The News Delivery Sequence: Bad News and Good News in Conversational Interaction

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Doctor: I've got good news for you, Mrs. Brown.
Patient: It's Miss Brown, actually.
Doctor: I've got bad news for you, Miss Brown.

Reported as "the classic waiting room joke" in MacIntyre (1976, p. 160), this exchange displays two important features related to the purpose of this article. One is a formal structure, a preannouncement, through which hearers of the joke as well as the fictional Miss Brown can anticipate a delivery of news (although the news, presumably about pregnancy, does not get delivered within the joke). The visibility of some spate of talk as "news," then, is something for which participants provide through their analyzable practical actions. A second feature of this joke is its indicating that when an occurrence-in-the-world is worked up for announcing, whether the news is to be regarded as good or bad depends on a variety of

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things, including who the teller is, who the recipient is, who the main figure is, the presumptions of each party, and other matters. In this instance, the doctor, no doubt assuming cultural standards to the effect that pregnancy is uniformly desirable for married women and undesirable for the not married (MacIntyre, 1976), alters the projected valence of the news according to what is learned in situ about the conjugal status of the recipient, whom the news is "for." Although the joke includes neither the actual delivery nor the recipient’s response to the news, both of which are also crucial to the determination of its valence, the lesson should be clear. Whether news is good or bad is not inherent in events and instead is something that is, relative to the exhibited concerns, perspectives, and identities of coparticipants, their own interactional production. To put it succinctly, for an event-in-the-world to be news of a particular kind is a conditional matter, dependent on, among other features of embodied actual activity, the actions and responses of participants in conversational interaction.

The purpose of this article is to explore the conditional nature of good and bad news. Three matters are at stake here. First, participants often share information about events-in-the-world, but for information to be news is something that these participants work out in their interaction. Second, although members of society often presume that news of some events (death of a loved one, getting cancer, failing an exam) is inherently bad, and that news of other events (getting engaged, having a healthy baby, earning a good grade) is good, they also interactively establish the valence of the news and just how good or bad it is. Third, participants display that the news directly has consequences or concerns some particular party or parties, whom I call the consequential figures. In short, when participants approach, tell, and receive bad or good news, they often converge in understanding the conveyed information as news and as of a particular kind that affects some person(s) or other subject(s). This convergence, rather than reflecting agreement about the objective nature of events-in-the-world, depends on participants' in-course practical activity. To paraphrase Garfinkel (1967), good or bad news as it emerges in the particularities of the conduct of those copresent to one another, like every other feature of a setting, is a "contingent accomplishment of socially organized common practices" (p. 33).

In this article, I examine how news qua news and the valence of that news evolve, in ordinary conversation, from participants' introduction and articulation of a News Delivery Sequence (NDS). How interactants display consequential figures as they deliver and receive good or bad news is a topic in its own right, and in this article I only point to the phenomenon at relevant places. I have collected approximately 100 conversational news episodes, with about half representing "good" news and half that are "bad" news. As much as possible I illustrate analytical points with instances of each kind of news, but even when using an example of just one kind, the general points apply to both. This should not imply that good and bad news deliveries are conversational equivalences. A paper in progress (Maynard, 1995) explores ways in which good news is privileged over bad news in conversational interaction.

PRESENTING "INFORMATION" AS AN ACCOUNT OR AS NEWS: NEWS INQUIRIES AND PREANNOUNCEMENT SEQUENCES

Obviously, for some event-in-the-world to become news-for-participants, one has to report it to another. Previous conversation analytic research has identified sequences by which potential deliverers and recipients provide for such reporting. The means by which participants initiate these sequences could be called occasioning practices. A potential deliverer's mechanism is the preannouncement (Terasaki, 1976). Referenced in the joke at the beginning of this article, a preannouncement (e.g., "Hey we got good news!") is designed to handle a central contingency in the development of conversational news, which is a recipient's prior knowledge of the occurrence to be reported. After a preannouncement, a potential recipient can either produce a "blocking" move (Schegloff, in press) or a "go-ahead" token or phrase that solicits an announcement. Potential recipients of news can occasion its delivery through what Button and Casey (1985) called the "Itemized News Inquiry" ("How is Dez anyway?") that nominates a particular item for reporting, or through a "Topic Initial Elicitor" ("What's new with you?") that provides a more open domain for reporting news. I will refer to such devices as news inquiries.

In saying that for some event-in-the-world to become news is a conditional matter, however, I am also suggesting something more fundamental than the necessity of using occasioning practices, such as preannouncements and news inquiries. The deeper point is that interactional organization and structure supersede utterance content in the achievement and display of talk as news. As Terasaki (1976, p. 6) has shown, items that participants could treat as announcements of news are sometimes produced and heard in a way that makes them a different kind of object from such announcements:
The boldfaced utterance, as a kind of informing about death, is here given as a reason for one party in a couple not being present for a golf game. The focal news—in the sense of occupying the part of A’s turn that is “sequentially implicative”—is A’s announcement that, because of the turn of events, another party (Dan) can play. B’s “Oh good” is directed to that and not to the “death in the family.”

