FEATURED DEBATE

Epistemics in Action: Action Formation and Territories of Knowledge

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This article considers the role of grammatical form in the construction of social action, focusing on turns that either assert or request information. It is argued that the epistemic status of a speaker consistently takes precedence over a turn's morphosyntactically displayed epistemic stance in the constitution of the action a turn is implementing. Insofar as asserting or requesting information is a fundamental underlying feature of many classes of social action, consideration of the (relative) epistemic statuses of the speaker and hearer are a fundamental and unavoidable element in the construction of social action. A range of examples illustrate patterns of convergence and divergence in the relation between epistemic status and epistemic stance.

Even where an utterance is in the linguistic form of a question, and seems to be doing questioning, the latter will not be adequately accounted for by the former. For if the question form can be used for actions other than questioning, and questioning can be accomplished by linguistic forms other than questions, then a relevant problem can be posed not only about how a question does something other than questioning, but about how it does questioning; not only about how questioning is done by non-question forms, but about how it gets accomplished by question forms. (Schegloff, 1984, pp. 34–35)

    We could not utter a phrase meaningfully unless we adjusted lexicon and prosody according to what the categoric or individual identity of our putative recipients allows us to assume they already know, and knowing this, don't mind our openly presuming on it. At the very center of interaction life

is the cognitive relation we have with those present before us, without which relationship our activity, behavioral and verbal, could not be meaningfully organized. And although this cognitive relationship can be modified during a social contact, and typically is, the relationship itself is extrasituational, consisting of the information a pair of persons have about the information each other has of the world, and the information they have (or haven't) concerning the possession of this information. (Goffman, 1983, pp. 4–5)

From the inception of conversation analysis (CA) in Sacks's earliest writings (1963, 1984a), conversation analysis was conceived as a systematic science of social action. Yet despite this focus, CA has not progressed very far in developing a systematic analysis of "action formation"— the ways in which turns at talk are designed and produced so as to be recognizable as actions of a particular kind. This lack of progress may be traced, in part, to a certain skittishness toward the topic following the impasses faced by the Searleian program of speech-act analysis. Searle's program mainly focused on a range of first or sequence-initial actions, for example, questions, requests, promises, etc. A central, but fundamental, difficulty for this line of analysis concerned how turns at talk could be simultaneously questions and something else that does not involve a straightforward request for information (e.g., invitations, requests, offers, etc.). This matter somewhat perplexed Searle (1969, 1975, 1979) and the generation of speech- act theorists who worked within the paradigm that he established, most of whom addressed the problem in terms of "indirect speech acts."

In the context of a series of critiques of this tradition (Levinson, 1979, 1981a, 1981b), Levinson (1983) offered a partial solution by suggesting that certain requests for information that function as *pre*-requests (e.g., "Do you have X?") can become institutionalized as direct requests by a con-ventionalized collapse of a fuller sequence (A: "Do you have X?" B: "Yes." A: "Can I have one?") such that the *pre*-sequence form ("Do you have X?") is treated as the request itself (Levinson, 1983, p. 361). But this will not do for many other kinds of actions. "Would you like to come to my party?" is both a question and an invitation and can be treated as, in effect, a "double-barreled" action (Schegloff, 2007). Indeed in an unlikely convergence with Searle, Schegloff suggests that in the environment of "Would you like a cup of coffee?," a response such as "Yes, thank you" addresses "both the action and the format through which it was implemented. The 'yes' answers the question; the 'thank you' responds to the offer" (2007, pp. 75–76). To compound the difficul-ties, Goffman (1976) offered such a large range of possible responses to the question "Do you have the time?" as to make the whole exercise of starting from the morphosyntax of first actions seem moot.

Although the CA approach to action and interaction stands in marked contrast to the speech-act tradition (Schegloff, 1988; 1992a, pp. xxiv–xxvii; 1992b), the paradoxes and difficulties encoun-tered by speech-act analysis undoubtedly had a chilling effect on CA's approach to first actions. Some initiating actions such as "hello" and "goodbye" were simple enough to handle and became paradigmatic instances of adjacency-pair firsts. Others, like questions, invitations, requests, and offers were primarily addressed by considering second or subsequent responses to them. Their character as actions was either treated as transparent or became largely a matter of ad hoc stipu-lation "in the midst" of analysis and not a systematic topic of empirical research. Thus, for many of the more significant first pair-parts, action was examined through the lens of reaction, and the consideration of sequential position took precedence over examination of the composition of the turns themselves (Goffman, 1983). By the 1980s, all the main players had effectively abandoned

the question of first actions and their formation: Searle for other topics in philosophy, Levinson for cross-cultural studies of cognition, and Schegloff for other domains of investigation within CA.[1] In the aftermath, the question of first actions and their constitution became effectively a dormant topic.

The consideration of even apparently simple first pair-parts can accrue complications quite rapidly. One recurrent difficulty concerns the relationship between questions, interrogative morphosyntax as a feature of turn design, and requesting information as a form of social action. It has long been known that, even in languages such as English, interrogative morphosyntax is not necessary for polar (yes/no) formatted requests for information to be executed successfully. "Declarative questions" (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik, 1975) can function by indexing what Labov and Fanshel (1977) termed "B-events," and are common in English conversation where they may comprise a majority of question forms deployed (Stivers, 2010). Other languages are considerably more parsimonious in their use of morphosyntactic resources to index polar questions. In a recent review of 842 of the world's languages, Dryer (2008) observed that 16% of them (including, for example, spoken Italian [Rossano, 2010]) do not use any form of interrogative morphosyntax to index polar requests for information.

Just as requests for information do not require interrogative morphosyntax, so too interrogative morphosyntax does not guarantee that a request for information is in progress. Sometimes this is a matter of sequential position, as Schegloff (1984) showed in his well-known analysis of "For whom" and "By what standard?" as forms of agreement. But well before that demonstration, Bolinger (1957) had argued that certain types of negative interrogatives asserted, rather than requested, information (see also Heinemann, 2006; Heritage, 2002a; Koshik, 2005), and subsequently, as Clayman and Heritage (2002a, 2002b) and Heinemann (2008) documented, a range of interrogatives ("How could you X?" is a prototypical example) can be framed as "unanswerable" and thus function as challenges or accusations rather than as requests for information. And then, there are also the "whimperatives" (instructions issued in the form of questions, e.g., "Why don't you open the window") and "queclaratives" (assertions packaged as questions, e.g., "Did I tell you that writing a PhD was a cakewalk?") identified by Sadock (1971; 1974).

Given all this, how do utterances function as requests for information? How are requests for information as a specific form of social action built and made actionable as such? This is not an idle question. Requests for information are the ultimate paradigm of an adjacency-pair first action (Schegloff, 2007; Stivers and Rossano, 2010) that make response actionable and accountable without delay across many languages (Stivers et al., 2009). If we cannot identify how this critical action is formed, one of the foundational concepts of CA itself remains unfounded.

This article begins to address the problem by focusing on polar requests for information and considers the relative significance of three primary elements in the formation of such requests: interrogative morphosyntax, intonation, and epistemic domain. It is proposed that when there is consensus about who has primary access to a targeted element of knowledge or information, that is, who has primary epistemic status, then this takes precedence over morphosyntax and intonation as resources for determining whether a turn at talk conveys or requests information. We begin with an overview of epistemic status and epistemic stance.

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[1]Though see Schegloff (1988). More recently Schegloff (2008) has returned to the fray.

