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## The Terms of Agreement: Indexing Epistemic Authority and Subordination in Talk-in-Interaction\*

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*Within the general framework of agreement on a state of affairs, the matter of the terms of agreement can remain: determining whose view is the more significant or more authoritative with respect to the matter at hand. In this paper we focus on this issue as it is played out in assessment sequences. We examine four practices through which a second speaker can index the independence of an agreeing assessment from that of a first speaker, and in this way can qualify the agreement. We argue that these practices reduce the responsiveness of the second assessment to the first; in this way they resist any claim to epistemic authority that may be indexed by the first speaker in “going first” in assessing some state of affairs.*

Social psychologists have long noted that social actions involve persons in commitments that others should recognize and validate. Perhaps the preeminent theorist of this perspective was Erving Goffman, who observed in “On Face-Work,”

[W]hen a person volunteers a statement or message, however trivial or commonplace, he commits himself and those he addresses, and in a sense places everyone present in jeopardy. By saying something, the speaker opens himself up to the possibility that the intended recipients will affront him by not listening or will think him forward, foolish, or offensive in what he has said (1967:37).

And in *Relations in Public*,

[L]et a participant whom others would rather see silent make a statement, and he will have expressed the belief that he has a full right to talk and is worth listening to, thereby obliging his listeners to give a sign, however begrudging and however mean, that he is qualified to speak (1971:95).

Goffman conceptualized these obligations in the concept of “face,” which he conceived as central to the organization of social

interaction. This work was extended by Brown and Levinson (1987); drawing on Durkheim’s (1915) distinction between negative and positive rites, they distinguished between negative face (the desire to be unimpeded) and positive face (the desire for approval, appreciation, or ratification).<sup>1</sup> Brown and Levinson operationalized face-work into a set of specifically linguistic strategies that embody connections between language use, social distance, power, and related variables. In this way, connections are made between *face* processes embodied in interaction and facets of social and cultural *identity*; both Goffman’s theory and Brown and Levinson’s extension are at pains to distinguish these notions. Identity is specific and local to persons, groups, and cultures, whereas the desire to be unimpeded and to be regarded positively—the two central components of face—embody putatively universal elements of human conduct and are conceived as basic to its organization.

Goffman’s theoretical conception of face as situated within “the flow of events in the encounter” (1967:7) invited an empirical focus on sequences of talk-in-interaction; these, as Schegloff (1992) observes, are a primordial site of human sociality. One domain

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<sup>1</sup> These notions, of course, have a long lineage in Western political and social thought; see Berlin (2002:166–217).

of such research, generally recognized as converging with Goffman's concerns, is the management of conversational actions, such as agreement and disagreement, that are clearly consequential for social solidarity. Conversation analysts have used the term *preference organization* to refer to the set of practices through which persons manage courses of action that either promote or undermine social solidarity (Holtgraves 1992; Lerner 1996; Pomerantz 1978; 1984; Sacks 1987; Schegloff 1988, forthcoming; Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977). The most prominent organizational consequence of these practices is to maximize the likelihood of affiliative, socially solidary actions, and to minimize the consequences of disaffiliative, socially divisive ones (Heritage 1984a:265–80).

In addition to the organization of preference, however, participants' concerns with face can be found in the management of rights and responsibilities related to knowledge and information. For example, conversationalists treat one another as possessing privileged access to their own experiences and as having specific rights to narrate them (Pomerantz 1980; Sacks 1984); journalists distinguish between firsthand and derivative access to breaking news as relevant for the rights to describe it (Raymond 2000; Roth 2002); callers to 911 emergency services report matters in quite distinctive terms if they are bystanders to an incident rather than victims (Whalen and Zimmerman 1990); and patients offer medical diagnoses to physicians only under relatively particular circumstances (Gill 1998; Gill and Maynard forthcoming; Heritage and Robinson forthcoming). In each of these cases, the distribution of rights and responsibilities regarding what participants can accountably know, how they know it, whether they have rights to describe it, and in what terms is directly implicated in organized practices of speaking.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper we consider sequences in which participants offer evaluative assessments of states of affairs. We focus on how relative rights to perform these evaluations are indexed within the talk. Although these sequences are occupied mainly with agree-

ment and are fundamentally affiliative, we show that they can involve complex face considerations relating to the management of knowledge and information. We distinguish between assessments that initiate an assessment sequence as "first position assessments," and assessments that are designed to be responsive to these as "second position assessments."<sup>3</sup>

In sequences of interaction, first position assessments establish a representational field in which second assessments will be found to position themselves in some fashion: through agreement, disagreement, or adjustment (Heritage 2002a; Pomerantz 1984). In this sense, first position assessments offer a terrain within which agreement will be sought. We propose that these assessments also carry an implied claim that the speaker has primary rights to evaluate the matter assessed. For example, as we demonstrate, persons offering first assessments may work to defeat any implication that they are claiming primary rights to evaluate the matter at hand. Conversely, persons who find themselves producing a responsive assessment may wish to defeat the implication that their rights in the matter are secondary to those of a first speaker. Because assessments are always produced in real time and are unavoidably produced as first and second positioned actions, they bring unavoidable relevance to issues concerning relative epistemic rights to evaluate states of affairs.

Our primary objective is to explicate the management of these rights, and the means by which this management is achieved. To do so, we focus on the intersection between differential rights to make assessments, turn design, and sequential positioning. As we demonstrate here, persons in the midst of jointly eval-

<sup>3</sup> First position assessments commonly emerge in environments that have been made "ripe" for them in various ways. For example, another speaker has made observations which clearly imply a particular evaluative stance towards the entity under discussion and which may trigger the production of an assessment. First positioned assessments are distinctive in that they take an explicit, on-record evaluative stance that is available to be agreed with or disagreed with in next turn. First positioned assessments do not "agree" or "disagree" with the previous comments that lead up to them, though they may be aligned or disaligned with the tenor of those comments.

<sup>2</sup> Also see Drew (1991); Drew and Heritage (1992).

uating states of affairs are concerned not only with agreement, but also with who is agreeing with whom (Schegloff 1996a:177)—or, as we shall have it, “the terms of agreement.”

### ASSESSMENTS AND THEIR EPISTEMICS

The assessment of states of affairs gener-

(1) [NB:IV:10:2]

1 Lot: [h h]Jgeziz Chris' you sh'd see that house E(h)mma yih'av  
2 ↓no idəa.h[hmh  
3 Emm: [I bət it's a drea:m.

Emma's response in line 3 (“I bət it's a drea:m.”) projects an agreement with Lottie's assessment of the house, while simultaneously thematizing her lack of first-hand experience. Lacking that experience, she manages raw affiliation with Lottie's evaluation by an utterance that expresses, at best, a simulacrum of agreement.

(2) [JS:II:28]

1 J: -> T's tsuh beautiful day out isn't it?  
2 L: -> Yeh it's jus' gorgeous...

Alternatively, it can be second-order and mediated, as in (3). Here Jon and Lyn are a

(3) [JS:II:61]

1 Jon: We saw Midnight Cowboy yesterday- or [suh- Friday.  
2 Eve: [Oh?  
3 Lyn: Didju s- you saw that, [it's really good.  
4 Eve: [No I haven't seen it  
5 -> Jo saw it 'n she said she f- depressed her  
6 Eve: -> ter[ribly  
7 Jon: -> [Oh it's [terribly depressing.  
8 Lyn: -> [Oh it's depressing.

As these two examples indicate, access to assessable objects is ranked. First-order access entails rights to assess, which can outweigh the rights of second-order access. In (2) the initial assessment of the weather is marked by its present-tense declarative form as drawn from direct and current experience; in this context of face-to-face interaction, such experience is equally available to the recipient. The co-interactant responds with an agreement (“Yeh”) and an upgraded second assessment with comparable features. In (3), by contrast, Eve's

ally requires some form of access to the state of affairs being assessed (Pomerantz 1984). In (1), for example, a second speaker struggles to find a basis for affiliating with a first assessment whose very construction (“you sh'd see that house E(h)mma”) denies the access necessary for building agreement:

While (1) illustrates the limits of verbalized agreement without access, most assessment sequences incorporate the presumption of concurrent or serial joint access to a referent state of affairs. Such access can be first-order and immediate, as in (2):

couple who have seen the film *Midnight Cowboy*, while Eve has not:

assessment of *Midnight Cowboy* at lines 5–6 is marked as based in the account of a third party. Jon and Lyn's responsive assessments, however, renew the claim to direct, first-order access to the movie (first asserted in line 1), and are marked by the “oh”-prefaces as asserting stronger rights to assess it (Heritage 2002a).

