

Chapter 20

Finding Action in Grammar: Two Cases from Storytelling in Multilingual Interaction



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Abstract Conversation analytic studies on storytelling have largely been concerned with data from monolingual interaction although the landscape is gradually becoming more encompassing. In this chapter, I investigate storytelling that occurs in two multilingual phone conversations in which English is the language used between the parties. One speaker is a less proficient user of the language while the other one is not. I present two single-case analyses in which two different versions of a telling are produced in response to the same question that is directed to the same multilingual individual. Analyses of the two episodes reveal the ways in which grammar is linked with action, bearing interactional consequences that also speak to the identities of the parties as cultural insider versus cultural outsider with respect to the topic at hand. In teller's recipient-designing of her responses to the same question, we witness how the parties do and find friendship with one another, using storytelling as an interactional resource. Implications of the study are considered with respect to how CA studies on storytelling contribute to language teachers' understanding of (second language) interactional competence and differences between the kind of retellings or "story grammar" that one might find in classroom instructional contexts versus that found in life outside the classroom.

20.1 Introduction

Early classic studies of storytelling from a conversation analysis (CA) perspective, which underpins much of the recent work on adult as well as children's storytelling (e.g. Bateman & Church, 2017; Filipi, 2019; Mandelbaum, 2012; Theobald, 2019), utilised monolingual English conversation data (e.g. Jefferson, 1978; Sacks, 1970, 1974, 1992; Schegloff, 1997a), although nowadays there is reason to problematise a monolingual standard (Waring, 2016; Wong and Olsher, 2000; Wong and Waring, 2017). Studies investigating storytelling in ordinary talk using data from multilingual interaction are relatively scarce although gradually increasing (e.g. Berger and

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Pekarek Doehler, 2018; Wong, 2021a, 2021b). For participants in multilingual interaction, chit-chatting on the phone in catching up with each other's news (Drew and Chilton, 2000) includes stories about family matters just as they do in monolingual interaction. Regardless of whether we are monolinguals or multilinguals, we are "custodians" of our experiences (Sacks, 1992, v2, Lecture 8, p. 468). We analyse occasions that are "powerfully relevant" for recounting our experiences *as* stories, which is, in part, how a culture reproduces itself (Sacks, 1992, v2, Lecture 8, pp. 468–469).

The aim of the chapter is to consider stories as linked with grammar and action, continuing an exploration of a "syntax-for-conversation" (Schegloff, 1979, p. 262) but within multilingual contexts. We examine data in which one party is a less proficient speaker of English, having learned English as an additional language, while the other party is an expert or highly proficient speaker of the same, having learned English as a mother tongue. Two single-case analyses are presented based on two different phone conversations. The teller of the stories, a multilingual individual who speaks English as a second language (L2), remains constant. An initial observation that sparked closer scrutiny of the data is two forms of a same question: *What did you name him?* versus *What is baby's name?* The questions seem similar enough; i.e. seeking the same information or answer. However, they lead to different tellings, one developing into a backstory while the other one does not do so.

Interest in the topic of grammar is not new for CA. From studies that explore intersections between grammar and interaction, we better grasp how grammar penetrates interaction in ways that we might not have considered otherwise; e.g. as connected with turn-taking and sequential organisations (Ochs et al., 1996; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1979, 1996). CA's perspective on grammar is unlike what one might find in traditional (applied) linguistics particularly as we flip lenses with an eye towards exploring "sentence *sequences*" (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 374; italics are his), which Sacks noted was rarely studied by grammarians (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 374). He remarked that "conventional grammatical analysis" (Sacks, 1992, v2, p. 182) cannot shed sufficient light on what is happening in sequential plays. Grammatical alternatives, choices or practices that participants make or engage in come replete with contingencies, manifesting in common understanding of actions that link organisations of practice such as: turn-taking, sequence, storytelling, and repair (e.g. Lerner, 1991, 1996; Ochs et al., 1996; Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 1979, 1996). Moreover, when participants, including second language learners, are not in the hothouse of the classroom, as noted by Schegloff in Wong and Olsher (2000), they are forced to deal with talk in a grammar of interaction just as monolinguals do.

Findings from this investigation confirm that in ordinary talk in multilingual interaction a story is an occasioned contingent achievement, a product of co-construction by the parties. In the data to be addressed, we witness just how interactionally competent one multilingual user is at the level of her understanding of a syntax-for-conversation. Along the way, the co-participants exhibit their identities as cultural outsider or cultural insider in regard to the topic at hand (Schegloff, 1991). In the play of stories, we also see how parties do and find friendship, whether of a close or distant sort (Wong, 2021a, 2021b). We conclude with pedagogical implications

that relate to the notion of second language interactional competence and classroom instruction.

20.2 Background: Storytelling and Grammar

In this section, I briefly highlight previous CA work on turn-taking, storytelling and grammar.

In addressing the resources deployed in storytelling with respect to turn-taking organisation, Sacks remarked: "...in storytelling you give them the floor to give it back to you" (Sacks, 1992, v2, p. 227). That is, in the organisation of turn-taking in ordinary conversation, there are competing demands, practices and/or resources such as "current speaker selects next" and "next speaker self-selects". If a speaker wants to tell a story, they must talk for more than one turn-constructive unit (TCU) (Sacks, 1970; Sacks et al., 1974); i.e. they must bid for a multi-unit turn. And when a bid for a multi-unit turn is oriented to and accepted by a story-recipient, the telling moves forward with the regularity of the A-B-A-B patterning of turn-taking in conversation held in abeyance until completion of the story. When the story is finished, the story-recipient typically aligns with the telling by displaying understanding that the telling is completed and offering a response with affiliative utterances as preferred responses (Stivers, 2008). That said, sometimes a completed story may open up, or may lead to a second story by another party (Ryave, 1978; Sacks, 1992; Sacks et al., 1974; Theobald, 2016). Put another way, in storytelling a built-in requirement is that "everybody more or less must listen" (Sacks, 1992, v.2, Lecture 2, p. 226).

Sequential placement of stories in ordinary talk is also an important consideration; i.e. stories occur as first-positioned, self-initiated, or as second-positioned other-initiated ones. First-positioned stories are initiated by teller typically by their use of a story preface; i.e. a story launch; e.g. I have something terrible to tell you (Sacks, 1992). Second-positioned stories are produced in response to a previous turn (Sidnell, 2010). For instance, in answering a question, a recipient, as teller, deploys a multi-unit turn to launch a story in second position (Schegloff, 1990; Sidnell, 2010).

