

Responding to the double implication of telemarketers' opinion queries



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HARRIE MAZELAND
 UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN

ABSTRACT During a call, telemarketers sometimes solicit respondent's opinions about a product or service. This turns out to be a query with multiple implications, and respondents are alive to them. On the one hand, the recipient orients to a local preference to evaluate the telemarketer's product positively. On the other hand, a positive assessment may result in expectations and commitments that survive the sequence and that are relevant for the call's outcome. The recipient is faced with two types of preference structures, one grounded in the sequence and the other one in the course of action it is part of. The preferences may be incompatible. Analysis shows that the shape of response turns with congruent preferences is observably different from response turns with cross-cutting preferences. In the latter case, the dispreferred character of the response to the caller's ultimate purpose – that is, making a proposal for a commercial transaction – dominates over the response to the opinion query as just an opinion query in its own right. To generalize, the analysis shows that preparatory sequences in standardized courses of action in institutional settings are a special type of presequence. The participants develop a course of action through ordered series of preparatory sequences. Although locally responding to initiatives of the interlocutor, each response shows an orientation to both the local contingencies of the ongoing sequence and to the overall course of action it is contributing to.

KEY WORDS: *course of action, institutional interaction, multiple preference structures, opinion query, preparatory sequences, scripted interaction, telemarketing call*

There are not many conversation-analytic studies of sales talk I know of.¹ That is a pity, not only because of the domain's weight in everyday life or in economics, but also because the pay-off is theoretically interesting. In this article, I will analyse the use of a particular sequence type in telemarketing calls. I have examined a small collection of calls (four), which is not enough for a

theoretically saturated analysis. It is, however, not my aim to reason with frequency distributions. Rather, I want to make observations that develop insight both in the genre and in the types of social organizations that are oriented to in its realization.

In the calls I have examined, the opinion query sequence turns out to be pivotal for the call's development, because its outcome determines whether and how the talk will continue. Interestingly, the prospects orient to negatively evaluating responses as a dispreferred type of reaction. A positive assessment of the product, however, may bring about expectations with respect to the way the prospect will respond to the transaction proposal for which the opinion query is preparing the ground. The sequentially preferred way of responding to the opinion query may be at odds with the commitments the prospect makes when assessing the product positively. The ways in which prospects solve the problem when they are faced with multiple, potentially conflicting preference structures is the subject of this article.

The article's structure is as follows. In the first three sections, I will supply some background in order to enable the reader to grasp the sequence's place and role in the telemarketing call. First, an impression of the campaign in which the telemarketing calls are made is given, and then the overall structure of the calls is characterized. After having described the placement and shape of the opinion query turn, I will focus on features of the sequence and on the ways in which the prospects respond to it.

The setting

The calls in my data collection are not the first contact of the sales organization with the prospective customer. They are part of a wider sales campaign for selling a savings plan in which private individuals lease shares at the stock exchange (*lease-arrangement savings plan*). As far as can be inferred from the calls, the campaign includes the following phases:

1. *Accosting the prospect face-to-face in a shopping street.* The prospect has already been approached in a shopping centre for a 'survey of savings and future provisions'. He or she at that point provided some private information about his or her financial situation and saving style. He or she also indicated an interest in receiving information about lease-arrangement savings 'without obligations'. In order to make this possible, the prospect thus must have handed over his or her name and phone number.
2. *Calling the prospect.* A couple of weeks later, the prospect is called by someone who identifies herself as an employee of a well-known savings bank. At the beginning of the call, the caller first refers to the encounter in the street, and then recapitulates some of the financial data that were gathered in it. See lines 13–18 and 20–6, respectively, in extract (1):

Extract (1) (extract from call 1) legend: *Tm*: telemarketer; *Pr1*: the prospect in call 1²

12. Tm: (. . .) meneer ((*surname*)) de reden dat ik u bel, (0.3)
 (. . .) mister ((*surname*)) the reason I'm calling you, (0.3)
13. u heeft e::h een november deelgenomen aan ons
november first you u::h participated in our little survey about
14. onderzoekje naar spaar en toekomstvoorzieningeh,
savings and future financial provisions,
15. ·h[: [en dat was in dat was in de binnenstad van
 ·h: and this was in the shopping centre of
16. Pr1: [jA: [↑h
yes:?
17. Tm: ((*naam stad*)). >weet u nog: ?<=
 ((*name city*)). do you remember?
18. Pr1: =>oh jahja° ↓jah.
oh yesyes yes.
19. (.)
20. Tm: °o:keeh.° ·h daarin had u onder andere aangegeven
okay:h. ·h in this survey you said among other things
21. dat u graag vrijblijvend informatie wilde ontvangen
that you were interested in receiving information without obligation
22. over 't spaar ↓leaS↑e [·h
about the lease-arrangement savings plan
23. Pr1: [jA: ↑h=
ye:s?
24. Tm: =verder dat u 'n koophuis bewoont en dat u
further that you live in a house that is owned by you and that you
25. spaart in (de) spaar loonregeling bij uw
participate in the in-company savings arrangement of your
26. werkgever,·hh[: [en nu wilde 'k even terugkome
employer, ·hh and now I just wanted to return
27. Pr1: [ja: [h.
ye:sh
28. Tm: op dat spaarlea:Seh, (. . .)
to this lease-arrangement savings plan

The caller introduces the reason for the call through a kind of *exchange tying* (Firth, 1991). She links the call to the encounter in the city centre by providing further identificational materials about the kind of relation in which the call taker stands to the caller (lines 13–18). The current contact is presented as a consequence of his earlier participation in the survey. The previous meeting thus serves as an admission ticket for the present interaction.