EPISTEMIC STATUS

In 1977, Labov and Fanshel famously distinguished between A-events (known to A, but not to B) and B-events (known to B, but not to A), using this to ground an analysis of declarative questions in which B-event statements made by A (e.g., "And you never called the police.") would count as requests for information. In a related distinction, Pomerantz (1980) differentiated between Type 1 knowables, which subject-actors have rights and obligations to know from firsthand experience, and Type 2 knowables, which are known by report, hearsay, inference, etc. These notions were developed separately in Kamio's (1997) discussion of "territories of information" focusing on Japanese—a language in which territories of information tend to be indexed with final particles (see also Hayano 2011, 2012)—as well as English. Kamio enlarged these earlier conceptualizations, arguing that both speaker and recipient have territories of information (or "epistemic domains" [Stivers and Rossano, 2010]) and that specific items can fall within each person's territory, albeit normally to different degrees. In some cases, as when a speaker says "I forgot to tell you the two best things that happened to me today" (Terasaki, 2004, p. 176) or "Jesus Christ you should see that house Emma you have no idea" (Heritage and Raymond, 2005, p. 17), the speaker is laying claim to an absolute epistemic advantage in which the recipient is, projectedly at least, entirely ignorant of what is to be described. In others, as when a speaker says "It's a beautiful day out isn't it?" (Pomerantz, 1984, p. 59), the speaker implies equality of access to the referent situation. Thus relative states of knowledge can range from circumstances in which speaker A may have absolute knowledge of some item, while speaker B has none, to those in which both speakers may have exactly equal information, as well as every point in between.

Bringing these several concepts together, we can consider relative epistemic access to a domain or territory of information as stratified between interactants such that they occupy different positions on an epistemic gradient (more knowledgeable [K+] or less knowledgeable [K−]), which itself may vary in slope from shallow to deep (Heritage, 2010; Heritage & Raymond, in press). Epistemic status is thus an inherently relative and relational concept concerning the relative access to some domain of two (or more) persons at some point in time. The epistemic status of each person, relative to others, will of course tend to vary from domain to domain, as well as over time, and can be altered from moment to moment as a result of specific interactional contributions.

That epistemic status is not unchallengeable is evident from the following case in which two women are talking about a mutual friend:

(1)   [Rah 12: 31–57]

```
1    Jen:      I  [saw Janie this morning=
2    Ida:         [Yes
3    Jen:      =in in: uh Marks'n Sp[encers ]
4    Ida:                          [Oh you] did di[dju   [y e s,]
5    Jen:                                         [Mm: [:. .hh]   She wz buyin
6             a ↑whole load of stuff she siz she's getting (vizitiz          )
7             hhh ↑huh[huh]
8    Ida:             [hnh]heh-ha-ha-ha
9             (.)
10   Ida:     (  [  ),
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```
11    Jen:            [.h Av you seen uhr,
12    Ida:     Ye- .h Well she's gon to m: eh: eh: Chestuh:.
13             (0.9)
14    Ida:     Ja[nie:,
15    Jen:       [↑Janie hahs.
16    Ida:     ↑Ey?
17    Jen:     No she hasn't?
18             (0.8)
19    Ida:     Ye:s. She's go::ne.
20             (0.7)
21    Ida:     She went just before dinner.
22             (0.2)
23    Jen:     Oh↑::::. Oh [I (thought   ),    ]
24    Ida:                 [She wz in such a] rush,
25    Jen:     Oh:? she sid she wz getting visito:rs.
26    Ida:     Ye:h, that's eh::m (0.3) t'morrow night ah thi:nk,
27    Jen:     .h °Oh::::.°
```

Prompted by Jenny's question at line 11, Ida offers the intendedly informative statement that the friend (Janie) has "gone to Chester." Pursuing response (line 14) across the subsequent silence, Ida encounters a query (line 15) followed by a counterinforming (Heritage, 1984a) that flatly denies her statement (line 17). Here resolution of the disagreement turns entirely on the relative epistemic status of the two friends concerning the recent whereabouts of the third. It is resolved when Ida declares that Janie left "just before dinner" (line 21), which is a more recent sighting of their acquaintance than Jenny's "this morning" (line 1). At this point Jenny concedes the epistemic high ground to Ida (lines 23, 25, 27) and the two subsequently collaborate on figuring out the basis of the misapprehension that Jenny so flatly asserted (data not shown).

Equality of epistemic access (and a "flat" gradient) may be restricted to specifically shared (ordinarily simultaneous) experiences of persons, objects, and events. But even simultaneous experience of something may be no guarantee of epistemic equality: My doctor and I may both look at an X-ray of my foot, but mere observation will not provide me with the epistemic resources to concur with, or contest, her diagnostic conclusion (Peräkylä, 1998). In circumstances where the object of knowledge is not an object of simultaneous experience, many additional factors may come into play: the recency of a person's information, its provenance, certainty, clarity, and extendedness, the independence of a person's access to it, the person's rights to know it in the first place, socially sanctioned authority to know it, and so on (Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig 2011). Complex and difficult epistemic circumstances can be created when incommensurate epistemic resources are in conflict: For example, in neonatal intensive care units, nurses with extended and textured knowledge of the children in their care can find that their judgments are trumped by clinicians who rely solely on readings from the patients' charts (Anspach, 1993).

The nature (and priority) of access to epistemic territories can be the object of complex sequential manipulation (Heritage & Raymond, 2005), which embraces not just the actual possession of information, but rights to possess and articulate it (Pollner, 1987; Raymond & Heritage, 2006), as well as questions concerning the moral contamination associated with access to certain types of information, such as gossip (Bergmann, 1993). In sum, epistemic territories embrace what

is known, how it is known, and persons' rights and responsibilities to know it (Drew, 1991; Maynard, 2003; Pomerantz, 1980; Sacks, 1992; Terasaki, 2004).

While it may be thought that the notion of epistemic territory introduces a contingency of daunting difficulty and complexity into the study of interaction, in fact relative access to particular epistemic domains is treated as a more or less settled matter in the large bulk of ordinary interaction. Outside of very specialized contexts such as psychoanalysis, the thoughts, experiences, hopes, and expectations of individuals are treated as theirs to know and describe (Heritage, 2011; Sacks, 1984b). Persons are also generally treated as knowing more about their relatives, friends, pets, jobs, and hobbies than others, and indeed may labor under an obligation to do so. Moreover there are socially sanctioned ways to adjudicate epistemic disputes in which, for example, recent experience is privileged over less recent, or external expertise and epistemic authority are permitted to take precedence over the judgments of amateurs (Pollner, 1974, 1975). For these reasons, notwithstanding the vagaries of its condition as a social construction, it is helpful to think of epistemic status relative to a domain as for the most part a presupposed or agreed upon, and therefore real and enduring, state of affairs.

EPISTEMIC STANCE

If epistemic status vis-à-vis an epistemic domain is conceived as a somewhat enduring feature of social relationships, epistemic stance by contrast concerns the moment-by-moment expression of these relationships, as managed through the design of turns at talk. In English, epistemic stance is prominently expressed through different grammatical realizations of propositional content. Consider the following three utterances— and also (6) below:

(2)   Are you married?
(3)   You're married, aren't you?
(4)   You're married.

In each of (2)–(4), the same propositional content (about the recipient's marital status) is expressed, but the epistemic stance encoded in the grammar of these three sentences is quite different. We can represent this in terms of the different epistemic K−/K+ gradients the sentences conventionally invoke (see Figure 1).