As for an intersection among grammar, action, and the novice speaker, in an interview with Emanuel Schegloff, the question was posed: "You have written about interaction and grammar and have looked at turn organization in this regard. What thoughts come to mind when the context is non-native speakers or native-non-native conversation?" (Wong & Olsher, 2000, p. 123).¹ He responded that "grammar is a resource for accomplishing different actions and that things one might not have thought to have mattered turn out to matter" (Wong & Olsher, 2000, p. 123). Schegloff (1986) offered two forms of a same question: *Are you awake?* versus *Did I wake you?* in exemplification, noting that the action of *Did I wake you?* prefigures an

¹ Nowadays, we know better, and avoid terms like native speaker, non-native speaker, native-nonnative speaker conversation, and use terms such as multilingual speaker, multilingual interaction, *lingua franca* talk, or the like.

apology while that in *Are you awake?* is of another interactional order and magnitude, harbouring bad news that must be delivered sooner rather than later; i.e. worth the risk of arousing a recipient from sleep (Schegloff, 1986, p.144). In this vein, he noted that those with less competence in the language, e.g. L2 learners or novice speakers, may confront the resources of the language in a different way given their developing linguistic command and nascent fluencies (Wong & Olsher, 2000, p. 124). Novice or less proficient users of the language may occasionally possess divergent understandings of the grammar of interaction (Wong, 2004).

From a slightly different angle, the above resonates with Sacks' "project of a question" about which he observed: "what you can see that the question wants to find out is something that controls how you answer it" (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 56). Question-answer sequences manifest in participants' efforts at tying and "syntactic operations" (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 716); i.e. demonstrations of understanding and sense-making practices in social interaction. On a local level, participants "[show] that an utterance is understood via tying..." (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 718). However, just because a question was asked does not mean that a story was specifically called for; moreover, a multi-unit turn does not necessarily lead to a story.

In short, participants' analysis of an occasion in ordinary talk and their construction of interactional space to tell a story is not as easy nor as simple as one might expect, and multimodal elements may be implicated when the interaction is in-person. Also, we do not typically announce that we have a story to tell (e.g. You want to hear a story?), though sometimes we may do so; nor do we announce the completion of a story unless, say, recipient missed the possible ending in which case teller announces its completion, e.g. "Is not that wonderful?" (Sacks, 1992, v2, p. 228).

Although stories are pervasive in our lives, emanating from a stockpile of "talkables" (Schegloff, 1986, p. 116), they are not a conglomerate of facts or just information to be delivered as "stories get occasioned by a current course of conversation" (Sacks, 1992, v2, p. 441). Just as in data from monolingual interaction, in multilingual interaction stories are the product of a joint achievement by the participants involved. The foregoing provides a glimpse of some of the interactional practices that underlie and underwrite how stories make their way to the surface of our conversation. Next, we describe the data and methods used before proceeding with the first single-case analysis.

20.3 Data and Method

The data used in the study derive from a corpus of 14 h of telephone conversations between 12 dyads (L1-L2 or L2-L2) who speak in English. The recordings were made in a city on the West Coast of the United States of America. The participants agreed to have their conversations recorded in the course of phone conversations that they made. Pseudonyms are used in the data extracts shown below. The participants in the two stories analysed are friends who call to chitchat, to tell each other about their recent happenings. Huang, the teller of the stories under examination, is a

multilingual who speaks Mandarin as a mother tongue and English as an additional language. Her story-recipients, Jane and Vera, respectively, speak English as their mother tongue, but Vera also studies Mandarin. Two storytelling episodes from two different conversations were selected for analysis because they confirm and extend previous work on storytelling in ordinary conversation in multilingual interaction. The study here provides a third snapshot of the same multilingual user and adds more to our understanding of her L2 interactional competence (see Wong and Waring, for parts I and II).²

From a CA perspective, the analyses of the data consider storytelling as a co-constructed and occasioned object or project between story-teller and story-recipient, with turn-taking and sequential organisations of practice coming into play in critical ways. We will see the inescapable role of turn-taking practices in ordinary conversation and in participants' building of multi-unit turns in order for a story to emerge in the interaction. We zoom in on stories as tied to sequential placement; i.e. a story as being situated in the opening or near the closing of the conversation affects its interactional outcome. We also see how recipient-design shapes the telling as well as its orientation to troubles-talk. The importance of sequencing practices, e.g. question–answer adjacency pairs, is also featured as the story-recipient uses her answer to a question in differing ways as tied to her understanding of a grammar of interaction (Schegloff, 1979). The transcription system used is that originally developed by Gail Jefferson (2004).

20.4 Analysis

In this section, I present two single-case analyses (Schegloff, 1987). The focus of each analysis is an extended telling that emerges as an answer to a question that was asked, i.e. *What did you name him* versus *What is baby's name*. The data for the first storytelling episode originates from a telephone conversation between Huang and Jane and consists of 97 lines of transcript. For discussion purposes, the story is subdivided, appearing as Extracts (1a)–(1d) below.

20.4.1 Storytelling 1: What Did You Name Him?

Huang, originally from China, recently gave birth to her first child. (See Wong (2021a) for discussion of Huang's interactional competence as story teller and Wong (2021b) for that on her interactional competence as story-recipient.) The story begins with the extract shown below from the opening of the conversation.

² In one sense, we have here a series or a kind of “Our storied lives: Doing and finding friendship III”, complementing Wong (2021a) and (2021b).