The caller then reminds her interlocutor of his wish to receive information about the lease-arrangement savings programme (lines 20–3). After having recapped some further data with respect to the prospect's financial situation (lines 24–6), she returns to the savings plan as the reason for the call (lines 27–8). In the end, the prospect himself is thus made responsible for the call. His earlier interest in getting more information about the savings plan is made to be the reason for calling him now. Instead of harassing him with yet another sales

offer, the caller is keeping a promise. Her call is just a response to an initiative of the prospect.

3. *Selling an appointment with a financial adviser.* The purpose of the call is an appointment with a financial adviser of the savings bank:

Extract (2) (from call 3)

79. Tm: (..) nou wat ik dan voor u kan ↓doen: is 't maken
(..) *well what I can do for you is to make*
80. → van 'n afspraak. met één van onze adviseu↑:rs
an appointment. with one of our advisers,
81. ·hH en sAmen met die adviseur >kunt u dan eve rustig
·hH and together with that adviser you can look at leisure
82. kijkeh< naar de verschillende mogelijkheden
at the various possibilities
83. afgestemd op uw persoonlyke situatie,
adjusted to your personal situation,
84. 0.6
85. Pr3: ehj↓ah.
uh yes.
86. Tm: nou uiteraard is dat advies gratis en vrijblijvend,
well of course this advice is free of charge and without obligations,
87. ·h en 't E:nige wat 't u ko↑:st is 'n half uurtje
·h and the only thing what it takes is about half an hour
88. van uw t↓ijid en daar wordt u 'n stuk wijzer van=
of your time and you'll learn a lot from it
89. Pr3: =hm↑hm:

From the perspective of the telemarketer, the call is not successful when it does not result in an appointment with the financial adviser. His or her visit is probably the final phase in the trajectory for approaching prospective customers. The prospect will have to decide then whether he or she wants to subscribe to the savings plan. So the telemarketer has an intermediate purpose for the call. She 'only' needs to sell an appointment. Note, however, that the prospect is left in the dark about this intermediate purpose until the telemarketer first mentions the appointment with the adviser. We will see presently that, up to this very point in the call, the prospect's responses are primarily informed by anticipation of the call's ultimate purpose, subscribing to the savings plan.

Interestingly, the proposal for making an appointment with the financial adviser is packaged as an offer ('what I can do for you . . .', line 79). Whereas a proposal also discloses the speaker's own interests and purposes, offers have a more altruistic appearance. They seem to be done in the interest of the person to whom the offer is made. The action is relationally uplifted in a way that is very similar to how the reason for the call was done as keeping a promise (see extract (1)). Both action-upgrading strategies suggest that the telemarketer is not so much into selling something to the prospect. This friendly caller is rather acting like a generous helper.

Some general impressions of the call's script

In its ideal form, the telephone conversation with the prospect will show the following steps:

1. The opening section.
2. Introduction to the reason for the call (see extract (1)).
3. Presentation of the product, in two rounds (see the next section):
 - (a) a recommendatory summary presentation of the product, focusing on how much profit can be made;
 - (b) an elaborate clarification of how this works.
4. Making an appointment (see extract (2)).
5. The closing section.

From my small collection of phone calls, I get the impression that the telemarketer has a very detailed script at her disposal. The calls display the same overall structure and the wording of utterances at corresponding positions is very similar in each of the calls. Even utterances that at first sight seemed to be spontaneous turn up in the other calls as well. When I was transcribing the data, I regularly got the feeling that an utterance or utterance part was being read aloud, although I am not able to explain which prosodic features make up the perceptual basis for this impression. Substantial parts of the script may be written out completely, or were learned by heart. The stretches of talk in which the telemarketer herself was *authoring what* she said and *how* she said it (Goffman, 1981) seem to occur primarily at places where the interaction took an unforeseen turn. More than once, this was at a point at which the prospect was responding in a way that was not favouring the caller's purpose.

Another characteristic of the telemarketer's interactional style is the absence of long silences after possibly complete turns of the prospect (see Sacks et al., 1974). Longer gaps only occurred in environments in which the prospect is expected to begin the next turn. Next turns of the telemarketer were regularly tied closely to the prospect's prior turn. I also had the impression that the telemarketer spoke relatively fast. Each of these production features contribute to the maintenance of a type of sequential organization that enables the telemarketer to permanently control what is going to happen next. Almost all initiatory actions are done by the telemarketer. She is not just the party who has made the call and – because of that – is assumed to be the one who propounds the reason for the call. She is also the one who asks the questions, who delivers unsolicited information and clarifications, who queries her interlocutor's opinion, or offers an appointment. From an analytic perspective, this type of initiative action is the *first pair part* of an *adjacency pair* (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). An adjacency pair is a form of social organization through which participants co-ordinately implement a local interactional project. If an addressee analyses a turn at talk as the first part of a specific pair type, he or she is urged to continue with a next turn that can be heard as the second part of that very same pair type. After a question,

29. 0.3
 30. Tm: °hmuh.° ohkee[h].
hmuh. okay.
 31. Pr2: |huhneehh!=
huhno!
 32. Tm: =nou bij dat ((naam spaarplan)), kunt u in drie
well with this ((name savings plan)), you can multiply your money
 33. jaar tij↑:d uw geld vervljfVQUdigen.
in a period of three years by five.
 34. 0.2
 35. Tm: → hoe vindt u dat klinkeh?
how does that sound to you?