Accordingly, there can be “information” that is ignorable or retrievable as news for a recipient’s assessment. Only when participants retrieve such information for independent announcement or assessment or both does it achieve the official status of bad or good news in a particular interaction. Whereas information about the death was ignored in the last excerpt, information about illness occurs in excerpt (2) and is retrieved; Steven has called and Leslie has answered the phone. This excerpt also illustrates the four-part NDS (see arrows) that we will probe in detail throughout the article:

(2) H17/B/Holt88:2.3.1

The News Delivery Sequence

Initially, Steven offers Geoff Haldan’s sickness as an account and not as bad news per se. That is, the sickness is a reason for an anticipated absence at an upcoming meeting (lines 4–6), and Steven’s action here is to initiate a request–response sequence for Leslie to have her husband (Skip) convey apologies. Leslie accepts the request (line 8, “Yes. Yes.”) and then, through a “solicitous inquiry” (Button & Casey, 1985), goes on to retrieve the embedded account for development as news (“Oh ‘dear what’s the matter with Geoff?’”). In lines 12–15 (arrow 1), Steven, with help from Leslie in a word search, announces the news of Geoff’s gout, to which Leslie responds with a token of receipt (arrow 2). Next, Steven elaborates a further aspect of the news (arrow 3), and Leslie produces a sympathetic assessment (arrow 4). This essentially completes an NDS consisting of the announcement, announcement response, elaboration, and assessment. Now Steven, in overlap with part of Leslie’s line 18 assessment, rerequests conveyance of apologies, recasting the sickness (via line 20, “that’s”) not to be news as such but as the “reason” for Geoff’s absence at the meeting (lines 19–20). Leslie again grants the request (line 21), which also works to occasion the closing of the conversation (not included in the excerpt). To reiterate: sickness of a mutual acquaintance is initially offered as an account, is momentarily retrieved for treatment as (bad) news, and then is reembedded in a request–response sequence to once more account for the request.

OCCASIONING THE NEWS DELIVERY SEQUENCE

The NDS can be occasioned by making inquiry or by preannouncing. Additionally, without following or being part of a presequence, the initiation of an NDS can itself mark a stepwise move or topic change in conversation, as when an announcement is in “first topic” position in a conversation; see excerpt [18]. By whatever route the NDS emerges,
participants shape each component according to a myriad of contingencies. Any NDS, in other words, emerges in and as the detailed course of action by which participants in interaction precisely configure and achieve some event-in-the-world as good or bad news. Shortly, I will consider each of the component turns—announcement, announcement response, elaboration, assessment—to demonstrate this configuring process. First, I wish to observe some features of the presequences that occasion bad and good news announcements.

Preannouncements and news inquiries help provide for the understanding of a subsequent turn as announcing good or bad news. Furthermore, these preceding utterances can foreshadow the valence of the news. In excerpt (2), Steven’s initial sickness account permits Leslie to ask “what’s the matter,” a colloquial query form that then foreshadows the valence of the news-to-come. However, some queries, as in line 1 in the following excerpt, are neutral in terms of marking expected valence:

(3) NB2B/NB:II:5:R:3
1 Lottie: Wt’s new with you.
2 Emma: .hhh Oh:: ah wen’t ilh th’dentis’n uh:: G-ed’e
3 Lottie: "Ye’ah?
4 Emma: wantuh pull a tooth ‘n make me a new gol’d uh::
5 Lottie: (’hhhhhh
6 Emma: =bridge fer El’GHT HUNDER’DOLLARS.
7 Lottie: “Oh:: sh:it::t::t.
8 Emma: Sh:it.
9 (0.2)
10 Emma: Is ri’ght.

Emma’s bad news (lines 2, 4, 6) then arrives in a story about visiting the dentist, and it is within this story that Emma originates an exhibit of valence (see following discussion).

Like some news inquiries, preannouncements may lack any lexical assessment of the news being augured:

(4) [HS ST:2:4] (Terasaki, 1976: Appendix III:3)
1 → A: Oh you didn’t- You didn’ hear the news didju. We were out
2 there before Thanksgiving.
3 B: Oh. You were.
4 A: Yeah. Were we?

The News Delivery Sequence

| 5  | B: Oh. Out here? |
| 6  | A: Yeah. |
| 8  | A: Yeah. Angie’s gonna have a baby. |
| 9  | B: Oh really. |
| 10 | A: Yeah |
| 11 | B: Well, congratulations |

Of course, preannouncements also may indicate a positive evaluation (“Hey we got good news”), a negative one (“Didju hear the terrible news?”), or some other stance toward the news, and thereby locate the kind of assessment a recipient should produce upon completion of the delivery. However, some preevaluations appear to withhold valence ascription in a kind of dramatic buildup. In excerpt (5), Andi’s preannouncement, which stretches across lines 4 and 6, both signifies upcoming “news” and indicates her news would come “as a bit of a surprise.”

(5) PND3:18
1 Andi: .hhh well; speaking of bot’oms are you sitting
2 down?
3 Betty: Ye’ah.
4 Andi: Well we have some news for you.
5 Betty: What?
6 Andi: .hhh that may come as a bit of a surprise ehhh!
7 Betty: I see- what are you telling me?
8 Andi: hhh! Bob and I are going to have a baby.
9 Betty: Oh my good’ness!

After Andi’s announcement (line 8), Betty indeed seems to show surprise with her upward-intoned exclamation (line 9). As we shall see, whether this surprising news is good or bad is something that the participants, in subsequent talk, systematically work to display.

THE NEWS DELIVERY SEQUENCE

The NDS, as noted earlier, has four parts: announcement, announcement response, elaboration, and assessment. Each of these components is itself an achievement or site of detail (Garfinkel, 1988) that is
consonant with its orderly, collaborative production. By this, I mean that each part of the sequence, just as the overall sense of bad or good news, comes into being according to actions and responses of coparticipants. A gross example is in excerpt (2), where Steven, the news deliverer, starts an announcement ("he’s got this wretched um . . .") that his recipient, Leslie, helps to complete ("gout"). Furthermore, the in-course actions and response of coparticipants determine whether, upon the production of an announcement, an NDS, as opposed to some other activity such as gossip (see [10]), will be pursued, and how far it will be pursued. Some deliveries of bad or good news come to occupy only two or three turns rather than the prototypical four-part sequence.