#### *First and Second Position Assessments and Rights to Assess*

Participants orient to first and second

position as involved in claims about rights to make assessments. This is most apparent in cases where there is some incompatibility between the epistemic rights that a speaker

wishes to claim and the position in which the assessment is offered. In (4), for example, Norma offers a downgraded first assessment of a third party:

## (4) [SBL 2-1-8:5]

- 1 Bea: hh hhh We:ll,h I wz gla:d she c'd come too las'ni:ght=  
 2 Nor: -> =Sh[e seems such a n]ice little [l a dy]  
 3 Bea: [(since you keh) ] [dAwf'l]ly nice l\*i'l  
 4 p\*ers'n. t hhhh hhh We:ll, I[i j's]  
 5 Nor: [I thin]k evryone enjoyed jus...

Just before this sequence, it emerged that Norma had met the person assessed in line 2—a longtime acquaintance of Bea—for the first time (see Example (14) below). The asymmetry in their experience is indexed in Norma's evidentially downgraded assessment "She seems such a nice little lady" and Bea's declaratively asserted agreement "dAwf'lly nice l\*i'l p\*ers'n." By downgrading her claimed access with the evidential verb "seems" (Chafe and Nichols 1986),<sup>4</sup> Norma

manages her initial assessment so as to defeat any epistemic priority that might have been inferred sheerly from its first positioning.

The reverse contingency is evident in (5) below. Here Abe and Ben are in the midst of a discussion prompted by Abe's announcement that he has acquired a Burmese cat. As emerged earlier in the conversation, Ben's knowledge of Burmese cats is second-order: it is derived from a neighbor's ownership of the breed:

## (5) [TCIIA:1]

- 1 Abe: It's the- only cat I ever saw that chased do:gs.  
 2 (0.2)  
 3 Ben: [ehh hhu[hh huhh ]  
 4 Abe: [(Hadda) [go out'n r]escue a dog that wz eight times bigger'n  
 5 he wz th's [morning.  
 6 Ben: [e- .hhhhhh Hurra::y fer the Burme:se.  
 7 Abe: e-huh-huh- [heh- [heh-he:h,]  
 8 Ben: [F:::[ight'n fo]o:ls.  
 9 (0.2)  
 10 Abe: Pard'n,  
 11 (0.3)  
 12 Ben: -> .hhh They're fight'n fools those Burmese,  
 13 Abe: -> Oh I know 'e is.

The target sequence of assessments (lines 12–13) emerges from Ben's effort (lines 6 and 8) to affiliate with Abe's illustration of his cat's fighting prowess. His clearly responsive "Hurra::y fer the Burme:se." is appreciated with laughter, while his appended characterization of Burmese cats as

"F:::ight'n foo:ls." is treated as problematic with "Pard'n."<sup>5</sup> As a result, Ben's original phrasal assessment, which initially was produced in second position to Abe's first positioned assessment (and therefore fitted to Ben's rights to assess Burmese cats), comes to be produced as a fully sentential declarative assessment ".hhh They're fight'n fools those Burmese," (line 12). In this context, Abe comes to treat Ben as asserting rights to assess Burmese cats that are equivalent to his

<sup>4</sup> Evidentially qualified claims (using expressions such as "It looks, feels, appears X") are downgraded relative to unmarked declarative claims because they are compatible with the asserted state of affairs not being the case. Thus it is possible to offer the remark "She seems (looks, sounds) X, but she isn't" without self-contradiction.

<sup>5</sup> For an account of this kind of "open class" repair initiation, see Drew (1997).

own, and it is this putative claim of equivalence that Abe resists. Three features of Abe's turn embody this resistance. First, he shifts the terms of assessment from Ben's assessment of the breed in general ("those Burmese"), to the cat which he owns and has primary rights to assess. Second, the "oh"-prefaced design of this assessment indexes his claim to primary rights in this matter (Heritage 2002a). Finally his use of, and stress on, the word *know* underscores his claims in this regard.

As the talk in these sequences demonstrates, participants work to manage the relationship between rights to assess and sequential position by manipulating the design of the turns out of which their assessments are built. In the following sections we examine speakers' resources for managing this intersection of rights to assess and sequential position.

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(6) [VIYMC 1:4]

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- 1 J: Let's feel the water. Oh, it...  
 2 R: -> It's wonderful. It's just right. It's like bathtub water.

(7) [NB VII:2]

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- 1 Emm: =We're painting like ma:d in th'kitchen=  
 2 -> =a:nd oh evrything's workin out so pretty here
- 

In (8) the first speaker deploys similar resources to evaluate past experiences which

were shared with the coparticipant:

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(8) [SBL 2-2-3:5]

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- 1 Ch1: -> We:ll it was [fu:n Clai[re, ((smile voice))  
 2 Cla: [ hhh [Yea::[:h,]  
 3 Ch1: [°M]m°
- 

A similar pattern is evident in (9), where the assessment concerns a joint acquaintance:

(9) [NB:IV.7:-44]

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- 1 A: -> Adeline's such a swell [gal  
 2 P: [Oh God, whadda gal. You know it!
- 

Across these sequences, the first speakers' declarative utterances (arrowed) flatly assert evaluations of states of affairs, and clearly do so on the basis of direct access to them.

*Downgraded first assessments.* Contrasting with these are assessments designed to exhibit downgraded epistemic access to a state of affairs. Two main

*Assessments in First Position: Resources for Indexing Epistemic Rights*

Speakers can design first positioned assessments to create three basic forms that modulate the extent of their claimed epistemic rights. Using these resources, producers of first positioned assessments may manage face claims by asserting the socioepistemic rights associated with particular social identities, or by deferring to the rights associated with the identities of others.

*Unmarked first assessments.* In unmarked assessments, speakers deploy simple declarative evaluations that claim unmediated access to the assessable. These utterances contain no language that either strengthens or weakens the declarative claim that is made. For example, in excerpts (6) and (7), speakers assess their immediate experience.

resources can be used to accomplish this. First are evidentials (also see (4) above), through which speakers mark mediated access to a referent, and thus downgrade the claims made by the accompanying assessment. In (10), for example, Hyla has been describing a play that she and Nancy have tickets to see:

(10) [HG II:6]

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1 Nan: -> Kinyih tell me what it's about?=  
 2  
 3 ..... [27 lines of description deleted]  
 4  
 5 Hyl: =.hh En she's fixed up, (0.4) en she meets this gu:y, .hh a:n'  
 6 yihknow en he's (.) rilly gorgeous'n eez rilly nice en  
 7 evrythi[:ng bud li]ke=  
 8 Nan: [Uh h u :h,]  
 9 Hyl: =.hh He's ah .hh Hollywood (0.3) s:sta:r's son yihknow who wz  
 10 a mista:[ke en they [put im in'n [Academy,]  
 11 Nan: -> [O o this [s o u n d s [so goo::]\_:[:d?  
 12 Hyl: [school, .hh buh  
 13 wai:t='n then, .hhm (0.2) .tch en the:(w)- the mother's .hh  
 14 sister is a real bigot.

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It is clear from line 1 that Hyla is the better informed about the play. This asymmetry is preserved in Nancy's assessment ("Oo this sounds so goo:::d?") at line 11; the evidential formulation of this underscores that the basis for her evaluation is premised on the information provided in Hyla's description.

A second means to downgrade an assessment involves the use of tag questions. By introducing an invitation to agree with the

assessment as a feature of its surface syntax, such questions index a putatively secondary access to a referent relative to the coparticipant.<sup>6</sup> In (11), for example, the assessment refers to Vera's grandchildren, whose recent visit included a stopover at Jenny's house. Jenny's declaratively formulated assessment is modulated with a tag question that defers to Vera's rights to assess her own family members:

(11) [Rah 14:2]

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1 Jen: Mm [I: bet they proud o:f the fam'ly.=  
 2 Ver: [Ye:s.  
 3 Jen: -> =They're [a luvly family now ar'n't [they.  
 4 Ver: [°Mm:.° [They are: ye [s.  
 5 Jen: [eeYe [s::,  
 6 Ver: [Yes,  
 7 Jen: Mm: All they need now is a little girl tih complete i:t.

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The tag question is positioned so as to invite response as the *first* matter to be addressed by the coparticipant. In this way, Jenny formulates her turn as (in the first instance) a question to be answered rather than as an assertion to be agreed with; thus she cedes epistemic authority in the matter to her coparticipant. The introduction of the invitation to agreement in the surface design

of the utterance indexes Jenny's position that Vera has primary rights to assess her own grandchildren.

