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On High Onsets and their Absence in Conversational Interaction*

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In recognition of the enthusiasm he has brought to all aspects of the study of spoken verbal interaction, we dedicate this series to Professor Dr. Aldo di Luzio, University of Konstanz.

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Introduction

There are two questions to be asked when examining prosody in conversational interaction (see also Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, eds. 1996). First, what are the tasks which participants must accomplish in the type of speech event at hand? And second, what contribution, if any, does prosody make to the accomplishment of these tasks? In this paper I will tackle these two questions with respect to data gathered from approximately four hours of talk on a local radio phone-in program broadcast in Berkeley, California, during the Gulf War crisis in 1991. The speech event which recurs again and again in this data is something which might be labeled — for lack of a better term — ‘calling in on a radio phone-in program’: there are approximately 45 instances of this event in the material I have examined. The phone-in program was recorded shortly after the first bombings in Irak, at a time when numerous peace protests and rallies were taking place, some of which had erupted into violence. In fact, it was in part due to this escalation that studio lines were open for callers to phone in — as the anchorman Leo Laporte puts it — “(to) talk about what’s going on overseas and ... in the Bay area ... and give people a chance to express their feelings and their fears and ‘move on’”.

1. The task of introducing the reason for one’s call

In private telephone communication, as Schegloff and Sacks (1973) have shown, one of the tasks incumbent on the person initiating the call is to establish why one is calling. Callers have routine ways of letting their interlocutors know why they have called. This may be done explicitly: “The reason I’m calling is...”, “I’m calling to ...” or more implicitly, through sequential positioning. In the latter case the reason for the call is recognized by the location of some mentionable in a particular slot: typically the crucial slot will come after completion of the identification sequence and the greeting sequence in what Schegloff (1986) refers to as *anchor position*. Speakers are, however, not obliged to present their reason for calling in anchor position. There are ways of talking past anchor position which often prove useful in interactionally delicate situations.

In radio talk, the medium constrains both time and topic to a much greater extent than in private telephone conversations. Calls to a radio phone-in program are typically one-topic calls and anchor position is *a fortiori* the locus for the introduction of this topic. The following are typical examples from the radio phone-in under investigation:¹

¹ For transcription conventions see Selting et al 1998.

(1) Franklin (17B, 51.53)

1 Leo: FRANKlin.
uh YOU'RE next on the giant sixty eight kay
en bee ar,
from san raphaEL.

5 Franklin: helLO.
Leo: hi FRANKlin -
Franklin: HI.

-> uh FIRST i wanna say that uh-
i'm one of the PROtesters and; (.)
10 i wanna say RIGHT up front that;
uhm (.) I support; (.)
the SOLDiers OVER there.
uhm and the THING is is that;
I THINK (there is) something that isn't said
15 enough;
by US; (.)
uhm the PROtesters. (.)
the FACT-
((turn continues))

(2) Bob (15B, 57.05)

1 Leo: BOB,
you're on the GIant sixty eight;
thanks for CALLing.

Bob: HI leo.

5 Leo: HI bob.

-> Bob: uhm i WANTED to say something about uh-
a COUple of things about uhm-
the WAR;
our attack on uh iRAK;
10 uhm a LOT of people are saying it's about OIL;
i think it's about uhm FREEdom.
uh the WORLD is a world commUNITY now,
it's gotten a lot SMALLer;
a:nd we can't take a an isoLationist (.) ATTitude;
15 and SIT over here and say it's not WRON::
i mean it's WRONG to FIGHT;
uhm how LONG can we ALLOW: (.)
Economic sanctions to take EFFECT-
how LONG can we ALLOW: (.)
20 the people in Kuwait to SUFFER.
((turn continues))

(3) Marie (16A, 8.52)

1 Leo: maRIE on the line from paCifica;
YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee
ar;
thanks for CALLing marie.

5 Marie: HI leo.
Leo: HI.

-> Marie: uhm I just had a comment about the: uhm

(5) Brad (16A, 26.38)

1 Leo: BRAD on the line from moRAga;
YOU'RE on the giant sixty eight KAY en bee ar.
Brad: HI.
uhm,
-> 5 i just WANT to say;
i don't (.) really agree with the PROtesters;
and what they're DOing but; (.)
i mean that's their preROgative;
they're allowed to PROtest. .hh
10 but just everyone's SAYing that; (.)
they think the SANctions;
would have WORKED;
but (.) what if you give hussein TI:ME a:nd; (.)
he works (.) on his chemical WEAPons;
15 and he takes over JORDan,
or (.) ISrael or something ELSE. (-)
well (.) he's DOing it.