Each of these sentences addresses information that is well within the epistemic domain of the recipient. Thus the recipient has primary rights to know the information. However (2) proposes that the questioner has no definite knowledge of the recipien's marital status, and indexes a deeply sloping epistemic gradient between an unknowing (K−) questioner and a knowing (K+) recipient. Utterances (3) and (4), by contrast, express increasing commitment to the likelihood that the recipient is married, which can be represented by increasingly shallow K− to K+ epistemic gradients. The last of these formats is mainly used when the speaker has already been told (or independently knows) the information and seeks to confirm or reconfirm it, or alternatively to convey inferences, assumptions, or other kinds of "best guesses" (Raymond, 2010; Stivers, 2010; Turner, 2008). While taking an "unknowing" epistemic stance (as in [2]) invites elaboration and projects the possibility of sequence expansion, the more "knowing" formats represented by (3) and (4) tend to invite confirmation and sequence closure (Heritage, 2010; Heritage & Raymond, in press; Raymond, 2010).
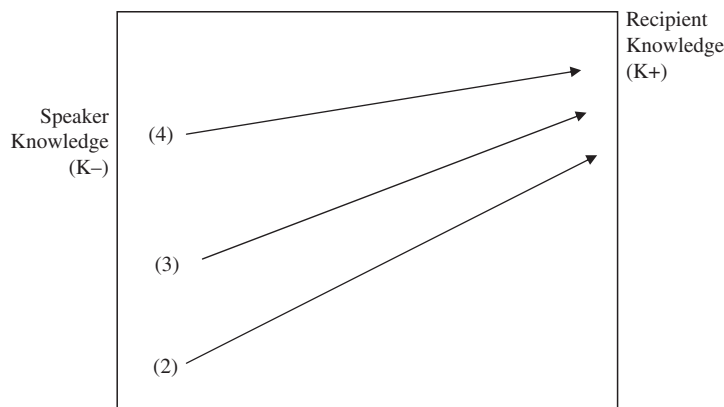
FIGURE 1 Epistemic stance of (2)–(4) represented in terms of epistemic gradient.

In general, of course, unknowing speakers ask questions (although at a certain cost [Levinson, in press]), and knowing speakers make assertions. Thus we may speak of a principle of epistemic congruency in which the epistemic stance encoded in a turn at talk will normally converge with the epistemic status of the speaker relative to the topic and the recipient. However, while the principle of epistemic congruency is often realized in fact, this realization is far from inevitable. Epistemic status can be dissembled by persons who deploy epistemic stance to appear more, or less, knowledgeable than they really are. Interactional exigencies may compel, or simply eventuate in, divergences between epistemic status and stance (Raymond & Heritage, 2006). For example, Raymond (2000) describes a television news operation in which, despite their much more comprehensive information about an urban disturbance, television news anchors persisted in maintaining an epistemic stance that privileged helicopter-based informants at the scene in terms of access to the domain in question.

In sum, we are here dealing with relative epistemic status as a consensual and thus effectively "real" state of affairs, based upon the participants' valuation of one another's epistemic access and rights to specific domains of knowledge and information. Epistemic status is distinct from the epistemic stance that is encoded, moment by moment, in turns at talk.

THE PRIMACY OF EPISTEMIC STATUS AS A FEATURE OF REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

In this section, I offer evidence that epistemic status is fundamental in determining that actions are, or are not, requests for information. To this end I review several major features of turn design that are conventionally associated with giving and requesting information. These features are declarative morphosyntax, rising intonation, tag questions, negative interrogative syntax, and interrogative syntax. In each case, I will show that the relative epistemic status of the speakers is a critical resource for determining the status of the utterance as an action.

Declarative Syntax

In contexts where an utterance formulated with declarative syntax concerns information that is within the speaker's epistemic domain, the speaker will be understood to be doing "informing," as in (5) below, where Ida has called her friend Jenny to tell her that some goods have arrived from a local department store:

(5)   [Rah:12:1:ST]

```
 1    Jen:        °Hello?,°
 2                    (0.5)
 3    Ida:        Jenny?
 4                    (0.3)
 5    Ida:        It's me:,
 6    Jen:        Oh hello I:da.
 7    Ida:    -> Ye:h. .h uh:m (0.2) ah'v jis rung tih teh- eh tell you (0.3)
 8            -> uh the things ev arrived from Barkerr'n Stone'ou[:se,
 9    Jen:                                                         [Oh::::.
10                    (.)
11    Jen:        Oh c'n ah c'm rou:nd,hh
```

Here the declarative form of Ida's turn is congruent with its content, which is exclusively within her epistemic domain. The result is an action that is unambiguously an "informing" and that is acknowledged as such with "oh" (line 9) by her recipient (Heritage, 1984a).

However, declaratives that address matters that are within the recipient's epistemic domain are ordinarily construed as "declarative questions" that invite confirmation (Labov & Fanshel, 1977; Quirk et al., 1975; Weber, 1993). In (6), for example, the physician's declarative formulation (line 5) concerning the patient's marital status—something to which the patient has privileged access—is incontestably in search of information. Here the patient is a middle-aged woman with a daughter in her twenties. The doctor's *yes*-preferring interrogative at line 1 is congruent with his epistemic status:

(6)   [MidWest   2.4]

```
1    DOC:        Are you married?
2                    (.)
3    PAT:        No.
4                    (.)
5    DOC:    -> You're divorced (°cur[rently,°)
6    PAT:                            [Mm hm,
```

Prompted by the patient's response at line 3, the doctor proceeds to offer a declarative turn that can only be understood as a likely "next best guess" about his patient's marital situation.

Similarly in (7), Jan is calling about helping Ivy out with the preparation of a meal. It is of course Ivy's epistemic priority that drives the interpretation of Jan's turn at line 7.

(7)   [Heritage:01:18:2]

```
1    Jan:        .t Okay now that's roas:' chick'n isn'it. Th[at ]=
2    Ivy:                                                 [It-]=
3    Jan:        =[roasting chick'n<]
4    Ivy:  1-> =[i t   h a s   bee:n ] cooked.
5                 (.)
6    Ivy:  1-> It's been co[oked.
7    Jan:  2->              [Iz ↑BEEN cooked.=
8    Ivy:  3-> =Oh yes.
9    Jan:        Oh  well   thaz  good......
```

Given that Ivy is the person whose cooked chicken is being talked about—a chicken moreover that is located in her kitchen (and not Jan's), Jan's "Iz ↑BEEN cooked." (line 7) cannot be understood as other than a request for confirmation—the request in this case being used by Jan to register a revision of her expectations about the chicken and, possibly, her likely cooking obligations.

In other declarative cases, relative epistemic status is indexed with inference markers. In (8) for example, Nancy, who is taking evening classes with a much younger group of students, encounters some skepticism about them from Emma (lines 1 and 3). Nancy defends them by asserting that they are either full-time students or work part-time. At this point, Emma revises her position with the inference-marked "They're not real kookie then." Like many declarative questions, this one addresses information already in play and encodes a relatively flat epistemic gradient. The matter it declaratively formulates in this case is primarily known to Nancy, who thus retains primary rights to this information:

(8)   [NB:II:2:R:11]

```
1    Emm:        I THINK SOME a' these kids need a good JO:B though too.
2                (0.5)
3    Emm:        Get ou:t'n do a liddle wor:k.
4                (.)
5    Nan:        Well of course all the kids in this: p'tilar class yih
6                know,h are eether full time stud'nts or they work during
7                th'day en go tuh school et ni:ght,
8    Emm:        °M[m h m,°   ]
9    Nan:          [Lot'v'm w]ork par'time u- [a:nd
10   Emm:                                      [°Mm h[m,°
11   Nan:                                            [go: part day en part
12               ni:ght? .hhhhh uh::m
13   Emm:  -> They're not real kookie then.=
14   Nan:        =Sev'ral of th'm are married,h Oh no:.h
```

In this case, Emma explicitly concedes primary rights to the information with the postpositioned inference marker "then" that indexes her remark as arising out of what Nancy has already said. For her part, after describing a further indicator of her fellow students' maturity

and responsibility ("S<u>e</u>v'ral of th'm are married,h") Nancy reasserts her primary rights with an emphatic confirmation "Oh No:.h" (Heritage, 1998), which also further underscores her viewpoint.

