

Reformulating place[☆]

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Abstract

This report examines what can be accomplished in conversation by reformulating a reference to a place using the practices of repair. It is based on an analysis of a collection of place references situated in second pair parts of adjacency pairs taken from a wide range of field recordings of talk-in-interaction. Not surprisingly, place references are sometimes reformulated so as to indicate a misspeaking or in pursuit of recipient recognition. At other times, however, we show that place references can be reformulated to more adequately implement the action of a turn in prosecuting the course of action of which it is a part. In these cases repairing a place reference can target a source of trouble associated with implementing the action of a turn at talk, and thus reformulating place can serve as a practical resource for accomplishing a range of interactional tasks. We conclude with a more complex case in which two reformulations are deployed in responding to a so-called 'double-barrelled' initiating action.

Keywords: Conversation analysis; Formulation; Place reference; Repair; Action formation; Turn design; Word selection

1. Introduction

When a speaker in conversation refers to a person, place, time, event or object, the expression they use can be understood as having been selected from among a range of alternative formulations, and so the question for co-participants and analysts alike is 'why that one now?'. In some of his earliest work, Sacks (1972a, 1972b, 1992) observed that because there is always more than one correct membership category to choose from when referring to a person

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categorically, the use of one or another membership category by a speaker cannot be based simply on its correctness. The same can be said for place formulations, which can be selected for this particular recipient or for “the activities being enacted by the utterance” (Schegloff, 1972:96). That is, place formulations can be selected as part and parcel of the formation of action in a turn at talk.

Previous conversation analytic research in this area has, for the most part, focused on references to persons, and much of the analytic leverage for such examinations is derived from the use of routine or so-called ‘unmarked’ ways for referring to persons such that nothing more than referring is being done. ‘Reference simpliciter’ (Sacks and Schegloff, 1979; Schegloff, 1996) includes such practices as the use of “I” for speaker self-reference, the use of a name for a known-to-be-known-in-common non-present person, and the use of “he” or “she” for locally subsequent reference to that non-present person. Departures from these routine ways of referring to persons, through the selection of ‘recognizably alternative’ formulations to them, invite inspection for what is being done beyond referring, as when a speaker refers to themselves, not as “I,” but as “the woman he fell in love with” (Land and Kitzinger, 2007; Hepburn et al., 2012), when a known-in-common party is referred to not as “Aunt Alene” but as “your sister” (Stivers, 2007), or when a person previously mentioned by name is nonetheless referred to again by name (Schegloff, 1996). These noticeable departures from reference simpliciter can be interactionally salient as speakers tailor their formulations for the action of their turn at talk, such that the formulation is itself integral to the formation of the action that the turn implements.

As Lerner and Kitzinger (2007) have demonstrated, another method for gaining analytic leverage in exposing how speakers select formulations from among alternative correct formulations – and thereby exposing how these contribute to the formation of action – is by examining how formulations are *re*-formulated. For example, on some occasions of self-reference either “I” or “we” can be correctly employed as a routine formulation and only the reformulation itself makes visible that one formulation is being specifically selected over a now overtly rejected (or at least abandoned) alternative (Lerner and Kitzinger, 2007). Likewise categorical references to non-present persons are sometimes replaced with different categorical references (e.g. from “men” to “detainees”), thereby exposing the selection of one formulation over another (Lerner et al., 2012).

Prior research (Lerner and Kitzinger, 2007; Lerner et al., 2012) has shown that reformulating a person reference can be used to tailor that reference for the action of the turn. In the present report we expand this line of work by investigating the reformulation of place references in conversation. This report is not focused on describing how formulating is done *per se*; rather it aims to show how place formulations – as an interactional resource – can be used to contribute to the action of a response and thereby to the course of action of which it is a part.

2. Data and method

This study is conversation analytic in its approach and aims. Thus it is an empirical study of the methodical procedures used by participants in organizing talk and other conduct in interaction and is based on detailed, systematic inspection of field recordings of talk-in-interaction. Our data are drawn from a large collection of recordings of conversations – mostly in English (British, USA, New Zealand, Australian standard and Aboriginal), but also in Polish and Spanish, some collected by individual members of our research team, some taken from established data corpora commonly used by conversation analysts. These conversations include some that took place over the phone (audio-recordings) and others that occurred during co-present interaction (video-recordings). We have data from personal encounters (e.g. family meal times, friends chatting) as well as from service encounters (e.g. helpline calls, emergency calls). We have transcribed our data extracts using the notation first developed by Jefferson (2004).