Here the caller issues a greeting in line 3 and proceeds immediately (after a transitional *uhm* in line 4) to a statement of why he has called (lines 5ff).

Greetings are sometimes foregone altogether by the anchorman and the caller, with the caller proceeding immediately (here, once again, following an *uhm*) to a statement of the reason for the call:

(6) Karen (17B, 1.18.28)

1 Leo: KAren on the line from NEWark;
YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee
AR;
-> Karen: uhm I just want to talk about the:
5 PROtesters; .hh
a:nd uhm a LITtle bit in terms of how we GOT
here.
one- ONE of the things i'd like to

How do we know that the arrowed turns in the excerpts above are indeed introducing the callers' reason for calling? At times there is an explicit reference such as *I'm calling because...*(4). But more systematically there is evidence in the anchorman's recipient behavior: in each case Leo treats the action underway as requiring extended talk. That is, he does not come in at the first possible syntactic and prosodic completion point in callers' turns. Instead he routinely holds off with a recipient response until callers have made a recognizably full statement of their concern.² This is evident from the fact that, for example, in (1) there are transitional relevance points (TRPs) — signalled by syntactic

² This is not to imply that he does not come in on occasion 'prematurely' e.g. to initiate repair.

10 I'M in I'M in the NAVY;
 and there's a CHANCE that I could be called
 Over there.
 ((turn continues))

(9) Noel (16A, 41.51)

1 Leo: NOel on the line from san CARlos
 you're on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee ar,
 i'm leo laPORTE.
 -> Noel: yeah i have a QUEStion for you.
 -> 5 Leo: SURE.
 Noel: uhm (.)
 if the THING in the
 the WAR in the gulf;
 continues to GROW uhm;
 10 are they gonna (.) START the DRAFT, or

(10) Dustin (16B, 51.11)

1 Leo: DUSTin on the line from ANTioch.
 YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee
 ar.
 Dustin: hh you GOT me.
 5 Leo: GOT you dustin,
 Dustin: hhh HOW you doing Leo,
 Leo: thanks for CALLing;
 GOOD.
 -> Dustin: uh i got an oPINion question for you.
 -> 10 Leo: ALright.
 Dustin: ((tsk)) is (.) sa sadDAM husSEIN; (.)
 is he is he PLAYing naive?
 or is he just STUpid.

(11) Marshall (16A, 41.40)

Leo: MARshall on the line from CONcord;
 YOU'RE on the giant sixty eight kay en bee
 ar.
 Marshall: HI:.
 Leo: HI marshall.
 -> Marshall: i'd LIKE to uh take a STEP to the (.)
 inVASion here.
 -> Leo: alRIGHT,
 Marshall: and uh;

In these cases the anchorman does not wait until callers are heard to have made a recognizably full statement of their concern before coming in. Instead, he produces a recipient response at the first transition relevance point in callers' anchor-position turn. In other words, he treats the first turn-constructural units of these callers — announcements about having something to say (7), wanting to talk about something (8)

or having a question to ask (9 & 10) - as requiring some uptake. Since next turns engage in precisely these actions, the sequential organization is characteristic of a *pre-sequence* (Schegloff 1979), specifically one which prefigures a particular type of next turn. The anchor-position turns in (7)-(11) are heard as prefiguring the action which is the reason for the call.⁴

Pre-sequences or preliminaries have been discussed in the literature as a type of turn which serves as a testing ground for some specific, often delicate activity. They provide a slot for ratification by the interlocutor before the action itself is carried out. Where problems are encountered, the action can be modified, rerouted or abandoned altogether (Levinson 1983). In the examples above, the callers appear to be understood as requesting ratification of the action announced before it is carried out. Once the anchorman has provided a ratification token (*okay, sure, alright*), they proceed either directly to the projected action, namely asking a question as in (9) or (10), or indirectly (via additional preliminaries), namely to saying a little something as in (7), talking about the protesters as in (8) or taking a step to⁵ the invasion as in (11).