And in a similar case, an inference-marked declarative about something that is clearly within the recipient's epistemic domain (line 11) receives a transformative answer (Stivers & Hayashi, 2010) at line 13. Here Nancy is complaining about her ex-husband's financial affairs and depicts her relations with him as quite profoundly estranged (lines 5, 7, and 10). Here, where a subsequent confirmation of Emma's inference-marked declarative at line 11 might seem to imply some minimal degree of connection between the parties, Nancy's transformative answer specifically preserves the estrangement presented in her earlier comments:

(9)   [NB II:2:10(R)]

```
1    Nan:          So: I js took th'second page u' th'letter? 'n (.) stuck
2                  th'fifty dollars: check innit? 'n .hhhhh (0.2) mailed it t'
3                  Ro:l.
4                  (0.3)
5    Nan:          No note no eh I haven't written a word to im.
6                  (0.3)
7    Nan:          I [jst uh,h for'd iz mai:l stick it in th'onvelope'n
8    Emm:           [°Mm:°
9                  (0.4)
10   Nan:          send it all on up to im en .hhh[hhh
11   Emm:   ->                                     [Yih know wher'e is the:n,
12                 (0.8)
13   Nan:   -> I have never had any of it retu:rned Emma,h
14   Emm:          Oh::.
15   Nan:          At a:ll, so: [I jist assoom
```

Subsequently Emma acknowledges the response (line 14) with a change of state (K− → K+) *oh*-receipt that acknowledges the information conveyed and intimates that she has revised her view of the situation (Heritage, 1984a).

In (10) a different kind of declarative (lines 1–2) is deployed to similar effect: In this case it references hearsay knowledge and is addressed to the one recipient who has unchallengeable rights as the subject-actor to know her own future plans:

(10)   [Rah:12:4:ST]

```
1    Jen:   -> =[Okay then I w]'z askin='er en she says yer
2           -> working tomorrow ez well.
3    Ida:          Yes I'm s'pose to be tihmorrow yes,
4    Jen:   -> O[h:::.
5    Ida:          [Yeh,
```

Jenny's declaratively framed utterance references information that is in her recipient's epistemic domain and is treated as a request for confirmation (line 3). Here it can again be noted that Jenny's change of state (K− → K+) *oh*-receipt confirms by implication that her original declarative was indeed a question in search of information.

Finally in (11) yet another declarative utterance that formulates a "my side" telling (Pomerantz, 1980), in which the speaker has less access to information than the recipient, is deployed with the force of a request for information:

(11)   [NB II:2:1 (Pomerantz 1980:195)]

```
1    Nan:          Hel-lo:,
2    Emm:          .hh HI::.
3                  (.)
4    Nan:          Oh: 'i::: 'ow a:re you Emmah:
5    Emm:    ->    FI:NE yer LINE'S BEEN BUSY.
6    Nan:          Yea:h (.) my  u.-fuhh h-.hhhh my fa:ther's wife ca:lled me,h
7                  .hhh So when she ca:lls me::,h .hh I always talk fer a lo:ng
8                  ti:me cz she c'n afford it'n I ca:n't.hhh[hhh ] °huh°]
9    Emm:    ->                                            [OH:]:::::   ]:=
```

Once again, Emma's "oh" receipt (line 9) registers that she has been informed and, again by implication, that her original declarative in line 5 was in search of information.

While all these examples are relatively straightforward, some of the potential complexity involved can be glimpsed in the following exchange from a CNN panel discussion that was part of CNN's news coverage of the 2010 U.S. congressional health-care reform debate. Here anchor Wolf Blitzer's turn constructional unit (TCU) at line 3 is designed to establish agreement that the Democrats will pass health-care reform. This is deployed as a means of going on to a question (line 7/9) that asks his recipient—a Republican health-care strategist—to comment on the next steps in the conflict.

(12)   [CNN State of the Nation 22nd March 2010: 8:56 EST]
            Conversation prior to the Congressional vote on health care reform

```
1    Blitzer:         .hh Kevin Madden you're- you're watching all of this and uh
2                     you are a Republican strategist.
3            ->    Right now uh you realize of course the Democrats are going to win.
4                  (1.0)
5    Madden:   ->    Right.
6                  (.)
7    Blitzer:       So [then what.
8    Madden:   ->       [Yes. (0.2) Oh are you asking me or telling me.
9    Blitzer:       On this- on this issue of health care reform.....
```

However, shortly after Blitzer initiates his subsequent question (line 7), his recipient displays uncertainty about whether and how he should respond ("Oh are you asking me or telling me."), formulating this as confusion over whether Blitzer's remark is conveying or requesting

information. That the recipient might be confused is understandable. While Blitzer's primary proposition ("The Democrats are going to win") was taken for granted among the panelists by this point in the broadcast, its frame ("you realize of course") targets a domain—personal knowledge—that is the privileged epistemic territory of a subject-actor. In short, the frame of Blitzer's remark is at epistemic odds with its propositional content, and the outcome is a brief, but genuine, moment of confusion for the recipient.[2]

We have now come far enough to see that real-world epistemic status will evidently take precedence over the significance of declarative syntax in determining whether a turn of talk is delivering, or asking for, information.

Declarative Syntax with Rising Intonation

Final rising intonation is sometimes asserted to be associated with declaratively formed utterances that request information (Quirk et al., 1975). Although this is questionable as a generalization (Couper-Kuhlen, in press; Geluykens, 1988),[3] we can briefly push the argument a step further by noting that rising intonation will not take precedence over epistemic status as a key to action formation. Thus in (13) the final rising intonation on a declarative in the speaker's epistemic domain (lines 10–11) is heard as "continuing" and not as "questioning." In this call, Katherine is calling her mother (Lesley) to make arrangements to go home from her university for the vacation:

(13)   [Field X(C):2:1:4: 95–128]

```
1    Les:        Anyway when d'you think you'd like t'come home ↓love.
2                    (.)
3    Kat:        Uh:m (.) we:ll Brad's goin' down on Monday.
4                    (0.7)
5    Les:        Monday we:ll ah-:hh .hh w:-Monday we can't manage becuz
6                (.) Granny's ↓coming Monday.↓
7
8                ...((15 lines of transcript omitted))
```

---

[2]In the following case, B interprets A's announcement in terms of his K+ knowledge of his fitness routine and is subsequently corrected:

[JH: FN] [A has just returned from a fitness class that A and B attend on separate days]
```
1    A:   So you're going to Ellen on Monday.
2    B:   Tuesday.
3    A:   No she's got a problem with Tuesday. She told me.
4    B:   Oh.
```

[3]As Levinson (in press) notes, "Grammars mostly say that in these cases questions are marked intonationally with rising intonation. However, every corpus study ever done on such languages, or on languages like English that uses declaratives as polar questions most of the time, has falsified this. The interpretative procedures are actually likely to be pragmatic."

```
9
10   Les:   ->      .hhh Yes alri:ght .hh The -thing is (.) u-we're all
11          ->      meeting Granny off the bus: on Monday eve↓ni:ng?
12   Kat:           ehYeah,
13   Les:           .hhhh But -then Dad could come: back 'n hhhave iz ↓tea
14                  'n then go on: to Glastonbur[y
15   Kat:                                       [Ye:s well if I'm at the
16                  Kidwells' house it dzn't matter (.) I mean he c'n come:
17                  pick me up whenever 'e wants to °can't h[e°
18   Les:                                                   [.hhh Yes that's
19                  ↓ri:ght.hh
```

Our focus is on lines 10–11, where Lesley is detailing the family's complex domestic arrange-
ments on the evening that Katherine is planning to return. Evidently, given that all this is fully
within Lesley's (and not Katherine's) epistemic domain, there is no chance that her turn could
be understood as anything but an "informing." Thus her final rising intonation at line 11 is
thus understood as "continuing" rather than "questioning" as Katherine's continuative response
indicates (line 12).