The telemarketer invites the prospect one more time to give his or her opinion after having concluded the clarification of how this miraculous multiplication of capital can be brought about (step 3b). Extract (4) begins with the first part³ of the multi-unit turn with the clarification:

Extract (4) (from call 4) opinion query following the elaborate clarification

36. Tm: ik kan't u nog wel eve kort uitlegge?
can I explain this to you PARTICLE PARTICLE just briefly?
 37. 0.9
 38. Pr4: °hm↑hm
 39. Tm: ·h nou de inleg bij dat ((naam spaarplan)), ·hh
·h well the deposit for this ((name savings plan)), ·hh
 40. is mogelijk vanaf vierduizend gulden in één kee↑:r.
can start from four thousand guilders in one go,
 (. . .) ((20 lines left out))
 61. Tm: nou als we dan uitgaan van 'n hE:le voorzichtige
well if we assume a very conservative
 62. prognoseh, (.) heeft u na drie jaar 'n winst van
prognosis, (.) after three years you have a profit of
 63. tienduizend gulden belastingvrijh (0.5) en daarmee is
ten thousand guilders tax free (0.5) and with that
 64. uw tweeduizend gulden dus vervijf:↑vou↑digd
your two thousand guilders is therefore multiplied by five⁴
 65. Pr4: °hm↑hm.=
 66. Tm: → =hoe vindt u dat klinken mevrouw ((surname))
how does that sound to you missus ((surname))

Note that the prospect does not volunteer an assessment of the telemarketer's good news, neither after the summary presentation (extract 3), nor after the clarification (extract 4). This is very different from the way in which the recipient of good news may respond to its delivery in conversational interaction. Compare the extract below, which is from a phone call between friends:

Extract (5) (from a phone call between friends)

- 62 Pieter: oh ja (.) ik heb ook al twee punten binnen
oh yes (.) I learned already about two marks as well

- 63 Frits: ja:?
really?
- 64 Pieter: → 'n acht en 'n zeven
*an eight and a seven*⁵
- 65 Frits: → oh da's goed
oh that's good
- 66 Pieter: ja:
yes

As soon as Pieter has told the news, his friend reacts by assessing it positively (line 65). This type of reaction is markedly absent in the telemarketing calls. In extract (3), for instance, the telemarketer does not really wait for her recipient to volunteer an assessment. Compare the short silence of 0.2 second after the summary presentation:

Extract (3) (detail)

46. Tm: nou bij dat ((*naam spaarplan*)), kunt u in drie
well with this ((name savings plan)), you can multiply your money
47. jaar tij↑:d uw geld vervijfigdigen.
in a period of three years by five.
48. → 0.2
49. Tm: → hoe vindt u dat klinkeh?
how does that sound to you?

The opportunity to assess the news voluntarily is pre-empted by the telemarketer's opinion query. Instead of putting herself into a position in which she possibly had to wait for a delayed appraisal, she prompts it.

The position of the opinion query in extract (4) shows that the telemarketer may even overrule a signal that the recipient is not going to assess the information that was just made available to her, in spite of the fact that the *discourse unit* (Houtkoop and Mazeland, 1985) with the clarification has reached a point at which it is possibly complete. Although the prospect has responded with an acknowledgement token (*hmhm*, line 65; Jefferson, 1984), the telemarketer pursues another type of response by doing the opinion query (line 66):

Extract (4) (detail)

63. Tm: (. . .) en daarmee is
and with that
64. uw tweeduizend gulden dus vervijf:↑vou↑digd
your two thousand guilders is therefore multiplied by five
65. Pr4: → °hm↑hm.=
66. Tm: → =hoe vindt u dat klingen mevrouw ((*surname*))
how does that sound to you missus ((surname))

In lines 63–4, the telemarketer marks the completeness of the clarification unit by returning to the original claim of fivefold multiplication of the deposit, which is now presented as the conclusion of her exposition. The recipient then signals

that she has heard what prior speaker said and that she is not going to say more about it. She 'passes', thereby providing an opportunity for prior speaker to continue (Schegloff, 1982). Although the prospect has clearly signalled that she is not going to say more at this particular point in the interaction, the telemarketer nevertheless prompts a more specific type of response.

So, on the one hand, we can observe that the prospect avoids immediate assessment of the product's presentation. The telemarketer, on the other hand, acts as though she is not expecting the prospect to deliver an appraisal without being prompted for it. Both types of reactions show that the parties handle the position after the presentation with care. The prospect is cautiously avoiding an early assessment of it, whereas the telemarketer is subdued in assuming its voluntary delivery. Both parties orient to the position after the presentation as a delicate place. Although this cautiousness may be based upon a converging analysis of locally sequential contingencies, it appears to be occasioned by divergent considerations as to how to deal with them. In the next sections, I will try to analyse what kind of considerations are relevant for the speaker of the second pair part of the opinion query sequence.