The Announcement Turn

If presequences to the NDS help provide for the hearability of news of a particular kind, this is not the whole story, because intrinsic to an announcing utterance can be design features displaying it as a telling of or report on some event (Schegloff, in press) and as having a positive or negative valence. For instance, speakers (with more or less collaborative contributions) regularly format an announcement utterance as an assertion or declaration (e.g., "He’s got this wretched gout," "God he wanted to pull a tooth ’n make me a new gold bridge fer eight hunder’ dollars," "Angie’s gonna have a baby," “Bob and I are going to have a baby"). Some announcements of news, however, consist not of an assertion or declaration but of a small narrative, as in (3) when Emma told her bad news by way of a story about her trip to the dentist. Because announcements draw from the biography of the speaker, that party displays firsthand knowledge about the event. Connected with this is some formulation that provides for the event being recent or current such that the recipient would not have previous knowledge. In (2) through (5), the news deliverers impart about present and recently attained conditions, which also have consequences for the future.

As for the valence of news being delivered, announcements may have distinct lexical components that express this, as in (2), when Steven characterizes Geoff Haldan’s condition as "wretched." Whether or not there is lexical marking, news also may be marked in prosodic ways to display a valence (Freese & Maynard, in press). Consider excerpt (3), in which Lottie announces the cost of a prospective new bridge. Her intonation on "Oh:: ah wen’tih th’dentis’ . . ." wavers in a low key that sets a turn-internal context (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 1996) for hearing as infelicitous the gold tooth price, which she speaks with elevated volume and with emphasis ("EIGHT HUNDER’DOLLARS").

A major contributor to the achieved valence of a news delivery (as well as to the newsworthiness or news implicativeness of a report) are a recipient’s turns after the announcement and elaboration. I investigate turn 2 (the announcement response) and turn 4 (assessment) subsequently, exploring how teller and recipient, in and through their respective turns at talk, are involved in exhibiting the valence of the news such that bad and good news as interactional events have a jointly accomplished character. That participants jointly accomplish the accountable valence of news does not mean, however, that their contributions are equal and symmetrical. Rather, a deliverer, whose epistemological access to an event-in-the-world is displayed as closer than the recipient’s, works to set the valence or tone in preannouncing, announcing, or elaborating turn(s), or all three, and a recipient is usually but not always in the position of aligning to that tone. When the recipient is the main consequential figure for some news, on the other hand, he or she may, more strongly than the deliverer, determine the texturing of the news in terms of valence.

Sequential Structures and Announcements

Following Terasaki (1976), I observed that interactional organization and conversational structure supersede content in displaying an event-in-the-world as conversational bad or good news. Reinforcing how structure matters to participants’ sense of bad or good news is that very diverse utterance types can convey the substance of the news. It is because of this that aphorisms such as "no news is bad news" capture how participants can learn certain tidings and their valence. For instance, a coparticipant, invited by way of a news inquiry to provide a news announcement, may respond by admonishing the speaker not to ask and by refusing or postponing production of discrete information about the situation. A recipient can then appraise that action, infer something negative, and offer responses as if news had been told substantively. Prior to the following excerpt Edward had asked Donna how school was. She indicated it was difficult and then returned the question:

(6) ZG:6
1 Donna: How's yours?
troubles resistance. Still, this episode demonstrates that when the giving of information is resisted in a sequential environment that provides for it—when, that is, a participant rejects the request for news—a potential recipient, no doubt drawing on commonsense knowledge of the situation, can take the refusal itself as “bad news.” Therefore, participants can fill the “slots” (Sacks, 1992a, p. 262) embedded in organized sequences and in that way communicate substantive matters. Produced structures and their mutual articulation help form content and figure heavily in participants’ sense of there being news and of the kind that it is.

Accordingly, participants can convey bad and good news “in so many words.” Another example is how news bearers can design their talk in a way that, while informing about one thing, allows a recipient to respond to another. Referring to the device of “burying,” Sacks (1992a, pp. 177–178) analyzed a fragment of conversation in which Anne telephones her neighbor Gilda and reports that her (Anne’s) husband, Bob, put the newspaper on Gilda’s porch.

(8) NB18G/NB:IV:11:R:1

1 Anne: Ah did’nt get the paper this morning it wz=
2 Gilda: Ahshhh
3 Anne: :=get’n fr’n v ar pl’ase:=
4 Gilda: :=m-
5 Anne: :=Yes dear ah di’ed:
6 Gilda: =yeh w’r u’r:p:h
7 Anne: =Bob took’t over on the porch he didn’ know whether
8 =yeh w’r u’r:p:h
9 Gilda: =Well thank you yes I did I’m just up a little
10 =while en doing the chh chores...