To summarize the discussion so far: anchor-position turns in these telephone calls fall into two groups. In one (examples (1)-(6)), the caller engages immediately in a turn which is hearable as being in its own right the reason for the call and the anchorman withholds talk until the action which constitutes the reason for the call (saying something, making a comment, etc.) has been recognizably completed. In the other group (examples (7)-(11)), the caller prefaces the turn which is the reason for the call with a preliminary turn in anchor position, one which is heard as leading up to and projecting an upcoming action which will be the reason for the call in its own right. The anchorman treats this turn as a request for ratification of the action projected, which he provides at the first opportunity for turn transition. The caller then proceeds (directly or indirectly) to the projected action (statement, question, comment, etc.) in next turn.

3. Cueing the status of talk in anchor position

Notice now that turn-constructural units in anchor position are not intrinsically reasons for the call or preliminaries (pre-preliminaries) thereto. Whether the anchor-position turn is actually engaged in the action which constitutes the reason for the call or is merely projecting that action cannot be determined by wording alone. This becomes clear when

⁴ In some cases they are actually *pre-pre's* (Schegloff 1980), since the projected turns also contain preliminaries: Mike's next turn in (7) does not yet say the little something he has projected, Erica's next turn in (8) does not yet talk about the protesters.

⁵ In context this expression is understandable as 'take a stand on'.

we compare the anchor-position turn-constructural units in the two sets. There is nothing in the wording of (6), for instance, to signal that *i just want to talk about the: protesters* is engaging in the action which is the caller's reason itself, while (8) *i'm just calling up to uh talk about the protesters* is a preliminary to the talk which will constitute the caller's reason for calling. Nor is there any way to tell from the wording in (2) that *i wanted to say something about uh - a couple of things about uhm - the war* is part of a multi-unit turn which constitutes the reason for the call, whereas (11) *i'd like to uh take a step to the (.) invasion here* is a preliminary thereto. Even in the first set of examples the callers' initial turn-constructural units in anchor position do not directly engage in the action which is the reason for the call: in (1), for instance, Franklin announces in his first TCU that he is one of the protesters. This bit of information establishes his social identity with respect to the events in question but it does not yet qualify as the reason proper for his call. Likewise Bob's *i wanted to say something about uh - a couple of things about uhm - the war* in (2), Marie's *i just had a comment about the: uhm protesters* in (3) or Karen's *i just want to talk about the: protesters* in (6) are not yet the relevant comment or talk itself. Nevertheless they are heard as being part of a multi-unit project, whereas the TCU's in (7)-(11) are not. Thus, although the two sets of turn-constructural units have a different interactional status — as evidenced by the fact that they receive different sequential treatment from the anchorman — this cannot be attributed to differing verbal design.

How can the anchorman's interpretations be accounted for, if not verbally? One hypothesis is that there is something about the *prosodic* configuration of the two sets of turns which cues divergent interpretations. For this hypothesis to be borne out, we must identify one or more prosodic features which are systematically present in one set but absent in the other. There is a long tradition which regards *final pitch* configuration as an important cue for transitional relevance. To take one recent proposal within a framework for discourse transcription, DuBois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming and Paolino (1993) distinguish 'period' and 'question mark' intonation from 'comma' intonation. 'Period' intonation typically involves a fall to low pitch in English and has final transitional continuity; 'question mark' intonation is realized by a rise to high pitch in English and has an appeal function. Both are said to mark that a speaker's discourse business is finished, i.e. in conversation to signal the relevance of turn transition. 'Comma' intonation, on the other hand, may involve a fall to mid, a slight rise or a level pitch in English; it is said to signal that a speaker's discourse business will continue, i.e. it forestalls turn transition. Yet different final pitch movements - 'period/question-mark' vs. 'comma' intonation - will not account for why the anchorman treats these anchor-position TCUs differently. In (3), for instance, Marie uses 'period' intonation at the end of her first TCU and yet Leo does not come in. The same thing happens with Julie in (4). In fact, in all six

instances in the first set of data, Leo foregoes opportunities to take over the floor following TCUs which end in ‘period’ intonation. On the other hand, in the second set of data Mike uses ‘comma’ intonation following his first TCU in (7) but the anchorman comes in despite this contour, although it is said to be a marker of continuation. Therefore a distinction in terms of continuing (‘comma’) vs. transition-relevant (‘period/question-mark’) intonation will not account for the anchorman’s behavior. Nor will other attempts at grouping final pitch contours, e.g. in terms of rising vs. falling patterns: the relevant TCUs in the second set of data have both rising and falling contours and, although not documented in the examples above, both rises and falls are also attested in the first set (see Couper-Kuhlen 1998).