In (14) by contrast, Vivian's final rising declarative (lines 1, 3) is not initially heard, or at least
treated, as seeking information. However, after the appended "or not." (line 6), it becomes clear
to the analyst (and presumably to the coparticipants) that she is in an epistemically K− position.
After this point, her reissue of her utterance, this time with reversed polarity and still with final
rising intonation, is now understood by Shane as in search of information and treated as such
(line 10, 13):

(14)   [Chicken Dinner 19–20]

```
1    Viv:   ->            [Tom still though] works (.) be[hind that=
2    Sha:                                               [.ihhh
3    Viv:   ->      =[j  u  i  c  e  b  a__r ?]
4    Sha:           =[( e h   h e   h h   e h ) ]
5    Mic:           =[(Specially) if yih don't ]thi[nk abou[t it.]
6    Viv:   ->                             [Or   n o[: t .]
7    Sha:                                           [uh-hn-hn Yeh
8    Mic:            nhh[h
9    Viv:   ->       [Tom doesn'work behin'the juice [ba[r?
10   Sha:                                            [N[o not'ny mo'.
11   Nan:                                              [Mm
12                  (.)
13   Sha:           Hadtuh let'm go
```

Here too a grasp of Vivian's (K−) epistemic status is the critical resource in determining the
import of her several contributions as in search of information.

In sum, across all the examples of declaratives (6)–(14), with or without final rising intonation,
the relative epistemic status of the participants is decisive in determining whether an utterance is
intended to convey information or to request it.

Tag Questions

The functions of tag questions are generally understood in one of two ways: (a) as a way of requesting information, normally confirmation of the assertion made in the declarative component of the utterance, or (b) as a method of mobilizing response (Stivers & Rossano, 2010) in contexts where the speaker is looking for support for a point of view. What distinguishes these two uses of tag questions is the epistemic status of the speaker, relative to the recipient, of the talk. Thus there are numerous cases in which tag questions are used by speakers with lower epistemic status to index just that. Recipient responses just as commonly index higher epistemic status by a variety of means (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Raymond & Heritage, 2006). Extract (15) is a case in point. Here two sisters are involved in talk about the weather in their respective cities:

(15)   [NB II:1R: 43–51]

```
1    Emm:          WHAT A MISERBLE WEEKE:ND.
2                  (0.2)
3    Lot:     ->   Yea:h en gee it's been: beautiful down here I know
4             ->   you've had it (.) lousy in town have[ncha.  ]
5    Emm:                                              [ Yea:h] it rained
6                  yesterday,
7                  (0.2)
8    Lot:          But the sun wz ou:t here it wz beautiful [yestered]ay.
9    Emm:                                                   [°eeYah.°]
```

In describing her own local weather, Lottie deploys declarative syntax (line 3), while the epistemic stance of her description of the weather in her sister's location is downgraded with a tag question (line 4). Her sister then proceeds to confirm this description (lines 5–6). A similar pattern is evident in (16), where Vera is the person related to the family members under discussion while Jenny is not:

(16)   [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.
```

Jenny's remark (lines 7–8) about a family member's ability to deal with an apparently nasty child is downgraded with a tag question fitted to her lower epistemic access to the family (as indexed in lines 2–3), while Vera's response (line 9) is fully constructed as a confirmation, indexing her greater access to the matter under discussion.

Similarly in (17), which concerns the pregnancies of Norma's dogs, Ilene downgrades her claims about "Trixie" (line 9):

(17)   [Heritage 1:11:4]

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

Consistent with Ilene's epistemic stance, Norma's *oh*-prefaced response asserts her epistemic primacy in relation to this information (Heritage, 1998; Heritage & Raymond, 2005).

In other cases, however, statements formulated with tag-questions may simply constitute assertions of fact or opinion in search of support. Extract (18) is taken from a small claims court hearing (Atkinson, 1992) in which the plaintiff is demanding recompense for dry cleaning damage. Although the defendant is present, the plaintiff refers to him in the third person (using the institutional "they" (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Sacks, 1992 [Fall 1967, Lecture 11]) and thus addresses her remarks to the arbitrator:

(18)   [Dry Cleaned Dress]

```
1   Pla:            I mean I: think mese:lf they put it on one a' their steam
2                   thi:ngs ri:ght?
3                   (0.7)
4   Pla:    ->      'N' sta:rt pressin' it.<Don't they.
5                   (0.6)
6   Pla:    ->      See w't they u:se, they don't use an iron ↑do they.
7                   (.)
8   Arb:            .hhh We:ll p'raps we c'n get Mister Collins t'tell us about
9                   that'n a mom'nt.
```

Each of the plaintiff's last two utterances (lines 4 and 6), which propose that dry cleaning involves steam pressing, has a tag question. But these remarks do not encode a K− position on this matter relative to the arbitrator. Rather, they are designed to entice an affirmative response from the arbitrator, who will ultimately rule on the damages involved. Understandably, the arbitrator resists this enticement (lines 8–9) by referring to the defendant's expertise on this question.

Finally, (19) embodies an exquisite collision between the epistemic and response mobilizing aspects of tag questions. This sequence is taken from a call in which Emma is thanking her friend Margy for a lunch a few days previously. It follows an extended series of fulsome compliments about the lunch and Margy's friends, the most proximate of which is at lines 1–3. Following this, Margy, who does secretarial work in her husband's (Larry's) business, apologizes for having to be away from the table a good deal, minimizing its impact on her friends (line 12) and asserting its necessity (line 14). Emma is quite supportive (lines 13 and 15) and launches into a comment about

Larry's business success (line 16). Here it is clear that Emma is not asking about this success (in fact this remark is a bridge to a further story about how Emma has praised their success to an influential third party, which is initiated at lines 19–21). Instead this is offered as yet another compliment—that is, as asserting rather than requesting information. As an assertion from a K− position about Margy's husband's business success, the subsequent tag question is appropriate. However, in sequential terms it strengthens the pressure for an affirmative acknowledgment of the compliment (Stivers & Rossano, 2010)—a normatively inappropriate action (Pomerantz, 1978).

(19)   [NB VII Power Tools:]

```
1    Emm:           .hhYou do evry]thing so beautif'lly end yer table
2                   wz so byoo-I told Bud I said honestly. .hhhhh ih wz jis:t
3                   deli:ghtful t'come down there that day en mee[t these]
4    Mar:                                                        [W e :ll]
5                   (.)
6    Emm:           [ga:ls] 'n: ]
7    Mar:           [ I :.  ] jist ] wz so:- tickled thetchu di:d,B'[t uh    ] .hh=
8    Emm:                                                           [°Mmm]
9    Mar:           =I like tuh do that stu:ff en u-[I he- ]=
10   Emm:                                           [°Ya h]=
11   Mar:           =I:: s-I: be-I knew I hedtuh be away fm the table a lot b't-
12                  .hhh wir all frie:nds'n you guy[s didn't ca  ]:re,=
13   Emm:                                          [That's ri:ght]
14   Mar:           =En uh-.h-.h it's jis stuff I haftuh do fer [° Larry,]
15   Emm:                                                       [°Ye::ah.]
16   Emm:    ->     I [know en y[er do]in real good ar[ntche.]
17   Mar:             [.t.hhh     [E : n]              [I : ' ]m jis:so delighted I
18                  cn do it E[dna cz] if:I didn'do it we'd haft[uh hire it    ] do:ne,
19   Edn:                     [.hhhhh]                          [Wih y'know]
20   Edn:           i-yihknow it's funny uh:: uh Bud played et San Mar-av yih
21                  gotta minute?=
```

It is a notable feature of this sequence that Margy specifically overlaps Emma's tag question at line 17, and does so with a continuation of her earlier account for being away from the table. In this way, she interdicts Emma's tag question with its pumped up level of normative constraint and sequentially deletes the compliment. Here a tag question produced out of epistemic considerations is interdicted for its response-mobilizing properties.

Negative Interrogative Syntax

Just as declarative syntax is not decisive in determining the status of a turn as "informing," so interrogative syntax does not determine whether a turn is seeking information. We will examine this issue first by reference to negative interrogatives, subsequently turning to straight interrogatives.

In circumstances where a speaker claims, or is understood to be in a K+, or at least equivalently knowledgeable position (i.e., Bolinger's [1957] "blinds up" position), negative interrogatives will be heard as assertive rather than as questioning. The following evaluation of Palm Springs by two sisters in (20) is a case in point:

(20)   [NB:IV:10(R):14–17]