In a context where, after an argument, Anne’s husband Bob had left her for several days, this report effectively tells Gilda that he had come back home. However, because Anne here reports a favor Bob did, Gilda, rather than being obligated to then and there deal with the mention of Bob’s being home, can produce a “thank you” (line 8) for the favor, can respond to the other information at her discretion, and in those ways can perhaps recognize the delicacy of that information. Later in the conversation, Sacks (1992a) observed, Gilda does pick up on this information and appraise it. Her query at lines 1 and 3 is a topic change after she had declined Anne’s invitation to “come over”:
At lines 4–7, Anne confirms Gilda's observation and elaborates the news, whereupon Gilda now receives this as news (line 8) and assesses it (line 11) in a measured way. This example returns us to the phenomenon of retrieving "information" for treatment as good or bad news; it may not be happenstance that such information appears as an account for another action and not as a delivery of news. Both an informant who does bury information and a recipient who grasps that doing and later provides for officially recognizing the information as bad or good news are artful users of structural knowledge. Their skill at introducing information and then, according to the developing course of conversation, disregarding or regarding its newsworthiness, displays the possible delicacy of this very information (Sacks, 1992a, p. 47).

The Announcement Response

Deliverers structure their announcements, which can embody a variety of utterance types, to exhibit the information within the turn as news, and lexically or prosodically or both to mark the news as to valence. Recipients, in a next turn, display the announcement as "news-for-them" (Terasaki, 1976, p. 7), and also may show an orientation to valence. In displaying the announcement as news-for-them, recipients accept that an announcement is news. For example, in regard to oh as a change-of-state token, Heritage (1984) put it well:
News Receipts and Newsmarks

When recipients do respond to announcements as news, they can use their turn in different ways. With news receipts, they show a retrospective orientation, primarily acknowledging an announcement as news while discouraging development of the news. News receipts include freestanding ohs, oh really, and nonsyntactical queries (she did?), as Jefferson (1981) and Heritage (1984, pp. 339–344, footnote 13) have shown.

In other words, news receipts (as the one arrowed in [11]) may elicit a confirmation in next turn (line 5) but no elaboration and sometimes may mark the end of an informing sequence altogether (Heritage, 1984).

With a complexity that will be noted later, other news receipts include oh + assessment turns, such as oh good, oh lovely, oh dear, and the like (Heritage, 1984, p. 302; Local, 1996):

1 Ida: “hhh well theez eh few things arived fer you,
2 Jenny: → Oh good. “hhh
3 Ida: “eeYes.
4 Jenny: Oh cz the boys w’re askin ’ow long they’d been . . .

At line 3, Ida follows Jenny’s oh-prefaced assessment with a token of confirmation, but no more. The “oh good” therefore appears to operate as a news receipt, and the NDS occupies just three turns (announcement, response, confirmation). After Ida’s confirmation, Jenny, the recipient of the news, takes a turn of talk, producing an account of why the news was good. As well, there are instances in the data corpus where a deliverer changes topic after giving good news, meeting with recipient’s oh-prefaced assessment, and confirming the original announcement.
With bad news, when deliverers are the main consequential figure in the news, they also may treat an *oh*-prefaced assessment as a news receipt by producing an exhibit of troubles resistance. Before the following excerpt, Ann had been telling Jenny about some newly arrived furniture, and here (lines 3–5) announces one of the negative outcomes from this arrival:

(13) R3B/Rah:B:1:JA(11):4
1 Jenny: So have you got it all organized then *more*=
2 Ann: Well
3 Jenny: *less*?
4 Ann: Well except the mud fr’ the front do’h
5 right up. uh the hh trai’led up’n down t’he
garage with screwdriviz ’n God knows [what ()].
6 Jenny: O h: : d e a : u h.
7 Ann: Nevuh mind it’ll all come right in the end.
8 Jenny: Yeh. Okay you go’n getta clean troushis on . . .

After Jenny’s *oh dear* response (line 7) to the bad news about mud (lines 4–6), Ann produces (line 8) an “optimistic projection” (Jefferson, 1988) that seems to comment on the entire set of problems the furniture arrival entailed. As in (12), the NDS here is three turns (announcement, response, optimistic projection). Subsequently, Jenny moves to close the conversation (line 8).

Newsmarks, as contrasted with news receipts, include *oh*-plus partial repeats (*Oh do they*), freestanding but query-intoned objects (really?), and syntactical queries (did she?) that both receive an announcement as news and promote development or elaboration of that news (Jefferson, 1981; Heritage, 1984, footnote 13). As contrasted with *Oh really*, for example, a freestanding *really* encourages elaboration. In (14), R’s newsmark (arrow 2) is freestanding and is spoken with high volume:

(14) Terasaki (1976:9)
D: 1→ "huh And I got athletic award.
R: 2→ REALLY!!!
D: 3→ Uh huh. From Sports Club.
R: 4→ Oh that’s terrific Ronald.

D both confirms the news and elaborates in line 3. Newsmarks, more strongly than news receipts, have both a retrospective and prospective character in relation to the news delivery.

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**Standardized *Oh*-Prefaced Assessments**

Recipients respond to particular announcements and what they project and more or less encourage development of the news delivery through lexical and prosodic manipulations that strengthen or weaken the response. Two points are relevant here, both having to do with *oh*-prefaced assessments. It has been argued that, as announcement responses, they largely operate as news receipts, and appear to curtail development or elaboration of a news delivery. However, such items as *oh good*, in response to good news, and *oh dear*, in response to bad news, may be designedly ambivalent in terms of encouraging or discouraging elaboration. That is, they may straddle the news receipt–newsmark distinction in terms of articulating a primarily retrospective (sequence terminating) or prospective (sequence expanding) orientation.