In a similar case, Norman and Ilene are dog breeders discussing the breeding potential of one of Norman's younger dogs. At line 9, Ilene invokes a comparison with Trixie, another of Norman's dogs.

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<sup>6</sup> A number of authors, including Bernstein (1971), Kollock, Blumstein and Schwartz (1985), Lakoff (1975), and O'Barr and Atkins (1980), have linked the use of tag questions to class, gender, and power. In this

section we connect their use not to general social identities but to the acknowledgment of particular, situated rights to evaluate specific states of affairs. Such rights may or may not map onto more general differences in social power.

(12) [Heritage 1:11:4]

1 Ile: No well she's still a bit yung though isn't [she<ah me]an:=  
 2 Nor: [S h e : :]  
 3 Ile: =uh[:  
 4 Nor: [She wz a year: la:st we:k.  
 5 Ile: Ah yes. Oh well any time no:w [then.]  
 6 Nor: [U h : : ] : [m  
 7 Ile: [Y e : s . =  
 8 Nor: =But she[:'s ( )]  
 9 Ile: -> [Cuz Trixie started] so early [didn't sh[e,  
 10 Nor: -> [°O h : : [y e : s . °=  
 11 Ile: =°Ye:h°=

Ilene's assessment asserts that the dog started breeding "early" and the following tag acknowledges Norman's primary rights to assess his own dog.<sup>7</sup>

*Upgraded first assessments.* Just as assess-

ments can be epistemically downgraded relative to a recipient's attributedly superior rights, so can they be upgraded. The primary resource for this task is the negative interrogative, as in (13):

(13) [SBL:2-1-8:5]

1 Bea: Wz las'night th'firs'time you met Missiz Kelly?  
 2 (1.0)  
 3 Nor: Me:t who:m?  
 4 Bea: Missiz Kelly?  
 5 Nor: ^Y e : s . hh [Y i h kno ] : w what < ]  
 6 Bea: -> [ Isn't ] she a culte little thi:ng?

Here it is established at the beginning of the sequence that Bea has a more extended acquaintance with "Missiz Kelly" than does Norma (lines 1-5). Bea asserts her corollary epistemic rights in her assessment at line 6. The form of her assessment embodies this stance

through the following features working in concert:

First, by virtue of its interrogative syntax, this format mandates a second assessment through the conditional relevance of a question-answer pair more strongly than would a simple declarative. Moreover, by projecting a

<sup>7</sup> In (11) and (12), the first speaker uses epistemic downgrading to address the coparticipant's clear primary rights to assess the referent. In a sub-set of cases, however, similar downgrading does not appear

to address such a contingency. These cases involve copresent parties assessing a commonly available state of affairs:

In these three cases, it is evident that neither party

[JS:II:41]

J: -> T's- tsuh beautiful day out isn't it?  
 L: Yeh it's jus' gorgeous ...

[VIYMC:1:2] ((J and R are in a rowboat on a lake))

J: -> It's really a clear lake, isn't it?  
 R: It's wonderful.

[Ravioli Dinner:6 (Mark and Kim are eating dinner involving many samples of free food)]

Mar: Not bad for free huh?  
 (0.3)  
 Kim: Hm mm.

yes/no (or type-conforming) response, it asserts command of the terms to be used by the recipient in the assessment of the referent (Raymond 2003). Finally, the negative interrogative strongly invites agreement (Heritage 2002b). It thereby invokes an established or settled position and, through that, a more extensive acquaintance with the referent and/or stronger rights to assess it.

All three of these features cooperate to establish Bea's evaluative position as "settled" or "decided" and, as part of that position, to

reinforce her primary rights to assess the acquaintance in question.

In a second case, (14) below, Emma is calling to thank Margie for a recent lunch party. She extends a compliment about the occasion into a sustained and favorable evaluation of the others present. This culminates, like (13), in a positive assessment managed through a negative interrogative. Emma's assessment "e-that Pa:t isn'she a do:ll?" emerges as an Nth compliment to her co-interactant:

(14) [NB VII:1-2]

- 
- 1 Emm: =Oh honey that was a lovely lunchon I shoulda ca:lled you  
 2 s:soo[:ner but I:ll[:lo:ved it.Ih wz just deli:ghtfu[: l.]=  
 3 Mar: [(f)) Oh::i] [°( )] [Well]=  
 4 Mar: =I wz gla[d y o u] (came).]  
 5 Emm: ['nd yer f:] friends] 'r so da:rling,=  
 6 Mar: = Oh::i[: it wz:]  
 7 Emm: -> [e-that P]:t isn'she a do:ll?]  
 8 Mar: [iY e]h
- 

Here, perhaps in an effort to emphasize the compliment, Emma deploys a format that asserts her own epistemic primacy in relation to "Pat," the assessed party, although she acknowledges her recipient's closer relationship with her. In contrast to the previous case, then, we find a lack of fit between this claim and the actual state of the relations between the parties. This turns out to be a source of subsequent difficulty (see the discussion of (27) below).

In sum, although first assessments index a tacit claim to epistemic primacy, that claim can be modified: practices exist for asserting both upgraded and downgraded epistemic access and/or rights to assess a referent. It is clear that these practices embody selectional choices, given that an unmarked method of

assessment (i.e., the use of an unqualified declarative statement), which embodies an unmarked claim of primacy, is also an available option.

#### *Managing Epistemic Rights in Second Position Assessments*

Just as first position assessments can incorporate features that index relative access to a referent, so too do second position assessments. The task of indexing relative access is complicated for second speakers by the fact that their access must be managed in relation to the claims embodied in first position assessments, and indeed to the specific practices deployed by first speakers to index those claims.

Second position assessments can take a simple declarative form, as in (15) and (16). Here the participants are jointly assessing shared social occasions. In each case these assessments conclude an extended passage of conversation about the events that are referenced, during which joint access to the events has been thoroughly established as a feature of the talk.

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can claim epistemic primacy concerning the referent states of affairs. Given the concurrent, direct, and therefore equal access enjoyed by both participants, the first speaker's use of a tag question can be understood to downgrade the putatively primary rights to assess the referent that might attach to having gone first. This downgrading is accomplished by inviting agreement in the surface design of the turn through the [declarative + tag question] format.



(15) [SBL 2-2-3:5]

- 
- 1 Ch1: We:ll it was [fu:n Clai[re, ((smile voice))  
 2 Cla: [ hhh [Yea::[:h,]  
 3 Ch1: [°M]m°  
 4 Ch1: [(an')  
 5 Cla: -> [I enjoyed evreh minute o[f it,  
 6 Ch1: [Yah.

(16) [SBL:2-1-8:5]

- 
- 1 Nor: I think evryone enjoyed jus' sitting aroun'  
 2 ta:lk[ing.]  
 3 Bea: -> [ h h] I do too::,  
 4 (0.3)  
 5 Nor: Yihknow e-I think it's too bad we don't do that once'n  
 6 awhile insteada playing bri:dge er 'hh
- 

As these examples suggest, given equal access to past events, a declarative assessment in first position invites a matching response claiming similar access.

Alternatively, second speakers can modulate their response to upgrade their claimed epistemic access to, and/or rights to assess, a referent. Two main kinds of resources are deployed to this end. First, speakers can design the second assessment so as to convey that their position on the matter is already “settled”—that is, held independently of the view that the first speaker’s assessment conveys. In this way they can undercut any relative inferiority in epistemic rights that sheer “secondness” might otherwise convey; indeed, they can advance a claim to primary epistemic rights in the matter under evaluation. Second, speakers can use interrogative syntax in second position to undercut, and supplant, the “firstness” of a first assessment, and to seize the epistemic rights that accrue to that position. These resources are deployed, and their deployment is understood, in relation to the claims that are indexed in first position assessments.

*Upgrading with resources that assert a position as “previously held.”* We discuss two

(2) [JS:II:28]

- 
- 1 J: -> T's tsuh beautiful day out isn't it?  
 2 L: -> Yeh it's jus' gorgeous...

In response, L agrees with J’s assessment while similarly declining to assert primary rights in the matter. By initiating her turn

resources with which speakers in second position can present an evaluation as previously held or “settled.” Using these resources, producers of second positioned assessments may assert the socioepistemic rights associated with particular social identities: they may “match” the claims of downgraded first position assessments or, alternatively, may compete with epistemic priorities that may be suggested by unmarked first position assessments.