As part of the broader research project from which the findings reported here are drawn, we have compiled a sub-collection of place formulations. The original formulations in this sub-collection come in turns at talk produced in response to a sequence-initiating action – i.e. in a response to the first pair part of an adjacency pair (e.g. after a question such as: “where are you planning to have your baby?” or “where is the piano lesson?”). For the analysis presented here, we selected only those cases in which speakers, in the course of responding to an adjacency pair first pair part (or in its aftermath), reformulate their place reference and do so using the practices of repair (either self-initiated or other-initiated). This repair results in two (or more) successive formulations aiming at more or less the same place referent (the one made relevant by the sequence-initiating action to which it is responsive).¹

¹ Subsequent formulations of a place reference need not be the result of a repair operation (as can be seen in lines 2–3 of Extract 2 and lines 2–4 of Extract 3), but in this report we focus on cases where the progressivity of a turn’s talk is suspended so as to reformulate the reference through repair – that is, we center our discussion on cases where formulating place becomes a focal concern.

3. Findings

An occasion for reformulating a place reference is routinely furnished by one of two generic problems of talk-in-interaction – trouble in speaking and trouble with recipient recognition. It can be the case that nothing other than simply fixing one of these troubles is being done by reformulating. This might be thought of as ‘repair simpliciter’ (Lerner et al., 2012; cf. Schegloff, 1996, on ‘reference simpliciter’). We begin by briefly describing such instances and then turn to an examination of place formulation repairs that go beyond these generic sources of trouble. We describe instances that are aimed at trouble in producing a response suitable for the task-at-hand.

3.1. Reformulating place as repair simpliciter

Reformulations of place may be occupied with repairing generic sources of trouble in talk-in-interaction: trouble in speaking and trouble in designing a reference for recipient recognition (i.e. trouble in recipient design). We will show instances of each.

3.1.1. Reformulating place to repair a trouble in speaking

In Extracts 1 and 2 the subsequent formulations can, in each case, be understood as correcting a misspoken prior reference – and nothing more. So, the subsequent place formulation in Extract 1 (“Bristol”, line 2) replaces (and simply corrects) the first formulation (“Yeov:”, line 1) – the start of “Yeovil”, which (like “Bristol”) is a municipality in the South-West of England. The subsequent place formulation in Extract 2 (“Princess Anne Maternity”, line 5) replaces (and simply corrects) the first formulation (“Saint Anne Maternity”, line 3).

Extract 1 [Holt X(C)-1-1-1]

01 Les: .hhhh But nex:t Thursday he has to go to **Yeov:**
02 uhm (.) **Bristo:l?**

Extract 2 [HBCK]

01 Clt: So where are they ba:sed.
02 Kay: Uhm it's Bolton. They're based at thee (.)
03 **Saint Anne Maternity Unit.**
04 Clt: Saint Anne. Is that with or without an e:.
05 Kay: <Oh it's **Princess Anne Maternity**...

In each of these extracts, the repair completion can be understood – in juxtaposition to its trouble source – as having corrected a misspeaking and nothing more.

3.1.2. Reformulating place to secure recognition

In Extracts 3 and 4 there is no problem with the correctness of the initial reference: both first and subsequent formulations in these instances are correct ways of referring to the intended place. The problem each repair addresses is one of recipient design. Here the reformulations are designed for recipient recognition and apparently nothing more.

In Extract 3 the recipient is treated as possibly not having recognized the name of a small English town (“Louth”, line 4).

Extract 3 [P81:HB]

01 Clt: A:nd where are you planning on having your baby:z
02 Jan: At ho:me.
03 Clt: Goo:d! And wh:ere i:s thisz
04 Jan: **Louth.**
05 (.)
06 Jan: Uh **Lincolnshire.**
07 Clt: In Lincolnshire.