The compound preference structure of opinion queries in telemarketing calls

Extract (6) documents a prospect's response to the opinion query after the summary presentation of the product (step 3a):

Extract (6) (from call 3) the prospect's response to the query after the summary presentation

27. Tm: hoe vindt u dat klinken?
how does this sound to you?
28. 0.5
29. Pr3: → ·hH jah dat klinkt natuurlijk altijd goeðh.
·hh yes this always sounds good of course.
30. 0.6
31. Tm: °*okee.*° ·h nou de inleg bij dit ((name savings plan))
okay. ·h well the deposit for this ((name savings plan))
32. is mogelijk vanaf vierduizend gulden in een kee↑:r
can start from four thousand guilders in one go,

In his response to the opinion query, the prospect assesses the telemarketer's presentation of the product positively. I will discuss the 'packaging' of the prospect's response turn in the next section. I first want to focus on the fact that this prospect is the only one who does nothing more than just respond to the opinion query in his response turn. The response turns of the other prospects have a more compound character. Whenever they display their opinion about the product, they also report an objection against buying it. Consider extract (7):

Extract (7) (from call 4) the prospect's response to the query after the summary presentation

33. Tm: hoe vindt u dat kl[↑]inken?
how does this sound to you?
34. 1.7
35. Pr4: → ja:h 't- (0.5) 't klinkt allemaal wel: maar ik heb t'r
well: it- (0.5) it all sounds okay indeed but I am
36. → eigenlijk- eigenlijk niet zo veel interesse ↓voor.
actually- actually not very much interested in it.
35. 0.3
36. Tm: nee:h. (°no-) (.) ik kan't u nog wel eve kort uitlegge?
no:h. (well-) (.) can I explain this to you PARTICLE PARTICLE just briefly?
36. 0.9
37. Pr4: °hm[↑]hm
38. Tm: ·h nou de inleg bij dat ((naam spaarplan)), (. . .)
·h well the deposit for this ((name savings plan)), (. . .)

In this call, the recipient of the opinion query first – rather minimally – approves of the product, and then continues with a report that forestalls treating this as a display of interest ('but I am . . . actually not very much interested in it', line 36). The feature I want to draw attention to – the one that shows that the prospect treats the opinion query as having as a double function – is the *compound character* of her reply. That is, she not only thinks the plan sounds okay, but she also stresses that she is not very interested in it. By putting it this way, she is not only responding to an invitation to tell what she thinks of the product; she also treats the query as a vehicle for creating a context in which a proposal for a transaction will be made. The prospect is in fact orienting to the 'larger' trajectory of the interaction, namely the path to acceptance of the ultimate sales pitch. The opinion query is oriented to as *preliminary* to a follow-up with a proposal for buying the product (Schegloff, 1980). Next to its function as an invitation to give her opinion, the query is also treated as a *pre-transaction-proposal move*.

The opinion query functions doubly, both as an action in its own right, and as a vehicle for doing a *pre-proposal move*. The first function is articulated in the utterance's format, whereas the anticipatory reading is grounded in its environment of use, immediately after the presentation of the product and in the context of the telemarketing call.

Note that the prospect is attending to the course-of-action value of the opinion query in the second part of the response turn. She first deals with the opinion query, and then turns to the consequences her opinion may have for the target proposal that is co-implicated by such a response. This order is identical to the one Schegloff observes for the construction of responses to a more straightforward type of 'double-barrelled' first pair parts. In most everyday contexts, a question like 'Would you like a cup of coffee?' is not only a request for information, it is also an offer. When it is responded to with 'Yes, thank you', the recipient deals with both aspects, and in a specific order: 'first the format or vehicle, then the action implemented through it' (1995: 71–4). The two-faceted responses to

the opinion queries in the telemarketing calls display the same order. The prospect first deals with the action that is articulated in prior turn and then with the action that is co-implicated by a positive response.

Double-duty first pair parts may pose a complexity problem to their addressee. First pair parts structure the set of possible continuations into subsets of preferred and dispreferred response types. Acceptance of an offer is more preferred than its rejection, just as agreement with a first assessment is more preferred than a disagreeing second assessment. Preferred and dispreferred second pair parts are non-equivalent alternatives. Speakers of second pair parts orient to the preference structure of the pair type that is initiated in the first pair part (Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Atkinson and Heritage, 1984). Double-duty first pair parts establish multiple preference structures. The speaker of the second pair part has to consider multiple preferences that may not be compatible. When preference structures converge, they are easy to handle by the speaker of the second pair part. A rather basic compound response – such as the afore-mentioned response ‘Yes, thank you’ – illustrates this. In the case of ‘cross-cutting’ preferences, however, compliance with one preference structure may cause a potential conflict with the satisfaction of the other (Pomerantz, 1978; Schegloff, 1995: 72–4).