*Upgrading with confirmation + agreement token:* The first resource to be discussed exploits features of tag questions in downgraded first position assessments. Because a tag question (like other yes/no-type questions) makes a “yes” or a “no” relevant as the first component of a response (Raymond 2003), speakers can produce different actions by designing their responses to satisfy or defeat this expectation. For example, in the following excerpt (discussed above as excerpt (2)), the first speaker uses a tag question to downgrade a declaratively produced assessment of the weather, thereby indexing the similar rights available to a copresent participant.

with “Yeh”, L satisfies the constraints set by J’s tag question and thereby accepts the terms set by J’s first position assessment

(Raymond 2003). In this respect, L's responsive assessment is wholly occupied with agreement.

Alternatively, speakers can upgrade their claimed access to a referent using a [confirmation + agreement token] turn format. In the following excerpt, for example, Mum describes a child in "hot water" because of a

"craze" for wearing two earrings in a single ear (lines 4–9). While the turn-initial "oh" of Lesley's response (line 10) indexes recognition of the "craze" to which Mum's answer to Lesley's question refers (Heritage 1984b), its tag question downgrades her asserted rights to assess the fashion that has landed Miriam in "hot water":

(17) [Holt 1.1:8]

- 
- 1 Mum: Miriam's going next week,  
 2 Les: Ye:s: ye:s:  
 3 (0.4)  
 4 Mum: She['s been in hot water with'er Mum t'day,  
 5 Les: [M-  
 6 Les: Why:i?  
 7 Mum: .hh We:ll. (0.2) Uh you know (.) there's a cra:ze with the  
 8 girls now to have (.) a secon:d. (1.1) ring ih- a secon:d  
 9 uh garring in one ear.  
 10 Les: [Oh: it's very chea:p isn't it.  
 11 Mum: -> It's very cheap ye:s'n this is u- this is what Ann said. An'  
 12 Ann said (0.3) she- she'll haf (.) tuh have another. (0.5)  
 13 .hh (.) hole in'er ear...((continues story))
- 

Mum's response takes the form of a full repeat ("It's very cheap") followed by a type conforming token ("Yes"). This response complements Lesley's stance by indexing her own primary rights as storyteller, which initially were projected by Lesley's epistemically downgraded turn. Two features of Mum's assessment work to accomplish this complementarity.

First, Lesley's epistemically downgrading tag is a "yes/no" question: like other questions of this type, it invites a "type-conforming" "Yes" or "No" response as the *first* component of any response (Raymond 2003). In this context, Mum's deferral of the "Yes" is constructed as a marked action. The placement of the agreement token ("Yes") after the partial repeat *separates* the action of agreeing from the action of "confirming" in a way that the normal ordering of responses to the question ("Yes it is") does not. Whereas "Yes it is" would be understood as wholly occupied with agreement, Mum's actual response ("It's very cheap yes"), with its initial declaratively formed partial repeat, *confirms* Lesley's evaluation rather than simply *agreeing* with it. By "confirming the assertion" before "responding to the question," Mum also treats agreement with Lesley's

assessment as a matter of lower priority. Thus she goes out of her way to subordinate the action of agreeing with the assessment to the assertion of her epistemic rights relative to Lesley's. Finally, Mum's ordering of the [partial repeat] and [agreement token] conveys the position that Lesley's evaluation addresses a matter on which Mum already holds a "settled" opinion which is quite independent of this occasion (Raymond 2003). In this instance, that she held this position previously is also asserted overtly by reference to what "Ann" (Miriam's mother) previously said to her (lines 11–13).

Second, if the first component of Mum's turn is designed to assert the independence and priority of her position in relation to Lesley's, the second component modulates any hint of impropriety that might be glossed from that treatment, legitimizing Lesley's evaluation and bringing the two women's positions into alignment. This is accomplished by the production of a type-conforming token; this token, in satisfying the constraints set by Lesley's tag question, ultimately accepts the terms set by Lesley's first position assessment (Raymond 2003).

In this example, to assert priority the second speaker draws on the tag question in the

prior speaker's turn. In this way she matches the prior speaker's indication of downgraded access/rights to evaluate with her own upgraded claims in the matter. This complementarity is present in a large majority of first positioned [assessment + tag question] formatted utterances in our data.<sup>8</sup>

In (18), the same speakers are discussing Lesley's daughter's dental problems. At line 3, the grandmother (Mum) asks if the problem is related to "eye teeth," using a format

that prefers an affirmative response. Lesley's response is complex: it refers to the child's dentist as the authority for a negative response, while stating her intention to send the child to her own dentist for a second opinion (line 8). Mum's renewal of her earlier diagnostic suggestion (line 9), produced in this context of skepticism, reinvokes her earlier question-formed diagnosis while upgrading its likelihood by using a [statement + tag question] format.

(18) Holt X(C)-1-2-7 (p4, 14)

- 1 Les: .hh An' I'll: get her fixed up with a de:ntist too:,  
 2 (0.7)  
 3 Mum: Oh w't a ↓nuisance isn't ↓it. Is it ↓ey:e tee:th?  
 4 (0.4)  
 5 Les: .hh ↑Well the den: u-her dent:ist says °no:t.°  
 6 (0.2)  
 7 Mum: [↑Hm:.  
 8 Les: [.hh But I:'ll send 'er to ↓my den:t:ist I thi[nk  
 9 Mum: [Sounds  
 10 ↓like it ↑d'z'n't[↓it.  
 11 Les: -> [.hhh It does rather yes:

Here Lesley is the one with more direct access to the daughter's medical problems; as her mother, she has primary rights to evaluate them. The downgraded rights to assess indexed by Mum's [statement + tag question] are matched by Lesley's epistemically upgraded [partial repeat + agreement] response.

Upgrading via confirmation can be accomplished by means other than partial repeats. Excerpt (19) involves a further case, in which the neighbor (Jenny; also see Example (11)) assesses a member of Vera's family (her son Bill) in first position. As in the prior sequences, Jenny's subordinate rights are indexed in a [statement + tag question] formatted assessment:

(19) [Rah 14:6]

- 1 Ver: =Jillian, she c'n be a little nasty little bi[tch.  
 2 Jen: [Well you w'r  
 3 say:↑ing thez something in that\_=It's a sha:me i[sn't i:t.]  
 4 Ver: [Yeh a::n]d-  
 5 Ver: even Jean said she couldn't do eh uh she said she's alw'z  
 6 glad when they go:.  
 7 Jen: Yeh .h well of course you see Bill is so good wih th'm ez  
 8 well is[n't h[e:.  
 9 Ver: -> [.kl [That's ri:ght yes.

<sup>8</sup> The data used in this paper comprise several hundred items of ordinary conversation drawn from Britain and the United States. Most, but not all, of our cases involving symmetry between [assessment + tag question] and [partial repeat + agreement] forms are drawn from British data. What Schegloff (personal

communication) calls "the British tag" as a means to downgrade epistemic claims may be much more prominent among speakers of British English than among their U.S. counterparts. For another case of British/U.S. divergence in basic interactional usage, see Jefferson (2002).

Similar to the repeats deployed in the prior excerpts, Vera's "That's right" response treats "confirmation" as the primary business of the response, before going on to agreement with "Yes." In addition, the formulation "That's right" more overtly takes an epistemically authoritative stance in relation to Jenny than do the earlier partial repeats.

In these examples, speakers achieve epistemic alignment by downgrading rights to assess in first position assessments and upgrading them in second position. The [confirmation + agreement] format is most commonly used in response to interrogatively formed assessments, particularly those deploying tag questions. This distribution can be understood as a product of the specific set of resources that tag questions make available and relevant. An assessment with a tag question appended offers the recipient an opportunity to disentangle confirmation and agreement as distinct activities in a responding turn. Speakers can simply agree (e.g., "Yes" or "Yes, they are"). Alternatively, by

inverting the order of a confirmation and an agreement token, speakers can treat answering and agreement as separable activities and can exploit their separation to assert their epistemic supremacy.

*Upgrading with "oh"-prefaced second assessments:* A second practice for epistemically upgrading second assessments is "oh"-prefacing. In these cases, the change-of-state sense of "oh" (Heritage 1984b, 1998) is used to index epistemic independence and priority, relative to a first assessment (Heritage 2002a). In contrast to the practice of confirming in turn-initial position described above, which normally exploits an earlier tag question, "oh"-prefaced second assessments are much less constrained in the contexts of their occurrence.