In Extract 3 both “Louth” and “Lincolnshire” – the name of the county within which the town “Louth” is situated – are correct ways of referring to the place where the speaker lives, but the reformulated place reference (“Lincolnshire”) is attentive to the problem of recipient recognition – a concern apparently based on the lack of uptake (at line 5). The reformulated version broadens the scope of the place reference, thereby giving it a better chance of being recognized – and the recipient then claims recognition (Heritage, 2007) through a repeat (at line 7).

Recipient recognition of a different kind is at issue in Extract 4, where the reformulation is designed to avert a possible problem in recognizing which of two possible referents is being indicated by the initial formulation. (Here the question about the location of the funeral (at line 1) is in the service of continued on-topic talk and is not in the service of making arrangements to attend.) The first formulation (of the place where the speaker's mother is to be buried) is cut off mid-way through ("the cem-", line 10) and reformulated to specify the place as "the Cary cemetery" (lines 10–11).

Extract 4 [Holt X(C):1;1;3]

01 Les: ...are you goin' t'have th'funeral i:n North Cadb'ry or i[: n]
 02 Phi: [Ye]s in North
 03 Cadb'ry o:n Tuesday at twelve o'clock.
 04 Les: Oh[:.
 05 Phi: [°(at uh)°
 06 Les: [[Yes.
 07 Phi: [[°Mmhm°
 08 Les: Right.
 09 Phi: at uhm (0.2) Yeh the service's at uhm twelve o'clock'n
 10 then: the .hwhhhh the: uh:m: (0.5) it'll be in **the cem- the Cary**
 11 **cemet'ry** afterwards you kn [ow
 12 Les: [Oh yes. [Yes.
 13 Phi: [I mean my father: is we've
 14 got a double grave there°(so it's [)°
 15 Les: [Oh °yes.°

By specifying the referent as the 'Cary' cemetery, the reformulated version deals with a possible problem of recipient recognition by differentiating between two possible referents – the intended referent (the Cary cemetery) and a locally relevant alternative (the North Cadbury cemetery, analyzably inferable as a possible referent from the surrounding context; see Wilkinson and Weatherall, 2011 for a fuller analysis). As with Extract 3, this reformulation is doing nothing more than allowing recipient recognition of the intended referent.

In this section we have shown that some reformulations of place are correcting a misspeaking (as in Extracts 1 and 2) or seeking to ensure recognition of the intended referent (as in Extracts 3 and 4) and apparently nothing more. We now turn to reformulations of place in which the speaker alters the original formulation not so much to manage troubles in speaking or with recipient design, but so as to more adequately implement the action of the response turn in prosecuting the interactional task-at-hand.

3.2. Reformulating place for the task-at-hand

Reformulation can be dedicated to narrowing the scope of a formulation that emerges as practically inadequate. So, in Extract 5 (taken from a call to a child protection agency) the Child Protection Officer (CPO) asks for a location (at lines 6–7) and on receiving the name of a metropolitan county, goes off-line to retrieve a local number (at line 11) for social services that might be able to help with the problem the Caller is reporting. (The fact that she goes off-line to retrieve a number shows that recipient recognition is not at issue here.) She returns to report a failure to complete the task (retrieving the number of a local office the Caller can phone up) and then poses a locational problem: "there's several offices ... that cover Merseyside" and asks explicitly for a more narrowly circumscribed formulation (at line 19).²

Extract 5 [P02_NSPCC BN Internet 4:51]

01 CPO: If I give you: a local number, .hh you could have
 02 a chat with them and they will tell you: whether
 03 there's enough information here, .hh for them to
 04 actually investigate.
 05 (0.4)
 06 CPO: So ↑ what part of the country does the family
 07 live in.

² The original place names used in Extract 5 have been replaced due to concerns with participant confidentiality with alternatives ("Merseyside" and "Sefton") that nevertheless preserve the geographical and administrative relationship between the two places. All other place names in the extracts presented in this report remain the same as in the original recordings.