Extract (1a) [HJ: a little boy]

01 (Huang): [(hello)o
 02 Jane: [HI↑*huang*↑ *zhou*↑
 03 Huang: (h) Hi (.) I'm sorry I was(.)feeding h:im[(so::)
 04 Jane: [I k(h)no:::w.
 05 Huang: uh huhh=
 06 Jane: =congradu\$la::tions\$↑
 07 Huang: \$thank you::\$, a liddle \$boy\$hh.
 08 Jane: I k(hno(h)w(h).
 09 Huang: [(h)ih(h)ih hih .h (I-)
 10 Jane: → [(whaddid-(.) whaddid you \$\$na::me im hh\$\$
 11 (0.4)
 12 Huang: → and:: you know we:: we:: we changed the name. hh

Sequential placement is an interactional resource that is brought to bear in storytelling. In the extract above, the parties exchange greetings (lines 02–03), with Huang remarking that her delay in answering the phone was due to feeding her baby. After a congratulations sequence and Huang's announcement that it is a boy (lines 06–07), Jane inquires, *What did you name him?* (line 10). She asks about the baby's name sooner rather than later, possibly pre-empting first and reciprocal 'how are you' sequences, which could lead them onto other matters and other actions (Schegloff, 2007). So, at this juncture, early on, the participants arrive at the "anchor position" (Schegloff, 1986), which is a sequential environment ripe for raising a first topic (Schegloff, 1986).

Turn-constructive units (TCUs) typically start with a beginning, but they can start with something hearable not as a beginning, and that is how Huang bids for a multi-unit turn to create space for her projected story (Sacks, 1970; Schegloff, 1996). Yet despite the prime sequential location, she does not answer Jane's question as put when she delays her response (line 11), and after the pause, she merely states that the name has changed. The verb *changed* resonates with Sacks' remarks on "first verbs" (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 180); i.e. the recipient orients to something else to follow to complete the sense of the utterance, which, in this case, projects a chronological "backlinking" (Schegloff, 1996, p. 67) to a previous topic not yet revealed. She builds her answer as a multi-unit turn when she withholds the baby's name, alluding to something that comes "first" chronologically and sequentially. All the while, she builds drama and suspense from the get-go (Ochs and Capps, 2001). (See Wong (2021a) for another storytelling episode in which Huang builds drama and suspense early in the conversation.)

In "doing answering" as a larger interactional activity (Schegloff, 2011), Huang creates a gap in intersubjectivity, cutting open a swath of turns for herself (Pekarek Doehler and Berger, 2018). Her answer to Jane's question serves as a story launch, projecting a history to be unravelled pertaining to the naming of the baby. She begins her answer with *and*, a marker which suggests continuation (Helisten, 2017; Jefferson, 1972). By initialising her talk in this manner, she seemingly finds herself in the midst of a story in progress, yet she is only just beginning. Thus, her answer is dual-purposed: a bid to take a multi-unit turn and an offer to tell a story. But not

all multi-unit turns lead to stories, and not all questions lead to stories. Yet this question–answer pair (lines 10–12) does so as will be seen below. (Huang’s mention of Sun Pei below refers to her husband.)

Extract (1b) [HJ: Troubles with the names]

13 Jane: → \$you did::\$†
 14 Huang: uh huh because you know we:: we:: we told our(.) y-you
 15 know we tolduh Jame- eh his name Jamie to some- another.h
 16 guys like uh our boss or you know(.)some people
 17 work- workin in our group .h=
 18 Jane: =uh huh,
 19 Huang: they said dum (0.2) the Jamie (0.2) always give to: the
 20 childa (0.2) you like uh(h)ten(.)before ten years old=
 21 Jane: =o::h yea::h,
 22 Huang: yeah andda they (0.2) never use it(.) to them
 23 (0.2)
 24 Jane: tch when they’re older?
 25 Huang: yeah::
 26 Jane: uh huh.
 27 Huang: .h so they- they said dum (0.2) iz not(.).iz not s-
 28 you know iffu eh children grow up(h)iz not so (0.2)
 29 pop-popular call(.)him(.) Jamie.
 30 Jane: uh huh.
 31 Huang: so: we:: decided change to you (h)k(h)now to
 32 ano(h)ther n(hame\$.h so Sun (0.2)
 33 uh Sun Pei eh find some (0.4) (d-) yih know another like
 34 kuh(.) .h j- Jeffree::y andda
 35 something likeuh st- Steween (h)huh then we:: we::
 36 decided to change it to Steween(h).

In the extract above, Jane, as story-recipient, assists in co-constructing Huang’s impending tale. She treats Huang’s answer as unexpected and inviting news (line 13). Her response is a go-ahead, an acceptance of Huang’s bid to take a multi-unit turn and to usher in a backstory. In this regard, Huang offers troubles-talk (Jefferson, 1988, 2015) when she recounts via indirect reported speech (Holt, 2017) that she and her husband considered the name Jaime, but they checked with co-workers who disapproved, saying the name is unsuitable for an adult though acceptable for a 10-year-old (lines 14–17 and 19–20). Huang also tells Jane that the name Jeffrey was entertained, but apparently there was trouble with that name presumably from the same co-workers (line 34). Thus, choosing a name for their baby was an unexpected ordeal, with troubles that reflect Huang and her husband’s identity as cultural outsiders with respect to naming practices found in the United States. Along these lines, Jane displays understanding and/or agreement with the co-workers as seen in her collaborative completion (line 24), which finds its attachment to Huang’s utterance (line 22) despite it being “ungrammatical”. Huang may have viewed her turn and talk at line 22 as possibly complete, but for Jane, it may have been incomplete, so she offers to complete the turn. Her continuers and acknowledgement responses (lines 27–29 and 31–36) continue to co-drive Huang’s story, so Jane does not get the answer to her question until many turns later (line 36).

After Huang gives the baby’s name, the backstory does not end, however. Jane initiates repair with an understanding check that keeps the story open, as shown below.

Extract (1c) [HJ: Steven Sheng Shao Sun]

37 (0.2)
 38 Jane: so you named him Steven?§
 39 Huang: uh huh hh.
 40 Jane: \$wow::\$\$†
 41 Huang: is okay? (h)i(h)
 42 Jane: but- but also your Chinese name right?
 43 Huang: yeah:: we- we- we got a first name is Steven .h and the
 44 mm middle name is uh:: eh Jamie(h) (0.2) oh no
 45 no(h)middle n(h)ame is \$Sheng Shao\$.
 46 Jane: uh huh.
 47 Huang: .h and duh la- last name is Sun so
 48 Jane: \$aw::\$
 49 Huang: so is uh Steven(0.2) Sheng Shao Sun
 50 (h)i(h)(h)i(h) [(h)i(h)
 51 Jane: [uh hu::h
 52 Huang: .h it's a long n(h)ame. (h)i(h)(h)i(h)
 53 Jane: (h)i(h)(h)i(h)
 54 Huang: (h)i(h).h yeah but uh we- we- we al-always call him
 55 Steven(h)(h)
 56 (0.2)
 57 Jane: Steven? [(Stevie?)]
 58 Huang: [mm hm] mm hm
 59 Huang: he's okay?
 60 Jane: \$↑yeah:::\$
 61 Huang: think so?
 62 (0.2)
 63 Jane: \$y-ea::s↑\$
 64 Huang: thank you (h)i(h)(h)i(h)
 65 Jane: (h)i(h)(h)i(h) \$that's °cu::te\$.°
 66 Huang: mm::hm.

