

Making it Newsworthy: The Appendor Wh-Question in Announcement Sequences

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This paper will take a conversation analytic approach to examining the appendor wh-question in announcement sequences in English talk-in-interaction. The appendor wh-question is a linguistic format consisting of a preposition plus a wh-question word (these are not themselves repeats). This paper is primarily concerned with how the recipient of an announcement may treat the announcement as not yet newsworthy for them and the role that the appendor wh-question has in this. How these recipients indicate that an announcement is not yet newsworthy for them has yet to be examined in the literature.

This paper stems from my broader study on appendor wh-questions in English talk-in-interaction. The data derives from 135 hours of naturally-occurring interaction and the methodology of conversation analysis was employed. 80 instances of appendor wh-questions were analysed; 17 of which were used in announcement sequences.

To take a look at one excerpt, the following contains two appendor wh-questions being used to indicate that the announcement is not yet newsworthy for the recipient.

Excerpt (1): CallFriend North (ENGN6384)

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|----|-------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | Rick: | o:h I got another gift today. |
| 2 | | (0.5) |
| *3 | Kate: | from who? |
| 4 | | (0.5) |
| 5 | Rick: | from my sister |
| 6 | | (0.5) |
| *7 | Kate: | for what? |
| 8 | | (.) |
| 9 | Rick: | she got (.) me a mezuzah |
| 10 | | (0.9) |
| 11 | Kate: | nice |

In line 1, Rick announces “oh I got another gift today”. The word “gift” suggests that there is a giver of the gift, and perhaps it was for a particular occasion. This information is missing from the announcement in line 1, which is treated as relevant in subsequent lines. Kate pursues information to recognise the newsworthiness of the announcement with the first appendor wh-question “from who”. Rick responds with “from my sister” (line 5). Kate still does not treat the new information together with the announcement as newsworthy for herself yet, as indicated by her second appendor wh-question “for what” (line 7). As the recording occurred around the Christmas/Hanukkah period, the “for what” is perhaps soliciting the purpose of the gift or the occasion he received the gift. Rick says “she got me a mezuzah” (line 9) (note that a “mezuzah” is a Jewish ornament), to which Kate responds with an assessment “nice” (line 11). Kate now treats the announcement as news for her and such assessments may typically conclude announcement sequences (c.f., Maynard, 1997).

The study revealed that the appendor wh-question is used in announcements to signal that the recipient of the announcement has not recognised the newsworthiness of the announcement. Through the appendor wh-question, the recipient indicates what missing information (whether that be a location, purpose, etc.) that could be supplied in addition to the announcement to make it possibly newsworthy for them. The conversational participants work together to make the announcement possibly newsworthy for the recipient. The recipient orients to a newsworthy announcement with, typically, an assessment of the news. All in all, we can see how the unrecognisable newsworthiness of an announcement is dealt with by the conversational participants, and how the announcement sequences have been intricately designed and understood by the conversational participants themselves.

References

Maynard, D. W. (1997). The News Delivery Sequence: Bad News and Good News in Conversational Interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 30(2), 93-130.