08 (.)
 09 Caller: Mersey↓side ((county name))
 10 CPO: Merseyside.=Cn'you hold on just a moment and
 11 I'll get you a local number.
 12 ((53.2 seconds pass))
 13 CPO: Hello:
 14 Caller: 'Allo
 15 CPO: I'm sorry to keep you waiting,=I couldn't find
 16 thuh: the file.=.hh There's several: offices in
 17 Mersey[side.]=that cover Merseyside=.hhh uhm
 18 Caller: [°Mm.]
 19 CPO: Whereabouts in Merseyside are they_
 20 (.)
 21 Caller: **West Merseyside=Sefton.**
 22 (.)
 23 CPO: Sefto:n.
 24 (3.6)
 25 CPO: I think Sefton's a different authority to
 26 Merseyside.=I f-er I-'m gonna have to (.) ask you
 27 to hang on just another second,

The three formulations (“Merseyside”, “West Merseyside” and “Sefton”) are all correct and apparently recognizable answers, but they are not all equally adequate for the task-at-hand: finding an area-specific phone number. Over the course of this sequence, there is a “step-wise recalibration” (cf. Lerner and Kitzinger, 2007) of the place reference that successively narrows the original formulation: from the county (“Merseyside”, at line 9) first to a region within it (“West Merseyside”, at line 21) – in response to a prompt for a more specific formulation – and then, without further prompting, to a specific borough within that area of the county (“Sefton”, at line 21).

This seems to be an attempt to fine-tune the location asked for in the question (at line 19) and thus can be understood (by the participants) as offering a more narrowly construed place formulation that is a better fitting answer – for this question in its particular unfolding sequence – and not one reformulated simply to gain recognition. Here, narrowing a formulation is part of a small sequence aimed at settling a preliminary contingency: it is in the service of fulfilling the offer to give the Caller a phone number – thereby responding to the Caller's request for help that was the reason for the call. The Call-taker first requests a narrower reformulation (line 19) that the Caller furnishes (with “West Merseyside”), but it is the Caller who then volunteers a still-narrower location (line 21). This second, self-initiated, reformulation exhibits the speaker's orientation to the task-at-hand – finding a phone number in the Caller's area – in selecting a practically adequate formulation, even after having seemingly already satisfied the Call-taker's request. Here the place reformulation is fashioned by reference to the on-going service task for which it and its sequence are preliminary. Prosecuting a task – when completion of the task-at-hand stands in the balance – can be consequential for constituting a practically adequate formulation. This is one way that such undertakings can reach into a sequence and into a turn at talk in a way that is consequential for how a reference within a turn-constructional unit is formulated. The Call-taker's uptake of “Sefton” (line 23) and ultimate provision of a telephone number suggests that the Caller's reformulation was instrumental in completing this project.

In Extract 6, the search (for the name of a district in their town) is prosecuted in a fashion that is fitted to the on-going arrangements being made for driving the child of one of the speakers to Polish school by the other speaker, who also has another time-sensitive commitment to meet (his own piano lesson). Here, the child's mother (Agnieszka) has shown some concern for the management of these two potentially conflicting commitments by the driver (John), and so they are estimating the timing of these commitments. This sequence is occupied with working out whether time will permit John both to take Agnieszka's son to the Polish school in a neighboring city at 9:15 AM, and then to get to his own piano lesson at 10:00 AM back in the city where he lives. Agnieszka estimates the driving time between the Polish school and her home (in the same city as the piano lessons) to be 40 min (not shown), but whether this means that John will have enough time depends on a further contingency: namely the matter of where exactly his piano lessons take place. Agnieszka's question, “where is the piano lesson” (line 34) is in the service of establishing whether her estimate of 40 min for the journey to her home is applicable to John's trip to his piano lesson.

Extract 6 [P54:BP 2-6 7:55]

01 Agn: You should ma:nage if you ha- you-
 02 you have a: piano lesson.=Yeah¿

- 03 Jon: Yeah.
 04 Agn: You have piano lesson at ten ten thi:rtý?
 05 Jon: Ten to ten thirty. Yeah.
 06 Agn: Ten to ten thi:rtý. .hh His school sta:rts (0.2)
 07 quarter pa:st nine.
 ((20 seconds omitted))
 24 Agn: An' sti- still was on time on- mm: ten past
 25 ((clears throat)) (0.2) .pt ten pa(ha ha)st nine.=
 26 Actually I was quite earl(ha)y(h).
 27 .hh So:. Bu:t jus': comfortable I
 28 think. Forty forty five minutes.
 29 (0.2)
 30 Agn: Is oka:y?
 31 Jon: Yeah.
 32 Agn: [Will you mana-]
 33 Jon: [Yeah, I think] so
 34 Agn: Where is- Where is the piano lesson.
 35 **Jon: Uh:. It it's in: uh:>It's< not far from here.**
 36 It's just down th' ro:ad in uh: Co[pn]or.
 37 Agn: [tu-]
 38 (0.8)
 39 Agn: Copla:nd.
 40 Jon: Cl-. Copnor. Cl- [Clo:se-]
 41 Agn: [Copnor,]
 42 Jon: Yeah. Closer to Portsmouth city centre.
 43 Agn: Uh hahz