In (20), as noted earlier, Norman is the owner of the dog "Trixie," whom Ilene evaluates (line 9) as having "started so early." This assessment is followed by a tag question which downgrades her epistemic access to this information relative to Norman's

(20) [Heritage 1:11:4]

---

1	Ile:	No well <u>she's</u> still a bit <u>young</u> though isn't [she<ah me]an:=
2	Nor:	[S h e : :]
3	Ile:	=uh[:
4	Nor:	[She wz a <u>year</u> : la:st we <u>g</u> :k.
5	Ile:	<u>Ah</u> <u>yes</u> . <u>Oh</u> well <u>any</u> time <u>no</u> :w [then.]
6	Nor:	[U <u>h</u> :::]:[m
7	Ile:	[Y <u>e</u> :s.=
8	Nor:	=But <u>she</u> [:'s ( )]
9	Ile:	-> [Cuz <u>Trixie</u> started] so <u>early</u> [d <u>i</u> d'n't sh[e,
10	Nor:	-> [°O <u>h</u> : : [y <u>e</u> :s.°=
11	Ile:	=°Ye:h°=

---

Simultaneous with the tag question, Norman's "Oh::ye:s" asserts epistemic priority on the issue. "Oh"-prefacing here conveys a "change of state of orientation" in response to Ilene's assessment. This is a systematic way of claiming that a speaker has independent access to, and already holds a position regarding, the referent. "Oh"-prefacing is thus a resource through which a second speaker can convey that the assessment which follows is independent of the "here and now" of current experience and the prior speaker's evaluation. It achieves this outcome through a "change of state semantics," which conveys that the first assessment has

occasioned a review, recollection, and renewal of the speaker's previous experience and judgment, and that this forms the basis for the second assessment (Heritage 2002a). As with [confirmation + agreement], "oh"-prefacing functions to convey superior knowledge of, and/or rights to assess, the matter under discussion.

The following case (21) vividly illustrates this usage. Gay is giving Jeremy a German telephone number. After she has recited 11 digits, thus exceeding the norm (during the 1980s) for a (British) intra-country call, Jeremy comments (line 13) on the length of the number, prefacing his

comment with “Gosh.” This expression indicates that, for him, this is something new, notable, or surprising. Here Gay could have responded with a simple agreement, which, as in (15) and (16) above, would

have conveyed that her agreement was grounded in the “here and now” common experience of an interminable telephone number. Instead Gay begins her response with “Oh it doe:s”:

(21) [Heritage:0I:7:3]

- 
- 1 Gay: So the <sup>↑</sup>number is (0.2) oh<sub>i</sub> one oh<sub>i</sub>:i.  
 2 Jer: Oh one oh<sub>i</sub>,  
 3 (1.0)  
 4 Jer: Yeup,  
 5 Gay: <sup>↑</sup>Four ni<sub>i</sub>ne,  
 6 (0.5)  
 7 Jer: Ri<sub>i</sub>ght?  
 8 Gay: Sev'n three, u-six o<sub>i</sub>ne?hh  
 9 (0.6)  
 10 Jer: Sev'n three: six o<sub>i</sub>ne?  
 11 (0.3)  
 12 Gay: Ei<sub>i</sub>ght ni<sub>i</sub>ne,  
 13 Jer: -> °Gosh°it goe:s (.) goes on'n on  
 14 Gay: -> Oh it doe:s Germany doe:s.
- 

Two aspects of Gay’s “Oh it doe:s” treat Jeremy’s remark as reviving an earlier observation of the same type that she had made independently of this occasion. Thereby they convey that Gay, in contrast to Jeremy, finds the length of the number unsurprising. First, as noted earlier, the “oh”-preface indexes prior and independent access to this phenomenon. Second, the partial repeat (“it does”), by confirming rather than simply agreeing with Jeremy’s remark, underscores this stance (Stivers forthcoming). By these means Gay also manages to indicate that she is an “old hand” at phoning abroad. In addition, Gay continues with a turn component that appears to be designed to further suggest her expertise about foreign telephone calls. Her postpositioned “adjusting” component (“Germany doe:s”) recalibrates the referent of her response from this particular telephone number to German telephone numbers in general, and also conveys a degree of prior knowledge on the topic. Moreover, with

its hint of a further contrast with telephone numbers in other foreign countries, it implies a still broader expertise in placing telephone calls abroad. Shortly afterwards, Gay underscores her expertise, informing Jeremy that the “ringing” sound on a German phone sounds like a “busy” signal on a British phone (data not shown).

A third case points to the use of “oh”-prefacing as a means of countering a recipient’s upgraded claim of access to a referent that began as the speaker’s informational preserve. By inquiring into Lottie’s trip (to Palm Springs), Emma casts her as having direct and immediate experiential access to its events that Emma herself lacks. Emma, however, meets Lottie’s enthusiastic initial assessment of the trip (“Oh: Go:d wonderful Emma,”) with an “oh”-prefaced, negative interrogative “Oh idn’it beautiful do:wn the<sub>i</sub>re,” which embodies a competitive claim to primacy in assessing the attractions of the location.

(22) [NB IV.10.R:1]

- 
- 1 Emm: .h <sup>↑</sup>How wz yer tri:p.  
 2 Lot: Oh: Go:d wonderful Emm[a,  
 3 Emm: -> [Oh idn’it beautiful do:wn the<sub>i</sub>re,  
 4 Lot: -> Oh: Jeeziz ih wz go:rgeous:..  
 5 Emm: Wh’t a ni<sub>i</sub>ce <sup>↑</sup>wut time’djih git i:n. Jst a li’l whal ago?

Lottie herself then responds to this assessment with a further and equally competitive “oh”-prefaced agreement that underscores her own claims to primacy in the matter. This competitiveness is also evident in the referent shifting that is part of the sequence. The sequence begins with Lottie’s evaluation of her recent trip; Emma’s assessment at line 3 shifts the referent to its general locale, a knowledge domain to which Emma has some claim. In turn, Lottie’s response at line 4 uses the past tense (“wz”) to shift the referent of her assessment back to her own arena of expertise—the recently completed trip.

In sum, “oh”-prefacing can be deployed in a wide variety of contexts by a second or (as in (22)) subsequent assessor to assert epistemic independence and supremacy relative to a first. In addition to competing with sheer “firstness” (as in (20) and (21)), it can also be deployed (as in (22)) to meet and compete with epistemically upgraded prior assessments.

*Upgrading by usurping the “firstness” of a previous assessment.* Using two resources—tag questions and negative interrogatives—speakers who are responding to an assessment in second position can assert their assessment as a “first positioned” evaluation. In both cases, interrogative syntax is deployed as a means of usurping a previous speaker’s first positioned assessment with a new one that now commands the terms of agreement. With these resources, speakers effectively usurp the socioepistemic claims of others.

*Upgrading with tag questions:* While tag-questions downgrade first position assessments, their function is reversed in second position: there they *upgrade* second position

assessments.<sup>9</sup> In second position, the [assessment + tag] format invites agreement to the position that is taken by the second speaker, thus preempting “first position” in the sequence. In this way it upgrades the second speaker’s claimed rights over the first with respect to the matter at hand. This usage is illustrated clearly in (23). In this sequence, Jenny and Vera are discussing Vera’s two grandsons after a recent visit to Vera, during which the children also visited Jenny’s home. After some discussion of the children, Jenny and Vera face a potential discrepancy regarding what they have just agreed on (in lines 4–6) when each names a different child to complete Jenny’s observation “he’s a bright little boy.” Almost as soon as this discrepancy becomes apparent, (that is, when Vera, the grandmother, produces “Paul” in overlap with Jenny’s “little James,” lines 5 and 6), Jenny immediately accepts “Paul” by repeating his name (line 5) and then offering several agreement tokens (in lines 5/7). Perhaps to counter the potential inference that she was simply “going along” with Vera in accepting “Paul” as the “bright” boy, Jenny offers a negative assessment of James: “Yeh James’s a little devil” (line 11). By initiating her turn with “Yeh”, Jenny builds it as a continuation of the prior sequence, effectively offering the assessment as confirmation that she “meant” Paul in the first place because she already viewed James as “a little devil.” Ironically, in solving this problem, Jenny inadvertently creates trouble of a different kind: in conveying that she meant to refer to Paul, Jenny comes to produce a declaratively formed, first position, negative assessment of Vera’s other grandson, James.

(23) [Rahman:14:1-2]

1 Ver: ehr: they readjer comics: 'n evrythink yihkn[o:w  
 2 Jen: [Yeh: w'l  
 3 I think he's a bright little boy: u[h:m  
 4 Ver: [I: do=  
 5 Jen: =\_l [little Ja] : [:mes,] uh [Pau:l.yes.]  
 6 Ver: [ Pau:l, ] [mm- m] mm [Pau : i l,]  
 7 Jen: Mm: . [Yes.  
 8 Ver: [Yes.