Put differently, both *oh good* and *oh dear* are standardized, having an abstract and laconic quality that endows them with a utility for responding to very diverse kinds of good or bad news. Therefore, recipients can use them to align to announced good or bad news without being overly committed or distanced in displaying their appreciation of the newsworthiness and valence so far displayed. Accordingly, although they often appear in environments where elaboration of news is curtailed, they nevertheless may permit a subsequent proposal of elaboration. In other words, whereas other items such as *oh*, *oh really*, and the like may be strong news receipts, and still other items such as *really?* and *oh do they* may be strong newsmarks, *oh good* and *oh dear* and perhaps similar standardized *oh*-prefaced assessments may be weak in terms of either treating an announcement as complete enough or requesting elaboration. They neither emphatically resist nor encourage development of the news:

1 Mum: 1→ Auntie Vi is he:x:re=
2 Leslie: 2→ *he*:"Oh good,*
3 Mum: 3→ She’s bin here all the wee’k:n *hhh*:[Oh: how]
4 Leslie: 4→ nice.
5 ()
6 Mum: 7→ Mr:mm:
8 Leslie: *hhh Are you having your dinner?*hh
After her recipient’s “oh good” here (and in overlap with ending of that turn), Mum elaborates on her news about Auntie Vi. This receives an oh-prefaced assessment, and the informing has produced a structure that fits the prototypical four-part NDS. Topic change occurs after the fourth turn. Here is an instance involving bad news:

(16) H7B/Holt:X(C)1:6:15
1  1→ Leslie: Well I’m I’m s:- ( ) proba’ly going to a funeral on
2      Tuesday,
3      (0.4)
4  2→ Mum: ‘Oh ‘dear.’
5  3→ Leslie: Hkhh-hu “p”thh ‘D’you ‘member- You know
6      Philip Cole you ‘know ‘e had this u-very- good
7      ‘hhhh very busy little mother that wz al’ways
8      ‘Oh:
9  9→ Leslie: Yes.
10 10→ Leslie: busy doing things ’nd, ( ) She died.
11  4→ Mum: Ah’:
12      (0.2)
13  5→ Leslie: eh-in the week ‘very peacefu’ly;
14  14→ Mum: Yes.

In this excerpt, Leslie elaborates on her bad news after her recipient’s “Oh ‘dear.’” (line 4). (She produces a cough partially in overlap with that announcement response and preceding her elaboration at line 5.) The elaboration occupies lines 5–7 and 10; Mum’s “Oh: “yes” at lines 8–9 permits continuation. Following the elaboration, Mum issues an assessment (line 11), and there is further topical talk—a “bright side sequence” (Holt, 1993) after that (lines 13–14 and beyond in talk not included in the excerpt).

Whether a proposed elaboration that follows a standardized oh-prefaced assessment receives a further assessment as bad or good news is far from guaranteed. For instance, when the main figure of bad news is the deliverer, elaborative talk after an oh-prefaced assessment may involve “exposition” of the deliverer’s troubles (Jefferson, 1988). In the conversation from which excerpt (17) is taken, Leslie’s line 1 utterance is a topic change in which she announces some bad news about her son and his driver’s examination. Kevin produces an oh-prefaced assessment at line 2:

(17) H21B/Holt:S088:1:5:2 [modified]
1  Leslie: hhh Gordon didn’t pass his test I’m afraid, h=
2  Kevin: =Oh dear,
3  Leslie: ’k’tch He’s goin- ( ) Well ‘h he was hoping th
4      get it (0.2) in uh the summer but u ( ) they’re
5      getting very booked up so I don’t know if he’ll
6      even: get it in thern
7      (1.1)
8  Kevin: Yes I: ah: no doubt he’s back e(,)t uh . . .

Leslie’s turn at lines 3–6 may display her understanding of Kevin’s “Oh dear.” (line 2) as aligning him as a troubles recipient, which would make a possible exposition and elaboration of the trouble now due or relevant. However, subsequent to Leslie’s possible exposition/elaboration, Kevin waits (line 7) and then produces a token of receipt (line 8, “Yes”) rather than any further assessment and follows with an inquiry about where Gordon is going to school. Thus, Kevin avoids aligning as a troubles recipient, and the talk (not included in the excerpt) moves to different topics about Leslie and her husband going to visit Gordon, and about the visitors they soon would be hosting in their own home. Kevin’s receipt and query provide for a retrospective understanding of his previous “Oh dear,” as a news receipt that was not asking for elaboration.10

If standardized oh-prefaced assessment turns are weak in terms of signaling for continuation or discontinuation of the NDS, it is possible to intensify the oh + assessment form with modifiers that more clearly encourage further news pronouncements concerning the news. For example, Carrie, in excerpt (18) has special good news in that her announcement of a new granddaughter (arrowed) is her reason for calling Leslie. Carrie places the news in first topic position in the phone call (lines 4–5) and preempts the usual how-are-you sequence (Schegloff, 1986):

(18) H13G/Holt:1988:24:1
1  Leslie: Hello”
2  Carrie: Oh Leslie it’s Carrie.
3  Leslie: *h Oh: *Carrie: Yes he’il go r ‘hh *hh
4     Carrie: I thought you’d like
5     to know I’ve got a little gran’daughter
6  Leslie: *thik *Oh: how love’ly.
Leslie’s response to the announcement (line 6) is an oh-prefaced assessment; she gives high tone and emphasis to the “Oh:” and inserts a modifier as part of the assessment (“how love’ly”). These features appear to encourage progression of the sequence to Carrie’s next turn elaboration (line 7). Carrie, in fact, produces two elaborations (lines 7 and 9), each of which also meets with intensified oh-prefaced assessment (lines 8 and 10–11) before the news delivery is brought to completion (lines 12–14).