In response to Agnieszka's inquiry, John has some trouble formulating the location of his piano lesson (as a nameable place) at line 35. He then abandons searching for a precise formulation (i.e. a place name) and the TCU of which it is a part, and begins answering with a different kind of place formulation altogether – a relative formulation (the distance from here, “not far” and “just down the road”). This reformulation may not be as precise as a nameable place (and thus, as it turns out, is not a stable solution), but it goes to why the question was posed here. Agnieszka has been using her home as the base for reckoning the time John will need for his journey, and his reformulation (“not far from here”, i.e. her home) as well as its expansion (“It's just down the road”) seems designed to assuage her concern.³ Not having the name when due does not mean that he does not have a way of answering – and the reformulation of place in his answering turn is tailored to and constitutive of the action of the turn – advancing an optimistic projection of the possibility of fulfilling both commitments in a timely manner. In sum, here the reformulations seem to have been occasioned by a problem in producing the precise name when due, but the criterion for selecting among various ways for dealing with this trouble source is informed by the relevance of the on-going task of which this formulation, its turn and its sequence are a part.⁴

3.3. Reformulating place in responding to a double-barrelled first

In section 3.1 we examined reformulating as a way of managing generic sources of trouble in talk-in-interaction – problems in speaking and with recipient design. In section 3.2 we examined how reformulation was designed by reference to the action of the turn in prosecuting the task-at-hand. In this final section we examine a situation in which each of two reformulated place references is attuned to one of the two barrels of what Schegloff (2007:76) has dubbed a ‘double-barrelled’ first pair part of an adjacency pair. This is an utterance that is formed up as one action, but in doing so can also be understood as implementing another action as well. Schegloff (2007) gives the examples of an assessment implementing a compliment (p. 74) and a noticing implementing a complaint (p. 75). In the following case both barrels of a double-barrelled first pair part are taken up one after the other by separate reformulations.

³ Note that the search for the precise name (“Copnor”) is then resumed and successfully completed, although the name itself turns out to be problematic, as his recipient does not seem to be familiar with it as a named place.

⁴ For one other way he might have dealt with it here, note the formulation he does select subsequently, in line 42 (“Closer to Portsmouth city centre”).

In Extract 7, which takes place during a family dinner, Mum first announces that she is going to get some “sauce” and then gets up from the table. Shortly thereafter she asks Dad from an adjacent room, “What happened to the new sauce.” (line 2). Her inquiry is composed as coming subsequent to and occasioned by a failed search for the sauce – and puts the onus on Dad for knowing where the sauce is located. Whereas Mum’s inquiry is designed in a way that makes a place formulation relevant next, asking for a place is not the only thing this turn is designed to accomplish. That is, Mum is doing more than just asking for the location of the sauce. Especially in this sequential environment (i.e., purportedly after a failed search), the inquiry carries an accusation and appears to blame Dad as being the one responsible for the sauce not being where it could be found.

Extract 7 [BP1-1 10:25]

((Mum, Dad, their children Matthew and Amy, and Mum’s own mother, Barbara, are having dinner. Mum gets up and leaves the table.))