4. High onset vs. its absence at anchor position

Rather than pitch at the *end* of a caller’s anchor-position turn-constructural unit, I will argue that it is pitch at the *beginning* of this turn-constructural unit which is a more reliable cue to the way it is treated by the anchorman. By pitch at the beginning of a TCU, I mean specifically the height of the onset, or first stressed syllable, in the first intonation phrase of a caller’s turn-constructural unit (see also Couper-Kuhlen 1986 and Couper-Kuhlen, to appear). In each of the examples in the first set of data, the caller’s onset is noticeably *higher* at anchor position than it is in a prior same-speaker TCU: see, for example, in Fig. 1 (Appendix) the pitch track for Franklin’s anchor-position TCU in (1) and in Fig. 2 the pitch track for Bob’s in (2).⁶ I will represent these high onsets with an upwards arrow before the stressed syllable in question:

(1) Franklin (17B, 51.53)

1	Leo:	FRANKlin. uh YOU'RE next on the giant sixty eight kay en bee ar, from san raphaEL.
5	Franklin:	helLO.
	Leo:	hi FRANKlin-
	Franklin:	HI.
->		uh ↑FIRST i wanna say that uh- i'm one of the PROtesters and; (.)
10		i wanna say RIGHT up front that; uhm (.) I support; (.) the SOLDiers Over there.

⁶ These pitch tracks are raw fundamental frequency values obtained using X-waves software on a UNIX workstation.

(2) Bob (15B, 57.05)

1 Leo: BOB,
you're on the GIant sixty eight;
thanks for CALLing.
Bob: HI leo.
5 Leo: HI bob.
-> Bob: uhm i ↑WANTED to say something about uh-
a COUple of things about uhm-
the WAR;
our attack on uh iRAK;
10 uhm a LOT of people are saying it's about OIL;
i think it's about uhm FREEDom.

(3) Marie (16A, 8.52)

1 Leo: maRIE on the line from paCifica;
YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee
ar;
thanks for CALLing marie.
5 Marie: HI leo.
Leo: HI.
-> Marie: uhm ↑I just had a comment about the: uhm
PROtesters.
and i THINK,
10 I would rather last night have thought of
ourselves as DEMonstrators?
as ONE of the people among the ten THOUSand.

(4) Julie (17B, 1.15.31)

1 Leo: JULie on the line from PLEASanton.
YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee
ar.
Julie: HI leo.
5 Leo: HI julie.
-> Julie: ↑I'M calling because i have;
a really nice FRIEND;
real nice friend in ISrael.
10 and (.) i'm SURE lots of other people have
FRIENDS; (.)
NOT (.) HERE.

(5) Brad (16A, 26.38)

1 Leo: BRAD on the line from moRAGA;
YOU'RE on the giant sixty eight KAY en bee ar.
Brad: HI.
uhm,
-> 5 i just ↑WANT to say;
i don't (.) really agree with the PROtesters;
and what they're DOing but; (.)

i mean that's their preROgative;
they're allowed to PROtest. .hh

(6) Karen (17B, 1.18.28)

1 Leo: KAREn on the line from NEWark;
YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee
AR;
-> Karen: uhm ↑I just want to talk about the:
5 PROtesters; .hh
a::nd uhm a LITtle bit in terms of how we GOT
here.

By contrast, the onsets in the sequences in which the anchorman comes in immediately after the first TCU of a caller's anchor-position turn are *not* higher than prior onsets by the same speaker: see, for instance, in Fig. 3 the pitch track for Mike's anchor-position turn in (7) and in Fig. 4 the pitch track for Dustin's anchor-position turn in (10). What characterizes the anchor-position TCUs of these speakers, when compared to those in the first set, is the fact that their first stressed syllable *lacks* a high onset: speakers refrain from using high pitch on the first stressed syllable of their turns. The latter consequently lack an upwards arrow in transcription:

(7) Mike (15B, 1.07.47)

1 Leo: MIKE on the line from walnut CREEK,
you're on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee ar;
HI mike.
Mike: oh HI there.
-> 5 I have a little something to say about the: uh
PROtests that are taking place,
Leo: oKAY,
Mike: uhm I kind of feel that uh (.)
if PEOPle (.)
10 i think there're a lot of REAsonable people out
there;
who WANT to uh (.)
support PEACE;
((turn continues))

(8) Erica (15B, 1.11.21)