Finally, it also appears possible for a recipient to produce an announcement response that at first encourages elaboration and then to modify this response in the course of its production to deescalate a display of commitment to hearing further about the news. In excerpt (19), Leslie’s announcement (lines 4–5) emerges not as a reason for the call but after Leslie and her Mum, who talk regularly, had finished discussing facial pain and “jaw trouble” among various members of the family (excerpt 20). Sheer copresence as occurs through customary contact can mean the introduction of routine bad and good news. In this conversation there was an extinguishing of the jaw trouble topic through the production of token utterances and a series of brief silences. Leslie (line 1) then starts a turn of talk, which is like a sighing lead-in to next topic. Mum produces some indecipherable talk in overlap (line 2), and Leslie restarts her turn to produce a topic-shifting, bland announcement of news (“We had a ‘very nice evening . . . ,” lines 4–5).

Elaboration Turns

Their use of the standardized oh-prefaced assessment shows that recipients, beyond allowing for a deliverer to elaborate on some news, may be cautious and circumspect when they first hear the news, evaluating
the news abstractly and laconically. In the course of further interaction, and depending on the actions of the deliverer, recipients determine whether and how a more precise and particularized response should be produced. If a deliverer chooses to elaborate, it provides for a subsequent, more fitted assessment, as participants complete a four-turn NDS:

(20) H8B/Holt: X(C):1:2:7:7
1  1→ Leslie:  “hh Well I’ve written to you in the letter
2    Katherine’s:  ‘face is still hurting her?
3
4  2→ Mum:  ‘Oh ‘dear=’
5  3→ Leslie:  So uhm: she’s going t’see our doctor when she comes
6    ho-me.
7  (Mum):
8  8 → Leslie:  “hh An’ I’ll: get her fixed up with a d-entist
tog,
10  (0.7)
11  4→ Mum:  Oh w’t a “nuisance isn’t it? Is it ‘eye’ teeth?

After Mum’s turn 2 announcement response, Leslie elaborates on the news in a way that shows the news to involve not just her daughter Katherine but also herself (arrow 3). Mum follows this with an “affiliation response” (arrow 4; Jefferson, 1988, p. 428). That assessment is fitted to the particularities of the developed news—it proposes to formulate the “nuisance” of going to the doctor and fixing Katherine up with a dentist because of her difficulties.

Just as a standardized oh-prefaced assessment may precede elaboration and a more particularized, fitted assessment, newsmarks and assessments may be completely separated by an elaboration turn. Prototypically, after a newsmark, turn 3 elaborations offer the focal piece of the news, or provide details, such that a recipient can assess the news in a precise manner. As Sacks (1992b, p. 573) argued in discussing expressions of joy and sorrow that accompany deliveries of news, if assessments were placed before a deliverer has “a chance to fully develop what it is that happened,” it could be taken as cutting off the delivery and not “really caring” because it might discourage the deliverer from developing or elaborating the news in a way that allows particularized appreciation.11 Separating the newsmark from the assessment, accordingly, allows an early display of understanding that some announcement underway is news and also allows for a later, careful exhibit of the recipient’s comprehension of just what sort of news it is. In excerpt (21), Jenny and Vera had been discussing a missed hair appointment, and why it had been missed:

(21) R2G/Rahman 1:8
1    Vera:  Well ah think it wiz the wea’her yih know:w, she
2      didn like- feel like goin in the weather
3      yirknow “real-ly: (y’know)"
4    Jenny:  “A o h : :: “Oh I-e sh- cuz she said she
5      wouldn’t be going if Milly wz going t’thaht keep fit
6      thing.
7  1→ Vera:  uRight yeh “hh Oh I met Milly, ch::m yesthday en
8      she’d hahdda fo:rm from the Age Concern about
9      thaht jo:b=’
10  2→ Jenny:  <=Oh=sh=ha=hb?
11  3→ Vera:  So: eh she wz sending the fo:rm bahck
12    [the:n yOD] know
13  4→ Jenny:  [Oh she di-:] aOH w’d’i thaht’s good ah’m s-
14    ’pleased she applied:

Vera’s news announcement about Milly’s obtaining a job form (arrow 1) is a change of topic that is touched off by Jenny’s mentioning of Milly in the previous discussion. The oh-prefaced newsmark here (arrow 2) is of the oh + partial repeat form that Jefferson (1981, pp. 62–64) suggested is associated with a pursuit of further talk, which Vera provides in her elaboration (arrow 3). This is prefaced with a “so” token hearably connecting this part of her announcement with her previous turn. In overlap, Jenny (arrow 4) appears to produce another newsmark (“Oh she di-”), abandoned as she goes on with an utterance of the form oh + assessment. This assessment attends to the announcement sequence as complete, and through it Jenny exhibits pleasure not just at Milly having the form, but at her having sent it back and having applied for the job, as Jenny herself formulates the matter. Notice also that, even as the news is about a third party, in being “pleased” Jenny exhibits the news to be consequential for herself as well.

The development of Andi’s news of her pregnancy in (22) also demonstrates how marking something as news and providing for elaboration before assessing that news can be critical to an appropriate assessment:
After Andi announces her news about being pregnant (line 8), it is marked (line 9) by Betty as “surprising” news (recall from [5] that it had been preannounced as surprising) but not yet assessed. In response to Betty’s questions (lines 9–10, 14), Andi elaborates (lines 11, 15) that the pregnancy came about after Bob’s vasectomy had been reversed. This possibly informs Betty that the pregnancy was a sought happenstance, and more clearly allows for positive appraisal than the sheer by-itself news of the pregnancy, which might have been accidental and unwanted. After the elaboration, Betty produces another “OH MY GOD’NESS:” utterance (line 18), this time with increased pitch and volume, and (overlapping Andi’s characterization of the vasectomy, line 13) she follows this with her assessment, a claim and display of being happy (line 21).