01 (1.0)
 02 Mum: What happened to the new: sau:ce.
 03 (0.4)
 04 Dad:- >I put it in **the cupboard**.
 05 (0.2)
 06 Mum: `Which one`
 07 (.)
 08 Dad: **a::h with all your other sauces**.
 09 Bar: .H
 10 Mum: Pardon?
 11 Bar: khkh.
 12 Dad: **Next to the fridge**
 13 (1.0)
 14 Mum: Next to the fridge.
 15 (4.0)
 16 Mum: ((mum comes back into the room with the sauce))

Dad’s response “I put it in the cupboard” (line 4) complements the accusatory format of the question in that it is formed up as a defense in terms of what he did (as opposed to an alternative response such as “it’s in the cupboard”, that would attend only to the on-going task-at-hand). Here Dad intimates that he did the right thing by putting the sauce in its proper place, and that he can’t be blamed for Mum’s failure to find it. However, offering “the cupboard” as the location of the sauce is poorly designed for something that follows a failed search, as it does not provide additional information that would aid Mum in finding the sauce, but rather presumes she knows – or should know – which cupboard it properly belongs in. This is evidence that Dad’s turn attends primarily to the accusatory complaint, and not to the task of locating the sauce. His response, in effect, withholds offering the requested assistance in favor of responding to the accusation in a way that makes failing to find the sauce Mum’s problem (of not looking where such things ought to go) and not his problem of having put it in an improbable place – that is, in the wrong place. In short, Dad’s original place formulation is not only poorly designed for the task-at-hand, but is apparently designedly poor.⁵

After Mum targets this formulation as a source of referential trouble (“which one”, line 6), Dad offers a meager expansion in response (“with all your other sauces”, line 8), rather than producing a fresh formulation. This expansion of his original place reference (produced, in effect, as an incremental extension of his own prior TCU) adds slightly more, but seemingly obvious, information about the cupboard’s location, and now does so in a manner that explicitly attributes ownership of the sauces to Mum (“your other sauces” and not “the other sauces” or “our other sauces”), thereby treating her as someone expectably knowledgeable about ‘her’ sauces and their location. In this way, Dad defends the original place reference (“the cupboard”) as having been more or less suitable, and thus redoubles his rejection of the accusatory format of the initial inquiry. Mum’s subsequent other-initiation of repair (“pardon?” at line 10), however, strips the inquiry of its accusatory format by locating a rather unspecified source of trouble in Dad’s response. It is then that Dad furnishes a specific location that no longer holds Mum responsible for her own failure, but is fitted to the task-at-hand – that is, one that properly responds to her “Which one” query. He adds an entirely different kind of place reference, which draws not on

⁵ A reference to “the cupboard” without further specification is open to problems of recipient recognition because it does not differentiate among the various cupboards in the kitchen. In support of our analysis of Dad’s turn as withholding actionable assistance, compare Extract 4 lines 10–11 in which the speaker specifically suspends the TCU-in-progress in order to specify which of two possible referents he intends to refer to, thereby preempting (via self-repair) the kind of other-initiated repair launched by Mum at line 6.

household customs for placing sauces (“the cupboard” and “with all your other sauces”), but uses a landmark in relation to which the proper cupboard can be identified for the practical task-at-hand: Look in the cupboard “next to the fridge” (line 12).

So here we see two conjointly produced and concurrently relevant initiating actions from Mum (a request for assistance and an accusation) – and it is Mum who also makes relevant the two opportunities for reformulation as post-expansions to the request sequence. In response to Mum’s double-barrelled sequence-initiating action, Dad first formulates and then reformulates the requested place reference as a response to the accusatory complaint. He then reformulates it again, but this time it is designed to aid the unfinished task-at-hand: locating the ‘new sauce’ so as to bring it to the table.

4. Concluding remarks

Schegloff (1972) notes that formulating a reference to a place “has taken work” (p. 80), insofar as, on the whole, “speakers select ‘right’ or adequate formulations” (p. 114) – i.e. ones that are not subsequently reformulated. Our analysis of some occasions when an initial place reference is repaired exposes the work that is done in order to make it “right or adequate” and therein reveals the way in which that initial formulation was not right in the first place.

We build upon Schegloff’s (1972) description of formulating place by employing the machinery of repair as a natural method for investigating how turns at talk are constructed for the task-at-hand – a method we first introduced in earlier investigations (Lerner and Kitzinger, 2007; Lerner et al., 2012). In this report we have shown how repair affords a means for doing re-formulating, and how such reformulations of place can do more than – and other than – simply fix a problem with speaking or with recipient recognition. We have described some ways reformulations are designed by reference to, and can be a constitutive part of the action carried by a turn at talk. Formulating a place can contribute to what a response turn accomplishes, and the successive selection of different formulations can reveal what considerations are involved in using one form of reference over another in forming up the action that the turn implements in conversation.

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