The opinion queries in the telemarketing calls may occasion a similar dilemma. The prospect’s response in extract (7) earlier is a case in point. The prospect first strives to satisfy a constraint not to give a negative assessment of the telemarketer’s presentation of the product (‘it all sounds okay’, line 35). In the second part of the response turn, she then averts the possible consequences of her positive assessment (‘but I am . . . actually not very much interested’, line 36). The prospect reports a state of mind that may serve as a rejection of the transaction proposal for which a positive assessment flags the go-ahead. After having provided a preferred response to the type of first pair part that is articulated in the opinion query, she continues with a dispreferred response to the first pair part that is co-implicated by the preferred outcome of the opinion query.

For the type of straightforward, double-barrelled first pair parts Schegloff discusses, he concludes that ‘the preference structure of the action being implemented . . . dominates and shapes the construction of the second pair part turn, not that of the action’s vehicle’ (1995: 74). Similar principles of constructing and packaging turns are oriented to in the design of response turns in the opinion query sequence. I will turn to them in the following two sections. I will first discuss the properties of responses that converge with the multiple preferences that are installed into the interaction through the first part of the opinion query sequence. And later, I will consider responses with cross-cutting preferences.

Responses that primarily attend to the opinion query

The standardized wording of the opinion query – ‘how does that sound to you?’ – does not articulate any speaker preference with respect to how to respond.

Surprisingly, perhaps, the opinion query is clothed in a neutral format. It does not offer a candidate answer (Pomerantz, 1988). It does not say ‘This sounds good, don’t you think?’ The latter type of query design seeks agreement with the speaker’s own assessment. An agreeing response is preferred, whereas a disagreeing one is not. This fictitious alternative formulation of the opinion query establishes a preference structure – the *preference for agreement* (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987) – that is grounded in a speaker practice (Schegloff, 1995: 59). Despite the apparent neutrality of the query’s format in the calls, however, the prospects nevertheless orient to the opinion query as indisputably looking for a positive evaluation. One of the prospects even formulates this explicitly in his response to the second opinion query in the phone call, the one after the elaborate clarification how the product works (step 3b in the script, see the section about the call’s overall structure):

Extract (8) (from call 3) the prospect’s response to the query after the elaborate clarification

61. Tm: (. . .) en daarmee is uw tweeduizend gulden dus
and with that your two thousand guilders is therefore
62. vervijfvoudigd ·h >hoe vindt u dat kl↑inken↑
multiplied by five ·h how does that sound to you?
63. meneer ((surname)).
mister ((surname)).
64. [(1.0)]
65. Pr3: [·hhH] ja:h eh: dat- ja hoe zou dat klinke, (k-)
·hhH ye:s uh: that- yes how does it sound, (s-)
66. → als ik zeg van eh: slecht dan eh: dan is 't natuurlijk
if I say like uh: bad then uh: then it is not right
67. nje goed. eh: dat klinkt >natuurlijk< altijd ↓goed.
of course. uh: this sounds always good of course.

The prospect shows he is aware that he is expected to issue a positive assessment. He even formulates a rule why this is so (‘if I say like bad then it is not right’, lines 72–3). Evidently, the query’s placement immediately after a presentation – which itself is designed so as to make the best possible impression of the product (see extracts 3 and 4) – creates a slot at which a positive assessment is the preferred type of filler. In the eyes of this prospect, it is even the only option that is left open. Although it is not articulated in the design of its first pair part, the opinion query installs a preference for a second pair part with a positive assessment. The preference is not based on a speaker practice – that is, the speaker’s formulation of the turn – but is grounded in the character of the course of action it is part of.

Although the prospect in call 3 knowingly proceeds along the sequence’s in-built directionality, he only does so in a detached and non-committal manner. When the prospect finally gives his opinion (‘this sounds always good of course’, line 73), he presents it as a self-evident (‘of course’) and general (‘always’) property of this type of sales presentation. Remember, by the way, that this prospect

has already used the very same wording in his response to the first opinion query (see extract 6). Note further that he does not say 'very good' or 'great!' Instead, he repeats and matches the interrogative's frame ('it sounds . . .'). The cross-speaker maintenance of the query's frame forestalls the assessment's attribution to the prospect personally. The delivery of the assessment opinion is shaped so as to minimize the speaker's responsibility for it. Although the judgement is positive, the speaker is not personally committed to it. He is just the *animator* of a script that is authored by the course of action in which he is invited to perform (Goffman, 1981).

Despite indications of this kind of formal reservation in the assessment's formulation, this prospect is the only one in the four calls studied here, who eventually accepts the proposal for the appointment with the financial adviser. He is also the only one – as has already been noticed – who merely states his opinion in the response to the opinion query. Unlike the response we saw in extract (7), his opinion turns do not end up in a part in which the speaker attends to the trajectory for which a positive assessment opens up the way. The prospect refrains from the use of blocking practices. The speaker is solely issuing an – albeit obligatory – preferred response to the action that is articulated in the opinion query. He is not explicitly attending to the action for which a positive response is setting up a context. Apparently, it suffices to respond only to the action that is articulated in the format of the opinion query turn. The recipient takes the opinion query as an action in its own right and does not orient to the course of action it is enabling as a definitely dispreferred trajectory, at least, not yet at this point. Apparently, there is no need to already avert the follow-up action that is co-implicated by a positive response to the opinion query. More data have to be examined in order to be able to determine whether this is exemplary for a more general orientation in the construction of responses to first pair parts with dual impact: if preferences are congruent, a preferred response to the action that is articulated in the format of the first pair part is enough.