1 Leo: ERica on the line from alaMEDa;
you're on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee
AR;
Erica: HI:.
-> I'M just calling up to uh (.)TALK about the
5 PROtesters?
Leo: oKAY,
Erica: and uhm (.) I=don't=know=
I'M in I'M in the NAVy;

10 and there's a CHANCE that I could be called
Over there.
((turn continues))

(9) Noel (16A, 41.51)

1 Leo: NOel on the line from san CARlos
you're on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee ar,
i'm leo laPORTE.
-> Noel: yeah i have a QUEStion for you.
5 Leo: SURE.
Noel: uhm (.)
if the THING in the
the WAR in the gulf;
continues to GROW uhm;
10 are they gonna (.) START the DRAFT, or

(10) Dustin (16B, 51.11)

1 Leo: DUSTin on the line from ANTioch.
YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee
ar.
Dustin: hh you GOT me.
5 Leo: GOT you dustin,
Dustin: hhh HOW you doing Leo,
Leo: thanks for CALLing;
GOOD.
-> Dustin: uh i got an oPINion question for you.
10 Leo: ALright.
Dustin: ((tsk)) is (.) sa sadDAM husSEIN; (.)
is he is he PLAYing naive?
or is he just STUpid.

(11) Marshall (16A, 41.40)

Leo: MARshall on the line from CONcord;
YOU'RE on the giant sixty eight kay en bee
ar.
Marshall: HI:.
Leo: HI marshall.
-> Marshall: i'd LIKE to uh take a STEP to the (.)
inVASion here.
Leo: alRIGHT,
Marshall: an uh;

In sum: there is evidence that the height of the onset at the beginning of a turn-
constructional unit in this particular sequential position and in this particular kind of
speech event cues the status which a current turn-at-talk is perceived as having.
Anchor-position high onset (e.g. higher than the onset in that caller's greeting) appears to
format the turn in such a way that the studio moderator perceives it to be — directly or
indirectly — engaging in the action which is the reason for the call. His withholding of talk

Erica: and uhm (.) I=don't=know=
 -> ↑I'M in I'M in the NAVY;
 10 and there's a CHANCE that I could be called
 Over there.
 ((turn continues))

(9) Noel (16A, 41.51)

1 Leo: NOel on the line from san CARlos
 you're on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee ar,
 i'm leo laPORTE.
 Noel: yeah i have a QUEStion for you.
 5 Leo: SURE.
 Noel: uhm (.)
 -> if the ↑THING in the
 the WAR in the gulf;
 continues to GROW uhm;
 10 are they gonna (.) START the DRAFT, or

(10) Dustin (16B, 51.11)

1 Leo: DUSTin on the line from ANTioch.
 YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee
 ar.
 Dustin: hh you GOT me.
 5 Leo: GOT you dustin,
 Dustin: hhh HOW you doing Leo,
 Leo: thanks for CALLing;
 GOOD.
 Dustin: uh i got an oPINion question for you.
 10 Leo: ALright.
 -> Dustin: ((tsk)) is (.)↑sa sadDAM husSEIN; (.)
 is he is he PLAYing naive?
 or is he just STUpid.

In each case where anchor-position talk is heard as a preliminary, once Leo has produced a ratification token next turns are configured with high onset: see, for example, in Fig. 5 the pitch track for Mike's next turn after the pre in (7). And these next turns proceed to carry out the action projected in the pre-sequence — indirectly as in (7) and (8) or directly as in (9) and (10).

By contrast, with turns in which high onset is deployed and whose sequential positioning lends them a reason-for-the-call interpretation, those anchor-position turns where high onset is lacking but could have been used are in a sense hearable as *not* engaging in talk which constitutes the reason for the call. On the assumption that the latter action is under institutional constraints to be located in anchor position, absence of high onset in this position can be said to function somewhat like a displacement marker. It signals a departure from the routine, institutional placement of a reason-for-the-call turn.