<sup>9</sup> The fact that tag questions function differently in first and second positions in a sequence is a clear

example of what Schegloff (1996b) calls “positionally sensitive grammar.”

- 9 (0.3)  
 10 Ver: [Yes ( )]  
 11 Jen: -> [Yeh James's a little] divil ihhh ↑heh heh  
 12 Ver: [That-  
 13 Jen: [.huh .hh[h He:-  
 14 Ver: -> [James is a little bugger [isn'e.  
 15 Jen: [Yeh-  
 16 Jen: Yeah [(into) ev'rythi]ng.

Although she steps in to agree with Jenny's assessment, Vera as the grandmother resists the putatively superior access entailed in such a first position assessment.

This resistance is embodied most forcefully in Vera's use of a tag question in turn-final position. By deploying an interrogative form as part of a second position assessment, Vera marks her turn as a "new" first pair part. The "firstness" of her assessment is also manifest in her re-use of "James" (a locally initial reference form deployed in a locally subsequent position (Schegloff 1996c). Moreover, the remainder of her turn is designed as a full-form declarative that effectively disregards Jenny's immediately prior reference to him, and, by extension, her utterance. The status of Vera's utterance as a "first position" assessment is subsequently accepted by Jenny: she cuts off her initial response to Vera's comment (line 15), and then redoes her responsive agreement at line 16 with a type-conforming "Yeah" and an elaboration

that gives a potential (and decidedly pallid) specification of the "little bugger" as "into everything." In this case, then, the tag question, by inviting a response, positions Vera's evaluation as a first action to be agreed or disagreed with. In this way, it attenuates its responsiveness to Jenny's initial evaluation, thus asserting Vera's rights in the matter.

*Upgrading with negative interrogatives:* Just as negative interrogatives upgrade the epistemic claims embodied in first assessments, they also can achieve this outcome for second assessments. Used in second position, negative interrogatives (like second positioned tags) provide a putatively "new" first pair part for the previous speaker to respond to, and thus attenuate their status as "second position" assessments. In the following case (discussed above), Margie's second assessment downgrades the virtues of the assessed party ("Pat") while deploying a negative interrogative to assert upgraded rights to her opinion.

(24) [NB VII:1-2]

- 1 Emm: =Oh honey that was a lovely luncheon I shoulda ca:lled you  
 2 s:soo[:ner but ill:[lo:ved it.Th wz just deli:ghtfu[: l.]=  
 3 Mar: [((f)) Oh:::i] [°( ) [Well]=  
 4 Mar: =I wz gla[d y o u] (came).]  
 5 Emm: ['nd yer f:] friends] `r so da:rli:ng,=  
 6 Mar: = Oh:::[: it wz:]  
 7 Emm: [e-that P]a:t isn'she a do:[:ill?]  
 8 Mar: -> [iY e]h isn't she pretty,

As we noted earlier, Emma praises Margie's friend ("Pat") using a negative interrogative (line 7) to upgrade both her rights to assess the friend and, with it, the compliment that her assessment embodies. Perhaps to manage the receipt of this compliment in an appropriately downgraded fashion (Pomerantz 1978), Margie responds (line 8)

with an initial type-conforming agreement and a significantly weaker token of praise ("pretty" versus Emma's "a doll") (Pomerantz 1984). At the same time, she asserts her own primacy in assessing her friend by packaging her response as a negative interrogative.

A somewhat more perverse case can be found in a return to excerpt (22):

(22) [NB IV.10.R:1]

1 Emm: .h ↑How wz yer tri:p.  
 2 Lot: Oh:: Go:d wɔndəfʊl Emm[a,  
 3 Emm: -> [Oh idn'it bəʊtɪfʊl dɔ:wn theɪre,

As we noted above, Lottie is the projectively authoritative evaluator of her trip. Her initial evaluation, however, is intersected with an “oh”-prefaced negative interrogatively formed assessment. By shifting the referent to the location, this assessment brings the topical focus of the sequence towards Emma’s generalized experience of Palm Springs rather than Lottie’s more immediate experiences there. In these ways, an assessment initiated in response to Lottie’s evaluation is designed to exert control over the onward trajectory of the sequence.

### Summary

Above we described four practices with which speakers can upgrade the epistemic claims of second assessments relative to the claims embodied in first positioned assessments. These four practices are of two types. The first two—[repeat/confirmation + agreement] and [“oh”-prefacing]—assert primary rights to assess by embodying the claim that the position asserted was held already and independently by the second speaker. The second two—[statement + tag] and [negative interrogatives]—assert primary rights by manipulating the sequence to “reclaim” the first position assessment slot and thereby the epistemic rights which accrue to that position. These two latter practices reflect an important way in which “first” and “second” position, though at first appearance lodged in the temporal order, are not confined there. Rather, these positions can be negotiated through practices of speaking that reflexively claim “first position” and “second position” (see note 10) as distinct from the raw appearances of temporal ordering in the flow of conversation.

Reviewing these practices, the first—[confirmation + agreement]—is relatively specialized to environments in which first assessments are downgraded by using tag questions. For these reasons, this practice is normally used in circumstances where the speakers achieve alignment concerning their

relative rights to assess, and therefore is relatively “mild.” Much more combative are the “all-purpose” resources afforded by the use of “oh”-prefacing, tag questions, and negative interrogatives. Whether a first assessment is unmarked, upgraded, or downgraded, the change-of-state semantics of “oh”-prefacing asserts an independent stance, and hence epistemic authority, in relation to an assessable. It can be used in combination with other resources, and can be deployed to address first assessments regardless of their specific formulation. Tag questions in second position function by asserting interactional primacy in assessment sequences: their deployment of interrogative syntax formulates the second speaker’s assessment as the axial one calling for agreement. Finally, negative interrogatives are perhaps the strongest of the four practices. Like tag questions, they deploy interrogative syntax to assert interactional primacy in an assessment sequence, but they are significantly more assertive. Thus they combine both the import of a declarative and the sequential implicativeness of an interrogative as resources to wrest the initiative from the first speaker.

### *Multiplex Deployments of These Resources and the Management of Face*

Having developed an analysis of some of the resources through which speakers negotiate epistemic primacy and subordination in assessment sequences, we now turn to three cases in which the terms of agreement are more complicated. In the preceding analysis we relied on examples involving a straightforward relationship between the participants’ prima facie socioepistemic rights and the practices they deploy to manage them as a way of establishing a relationship between the two. There is no guarantee, however, that speakers will assert the rights to which they may be entitled, nor that recipients will align with or support the rights asserted by them. Speakers may assert rights that are (or could be) contested; in some cases they may defer



to a recipient with putatively subordinate rights. Here we consider three cases in which participants assert rights which are potentially problematic, or which become a source of conflict or struggle. By explicating the resources through which such circumstances are prosecuted, we can discern the reflexive character of these practices for asserting relative rights to assess in sequences of turns, and thus the management of face and identity issues within these interactions.

The first of our cases involves one party's assertion of the primary right to assess a person that previously had been treated as her recipient's primary right to assess. In (25), Vera and Jenny are discussing Vera's grandchildren after a recent visit. As we noted above, in the course of managing a potential discrepancy regarding what Jenny and Vera have just agreed on (in lines 4–6), Jenny

comes to offer a negative assessment of one grandson, James (line 11), most likely to counter the inference that she was simply deferring to Vera's naming of Paul as the "bright little boy." Although Vera produces a similarly negative assessment of James (line 14), she then complicates matters by reversing herself and evaluating James's behavior positively (line 17–18). It is this reversal, and Jenny's response to it, that we now address. This environment may be especially problematic for Jenny: if she is to agree with Vera, she must produce a positive, second position assessment of James even though she has just offered a highly negative assessment. As in the sequence regarding Paul, Jenny has a clear interest in indicating that her reversal is not "merely responsive" to Vera's, especially since she has lesser rights to evaluate the child.