As recipients locate what may be, for them, missing constituents in an announcing turn—for example, “when” or “how” some event happened—they participate in the elaboration of an announcement in the NDS. More than this, recipients may collaborate in producing the elaboration and the news, as when a deliverer engages in a word search that the recipient helps to complete (excerpt [2], for instance), or when the recipient produces an upshot for the deliverer’s confirmation because an announcing turn is vague or elliptical in presenting the news. In (23), Ellen has called Jeff to tell him news that “has to do with” their “beloved advisor.” She forms her announcement (arrows 1a and 1b) in two parts, the second coming after the silence at line 22:

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**Assessment Turns and Beyond**

The assessment turn may mark the completion of an NDS. However, following an initial assessment, a deliverer may produce further, embellishing elaborations that also receive evaluation. In excerpt (28) we saw this in Carrie’s news about her new granddaughter. In excerpt (21), after Jenny’s assessment and declaration of being pleased at the news of Milly’s application, a further elaboration offers information (lines 15–16) about “when” and also meets with a positive assessment (line 17):
Bad and good news deliveries therefore may involve numbers of turns at talk beyond a four-part sequence, although at some point participants segue to producing “informational” topical talk (as at line 19 and subsequent utterances) to which recipients respond with receipts, questions, and so on (lines 20, 24, 26, 28). At some point also, participants move to a different topic (lines 30–31), or work to bring the conversation to a close.

Assessments in Relation to Foregoing News Delivery Components

Because they represent the last component(s) of the NDS, and are almost wholly devoted to displaying valence, assessment turn(s) are especially important to the coproduction of good or bad news. However, we have seen that valence is not something that is suddenly assigned in the second turn or fourth turn of this sequence. Rather, in announcement and elaboration turns, lexical and prosodic cues may exhibit a valence and more or less induce or solicit an assessment term fitted to it. The fourth turn in particular, far from alone in constituting valence, is the site of valence-ascribing work that regularly corresponds to how matters have been so far presented.

As it is deliverers who largely produce announcements and elaborations, they, rather than recipients, would seem to have primacy in ascribing valence to news. As discussed earlier, however, it is the party who is or who is closest to the main consequential figure who seems to have a privileged position in this regard. Consider the situation in which someone has learned about an event-in-the-world and has oriented to this event independently of interaction with those whom the event most immediately affects. That can lead to problematic presumptiveness when the parties meet conversationally. In excerpt (25), Moira has called to express sympathy to Leslie, a friend whose recent burglary she had just “heard” about. Moira employs a “my side” telling, which provides for Leslie to volunteer information about the burglary. As Pomerantz (1980, p. 194) observed, “A ‘my side’ telling is intended to be heard in terms of an unformulated event that is being treated as appropriately referred to in that manner, that is, as better unsaid.” Indeed, Moira’s telling is an expression of regret that avoids naming the event as she both offers her help and asks Leslie whether she would “rather not talk about it” (lines 1–5):

(25) H10B/Holt:X(C)2:1:9:1

1 Moira: ... eh Les ’hffh Les I just wanted a"say
2  "hnhh eh:mm: "t I'm sorry about what I hear:
3  about () an’ I'm not being nosey is there
4  anything I c’n do?: or () can I help in any
5  wafy o:;f would you rather not talk about it?
6  Leslie: "eh:" h e h hel: What about: the "bu:reglar:"
7  (0.2)
8 Moira: "t Yes:
9 ()
10 Leslie: "Uhhf! "hh () "Noo:: It's very kind of you; "h
11 "Noo:: "h In fact () "we thought it wz
12 killingly funny really.
13 (0.4)
14 Moira: "Oh: good
It is Leslie who then formulates or names the referent event with “What, about the ‘burr-gelar?’” (line 6). After Moira confirms this as the basis of her inquiry (line 8), Leslie at lines 10–12 shows appreciation for the offer of help and then, following a marker of contrast (“In fact” line 11), suggests that the event was “killingly funny really” (lines 11–12), whereupon after a brief wait (line 13) Moira (at line 14) says, “Oh: good.” So the victim here denies the need for help and volunteers a positive feature of the event, which occasions a good news assessment from the recipient. This excerpt demonstrates dramatically that there is no necessary equivalence between the nature of events-in-the-world and how they are embodied in actual talk and interaction. Indeed, a stronger statement is that there is no nature of events-in-the-world except as they are so embodied.  

