abrupt termination of the opening, as Vicki announces the reason for her call (lines 10–11):

(31a) Erhardt, 01 (#5)

01 Kar: hHullo?
 02 (0.2)
 03 Vik: Hi.
 04 Kar: ↑Hi: how are yuh I wz js talking about you.
 05 (0.3)
 06 Vik: Oh:.
 07 (·)
 08 Kar: h [huh huh huh] hu[h huh.]
 09 Vik: [ehh-heh heh] [‘eh:::]: hhh=
 10 Vik:-> =I ca:lled um to see if you want to uh (0.4) c'm over en
 11 watch,the Classics Theater.
 12 (0.3)
 13 Vik: Sandy'n Tom'n I,=
 14 Kar: =She Sto[ops t'Conquer?
 15 Vik: [()-
 16 (0.4)
 17 Vik: Yeh.
 18 (0.3)
 19 Kar: Mom js asked me t'watch it with her,h=
 20 Vik: =Oh. Okay,
 21 (0.3)

Here, the “uh(m)”s occur just before the two verbs for Vicki's intended activity—finding something out (“to see”) and inviting (“to come over”). Although invitations are ordinarily unproblematic actions, this one is revealed subsequently to have been figured to be problematic from the outset; some 45 s after the end of the preceding sequence, Vicki moves close to the conversation:

(31b) Erhardt, 01 (#5)

- 22 Vik:-> Oka:y well I jis ca:lled tu:h (0.4) tēh:: () ask,=
 23 Kar: =Thanks [a l o : t,]
 24 Vik:-> [t̥hʊʊh'v cour]se I k̥nɛw [the ans]wer wʊd be no: h̥nh
 25 Kar: [(really)]
 26 Kar: Yehhh
 27 (2.0)
 28 Kar: We:ll,
 29 (0.9)

This data-internal evidence of the possibly problematic status of what the caller is proposing to do prompts the observation about the previous exemplar (Extract (30)), that virtually every suggestion offered by Joyce in response to Stan's request for “advice” is problematized by him or rejected outright. In the previously examined Extract (28) in which Vicky has returned the call of her boss at work, we may note that the two “uh(m)”s that are not pre-positioned (at lines 15–18) are deployed (a) just before the boss issues an alert that something objectionable is on the way and (b) just before the key problematic element (the short notice on having to work the next day).

The upshot of these last several paragraphs is that, having constrained the search to an environment specifiable by reference to the overall structural organization of the unit, “a single conversation,” and having constrained the search for what non-prepositioned “uh(m)”s might be doing by requiring a formulation of where in the reason-for-the-call turn they occur, we have a candidate finding with initial *prima facie* evidence. Its import for parties to an interaction is that non-pre-positioned “uh(m)” in a reason for the contact may serve as an alert of possible trouble up ahead. Its import for researchers is that there is possibly that import for participants.

The general message of this article, then, is threefold. First, once *position* is added to *composition* as a defining and criterial feature of what some element of conduct in interaction is doing, the scope of inquiry is enlarged by orders of magnitude that cannot be gauged in advance.

Second, the Clark and Fox Tree (2002) notion of the basic meaning and use of “uh(m)” as “announcing a delay in speaking” is, at best, limited in its scope. A great many “uh(m)”s are *not* followed by silence; and if it is argued that, in those instances, they themselves constitute the delay, then (a) that is “embodying,” not “announcing,” a delay and, in that case, (b) their claim cannot be falsified, as it is a self-fulfilling prophesy. Further, some silences following “uh(m)” indicate not a delay in speaking, but an orientation to no further speaking in that turn (pp. 9–12; see also Schegloff, 2009).

Third, what any given “uh(m)” is doing is not, in the first instance, an issue for academic researchers; it is part of the real-time analytic demands on parties

to talk-in-interaction. Hearing an “uh(m),” a recipient needs to figure out what is to be made of it: What is the reason for the contact? Is there a dispreferred FPP or SPP on the way? Have I missed an effort to exit the sequence? Is there some repair issue—word selection, replacement, insertion, deletion, or so forth? Figuring this out implicates attention to *all* the basic organizational domains of practice that support the enterprise of talking-in-interaction, it needs to be done in time to talk next *on* time, and it is only one of the things that participants have to do on the fly. Academic work is a piece of cake by comparison.

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