```
1   Emm:              .h -How wz yer tri:p.
2   Lot:              Oh:: Go:d wonderful Emm[a,
3   Emm:    ->                                [Oh idn'it beautiful do:wn the:re,
4   Lot:              Oh:: Jeeziz ih wz go:rgeous::.
```

Here Emma's negative interrogative (line 3) deploys a tense change that shifts the object of evaluation from Lottie's trip, which Emma lacks epistemic rights to evaluate, to Palm Springs as a destination, for which Emma does have such rights (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987; Heritage, 2002b). From this K+ position Emma's turn, while soliciting agreement, is not requesting information but asserting an opinion.

Similarly in (21) Skip, who works in the accounts department for a small company, has called Fred to make sure that a message has reached him. Emerging from this sequence (line 3), Fred remarks on the arrival of an apparently delayed payment, and Skip, the one with expertise about the company's cash flow, assesses the news with a negative interrogative:

(21)   [Field U88:1:10: 11–24]

```
1   Ski:       That's alright I just wanted to make sure: (.) whether
2              (you'd/you've) p'hh gone back or no[t.h
3   Fre:                                          [Yes I did. No [I got that=
4   Ski:                                                         [.hhhhhhh.p
5   Fre:       =thanks 'n I, I've also heard about th'of course w'got
6              the cash in toda:[y.
7   Ski:   ->                  [gYes::. Yes isn't that good at l:ong
8          ->  la:[st.   [((sniff))
9   Fre:        [That[s u-very good news. B't'v cour[se it (0.3)
10  Ski:                                            [khhhhhhhh
11  Fre:       we'll haf to pay out a lot a'that I [guess
12  Ski:                                           [.hhhhhh ih Ye:s but
13             at least it'll bring us int'th'black hhh.hhh in the
14             middle of Ma:y......
```

Once again, the interrogative is heard as an assessment to be agreed with (line 9) rather than a request for information. And in (22) the evaluation of "Pat" becomes a site of extensive epistemic struggle in which competing negative interrogatively formed assessments play a significant role (Heritage, 2002a; Heritage & Raymond, 2005):

(22)   [NB VII:1–2]

```
1   Emm:           =Oh honey that was a lovely luncheon I shoulda ca:lled you
2                  s:soo[:ner but I:]l:[lo:ved it.Ih wz just deli:ghtfu[: l. ]=
3   Mar:                [((f)) Oh:::] [°(    )                         [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:[:ll? ]
8   Mar:   ->                                        [iY e]h isn't she pretty,
```

```
9    Edn:          Oh: she's a beautiful girl.=
10   Mar:          =Yeh I think she's a pretty gir[l.
```

In neither line 7 or line 8 is the negative interrogative understood as in search of information.

In other cases, however, where the speaker is understood to be in a K− position, negative interrogatives can be understood as information seeking. To illustrate this, I draw on two cases in which a speaker retreats from a putative claim to be informed to a relatively uninformed (K−) position, moving from declarative to negative interrogative formulations in the process. In (23) a European visitor to Japan is talking to a native Japanese about weather conditions in Tokyo:

(23)   [JH:FN About the weather in Tokyo]

```
1    A:    But the weather's humid in Fall,
2    B:    ((Looks puzzled))
3    A:    Isn't the weather humid in Fall?
4    B:    Yes it is.
```

Here the trajectory from declarative to negative interrogative expresses deference to the local expertise of the recipient, and the negative interrogative is understood as a question in search of confirmation rather than as an assertion in search of agreement.

Similarly in (24), in a context where Mike is making a claim on a fish tank, Rick objects that some of them are owned by Alex (line 6). His objection and his subsequent epistemically downgraded reassertion (line 9) attract "open class" repair initiations (Drew, 1997) from their addressee (Vic) (lines 8 and 10):

(24)   [US: 1076–1086]

```
1    Mik:           You have a tank I like tuh tuh- I-I [like-
2    Vic:                                              [Yeh I gotta fa:wty::
3                   I hadda fawtuy? a fifty, enna twu[nny:: en two ten::s,
4    Mik:                                            [Wut- Wuddiyuh doing
5                   wit [dem. Wuh-
6    Ric:    ->         [But those were uh::: [Alex's tanks.
7    Vic:                                     [enna fi:ve.
8    Vic:           Hah?
9    Ric:    ->     Those'r Alex's tanks weren't they?
10   Vic:           Pondn' me?
11   Ric:    ->     Weren't- didn' they belong tuh Al[ex?
12   Vic:                                            [No: Alex ha(s) no tanks
13                  Alex is tryin'tuh buy my tank.
```

The consequence is that Rick progressively retreats from the K+ position he took at line 6, through a downgraded declarative + tag reassertion at line 9, to a K− position expressed in the negative interrogative at line 11. It is to this latter that Vic chooses to respond with a vigorous denial of Rick's position.

These cases strongly support Bolinger's (1957) contention that the interpretation of negative interrogatives as requesting or conveying information is dependent on the epistemic status of the speaker relative to the recipient.

Straight Interrogative Syntax

Although straight interrogative syntax may seem to be dedicated to the indexing of K− positions, and hence consistently aligned with a speakers' K− epistemic status, it is simply not true that straight interrogative syntax is locked in with these real world territories of knowledge. In fact, just as negative interrogative syntax is not decisive in determining the status of a turn as "questioning," so also interrogative syntax does not determine whether a turn is seeking information.

Interrogative syntax is of course generally heard to be indexing a search for information when it is aligned with K− epistemic status. Thus in the following sequence, a polar request for information by Nancy motivates a corresponding response from her friend Hyla. Here the information (about Hyla's new boyfriend) is clearly in Hyla's epistemic domain, and the status of Nancy's turn at line 1 as an information request is reinforced and placed explicitly on record by the use of interrogative syntax and rising intonation:

(25)   [HG:II:25]

```
1     Nan:    -> .hhh Dz he 'av 'iz own apa:rt[mint?]
2     Hyl:                                     [.hhhh] Yea:h,=
3     Nan:       =Oh:,
4              (1.0)
5     Nan:       How didju git 'iz number,
```

That this turn was produced from a K− position and was to be heard as a request for information, is retroactively confirmed by Nancy's *oh*-receipt of Hyla's responses (lines 3), which indexes a "change of state" from K− to K+ (Heritage, 1984a).

However, whether an interrogatively framed turn is heard as seeking information may ultimately turn on a determination of the relative epistemic status of speaker and recipient, as in the following sequence from Terasaki (2004; see also Schegloff, 1988):

(26)   [KR:2]

```
1     Mom:       Daddy 'n I have t- both go in different
2                directions, en I wanna talk t'you about where I'm
3                going (t'night).
4     Rus:       (Mkay,)
5     Gar:       Is it about u:s?
6     Mom:       (Uh) huh,
7     Rus:       <I know where yer goin,
8     Mom:       Wh^ere.
9     Rus:       To thuh eh (eight grade    )=
10    Mom:       =Yeah. Right.
11    Mom:    -> Do you know who's going to that meeting?
12    Rus:       Who.
13    Mom:       I don't kno:w.
14               (0.2)
15    Rus:       .hh Oh::. Prob'ly .h Missiz Mc Owen ('n Dad said)
16               prob'ly Missiz Cadry and some of the teachers.
```

At issue in the sequence running from line 11 on is whether Mom or Russ is in the K+ position. Russ originally treats his mother's turn at line 11 as a reciprocal to his own preannouncement at line 7. That is, he hears "Do you know who's going to that meeting" as clearing the way for Mom to deliver an informing about the meeting participants and he cooperates with that project with "Who" (line 12). It is only at line 13 that Russ can see that he has misconstrued his mother's true epistemic status, and starts (at line 15) to answer the question that he now recognizes was "asked" at line 11. Since, as lines 15–16 make clear, Russ could have responded immediately to line 11 as a request for information, the case is exquisite for showing the role of attributed epistemic status in determining how an utterance with interrogative syntax is to be treated in action terms.

In response to cases like (26), it may be objected that interrogatives with frames like "Do you know X" are systematically ambiguous between requesting information and clearing the decks for the delivery of information (S. E. Clayman, 2010, personal communication). However, this claim cannot possibly be sustained for "exam" questions, which are not in search of information but rather are aimed at determining whether the recipient has the information (or understanding) requested (Searle, 1969):

(27)   [Gypsyman:1]