In the extract above, approval-seeking becomes a project once again, this time with Jane. Her repair-initiation *so you named him Steven* is preceded by a pause (line 37), which contributes to its being heard as indicating surprise (Wilkinson & Kitinger, 2006). After Huang confirms the name, Jane produces the assessment *wow* (line 40) to which Huang seems puzzled. She solicits Jane's approval of the name with *is okay?* (line 41). That is, despite a secured approval of the name from her co-workers, Huang still seeks approval from Jane. She displays her category membership as a cultural outsider in relation to that of her co-participant, treated as a cultural insider. Yet in response to Huang's solicit of approval, Jane neither approves nor disapproves (line 42). Had she approved, she might have provided an upgraded assessment, countering Huang's *is okay* (line 42) with, e.g. "it is wonderful", "great", "nice", or the like. As a next responsive action Jane's non-answer displays disalignment (Sacks, 1978). She sidesteps Huang's question, not directly answering it when she shifts to asking whether the baby has a Chinese name (line 42). Her utterance begins with two sayings of *but*, which suggests pre-disagreement though the utterance assists Huang in resuming her story (see Helisten (2017) on doing resumption and Lee and Lee (2021) on progressivity in storytelling in multilingual interaction).

After Huang gives the baby's first, middle, and last names (lines 43–45 and 49), answering that there is a Chinese middle name, Jane responds with a smiley-voiced *aw* (line 48). Next, Huang produces increments, saying it is a long name (line 52) but

that they always call him Steven (line 54–55). After a pause (line 56), Jane produces the name (*Steven*) (line 57) with rising “try-marked” intonation (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979, p. 18–20), which suggests a practising of the name aloud to see how it sounds as a recognisable reference (Schegloff, 1996). Indeed, Huang treats Jane’s line 57 as a try-marked recognitional reference when she asks whether the name is okay (line 59), e.g. how does Steven sound to your ears? To that Jane replies positively though minimally with *yeah* (line 60), which leaves Huang not entirely convinced as she pursues confirmation with *think so?* (line 61). Subsequent to that a pause ensues (line 62) before Jane confirms. Yet in not being quicker on the uptake, her confirmation seems dispreferred, something less than wholehearted approval. But at line 62, Jane produces a stronger approval of *yes*, this time with stretched emphasis and smiley voice though the slight cut-off in her halted *y-es* still conveys something less than full approval. Thus, more than one attempt at securing Jane’s approval is done before Huang is satisfied. She closes the sequence with *thank you* (line 64). Reciprocally, Jane offers a topic-closing assessment, *that’s cute* (line 65), which Huang acknowledges. Although the sequence draws to a close (line 66), the story is not finished, as seen in the final extract.

Extract (1d) [HJ: Sun Pei’s search for the name]

67 Jane: so how did you get Steven out of all the names?
 68 (0.4)
 69 Huang: I don’t know you know *Sun Pei* looking for them (0.2) you
 70 know the book (h)=
 71 Jane: =uh huh.
 72 Huang: the::y they call direction of first uh name ((by
 73 ‘direction’ she means ‘directory’)).h he lookee::n for
 74 them= I:: don’t know how can he find (h) (h)
 75 [(h) i (h) i (h) i (h)
 76 Jane: [E (H) U (H) u (h)
 77 Huang: (h) i (h) (h) i h .h so he got this (name-) =he a-a-askuh
 78 me:: andda some (0.2) some another (.) people (0.2)
 79 everybody says its okay(h).
 80 Jane: huh.
 81 Huang: so I think it’s okay too [HHhh
 82 Jane: [oh: yea::h†
 83 Huang: yea::h.
 84 Jane: it’s a (.) real popular name.
 85 Huang: really?
 86 Jane: yea::h†
 87 Huang: because uh he- got- got decide uh only (0.2) only two
 88 hour(0.2) you know they- they hos- hospital need a(.)
 89 name (0.2).h fo:r for baby
 90 [so]
 91 Jane: [(h) u (h)]
 92 Huang: he- .h he come back home then [look]ing
 93 Jane: [(h) u (h)]
 94 Huang: for (h) u (h) an’ then he come back he said uh I- I- I
 95 found one (h) i (h) (h) i (h) (h) i (h) .
 96 Jane: (h) a: :w=
 97 Huang: =⁰yeah⁰

Jane wants to hear more of the backstory, and she gets Huang to resume the telling. In doing so, she redraws the story's progressivity lines (line 67) (Lee & Lee, 2021). Her question begins with a presumptive "so" (Bolden, 2009) that returns Huang to an impending incipient action, something now viewed as incomplete. That is, Huang's earlier backstory specifies that the names, Jaime and Jeffrey, were under consideration, but does not tell how Steven was finally settled upon. The intersubjectivity gap that Huang constructed early on (line 12) remains unresolved, as displayed in Jane's follow-up question (line 66), despite the fact that Huang may have viewed her story as finished.

In the final turns before the story is completed, Huang builds another multi-unit turn to continue her telling. Reciprocally, Jane produces minimal responses with continuers and acknowledgement tokens (e.g. lines 71, 76, 80). We learn that Huang's husband was a key player (lines 69–79). After he found the name Steven in a directory of baby names, he sought the approval of Huang and of others (lines 77–81). Before the story ends, Huang mentions other troubles; i.e. the stress in settling upon a name under extreme time pressure as Sun Pei only had a couple of hours to return home from the hospital and to find a name given the baby's unexpected arrival (lines 87–95). (We do not learn of the baby's unexpected arrival in the extracts shown above, but see Wong (2021a) for that story).