(25) [Rahman:14:1-2]

- 
- 1 Ver: ehr: they readjer comics: 'n evrythink yihkn[o:w  
 2 Jen: [Yeh: w'l  
 3 I think he's a bright little boy: u[h:m  
 4 Ver: [I: do=  
 5 Jen: =l[little Ja]: [imes,] u[h [Pau:l.yes.]  
 6 Ver: [ Pau:l, ] [mm- m] mm [Pau : i l,]  
 7 Jen: Mmm: [Yes.  
 8 Ver: [Yes.  
 9 (0.3)  
 10 Ver: [Yes ( )]  
 11 Jen: [Yeh James's a little] divil ihhh heh heh  
 12 Ver: [That-  
 13 Jen: [.huh .hh[h He:-  
 14 Ver: [James is a little bugger [isn'e.  
 15 Jen: [Yeh-  
 16 Jen: Yeah [(into) ev'rythi]ng.  
 17 Ver: -> [Mindju 'eez good] Jenny, 'e wz mischeevius  
 18 but w-'e wz good.  
 19 Jen: -> Oo 'e wz beautiful here [wuz h't'ee.=  
 20 Ver: [↓yes.  
 21 Jen: ='E wz very well beha:ved.
- 

Despite her putatively subordinate rights in the matter, Jenny (line 19) strongly asserts rights to assess James by (1) producing an "oh"-prefaced assessment of James's behavior (2) focused on his behavior at her house. She follows this assessment with (3) a tag question. Each component of Jenny's assessment works against the potential inference that her positive assessment reflected any-

thing other than the actual position she held independently of Vera's immediately prior positive assessment. First, the "oh"-preface indexes Jenny's previous, independent access to James. Second, Jenny supplies the basis for this claim by invoking James's behavior "here" (at her own house), in contrast with Vera's assessment of his behavior in general. Finally, her use of the tag question casts her

turn as a “new” first assessment, even though its production immediately follows Vera’s positive evaluation of James.

In light of Jenny’s systematic deference, up to this point, to Vera’s primary rights to assess her own grandchildren, it appears that Jenny’s assertion of primary rights in this sequence is designed to defeat any suspicion that her current, positive assessment could be motivated simply by a desire to agree with Vera. Specifically, although her turn is produced in response to Vera’s, she deploys an array of practices to establish that the position she takes in that turn is held independently of the circumstances of its production. In this case, then, Jenny uses such practices for asserting her primary rights to assess James (despite her previous deference to Vera) as a method for managing the local,

interactional circumstances created by Vera’s reversal.

Our second case offers a more ambiguous deployment of these resources. This excerpt is taken from a conversation between Lesley and her elderly mother, in which Lesley offers a series of reports regarding (potential) acquaintances who are currently in the hospital or who have just died. In this case, although Lesley produces an extended description of Mr. Millbeck, Mum fails to recognize him. As Lesley proceeds with the report “anyway,” she notes that he was “still working” when he died at age 79. Yet despite Lesley’s status as teller and her clearly intimate access to the deceased, she packages her first position assessment (in line 25) using a tag question that eschews any claim of epistemic primacy:

(26) [Holt X(c)-1-1-1]

- 1 Les: And um (0.4) I ↑don’ t know ↑ ‘f you remember Missiz  
2 Mil↓beck th’t use to go to ↓chu:rch.  
3 (0.8)  
4 Mum: °(Mi[ssiz]°  
5 Les: [Uh: uh-hē wz the vicar’s ward’n ↑anyway ↑he die:d  
6 suddenly this week .hhh and he wz ↑still wo:r↓king.  
7 (0.3)  
8 Mum: ( [ )  
9 Les: [He wz ↑seventy ni↓:ne,  
10 (0.3)  
11 Mum: My: wo:rd.  
12 (0.2)  
13 Les: ↑Y e : s [he: wz um  
14 Mum: [(You’ve got s’m ↑rea:l) wo:rkers down thei:re,heh  
15 Les: He wz a p- uh: Ye:s. Indee:d .hh He wz a (0.2) .p a  
16 ↑bu:yer for the hoh- i-the ↑only horse hair fact’ry left  
17 in England.  
18 Mum: Good (gracious).  
19 (0.3)  
20 Les: And he wz their bu:yer,  
21 (.)  
22 Mum: ↑Hm:::  
23 Les: .t  
24 Mum: ↑↑Hm:.  
25 Les: -> So ↑he had a good inni:ngs ↑did[n’t] ↓he.  
26 Mum: -> [I should say ↓so: ↑Ye:s.  
27 (0.2)  
28 Mum: ↑Marvelous.  
29 (0.2)  
30 Les: .tk.hhhh ↑Anyway we had a very good evening ↑to:n  
31 Saturda:y

It is not clear whether Lesley's tag question indexes Mum's rights to judge a person of similar age, or simply acknowledges the self-evident character of her assessment (i.e., that a person who worked until the day he died at age 79 had a "good innings"). Mum, however, matches the position taken by Lesley by using the [confirmation] + [agreement token] format to upgrade the rights that otherwise would accrue to her second position assessment. In this case, then, Lesley manages the potentially problematic circumstance of producing a first position assessment regarding a state of affairs that both she and Mum can claim rights to assess by simply avoiding any claim of epistemic priority, despite her status as putatively the better-informed party.

Finally, in our third case, competitive positions regarding epistemic rights to evaluate Margie's friend are coopted into a deeply ambiguous process of agreement. This example, as noted previously, is an extended compliment sequence. After a generalized

evaluation of Margie's friends as "so da:rlɪ:ng" (line 5), Emma's "e-that Pa:t ɪsn'she a do:ll?" singles out one of the guests for particular praise. As observed earlier, the primacy embodied in this first position assessment is further upgraded by Emma's deployment of a negative interrogative format to package it. On the one hand, this format (as noted earlier) invites an agreement produced as a response to a question. On the other, however, the assessment and its format create two problems for Margie. First, as a question, the assessment invites confirmation, but as a compliment Margie's agreement is constrained by conventions governing self-praise (Pomerantz 1978). Second, although Emma characterizes the persons present as "your friends" (line 5)—thus acknowledging Margie's primary rights to evaluate them—her assessment is packaged with a format which (as we have seen) asserts epistemic primacy and virtually commands agreement.

(27) [NB VII:1-2]

- 1 Emm: =Oh honey that was a lovely luncheon I shoulda ca:lled you  
 2 s:soo[:ner but Iɪll[:lɔ:ved it.Ih wz ju:st deli:ghtfu[: l.]=  
 3 Mar: [((f)) Oh::i] [°( )] [Well]=  
 4 Mar: =I wz gla[d y o u] (came).]  
 5 Emm: ['nd yer f:] friends] 'r so da:rlɪ:ng,=  
 6 Mar: = Oh::[: it wz:]  
 7 Emm: [e-that Pɔ:t ɪsn'she a do:[:ɪll?]  
 8 Mar: [iY e]h ɪsn't she pretty,  
 9 (.)  
 10 Emm: Oh: she's a beautiful girl.=  
 11 Mar: =Yeh I think she's a pretty gir[l.  
 12 Emm: [En that Reɪnam'n::

Margie's response in this context embodies two elements: (1) a minimal, pro forma, type-conforming agreement "iYeh", and (2) a negative interrogative-formed assessment, built as a new first assessment that invites agreement but which is downgraded significantly ("pretty" versus Emma's "a doll").

In the face of this divergent assessment, Emma's response at line 10 reasserts a version of her earlier assessment ("beautiful girl"). It does so within an "oh"-prefacing frame that, in this context, reasserts an over-

riding epistemic claim. Here it is plausible to see Emma's insistence on this compliment as an effort to overcome Margie's purely "social" resistance to it. Margie's final response again expresses a pro forma agreement; however, her repetition of her earlier evaluation ("pretty") underscores her position as overtly unmovable (as adumbrated in her turn at line 8), while the introduction of "I think" into the utterance explicitly acknowledges its status as a disputed assessment. Here, as in Example (25), one partici-

parent's efforts to build a strong positive evaluation of a part of another person's world creates a context in which agreement is contaminated by a competitive epistemic struggle.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In his essay "Territories of the Self," Goffman describes an array of territorial "preserves" and ways in which their boundaries "are ordinarily patrolled and defended by the claimant" (Goffman 1971:52). Goffman did not include a discussion of knowledge and expertise in his description of an "information preserve" (1971:63-64), though control over rights to information is evidently the object of linguistic and interactional management (Kamio 1997; Maynard and Zimmerman 1984) and systematic social competition (Abbott 1988). In this paper we have suggested that rights to evaluate states of affairs are indeed "ordinarily patrolled and defended" by individuals in routine conversational practices through which these rights are ranked by speakers relative to one another.

Our evidence comprises two sorts of observations. First, we have argued that assessing a referent state of affairs in first position implies a claim of primary epistemic and/or moral rights to assess that state. We will abbreviate these as "K+ rights," relative to those of a second speaker, who has lesser ("K-") rights. The evidence for this claim is fourfold:

To begin with, first position assessments are rarely upgraded in the several hundred ordinary conversations we have examined; however they are quite commonly downgraded. Similarly, second position assessments are rarely downgraded but they are quite commonly upgraded. These distributions suggest a recurrent social need to compensate for the primary (K+) claims of first position and the secondary (K-) claims of second position.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> As noted elsewhere, this analysis is based on an examination of several hundred recorded conversations. Robustly founded quantitative analysis is hampered, however, by what Schegloff (1993) calls the "denominator problem." Briefly put, without clear evidence of the parties' relative rights to knowledge

This general distributional observation is supported by three others:

Downgraded first position assessments are generally produced by persons who, at least at first appearance, have lesser socioepistemic (K-) rights to evaluate them.