5. Pre-empting anchor position for other business

There is a third set of cases in which callers' anchor-position turns are configured without high onset but do not project some specific action which will constitute the reason for the call. Consider the following instance:

(12) Theresa (15A, 45.38)

```
1      Leo:      theREsa's been hanging on from el graNAda;
           theREsa THANKS:,
           you're on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee
                               ar.

5      Theresa: HI leo.
           Leo:   HI theresa.
->     Theresa: I'M a first-time CALLer -
           Leo    GLAD you called.
           Theresa: uhm: -
10      ↑I'M kind of unHA:Ppy;
           because I DON'T feel (.) the Media -
           is ACcurately reFLECTing;
           the feelings of MOST people;
           reGARDing this persian GULF conflict.
15      (1.0)
           ((turn continues))
```

Theresa's anchor-position turn *i'm a first time caller* is delivered without high onset: see the pitch track in Fig. 6. But it is not a preliminary in the sense that it prefaces and projects some upcoming action. On the other hand, it does not deliver her reason for the call either. (The latter is not introduced until line 10, after Leo has attended to the business initiated in Theresa's anchor-position turn.) Line 7 is in a way like the anchor-position TCUs in (7)-(11): by refraining from the use of a high onset the caller signals a departure from the routine placement of a reason-for-the-call action. The difference is that the warrant for doing so is not the projection of an upcoming action which will be the reason for the call, but some other business requiring priority.

Warrants for a departure from the routine, institutionalized placement of a reason-for-the-call action are varied but they tend to have in common that the business is of the sort which must be accomplished here and now: it is 'urgent' in the sense that if it is delayed until later in the talk, it will no longer be relevant. One situation which may occasion an expropriation of anchor position for here-and-now business derives from the institutional organization of radio phone-in programs. Callers are given a preliminary screening and then put on hold until the anchorman is ready to take their call. In the meantime, however, they often monitor the ongoing interaction on their own radios. If some new issue arises

-> i'll [↑]MAKE this pretty quick;
 [i uh-
 Leo: [oKAY.
 10 Jean: my COMments are merely about the PROtesters. (.)
 .hh
 i:: (.) KINDa hesitate to LUMP them all toGETher;
 exCEPT that i think that uh (.) -
 those who are supPOSEdly PEACEfully PROtesting; (.)
 15 .hhh WHEN they SEE::;
 what's going ON;
 ought to be BACKing OFF;

In this extract Jean also places a metacomment about being quick in anchor position (line 7). But she uses high onset in doing so and thereby signals that a multi-unit turn is already underway. When Leo comes in at the end of this TCU, a hitch results. Yet Jean's next TCU (line 8) is designed to be part of the 'big package': its timing is appropriate for a turn extension and its pitch and loudness are geared so as to continue the declination unit begun in line 7. Moreover, her subsequent TCUs (lines 10-17) also lack high onset. Therefore, Jean's behavior is consistent with the hypothesis that high onset is used to cue the beginning of a reason-for-the-call turn. The turn-taking hitch here demonstrates that talk units such as *i'll make this quick* in the sequential environment described may on occasion require negotiation to resolve their interactional status. Prosodic configuration is a useful but not a foolproof device for contextualizing language (see also Auer and di Luzio, eds., 1992)

6. Conclusion

The study of calls on this radio phone-in program has revealed that speakers use different prosodic designs — high onset vs. absence of high onset — to cue the status of their talk at anchor position. High pitch on the first stressed syllable of a TCU in this position is routinely associated with multi-unit turns which are designed and treated as carrying out the action — directly or indirectly — which is the reason for the call. Absence of high onset in a TCU at anchor position, by contrast, is routinely found in conjunction with turns which are designed and treated as *not* being the reason for the call in its own right but as projecting this action or as having precedence over it due to their immediacy or 'urgency'.

Although the explicit phrase 'The reason I'm calling is...' is always accompanied by high onset in the data examined, with other phrases prosodic formatting is often as important as wording in cueing what callers are doing at this sequential position in their talk and how the anchorman perceives what they are doing. This is in particular the case for 'I'd just like to say...', 'I have a comment on...' and 'I'll be quick', where prosodic design often appears to determine whether they are deployed as prefatory or not. The way in which

prosody and wording interact at this particular sequential location in conversation is prototypical of the contextualization process as described in Gumperz 1982.

For prosodic theory this study provides evidence that onset height is a factor which must not be neglected if we wish to understand how units larger than the intonation phrase (e.g. pitch declination units) are constructed. It relates earlier work on the *paratone* in reading intonation (Couper-Kuhlen 1983) to onset height in more spontaneous kinds of talk. Because high onset has a projective force ('more intonation phrases to come'), it can be deployed by speakers at strategic points in conversation e.g. to signal that a 'big package' is underway. This means that onset height can be thought of as one of a number of strategies — indeed a non-verbal one — for managing the production of multi-unit turns.

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