As Huang and Jane co-construct the story, they reveal how participants "analyse the occasion" while remaining "constantly alert" for a story from a memory bank of personal experiences that targets and speaks to the context of the situation (Sacks, 1992, v. 2, Lecture 8, pp. 468–469). Doing answering of the question (*What did you name him?*) at the onset of the conversation offered Huang and Jane an occasion that is "distinctly ripe for them" (Sacks, 1992, v2, Lecture 8, p. 469), for ushering in a backstory about the difficulties of settling upon a name for the baby when one is not of the language and culture. In the stories that we tell, we co-produce cultural knowledge (Theobald & Danby, 2017), and we have a "culture reproducing itself" in relation to sense-making practices as well (Sacks, 1992, v2, Lecture 8, p. 468).

20.4.2 *Storytelling 2: What Is Baby's Name?*

The data for the second storytelling episode originates from a telephone conversation between Huang and Vera and consists of 104 lines of transcript. For discussion purposes, the story is subdivided, appearing as Extracts (2a)–(2d) below.

The turn labelled as line 01 below is not the first turn of the conversation given that the participants have reached preclosing exchanges of appreciation and solicitude (lines 01–09) (Button, 1990). Nonetheless, those utterances do not lead to closure of the conversation, but rather, to its opening up when Vera asks *What is baby's name?* (line 09).

Extract (2a) [HV: baby boy's name]

01 Huang: alright.
 02 (0.3)
 03 Vera: alright Huang Lin::
 04 Huang: thank you: Ve::ra=
 05 Vera: =well (I'm-)oh::
 06 Huang: ehuh(h)
 07 Vera: I'm so [happy for you
 08 Huang: [.h (yeah) thank: [you:
 09 Vera: [What(.) is baby's name?
 10 Huang: Oh:: yeah his name is Steween.
 11 (0.2)
 12 Huang: .h he got um mm:: (0.2) English name Engli- English
 13 first name is Steeween.
 14 Vera: Stewin?
 15 Huang: STeween.
 16 Vera: Steven?
 17 Huang: mm hmm.
 18 Vera: oh::: that's a very good name.
 19 Huang: you think so?
 20 Vera: yes:
 21 Huang: thank you=

Although Vera's question is quite similar to Jane's as seen in the previous case, Huang's answer here is markedly different. The question (line 09) begins with a *wh*-word (*what*) followed by a micropause, and the turn ends with added stress on the word *name*. Notably, Huang answers the question by giving the baby's name. She begins *Oh yeah*, which possibly marks misplacement of a topic being handled now (Schegloff, 1986). The matter of the baby's name, perhaps, ought to have been raised sooner, but is taken up almost as an afterthought; i.e. a last topic, before exiting the conversation (Schegloff, 2007; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). But raising the issue of the baby's name as a last rather than as a first topic just subsequent to preclosing moves is worth emphasising as that is not typical of how parties talk about newborns; i.e. asking about the sex and the name are among the first topics as we saw at the beginning of the conversation between Huang and Jane, even pre-empting other canonical opening sequences (e.g. "how are you"). The conversation between Huang and Vera came close to ending without the asking nor the offering of the newborn's name. Furthermore, this is Huang's first baby; i.e. all the more reason why there should be (more) excitement and interest displayed between them. This lapse in talk and conduct speaks loudly of the parties' distant relationship, as compared with that between Huang and Jane. (The lack of closeness is consistent with findings from another storytelling episode between them when Huang attempts to tell Vera about her arduous labour and delivery of a breach baby, but she meets with limited success given Vera's unaffiliative responses. See Wong (2021a)).

After Huang gives the baby's name (line 10), a brief pause ensues (line 11), which is a place in which Vera might have offered a compliment (e.g. that's great, I love it, or the like), showing alignment or a preference for agreement (Sacks, 1978). But she does not do so. After the pause, Huang specifies that the baby has an English name.

She self-repairs with an inserted element to clarify that the baby has a first name of Steven (lines 12–13). Vera displays a problem hearing the name properly given Huang’s pronunciation, which may explain the pause of line 11. But after Huang produces the name twice (lines 10 and 13), Vera remains unsure, so she initiates repair with the hearing check *Stewin?* (line 14). But *Stewin* is not an English name, of course. That this name falls within the realm of possibilities as her strongest spotlight on the trouble-source (Schegloff et al., 1977) is registered, revealing not only the impact of recipient-design but the divides between them; i.e. cultural outsider versus cultural insider in relation to the topic at hand (Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 1991).

Three attempts at saying the baby’s name (lines 10, 13, 15) constitute the upper limit after which Huang is relieved of having to pronounce the name again. That is, in responding to the hearing check, Huang targets her enunciation of the initial syllable as the trouble-source *STeween* (line 15), despite Vera’s targeting of the second syllable. But after Huang addresses the trouble-source, Vera hears correctly though she still initiates repair, checking again, and to which Huang confirms (line 17). Confirming Vera’s hearing check, which comes packaged with a proper pronunciation of the name, is an easier task for Huang than having to say the name a fourth time. Vera’s line 16 serves as an embedded correction (Jefferson, 1987), perhaps, done so as not to expose Huang’s pronunciation issue; i.e. a “recipient-designed solution” (Sacks, 1992, v2, p. 384). Each successive repair is progressive (lines 13–17), leading the participants closer to resolution of the trouble-source (Schegloff, 1979), which is resolved when Vera offers a compliment on the name (line 17) to which Huang responds with a confirmation check (line 20).

With the pronunciation problem and hearing check issues resolved, the talk continues with Vera stating why she approves of the name as seen below.

Extract (2b) [HV: Steven in the Bible]

22 Vera: =because um .h Steven
 23 Huang: mm hmm.
 24 Vera: was a man in the Bible.
 25 Huang: oh really? [(h)u(h)(h)u(h)
 26 Vera: [mm hmm. he’s a ve:ry- he(was (is)a very good
 27 man=he was very strong.
 28 (0.2)
 29 Huang: mm hmm,
 30 Vera: and(.)in character?
 31 (0.2)
 32 Huang: character?
 33 Vera: uh huh.
 34 Huang: uh huh=
 35 Vera: =an his- his person was very strong.
 36 Huang: uh huh.
 37 Vera: he was very (0.4) he was called .h he was one of the
 38 served- ()one of the m-men that would .h (0.2) s- um
 39 serve the widows?
 40 Huang: uh huh.
 41 Vera: an' so (0.2)°he was a very good man.°
 42 Huang: tch th-that's good name then.
 43 Vera: mm hmm.