In addition, upgraded second position assessments are generally produced by persons who, at least at first appearance, have greater socioepistemic (K+) rights to evaluate them.

Finally, under conditions where both speakers have putatively equal access to a referent state of affairs, first speakers may downgrade initial assessments using a tag question format, while second speakers respond with declaratives. These two practices cooperate to cancel the epistemic implications of the first and second positioned status of their contributions (see note 7).

This conversational patrol and defense of information preserves is mandated by the fundamental association between the positioning of an assessment and the epistemic claims implied by that positioning. Because social interaction is organized sequentially and because someone must necessarily be first to assess a referent, the management of information preserves is inexorably relevant in social interaction.

Second, we have identified a variety of practices that are deployed in managing these epistemic claims. Downgraded claims in first position are implemented prominently through tag questions and evidentials.<sup>11</sup>

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*independent of the talk*, we cannot evaluate the extent to which parties assert these rights *in the talk*. Thus we are obliged to focus on those cases in which the assertion of these rights emerges as a matter that the parties are addressing by talking. These methodological issues, of course, bracket the question of whether, or how, these relative rights exist independent of their assertion in the situation itself.

<sup>11</sup> These do not exhaust speakers' methods for downgrading the rights claimed by first position assessments. In addition to evidentials and tag questions (which focus on the authoritativeness of the assessment, or on the access claimed by it), speakers also can modulate the rights claimed by a first position assessment by downgrading its "firstness." For example, speakers can preface their turns with "so" or other expressions which indicate that the turn is being offered as an upshot or other product of prior talk, and by that action can acknowledge their recipients' primary rights. For example, in the following excerpt, Shirley offers a "so"-prefaced upshot (in

Upgraded claims in second position are implemented through an array of practices that either invoke a “settled” and preexisting point of view, or deploy interrogative syntax to compete for first position by usurping a previous evaluation with a new “first positioned” evaluation to which the other should respond. The practices we have identified here are somewhat varied in their privileges of occurrence. The [confirmation + agreement] response format is enabled by and virtually specialized to address, and complement, first assessments that deploy the [statement + tag] format. Although “oh”-prefacing is not tied to a specific first position format, and thus is usable in less complemen-

tary and more competitive ways, it is deployed almost exclusively in second position. Negative interrogatives are most aggressive and can be deployed in either first or second position to assert claims of epistemic supremacy. Some of these practices also have positional and relational variations. For example, the [statement + tag] format, which downgrades claims in first position, can be used by K+ speakers to upgrade a responsive assessment in second position.

Agreement involves more than simply arriving at aligned evaluations. As our analysis makes clear, persons evidently are concerned to establish the independence of the positions that are asserted in accomplishing

line 43) to display her understanding of Gerri’s telling about Dana. By virtue of the very way in which this sequence is initiated (e.g., Shirley’s “Did you talk to Dana this week” and “how is he” (line

7)), Shirley conveys her understanding that Gerri has superior knowledge about Dana. This stance is confirmed further by the telling that Gerri goes on to produce.

[Frankel TCI]

- 7 Shi: .hh Uhm how is he.  
 8 Ger: (Well) he’s fi:ne[(yeh),  
 9 Shi: [ss-  
 10 Ger: Yihknow he’s no:w (.) in (0.2) competition, .hhh=  
 ((14 lines of transcript omitted))  
 25 Ger: .hh A:nd u- (0.2) yihknow I don’t- he doesn’t think he’s  
 26 going to win.c’z there’s a lot’v other students thet, .hh  
 27 are doing equally well.=  
 28 Shi: =M-[hm,]  
 29 Ger: [or ]and or better.  
 30 Shi: M-hm,  
 31 Ger: Bu:t, he does feel tha:t (1.0) yihknow, (.) he’s proud a’  
 32 the fact thet he got intuh th’finals. .hhh en he doesn’t  
 33 ca:re if he doesn’t make the finals en go o:n .hh=  
 34 Shi: =Ri[:ght.]  
 35 Ger: [to- ]Berkeley er wherever, .h[h en then-  
 36 Shi: [Ri:ght.  
 37 (.)  
 38 Ger: become a Harvard attorney I mean ‘e doesn’t care  
 39 about\*that. et[all.  
 40 Shi: [Right.  
 41 Shi: Ri[ght.  
 42 Ger: [So  
 43 Shi: -> .hh So he’s doing alright.  
 44 Ger: Ye:ah.

After Gerri’s telling regarding Dana’s participation in an academic competition, Shirley conveys her understanding of its upshot by producing an assessment: “he’s doing alright” (line 43). Although Shirley produces her assessment of Dana before Gerri has offered any similar evaluation, she clearly indicates its derivative status, and Gerri’s prima-

ry knowledge in the matter, by prefacing it with a “so.” Thus instead of modulating the access claimed by her assessment, she downgrades its “firstness”—much as speakers have used interrogative forms in second position assessments to counter the default assumptions attached to that position (Raymond 2004).

agreement. This is reflected most prominently in two themes in our data. First, persons work to establish the independence of their access to evaluated states of affairs as a basis for agreement. Second, persons recurrently negotiate the relevance of "confirmation" rather than "agreement" in circumstances where primary access to a state of affairs comes to assume critical importance. In these and other ways, the matter of "who agrees with whom" turns out to be a common, if not ubiquitous, feature of the terms of agreement.

These considerations suggest a systematic dilemma at the heart of agreement sequences. Put bluntly, affiliation and agreement generally are sought from others; when provided, however, they must respect the parties' information territories and their associated epistemic rights. Although this problem may be soluble in the matter of "Burmese cats" by responding to someone who asserts the merits of his own cat in terms of the merits of the breed in general, such a solution involves an unavoidable element of detachment from the concrete specifics of the other's experience. Perhaps this is acceptable in the matter of cats, but a mother's claim to lack loving feelings for her child cannot be met effectively by remarks about "women in general" (Heritage and Lindström 1998). For this reason, Alcoholics Anonymous specifically encourages members to seek out persons with a history of recovering from alcoholism to discuss their problems (Alcoholics Anonymous 2001). In responding to assessments of distinctively personal matters, speakers must manage the independence of their access to the matters under discussion while avoiding too deep an intervention into territories of knowledge, feeling, and relational ownership that their recipients may defend as their own. In such cases, the sociological dilemma of involvement and detachment is an entirely practical matter.

Our analysis of these practices suggests a further observation regarding "face" and related subjects. As we noted in introducing this concept, Goffman and others distinguish between face and identity. As we have shown, considerations of face are clearly implicated in the kind of epistemic negotiations with which we have been concerned here. Yet as

Goffman also made clear, face claims commonly invoke elements of enduring social identity. Although multiple identities may be engaged in the sequences we have discussed (and in others like them), dog and cat owners evidently expect to be treated as experts on their pets. Grandparents have ownership rights and expect to have the last word in evaluating their grandchildren. And all participants, as Sacks (1984) and Goffman (1983) observed, have primary rights to know and describe their own thoughts and experiences.

Persons deploy these practices with remarkable frequency in the context of conversational agreement. One might think that interactants' insistence on the assertion of relative epistemic rights is an ugly contaminant of courses of action which otherwise are the essence of consensus building. One also might think that in this paper we make much ado about nothing: the negotiations and conflicts that we observe are simply made salient, as Labov and Fanshel (1977:346) noted, as a product of looking closely at activities which probably were not experienced consciously, much less recollected by the parties at this level of detail.<sup>12</sup> Yet one also may observe that relative epistemic rights to describe and evaluate objects within different knowledge domains are part of our basic human rights to experience and its expression. The regulation and sanctioning of such rights is no trivial matter, but is rather a part of the interactional "housekeeping" that is a condition of personhood and even sanity (Goffman 1983). That the means by which this housekeeping is managed are lost in a Leibnizian "surf" is, in this context, all to the good.

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<sup>12</sup> Labov and Fanshel (1977:346) termed this the "paradox of microanalysis," observing, "[T]he more deeply we analyze the underlying speech actions that motivated these sequences of events, the further we remove ourselves from the conversation as it was actually experienced."

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