The prospect in call 3 refrains from issuing a blocking response to the opinion query. This opens up the way for the telemarketer to continue with a report of arguments that support the prospect's position.⁶ This kind of uptake does not occur after the responses to the opinion queries in the other calls. For reasons of space, I cannot go into this in detail, unfortunately. It is important to note, however, that the telemarketer does not go on right away with a proposal for making an appointment after the positive assessments of this prospect. After the opinion delivery following the summary presentation (step 3a), she continues with the clarification discourse unit (as in extract 4). And after the opinion query sequence following the clarification (the extract above), she first affiliates with the prospect's opinion by reporting arguments for it, and then inquires whether her recipient would like to get more information. When the prospect then does not respond in a manner that blocks the offer carried by the inquiry, the proposal for the appointment is eventually made (cast as an offer, see extract 2).

So, a positive response to the opinion query in which the speaker does not

ward off a follow-up with a transaction proposal does not yet create an environment in which such a proposal can be launched. The sequential distance between the prospect's go-ahead response to the opinion query, and the point at which the transaction proposal is finally delivered, suggests that the opinion query sequence should not be analysed as a canonical type of presequence. Presequences may create a slot that should be filled with the action that is anticipated in it. A *go-ahead* response to a pre-request, for example, establishes the local relevancy of a contiguous continuation with the projected request. The opinion queries in my data do not display this contiguity requirement. The sequential distance between the opinion query and the action that is prepared in it may be greater and more diffuse. Other types of preparatory sequences may intervene, and cumulatively build on their respective outcomes. In order to be able to further examine more carefully the properties of this kind of preparatory sequence that contribute to an encompassing course of action, I will stick to a more cautious characterization as a pre-transaction-proposal move (Schegloff, 1980, 1988; Drew, 1984)

Dispreferred responses to first pair parts with multiple preferences

In the previous section, I discussed responses that deliver an allegedly preferred second pair part to the opinion query. The respondent assesses the telemarketer's product positively and does not make any explicit reference to the follow-up action that is co-implicated by a positive assessment. In this section, I will look at responses with cross-cutting preferences. We already saw an instance in extract (7):

Extract (7) (detail)

33. Tm: hoe vindt u dat kl[↑]inken?
how does that sound to you?
34. 1.7
35. Pr4: → ja:h 't- (0.5) 't klinkt allemaal wel: maar ik heb t'r
well: it- (0.5) it all sounds okay indeed but I am
36. eigenlijk- eigenlijk niet zo veel interesse ↓voor.
actually- actually not very much interested in it.

Note first that the opinion in the first part of the response turn is articulated in an objectifying mode again ('it all sounds okay indeed', line 35). The style of formulating is very similar to the way the prospect in call 3 delivered his opinion (see the previous section). The same non-committal way of formulating her opinion can be observed in the other opinion statement of this prospect, the one responding to the opinion query after the elaborate clarification (step 3b):

Extract (9) (from call 4) after the elaborate clarification

66. Tm: hoe vindt u dat klinken mevrouw ((*surname*))
*how does that sound to you missus ((*surname*))*
67. Pr4: → ·hH jA:h dat klinkt allemaal heel moo:i:. maar:
·hH ye:s it all sounds very beautiful. but

68. ↑net (als) ik zeg van °eh::°° (0.3) nou sowieso
 just (as) I say like uh: well anyway
69. heb (je) geen- geen vierduizend gulden,
 (one) ha(s) no- no four thousand guilders,
70. 0.3
71. Tm: °hm↑h[m
72. Pr4: |·h en ten tweede ↓ik heb t'r niet zo (gekke)vul
 ·h and in the second place I am not that very much
73. interesse voor:.
 interested in it.

The opinion statements in extracts (7) and (9) differ from the ones in call 3, however, because they also are marked as the first part of a contrast pair that projects a continuation with the second part of the contrast. In the opinion statement in extract (7), its speaker uses the concessive particle 'wel', translated here as 'indeed' ('t klinkt allemaal wel', 'it all sounds okay indeed'). If it is used in turn-initial turn constructional units, the concessive 'wel'-part projects a continuation with an adversative *but*-part ('maar') in the next turn constructional unit (Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1980) – as indeed is the case in the prospect's response in extract (7). The contrast projecting technique that is used in extract (9) is less easy to explain. It is located in the kind of *extreme case formulation* that is used to formulate the assessment part of the response ('it all sounds very beautiful, but . . .', line 67; Pomerantz, 1986). The combination of doing a very positive assessment in a 'by the way' manner – almost a technique for embedding an assessment so as to target a continuation with something else (Schegloff, 1997) – lends this type of opinion formulation its contrast-projecting quality.

What matters here, however, is that after each of the opinion formulations in call 4, the prospect goes on with the other part of the contrast structure that was begun in the first part of the response turn. She reports objections against the transaction proposal that is brought closer by the positive assessment in the first part of her turn. The delivery of the opinion in the first part of the response turn thus is subordinated to the contradictory continuation that is projected in it. Although the prospect complies with the preference for assessing the product positively, she simultaneously provides cues for the manner in which she will subsequently treat its possible consequences.