Beginning with the lexical item *because*, Vera “skip-connects” (Sacks, 1992) and returns to her previous utterance (line 18), saying that Steven is a man in the Bible (lines 22 and 24). She is onto a story launch to which Huang displays orientation when she responds with a continuer (line 23) followed by a news mark *oh really* (Maynard, 2003) (line 25), accepting Vera’s bid to tell a story (lines 26–27).

Similar to the case with Jane, seeking approval of the baby’s name emerges as a larger project, which simultaneously marks her identity as a cultural outsider on the matter at hand (Schegloff, 1991). In line 30, Vera adds an increment, saying that Steven was very strong in character. The increment, a third turn repair (Schegloff, 1997b), clarifies that by *strong* she means in character not physical strength (line 27). But Huang does not fully grasp what strong in character refers to as there is a slight delay (line 31) before she initiates repair by repeating Vera’s turn-final element *character* with rising questioning prosody (line 30 and 32). Vera acknowledges with *uh huh* (line 33), but in doing so, she neither hears nor treats Huang’s repeat of the word *character* as a sign of trouble. Subsequent to that Huang produces the acknowledgement *uh huh* (line 34). Thereafter, Vera comes to a delayed different understanding (Wong, 2000a) of Huang’s earlier acknowledgement responses (lines 32 and 34) when she now produces another increment, saying that Steven’s *person was very strong* (line 35). That is, she reformulates her earlier utterance that Steven was very strong in character, explaining that strong in “person” (character) is in contrast with physical strength (body). Yet still, it is unclear whether Huang understands as she produces another acknowledgement token *uh huh* that passes up the floor (line 40). Vera then adds that Steven is one of the men who served the widows (lines 37–39), and Huang again merely acknowledges (line 40). Then, Vera proceeds to draw the story to a close by repeating at line 41 the earlier utterance *he was a very good man* of lines 26–27 (Schegloff, 1990, 2011). Huang orients to the story as complete when she produces a topic-closing assessment *that’s a good name then*, while seeking approval one more time that Steven is a good name (line 42). Vera acknowledges that it is a good name but with a minimal response (line 43).

Vera’s telling about Steven from the Bible is brief. We wonder whether that is linked with Huang’s showing inadequate interest in hearing the story as she only produces minimal responses (*uh huh* and *mm hmm*). When a recipient produces one too many consecutive minimal responses in the nature of continuers (e.g. *uh huh* and *mm hm*) that may indicate a lack of interest or a desire to move away from the topic and sequence. (See Wong, 2021b, in which Huang uses too many acknowledgement responses that evidence claims of understanding but no demonstrations of understanding.)

After Vera’s story is finished, Huang continues to talk about the baby’s name, using the conjoining element *anduh* that reattaches with her earlier answer to Vera’s question (line 12–13) (Sacks, 1992). That is, the progressivity of Huang’s telling of the baby’s name gets interrupted, but she is able to resume the telling as shown below.

Extract (2c) [HV: Chinese name Sheng Shao]

44 Huang: .h anduh he got thum(.) ch-chinese name tch
 45 yeah chinese name is Sheng Shao.
 46 Vera: Sheng Shao.
 47 Huang: yeah.
 48 Vera: what does that mean?
 49 Huang: .h eng Sheng means eh:: mm:: tch .h how can I say sheng
 50 means em(.) just do- try do everything(.) bestte.
 51 Vera: oh::.
 52 Huang: an' work hard or: yih know tch jus- t- just try (0.2) try
 53 ev-ev-ev-everything by your- do your bestte way .h .h and
 54 then Shao means um (0.4) mm means sum let me see Shao
 55 means uh .h an:: (0.6) how can I say issa yih know .h
 56 mmeans uh f- how can I() an:: (1.2) um:: (h) uh
 57 -(h) uh I cannot- can't say english.
 58 Vera: ehuh huh huh huh.
 59 Huang: .h that means um mm yih know an' ss- som- som- something
 60 happen now or s- some- some- some- something will become.
 61 (0.6)
 62 Vera: uh huh.
 63 Huang: yeah(h(h)(.)) some[thing like that.
 64 Vera: [oh goo::d.
 65 Huang: something like that shshao means um hh tch I don't know
 66 how- can I explain hh (0.2) in english.
 67 (1.8)
 68 Huang: Yeah jus- just like uh .h an:: (0.4) (h) (h) I don't
 69 know.
 70 (0.4)
 71 Huang: (h) (h) (h)
 72 Vera: ehuh huh huh huh huh
 73 Vera: hih .h well I kinduv get thee idea.
 74 Huang: yeah.
 75 Vera: it sounds like a good name.
 76 (0.2)
 77 Huang: mm hmm we likeit too(h(h).
 78 Vera: g[oo::d.

In principle, any next item may become the object of repair, intervening or disrupting what might have occurred as a next item in relation to a prior one (Schefflo et al., 1977). As we saw in the earlier Extract (2a) above, the progressivity of Huang's telling gets interrupted by Vera's initiation of repair (line 14) and her brief story about Steven from the Bible leads them onto other talk away from Huang's story. But in Extract (2c), note that Huang returns to talking about the baby's name (lines 44–45), continuing the larger project of doing answering of Vera's question (line 09) when she now announces the baby's Chinese name *Sheng Shao*). In fact, the “first” part of her answer to Vera's question; i.e. the English name Steven, sets up a local sequential context for this “second” part of her answer that focusses on the baby's Chinese name. Also, when we give the first name first, the recipient projects the middle name (or the rest of name) as forthcoming next. As a “next” second pair part (lines 44–45), Huang is able to do resumption (Helisten, 2017), finding an extension of her telling (Lee & Lee, 2021). This may be all part of her bid to seize a multi-unit turn in answering Vera's question about the baby's name (Sacks et al., 1974).