```
1    Tea:   ->    Okay (.) now then (.) has anyone anything to say (.)
2                 what d'you think this poem's all about?
3                 (2.9)
4    Tea:         Miss O'Neil?
5    Stu:         The uhrm gypsyman they want his to stay one more day
6                 longer.
7    Tea:         The gypsyman they want him to stay one day longer,
8                 (.)
9    Tea:         Don't be afraid of making a mistake, if you've got
10                any thoughts you put your hand up.=No-one's gonna
11                laugh at ya.=I shall be very grateful for anything
12                you have to say. Miss O'Neil said it's a poem about
13                a gypsyman (.) an' somebody wants him to stay.
14                (0.3)
15   Tea:         Any other ideas.=She's not right.
```

As the teacher's turns in this datum make perfectly clear, there is only one "K+" individual in the room, and the correctness of the children's understanding of the poem will be determined by him. More generally, all third turns that affirm or deny the correctness of students' contributions (Drew, 1981; Sinclair & Coultard, 1975) retroactively reassert the K+ epistemic position that informed the question's production in the first place (Heritage, 1984b).

Similarly so-called "rhetorical questions"—for example, the "how can you/could you" format—that has become more common in public affairs during the past 30 years (Clayman, Elliott, Heritage, & McDonald 2006; Clayman & Heritage, 2002a, 2002b)—are designed to mobilize response to a "question" while simultaneously insisting that the question is unanswerable. Interrogatives of this sort are thus virtually dedicated to performing accusations.

For example, in the following sequence David Frost confronts a businessman, Emil Savundra, who had sold his auto insurance company—effectively liquidating it, leaving many claims outstanding. Savundra was subsequently tried and convicted for fraud. The interview took place before his trial and was conducted in front of a studio audience composed of individuals who had claims outstanding against the company. Savundra sat facing the audience, which was highly animated, while Frost addressed him from a standing position—frequently standing over him (Clayman & Heritage, 2002b). The sequence begins with Frost and Savundra in flat and explicit disagreement (lines 1–11). Subsequently, at line 21, Frost assumes an interrogative mode with "How d'you get rid of moral responsibility." The audience members, perhaps encouraged by Frost's earlier assertion about Savundra's moral responsibility (lines 6–7), treats this turn, not as a question to be answered but as an assertion to be agreed with (lines 23–25):

(28)   [UK BBCTV Omnibus: 21 Apr 1981: Insurance Fraud]
         IR: David Frost IE: Emil Savundra AU: Studio Audience

```
1    IE:          By selling out (0.7) I have no legal
2                 responsibility,(0.2) and no moral
3                 responsibility.
4    AU:          Rubbish                          ](1.0)
5    AU:          No moral responsibility?         ]
6    IR:          You have- (0.5) you have total moral
7                 respons[ibilityfor ALL these people.
8    IE:                 [I beg your pardo:n
9    IE:          I beg your PARDON Mister Frost.
10   AU:          You have.                        ](0.2)
11   IE:          I have not.
12   IR:          How can you s- You say you're a Roman Catholic
13                and [its  ] the will of God. .hh How can you be=
14   IE:              [Yes]
15   IR:          =responsible and head of company when all these
16                things happen. .hh And you think by some fake
17                deal with Quincey Walker (.) four thousand
18                pou[nds (.) on June twenty third
19   IE:             [ You have already assume::d
20   IE:          You have already assumed [a    fake   dea:l
21   IR:    ->                             [How d'you get rid
22          ->    of moral responsibility.
23   AU:          Yeah
24   AU:          You can't
25   AU:          You can't
26   IE:          How- you have already assumed (0.6) you've- one
27                thing: the fake dea:l
28   IR:    ->    Well forget the fake deal. [How do you sign=
29   IE:                                     [Right
30   IR:    ->    =a bit of paper [.hh that gets rid of past=
31   IE:                         [Yes
32   IR:    ->    =moral responsibility.
```

```
33   IR:   ->    =Tell me that.
34   IE:         By i-=
35   IR:   ->    ='Cause we'd all love to know.
```

Frost's subsequent interrogative (lines 28, 30, 32), with its ironic contrast between a "bit of paper" (line 30) and the shedding of "past moral responsibility" (lines 30, 32), is presented as unanswerable. And this is underscored by his subsequently insistent "Tell me that" and his ironic "Cause we'd all love to know." Commenting on this interview, the appeal judge in Savundra's subsequent trial for fraud remarked that

> This court has no doubt that the television authorities and all those producing and appearing in tele-vised programmes ... know also of the peril in which they would all stand if any such interview were ever to be televised in future. Trial by television is not to be tolerated in a civilized society. (Tracey, 1977)

In a similar case, Dan Rather's interview of President George H. W. Bush while the latter was seeking the Republican nomination for the presidency included the following sequence:

```
(29)   [US CBS Evening News: 25 Jan 1988: Iran-Contra]
       IR: Dan Rather IE: George Bush

1    IR:   =>    You've- you've made us hypocrites in [the face o' the world.]=
2    IE:                                             [(              )]=
3    IR:   =>    =How couldja [gr- how couldja-] (.) sign on to such a policy.
4    IE:                      [(That was ba:d) ]
5    IR:         .hh[h And the question]    [is, what does that tell us about your]=
6    IE:            [Well (half-) the]  [ same   reason   the   President ]=
7    IR:         =[record.]
8    IE:         =[    si]gned on to it. (0.2) The same reason the President
9                signed on to it. .hh When a CIA agent is being tortured to death,
10               .h maybe ya err on the side of a human life.
```

As in the previous case, Rather follows a combative assertion (line 1) with an accusatory question (line 3). Belatedly stepping back, he adds "and the question is . . . " (line 5/7), tac-itly recognizing that his previous unit of talk could not be construed as requesting information (Clayman & Heritage, 2002b). Here the interviewer has already abandoned even the simulation of a K− position assumed by professional interviewers, and his utterance, though framed with interrogative syntax, is not understood as in pursuit of information for himself or the news audi-ence. This highly controversial interview marked the beginning of a long decline in Dan Rather's broadcasting career (Rather, 1994).

Finally, interrogatives directed at domains in which the questioner has (or should have) pri-mary epistemic status are not ordinarily understood as information seeking. In the following case, Shelley has cancelled plans for a trip with some friends to go to a football game out of state. Debbie has called to protest this decision, intimating that Shelley has decided not to go because her current boyfriend (introduced to her by Debbie) will not be going either. The core complaint is that Shelley abandons her "girlfriends"in favor of "guys." In the following segment, Shelley is trying to deflect this accusation by indicating that the boyfriend would have paid for her to go if he were going (lines 2–3):

(30)   [Debbie and Shelley]