Both in extracts (7) and (9), the turn with the response to the opinion query displays features that show that the speaker delivers it as a dispreferred second. Preferred second pair parts are usually delivered without delay and formulated in a frank, concise mode. Dispreferred seconds, on the other hand, are frequently delayed, mitigated, hesitantly produced, hidden away, put in a roundabout way and/or accounted for (Pomerantz, 1984; Schegloff, 1995: 60–71). The most notable feature of dispreferredness of the response turns in extracts (7) and (9) is a consequence of its speaker orientation to the dual impact of the opinion query. By first attending to the format of the opinion query, the delivery of the dispreferred response to the co-implicated follow-up action is delayed within the

response turn. The delivery of the positive assessment in the first part of the response turn postpones the ensuing rejection of the anticipated transaction proposal.

Schegloff observes that, in responses to double-barrelled first pair parts, the preference structure of the action being implemented is decisive for the construction of the second pair part turn. This is also confirmed by other features of the turns in which the prospects respond to the telemarketer's opinion query. Generally, the response turn as a whole is from its very beginning placed and formatted as a dispreferred second pair part. Compare, for example, the comparatively long gaps after the opinion query turns in extracts (6), (7) and (8). The prospects also effectuate turn-initial delay by a variety of techniques, e.g., by prefacing the response with pro-forma agreement tokens such as 'ja' ('yes', see extracts 6–9), or a dispreferredness marker such as 'nou' ('well', see extract 10). They also deploy various types of mitigation devices such as the use of the particle 'eigenlijk' ('actually'; see Clift, 2001), or the litotes construction – a euphemistic type of affirmation by negation of the contrary – in terms of which the objection in extract (7) is formulated ('I am . . . actually not very much interested in it', line 40).

The prospect's orientation to the dispreferredness of the response to the co-implicated action overshadows the compliance with the preference for a positive assessment, both with respect to the placement of the response turn and in the way it is packaged. This dominance comes to light even more clearly when the prospect skips the opinion part and immediately reacts with reports that signal rejection of the anticipated action. Consider extract (10), from call number 2. The prospect reacts to the opinion query following the summary presentation (step 3a):

Extract (10) (from call 2) continuation of extract (3); this prospect's husband took part in the survey in the shopping centre

35. Tm: hoe vindt u dat klinkeh?
how does that sound to you?
36. Pr2: → °*n:ouah*° >ik ge- ik zelf heb GEen< interesse hooa↑:r
well: I mi- I myself am not interested you know
37. 0.5
38. Tm: en: mag ik vragen wat daar de RE:den voor i[s:.
and may I ask what is the reason for that
39. Pr2: [°*n:ou:h*
well:
40. ik e:h blijf gewoon bij 't ouwe↓:h
I uh just stick to the way it was

After several forms of initial delay ('nou', 'well' and a recycled turn beginning), the prospect responds by merely stating that she is not interested (line 34). This way of objecting to the transaction proposal is so consequential that this call is ended without having entered into step 3b, the delivery of the lengthy clarification of how the product works. Focusing solely on the proposal component might

turn out to be a way of demonstrating the degree of decisiveness with which the prospect is prepared to reject the action that is co-implicated by the query. In the previous section we saw that a response in which the prospect refrained from making objections against the proposal seemed to foreshadow the prospect's eventual willingness to accept it. Interestingly, responses that adumbrate the proposal's rejection can be done by a complementary construction technique. The prospect may signal he or she is going to block the trajectory for launching the target-proposal through only attending to the eventual course-of-action value of the opinion query.

The other prospects are not that straightforward, however. They orient to and comply with the normative constraints that are built into the interaction by the telemarketer's skilled exploitation of principles of sequence and preference organization. The telemarketer is not only controlling the call's line of development by permanently occupying the initiative. The sophisticated placement and formulation of the opinion query cause, each time anew, a potential conflict for its recipient. Generally, the prospects solve the problem in two stages. First, they comply with the preference structure that is articulated in the format of the opinion query. Then, if they do not want to co-operate with the preparations for the anticipated launch of some kind of transaction proposal, they cast their rejection as a dispreferred type of response.

Prospects are very obviously 'sensitive' about the dispreferred character of rejections. They even may try to avoid being forced to do them, however, without being committed to the consequences to which a withheld rejection ultimately leads. Compare the prospect in extract (11). It is from call number 1 and it renders the prospect's response to the opinion query after the elaborate clarification (step 3b):

Extract (11) (from call 1) the prospect's response to the query after the elaborate clarification

92. Tm: (hoe) vindt u dat k↑linkeh, meneer ((*surname*))
(*how*) *does that sound to you, mister ((surname))*
93. 0.8
94. Pr1: → joa:h wee:'k nie eig'lijk. wil 's e:vm over e::h-
yes don't know actually, just want shortly about u::h-
95. → >kē je me daar wa vrijblijvend< ook nog wat over stuur
can you also send me something about this without obligations still
96. of [nieh?
or can't you?
97. Tm: |jah, ·h nou e:hm: (.) wij sturen helaas geen
yes, ·h well u:hm: (.) we do not send information
98. informa↑tie, om[dat die folder voor u precies 'tzelfde is
unfortunately, because this booklet is exactly the same for you
99. Pr1: |neu↓:
no:

100. Tm: als v'r u- voor uw buurman ·h[h
as for you- for your neighbour
101. Pr1: |jah,
yes,

Instead of finally delivering the dispreferred response towards which he is unmistakably moving, the prospect does a *counter* (Schegloff, 1995: 6–9). He does a request in the position at which he was on his way to deliver the second pair part of the opinion query sequence. Instead, the position of the second pair part is occupied by another type of first pair part that has the capacity to obliterate the obligation that is still pending. The sequential roles are reversed: instead of the prospect being the one who is expected to deliver a second pair part, the telemarketer now is the one who has to respond. Note, by the way, that the telemarketer's second pair part is now formatted as a dispreferred response too!

Discussion

By issuing an opinion query in the context of a recommendatory product presentation, the telemarketer is luring her interlocutor into a web of potentially contradictory sequential commitments. If the speaker of the second pair part complies with the preference for assessing the product positively, he may create the expectation that he will also comply with the target action that is co-implicated by a positive response to the query, a proposal for some kind of commercial transaction. The prospect may cope with such cross-cutting multiple preferences by first complying with the preference for delivering a positive opinion about the product, and then reporting an objection against buying it. I have shown that the packaging of the preferred assessment in the first part of the response turn already targets a dispreferred continuation of the response. The response turn as a whole displays features of a dispreferred second pair part. The orientation to the anticipated course-of-action value of a positive response to the opinion query dominates the shape and the construction of the response turn.

In its environment of use in the telemarketing call, the opinion query has a dual impact. It may be oriented to both as an opinion query – the action that is articulated in the utterance's format – and as a pre-transaction-proposal move that is grounded in the course of action the opinion query is contributing to. Unlike the type of double-barrelled first pair parts discussed in Schegloff (1995: 71–4), however, the relation between the two actions seem to be less inextricably linked and more asymmetrical. This follows from two observations. First, if the recipient of the opinion query is not yet preparing for a rejection of the co-implicated follow-up proposal for a transaction, it suffices only to attend to the opinion query as an action in its own right. A response with a positive assessment of the product will do. On the contrary, the recipient of the opinion query may also skip the delivery of his opinion and immediately report objections against acceptance of the envisaged transaction proposal. The response is

balanced in one way or the other dependent on the trajectory choices the prospect makes in his or her response to the opinion query. Second, even after a response that opens up a trajectory in which the telemarketer works towards the launch of the transaction proposal, other preparatory sequences may come in between. A response that complies with the query's multiple preferences does not project a determinate contiguous position for launching the transaction proposal that is prepared in it.

This latter observation is important for our knowledge about preparatory sequences in standardized courses of action in institutional settings. Participants orient to the preparatory character of these sequences and in their responses they permanently display the duality of their first pair parts by oscillating between attending to the local value of the sequence and the target value it is recognizably working towards. This type of preparatory sequence is a special type of pre-sequence. The cumulative order in which they occur has to be explored further, just as the types of multiple preference structures they establish.

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NOTES

1. See, however, Clark and Pinch (1988, 1992), Clark et al. (1994, 2003), Firth (1991, 1994, 1995a, 1995b), Haegeman (1996), Mazeland et al. (1995), Pinch and Clark (1986).
2. For reasons of privacy and economic interest, all personal and commercial information that may lead to identification of specific persons, companies or products is made anonymously.
3. In the clarification (step 3b), the telemarketer works stepwise towards the conclusion that the product does what it promises, namely, that the invested money will be multiplied by five within three years.
4. The telemarketer now talks about a net deposit of two thousand guilders (lines 63–4 in extract 4). The difference with the deposit of *four* thousand guilders that was mentioned earlier (see lines 39–40 in extract 4) has to do with a tax benefit of two thousand guilders. The calculation that has multiplication by five as its outcome is made with the remaining net investment of two thousand guilders.
5. The Dutch grading system goes from 0 to 10, with zero as extremely unsatisfactory, and 10 as more than excellent. In subcultures that are not over-ambitious, 7 or 8 are seen as good marks.
6. The series *opinion query*, *opinion delivery* and *affirmative report* was one of the reasons why I originally thought the opinion query sequence was comparable with Maynard's *perspective display series* (Maynard, 1989, 1991; see Mazeland, 2001). This is not correct. In the kind of data I have examined, it is already clear what kind of opinion is favoured when the telemarketer inquires after the prospect's opinion. The prospects observably demonstrate that they are aware of the sequence's in-built directionality.

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HARRIE MAZELAND is Reader in Language and Communication at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. His research interests are in conversation analysis, discourse and grammar, empirical semantics and talk in institutional settings. Among his recent publications is, together with Mike Huiskes, 'Dutch *but* as a sequential conjunction' (in *Studies in Interactional Linguistics*, M. Selting and E. Couper-Kuhlen (eds), pp. 141–69. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2001). ADDRESS: Department of Language and Communication, University of Groningen, PO Box 716, 9700 AS Groningen, The Netherlands. [email: H.J.Mazeland@let.rug.nl]