Furthermore, in the extract above we see a series of repairs, beginning with Vera's repetition of the Chinese name followed by her asking what the name means (line 46 and 48). But Huang has difficulty translating the meaning of the Chinese name, particularly the Chinese character *Shao*. She makes multiple attempts at translation, but eventually gives up or fails (lines 65–66 and 67–68). For Vera's part, she does not pursue the matter, stating that she gets the general idea, and it sounds like a good name (lines 72 and 74). Here, the tables are turned when Huang becomes the cultural insider given that a Chinese name is referenced and explained. And Vera, the cultural outsider, can only go so far when she responds that the Chinese name, or Huang's translation of it, *sounds* like a good one (line 74); i.e. this is not quite the same as saying that it is a good name as she is able to do with the name Steven. After Huang and Vera talk about the baby's Chinese name amid Huang's failed attempts at translation, Vera offers the topic-closing assessment *good*, which serves as a sequence closing third (line 77) (Schegloff, 2007).

In the final extract, the topic of the baby's name winds down, leading to closure of the conversation (not all of the closing turns are shown below).

Extract (2d) [HV: Steven Sheng Shao Sun]

78 Huang: [so .h yeah so: we: iffu: iffu- eh then we .h we: put
80 the-the chinese name (0.4)uh y-aaahhh we put the chinese
81 name .h like uh m- meedle nayme name hhh so his name is
82 Steeween .h Sheng Shao Sun.
83 Vera: MM hmm.
84 Huang: something like that.
85 (0.4)
86 Huang: tch but uh but uh now we- we- we al-always uh cohl(.)
87 call him Steeween.
88 (1.0)
89 Vera: uh huh.
90 Huang: hh.
91 Vera: tch I like that name=I really do.
92 Huang: you-you like it?
93 Vera: mm [hmm.
94 Huang: [hhh okay good.
95 (0.2)
96 Huang: huh-huh ((sniffle))
97 Vera: that's a very good name() tch I'll have to show you the
98 story about Steven in the Bible.
99 Huang: (h)okay (h) (h)huh[huh huh
100 Vera: [hih hih hih hih
101 (0.6)
102 Huang: okay alright.
103 Vera: well you have a good ni::ght.
104 Huang: mm hmm thank you(h)you too.
...

Huang begins with *so* (line 78) in signalling resumption; i.e. a return to an impending matter that was interrupted (Bolden, 2009). She continues with her answer to Vera's question regarding the baby's name. Although she has troubles with the turn, manifest in the same turn repairs that comprise the turn (lines 78–82) (Schegloff, 1979), she is able to get past her disfluencies, which includes reliance on the token “yeah” that marks her exit from the troubles within the same turn (Wong, 2000b).

She finally gives the baby's full name (*Steven Sheng Shao Sun*) (lines 81–82), and after she announces it, Vera responds with a loud emphasised *mm hmm* (line 83), which, though marking receipt, seems to fall short as a full-fledged compliment or enthusiastic endorsement. From there, Huang states that they always call him Steven. Again, Vera expresses satisfaction with the English name Steven. Huang follows up with another confirmation check (lines 91–94), and Vera repeats that Steven is a very good name; she will show Huang the story of Steven from the Bible (lines 97–98). Though Huang replies *okay* followed by possible troubles-resistant laughter (Jefferson, 1984), we still leave with the sense that she is less interested in the Biblical linkage than she is with Vera's robust endorsement of the name. They initiate preclosings (lines 103–105), which, this time, lead to closure of the conversation with the last topic now addressed.

The sequential place, along with the slightly differing form of the question, i.e. as compared with that in the first single-case analysis, appears to affect how the answer and the telling emerge between the parties. When the question is asked and answered near the close of the conversation as a last topic, the backstory and the troubles-talk are not revealed. Approval-seeking of the name still remains as an important matter for Huang, despite the fact that the name is already settled and entered in the official records. The identities of cultural outsider versus cultural insider pull into view regarding the topic at hand, once again.

One final note about this particular instance: Huang received a tepid response from Vera in her earlier attempts, not shown in the data above, to tell a story of her troubles concerning the arduous labour and delivery of the baby (see Wong, 2021a). Having failed once to get Vera's ear as a cooperative listener (Sacks, 1992), she may have set aside any further attempt at introducing another story, which also contains talk of troubles. That is, prior sequences, e.g. prior story sequences, are informative of current or subsequent ones; i.e. whether to be expansive or not, and particularly in a preclosing environment. As Schegloff noted: "...an important part of what a co-participant knows is what has already been said in the conversation..." (Schegloff, 1984, p. 50).

20.5 Discussion

In the storytelling data displayed from multilingual interaction in which the participants converse in English, each respective question–answer pair is situated at opposite ends of the sequential spectrum. When the question is asked at the onset of the conversation, it serves as the first topic, leading to a backstory achieved in second position. In contrast, when the question is asked as the last topic before closing the conversation, the backstory is not revealed, but we know from the conversation with Jane that there is more to the telling as well as a contrasting one. Although Huang's telling with Vera is also done in second position, it does not lead to a story with troubles-talk as it does in the conversation with Jane. Thus, storytelling is not about the delivery of a set of "facts", not to speak of a same set of facts; e.g. as might be

the case when storytelling or retellings are done in classrooms about which we say more below.

For storytelling in ordinary conversation, turn-taking and sequential organisations enter into the picture in their occasioning. Using ordinary conversation but focussing on multilingual interaction, we confirm that two forms of a same question can have more than grammatical significance as they can play out in terms of action and interactional consequence differently, influencing and shaping how, or whether, a telling, e.g. backstory with troubles-talk, emerges in the conversation (Schegloff, 1986).

In answering the question, *What did you name him?*, the teller focusses on a history, and indeed, stories concern experiences that we have suffered or witnessed (Sacks, 1992). On the other hand, in answering another form of the same question, *What is baby's name?*, the teller focusses on the name itself. Between the two question forms, *What is baby's name?* may be less likely to lead the answerer down the path of bidding for a multi-unit turn, which is a first interactional task needed for a story to develop although it does not guarantee that one will be told. Huang seems sensitive to the question, *What did you name him?*, as foregrounding the process or a “doing” of the verb form, so to speak, and the question, *What is baby's name?*, as foregrounding the product or a “doing” of the noun form. As noted earlier, Sacks (1992) remarks answerers of a question focus on “the project of a question”. He stated: “what you can see the question wants to find out is something that controls how you answer it” (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 56). Huang may be exhibiting a nuanced understanding of local sense-making practices (Sacks, 1992), and along the way, reveals to us her L2 interactional competence as linked with *her* grasp and “linguistic” abilities, which include skilfully handling the recipient-design character of interaction. The excerpt below succinctly encapsulates:

This complement of “talkables” which each party has is sensitive to, and substantially shaped by, who the other is... For each party, on this identification [of the parties] will be contingent not only what their “talkables” or “tellables” *are*, but where they should go; what may be a high priority, early item for one interlocutor is a late mentionable, or not relevant at all, for another. (Schegloff, 1986, p. 116)

Sacks writes: “We are able to keep the news items that we have around in such a way that it is not that they occur to you and you censor them, but that they just do not come into your head in one conversation, but become a first topic in another conversation” (Sacks, 1992, Part III, Lecture 1, p. 168). We do this with remarkable speed in utterance time (Sacks, 1992, Part III, Lecture 1, p. 168). We analyse the context of the situation to see whether a story is “distinctly ripe” for the occasion that we happen to be in (Sacks, 1992, Part VII, Lecture 8, p. 469). When we produce an answer to a question, we demonstrate understanding, which implicates “syntactic operations” (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 719). Sacks observed “... one way tying is done involves presenting the results of some syntactic operation on the given utterance. Those syntactic operations require some sort of analysis... So “understanding the action” is one sort of thing, and “understanding the syntax of an utterance” is another. Normally they are combinedly present” (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 719). We find that

combined presence spotlighted in the two forms of the same question in our data; i.e. where grammar and action “meet”.

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Schegloff noted in Wong and Olsher (2000) that those still learning the language may come at the resources differently. In another paper, he asked: “What form(s) does granularity take in the domain of actions or events?” (Schegloff, 2000, p. 715). If Huang is able to catch on to different grammatical forms in nuanced ways with *What did you name him?* orienting to a history while *What is baby’s name?* does not, the sparkle of her interactional competence, which includes grammatical competence, and achieved, no less, within the extraordinary rapid pace of utterance time, is illuminating in ways that we may not yet fully comprehend nor grasp, particularly with respect to second/foreign language contexts (Waring, 2016; Wong and Waring, 2021b). But we might begin by appreciating that and how she displays an understanding of the “rules for structuring conversation” (Sacks, 1992, v1, p. 718) as *she* has deployed and displayed them for her co-participant and not for us as overhearing analysts.

Sacks (1970) remarked “telling stories and telling stories in conversation are then quite different events. Telling stories in conversation is specifically interactional...There is a sequential structure for stories told in conversation, and it derives from, among other things, the turn-taking organization of conversation.” (Sacks, 1970, p. 7). Huang certainly displays a “grammatical competence” as she is able to tell recipient-designed stories in conversation, which likewise orient to how she goes about doing and finding friendship (Wong, 2021a, b). And strikingly, between the two conversations, in the closer relationship, recipient (Jane) seems more interested in the baby’s Chinese name, but in the more distant relationship, recipient (Vera) is more interested in the baby’s English name. Each respective recipient focusses on a different facet of the cultural insider versus cultural outsider “dilemma” concerning the baby’s name, but space does not allow for more in that regard here.

20.6 Conclusion and Recommendations

Giving an answer in utterance time can be quite different from doing so in a classroom context. In classroom instruction, the focus is sometimes on learner’s retellings from storybooks. Learners are taught “story grammar” elements, e.g. characters, setting, problem, solution, and plot, and about “text structure” (Levey, 2019). (But see Theobald et al., current volume; Watanabe, current volume on doing answers in small stories where the focus is not on story structure but on the tellings as co-constructed events.) Language learners need to grasp the contingent achievement of stories that occur in ordinary talk, which, for instance, can lead to a “same” question being answered with different tellings; e.g. one merely conveying information while the other one reveals a backstory. In retellings, i.e. those that happen outside classroom instructional contexts, Sacks remarks that you hear a story as a recipient, and after a certain amount of time, you become a teller of it; i.e. you pass along the story you were told to another person, finding a ripe occasion for doing so (Sacks,

1992, v2, p. 466). Those kinds of retellings can be quite different from those taught or “rehearsed” in classroom contexts, much of which is geared towards helping learners with reading comprehension skills (Levey, 2019), but not to diminish the importance of that as a skill area for learners.

When it comes to mundane conversation, it is not “text structure” (Levey, 2019) but conversational structures along with local sense-making practices in interaction that take centre stage for participants. In focussing on question–answer sequences, e.g. *What did you name him?* versus *What is baby’s name?*, teachers can help learners realise that there may be more than one “correct” answer to a “same” question. Teachers can also encourage learners to think about differing ways of answering a (same) question, which includes exploiting the answer position to launch a story, e.g. with a story preface. As Schegloff noted, “the particular grammatical realization is a “that” in the “why that now?” question (Wong & Olsner, 2000, p. 123).

There is far more to storytelling or “narrative competence” development for learners than, say, the evaluation of language in the form of “measuring aspects, such as number of different words, number of clauses per utterance, and cohesion (Gutiérrez-Clellen, 2012)” (Levey, 2019, p. 216). Teachers might revisit their toolkit, and how they approach opportunities for learners to think outside a grammatical box; i.e. look “beyond grammar” in helping learners to weave in recipient-design and other critical aspects of conversation and interaction (e.g. turn-constructive units, multi-unit turns, etc.), overall structuring (e.g. openings and closings), and sequential organisation (e.g. storytelling practices, adjacency pair organisation, question–answer sequences, dis/preference, dis/alignment, dis/affiliation, etc.) in doing storytelling as a contingent achievement of the parties.

From an applied linguistics angle, researchers have emphasised the importance of form, meaning and use, e.g. in a consideration of “grammaring” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, 2015; Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 2016). That finds some resonance with the larger discussion here. Classroom teachers might complement their repertoire and knowledge base by turning to understandings of a *grammar of and in interaction*, and what that portends when the “rules” or practices are not only linguistic but eminently social, interactional and contingent in character and essence. Regardless of whether one is a novice or a highly proficient user of the language, underlying turn-taking and sequential organisations are inescapable, and they provide essential “resources” for doing and displaying common understanding in social life (Sacks, 1992), which include our storytellings as well. Analyses of “grammar” from a CA perspective have the capacity to augment *our* tellables about real-world storytelling practices in multilingual interaction, raising our awareness of the power and impact of turn-taking and sequential organisations, and what it takes to do seemingly simple or automatic actions such as asking a question or answering one.

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