```
1    Shelley:       So: I mean it's not becuz he's- he's- I mean it's not
2                   becuz he:'s not going it's becuz (0.5) his money's
3                   not¿ (0.5) funding me.
4    Debbie:        Okay¿
5    Shelley:  ->   So an' ↑when other time have I ever [done that?
6    Debbie:                                            [.hhh well I'm jus say:in'
7                   it jus seems you- you base a lot of things on-on guy:s.
8                   (.) I do'know:, it just- a couple times I don- I don-
9                   .hh it's not a big deal.
```

At line 5 Shelley asks "So an' ↑when other time have I ever done that?"—a question that invites response addressed to a domain to which she herself has privileged access. Whatever the action that is derived from this utterance—challenge, complaint, protest, rebuttal—it does not embrace "requesting information." Thus even if Shelley's interlocutor had responded by listing occasions in which Shelley had abandoned girlfriends for guys (a course of action she does not undertake here), we would be justified in viewing this eventuality as the subversion of Shelley's objective in producing the utterance—a case of her being "hoist on her own petard."[4]

Summary

A polar question, Dwight Bolinger observed in 1978, "advances a hypothesis for confirmation" (1978, p. 104). Clearly the morphosyntactic and intonational form in which the hypothesis is clothed can vary considerably. While there is a strong association between interrogative syntax and requesting information, we have seen that interrogative morphosyntax is not a decisive indicator of turns that "request information" nor even "question" more generally. Similarly, though there is an association between tag questions, rising intonation, and "requesting confirmation," this relationship is far from locked in, or set in stone. Nor, of course, is declarative morphosyntax a decisive indicator of assertions, though once again there is a powerful association between the two. The points raised so far are summarized in Table 1.

These associations between morphosyntax, intonation, and social action, when used in conjunction with varied epistemic statuses, allow significant adjustments of epistemic gradients. For example, declarative syntax and intonation primarily associated with assertions can, in conjunction with the speaker's K− epistemic status, claim more certainty than would be accomplished through interrogative syntax—thus "flattening" the proposed epistemic gradient between speaker and hearer and being understood to invite "confirmation" of the speaker's knowledge.

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[4]The existing literature (e.g., Han, 2002; Sadock, 1974) tends to stress that these "rhetorical questions" gain their primary force from the fact that their recipients are invited to affirm a proposition to which they have shown themselves to be opposed (often in the context of argument). However, the inverted epistemic positions of the protagonists—in which the questioning is about a matter to which the questioner, and not the recipient, has primary epistemic rights—seems fundamental.

TABLE 1
Epistemics and Action Formation

Turn Design Feature	K+ Epistemic Status (Within Speaker's Epistemic Domain)	K− Epistemic Status (Not Within Speaker's Epistemic Domain)
	Action Interpretation (Given the "known in common" epistemic status of speaker and recipient relative to the targeted state of affairs)	
Declarative Syntax	Informing (5)	Declarative/B-event question (6), (7), (8), (9), (10), (11)
Declarative Syntax with Final Rising Intonation	Continuing (13)	Questioning (14)
Tag Questions	Mobilizing support for an assertion (18), (19)	Seeking confirmation (15), (16), (17)
Negative Interrogative Syntax	Assertion (cf. Bolinger's [1957] "Blinds up") (20), (21), (22)	Request for information (cf. Bolinger's [1957] "Blinds down") (23), (24)
Interrogative Syntax	Preinforming question (26) Known answer question (27) Rhetorical question (28), (29), (30)	Request for information (25)

CONCLUSION

What are the implications of these observations?

First, relative epistemic status dominates morphosyntax and intonation in shaping whether utterances are to be understood as requesting or conveying information. One consequence of this is that both interrogative morphosyntax and intonation can be "freed" to participate as "response mobilizing" features of other classes of utterances, such as assessments and noticings (Stivers & Rossano, 2010). A further consequence is that the epistemic stance generally conveyed by interrogative morphosyntax and intonation functions as a secondary lamination on to epistemic status, fine tuning the epistemic gradient between speaker and recipient. It is for this reason that many languages can manage without any form of interrogative morphosyntax to index polar requests for information.

Second, while there are many considerations motivating speakers to remain cognizant at all times of their epistemic status relative to others on any matter under discussion—these embracing, for example, the entire panoply of issues falling under the heading of "recipient design" (Enfield & Stivers, 2007; Sacks & Schegloff, 1979; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1972), this analysis offers the following additional consideration. *Since any and all aspects of clausal morphosyntax are overwhelmed in their significance for action formation by epistemic status, interactants must at all times be cognizant of what they take to be the real-world distribution of knowledge and of rights to knowledge between them as a condition of correctly understanding how clausal utterances are to be interpreted as social actions.* This consideration must operate for every single turn at talk that embodies clausal elements, with the exception of imperatively framed utterances. For every clause will implement some form of declarative or interrogative morphosyntax, but the interpretation of the clause cannot correctly be effectuated without a fine-grained grasp of epistemic domains and relative

epistemic status within them. This knowledge must definitely be consulted to grasp the sense of an utterance as an action. Epistemic status is thus a key element of the background knowledge (Garfinkel, 1967) that is continually invokable and massively invoked as a means of grasping the actions executed in turns at talk.[5] It is, in short, a primary and unavoidable element of action formation.

Third, for these reasons the analysis of interaction cannot by any means avoid the fundamental relevance of epistemic status in the construction of action and the management of interaction.

It is sometimes suggested that speakers may lack the attentional, memory, or cognitive resources to maintain the kind of continuously updated epistemic "ticker" required, on this account, to make sense of utterances as actions, or at least that the cost of its maintenance may be prohibitive. Yet surely the culturally sanctioned and conventional division of epistemic resources between speakers and hearers in terms of attributes named by "psychological" verbs, together with pronouns, can provide many shortcut heuristics: It is hard to understand "I hope to win" as anything other than a declaration, just as it is hard to understand "You expect to win" as anything other than a request for information or confirmation. The maintenance of an epistemic ticker may simply be a facet of the "epistemic vigilance" canvassed as a basic element of communication by Sperber et al. (2010). Moreover, whatever the cost, it surely pales in comparison to the maintenance of cardinal spatial coordinates by the Guugu Yimithirr and other aboriginal groups as a means of describing the positioning of objects and the orientation of actors and actions (Haviland, 1998; Levinson, 2003).

What then is a question? In his *Interrogative Structures of American English*, Bolinger (1957, p. 4) says that a question "is fundamentally an attitude. . . . It is an utterance that "craves" a verbal or other semiotic (e.g., a nod) response. The attitude is characterized by the speaker's subordinating himself to his hearer." A little later he observes that "a question appears to be a behavioral pattern, and is as real—but as hard to pin down—as other behavioral patterns: aggressiveness, deference, anxiety or embarrassment. No inclusive definition can cover the pattern and at the same time meet the demands of scientific parsimony" (p. 5). An alternative image may be helpful, however. One could construe a turn at talk with its morphosyntactic features, its repairs, its lexical constituents with their referential and other pragmatic features, and its prosody as analogous to a complex organic molecule such as a protein, with a complex three-dimensional structure. Such a structure, as in the molecular world, may contain many components that can be "attached to" or "neutralized" by, switched on or off by, indexing, invoking or evoking, such real world circumstances as its position in a sequence of talk, the visual world available to speaker and hearer, and the multitudinous epistemic and social relationships between speaker and hearer that are conditioned by biography, history, and culture. What emerges as a "question" cannot be construed as other than the product of an interaction between a turn and its environment through which a recipient comes to see the method of a speaker's speaking, "of seeing how he spoke" (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 29).

This article has been confined to considering the role of epistemic status in the determination of whether an utterance is conveying or requesting information. While this may appear to be a relatively narrow domain, it may nonetheless play a fundamental role in the determination

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[5]The increasing value, complexity and, ultimately, necessity of "keeping score" of the multiple epistemic domains of numerous interlocutors in interaction may be a factor driving the evolution of greater cortical volumes associated with increased group sizes described by Dunbar (2003).

of higher-order actions such as requests, offers, proposals, suggestions, compliments, and complaints, to name but a few. The distinction is similarly fundamental to sequence organization since next actions and their sequelae to assertions that convey information, as opposed to questions that request it, are entirely distinctive and indeed contrastive (Heritage, 2012). Finally, because personhood and social identity are so deeply intertwined with epistemic status and its claims (Raymond & Heritage, 2006), the topic may have profound social and psychological ramifications.

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