The Fitting of Assessments

If recipients produce assessments that correspond to matters so far presented, they do not do so in a passive, automatic, or mechanical fashion according to some predetermined valence of the news. Assessment turns are carefully fitted not only to predecessor turns in the NDS but to prior inquiries and sequences. In general, interactional work regarding how news is to be assessed occurs at every point from the beginning to the end of its presentation. Consider again Ellen's news to Jeff (excerpts [23] and [26]) that she has decided to replace her adviser. This is special news; placing it in first topic position, Ellen had called Jeff with the purpose of telling him this news:

(26) (Excerpt [23] expanded)

1 Ellen: tch .hh Well I wanted to share some news with
2 you:, because you’ll find it relevant to your
3 particular:: (. ) situation
4 Jeff: 
5 [Woo']ps. Okay hold on, let
6 Ellen: me turn off the radio hh
7
8 Ellen: Okay.
9
10 Jeff: .hhhh Okay lay it on me.=
11 Ellen: =And this news has to do with our beloved (0.2)
12 advisor.
13
14 Ellen: I- I wouldn’a gue’ssed.
15
16 Ellen: =tch .hh Ye(hh)ah I knew-, I knew you wouldn’t
17 .hhhhhhhhhhhh––
18
19 Jeff: "Well I hope - it’s not bad news?"
20 Ellen: "Oh no, it actually is pretty good news.
21 Jeff: "OH "GOO:D.
22 Ellen: I mean (0.4) well I think it’s kinda good news.
23
24 Jeff: [hhhh]
25
26 Ellen: Um, I decided (. ) that (1.0) uhm I wanted to oast
27 him.
28
29 Ellen: And I decided I need to find out whadidit (. ) is I
30 have to do.
31 Ellen: =No.
32
33 Jeff: "h:::oh my gosh."
34 Ellen: "Oh "d I=
35 Jeff: ="Wo::: w:"
36 Ellen: [Um] tch .hh [IF:]
37 Jeff: [GOODFER] YOU:::=
38 Ellen: =It hit me last- thah(hh)h)aks .hh
39 Jeff: No seriously, good fer you. That took gu’ts.
40 I’im- I hope I’m inspired by you.
41 Ellen: [No]
42 Ellen: =hhhh Tha’hks hhh .hhhh uhm it hit me ...
suggesting that the news is "kinda good" (line 17). Then, Jeff strongly sol-icits and almost implores Ellen for the news in line 19, and Ellen goes on to deliver it at lines 20–24.

However, it appears to take effort for Jeff to gather what the news is. Subsequent to Ellen’s first formulation—that she has “decided” to “oust” the advisor—there is lack of uptake (line 22). Then, Ellen revises her announcement in a partially escalated manner, displaying resolve to carry out the announced decision (lines 23–24). Following this, Jeff produces what I earlier referred to as a candidate elaboration (line 25), which Ellen confirms (line 26), and then he shows appreciation of the news (lines 28, 30, 32, and 34–35).

Although the news in this episode emerges as good and also special in that it was the reason-for-the-call rather than something that merely came up in the developing course of conversation, Ellen seeks to play down the status of the news and align her recipient to it in a particular way. According to her response to Jeff’s line 16 reassessment of the news, for instance, Jeff may have overreacted to how good the news might be. That is, Ellen’s line 17 (“well I think it’s kinda good news”) is a slight modification of her previous characterization (line 15, “it actually is pretty good news”) and reaffirms a sense of her having medium and not spectacularly good news. Although Jeff’s subsequent assessments (lines 28, 30) are appreciative, they are quieted relative to the preceding one (line 16), which he speaks with elevated volume.

Following his receipt of the news (lines 28, 30), Jeff goes on to con-gratulate and compliment Ellen. As he does this initially (line 32) she is pursuing a topic shift (lines 31, 33, “... if:--it hit me last--”), but she abandons that shift and receives the congratulatory utterance with a laughing “tha(h)(h)nks” (line 33). Jeff at lines 34–35 counters her laughter tokens with “No seriously,” a repeat of the congratulations (“good fer you”) and praise (“That took guts. I’m hope I’m inspired by you.”), and this time Ellen produces a solid or nonlaughing “Tha’nks” (line 37), after which she manages to produce her topic-shifting utterance in the clear. Thus, Jeff’s congratulations and compliments to Ellen occur as a trajectory that is competitive with Ellen’s stepwise topical movement, and he perseveres with those actions to obtain her serious acceptance.

Although Ellen’s displayed reluctance may be related to a generalized orientation toward avoiding or downgrading praise and compliments (Pomerantz, 1978) it, along with Jeff’s perseverance, reproduces another pattern. As the participants move through anticipation, delivery, receipt, and official assessment of news, they accord it a valence in slightly disparate although compatible ways. It is not only that assessment of the news transpires across preliminary and announcing turns then. When applying categories such as good and bad to deliveries of news, emphasis should be placed on the relativity of these categories and the nuances with which participants work out just how good or bad some news is. In (26), according to the deliverer and main figure, the news, although being special enough to prompt a call to Jeff, was only “kinda” good and the achievement Ellen reported, according to her hesitating and light acceptance, perhaps only marginally worthy of the excited reaction and compliments her recipient nevertheless urged upon her.

CONCLUSION

In and through interactionally contingent and emergent practices, participants achieve a mutual sense of some event-in-the-world as good or bad news. Having been asked, or having preannounced, or in pursuing an initial or shifted topic, one announces with an intended valence some event; the other reciprocates with gestures marking the announced information as news and assessing it positively or negatively, usually but not always in accord with displayed anticipations. That is, through produced structures of sequential organization, participants collaboratively achieve accountable (mutually visible and oriented-to) good or bad news.

I have analyzed a News Delivery Sequence consisting of an announcement, response, elaboration, and assessment. This sequence occurs in both reduced form (when a news receipt, for example, helps curtail further delivery) and expanded versions (when newsmarks, elaborations, and assessments continue the delivery). These sequences are not structural vehicles by which information about events-in-the-world becomes news, however. As produced forms, they represent participants’ work to display the conditions that allow for events and information to become news-of-a-particular-kind. Such conditions include the routine or special nature of the event, knowledge of and accessibility to the event, its consequential figures, how worthy the reported event is for elaboration, whether it deserves abstract or particularized assessment, the degree to which deliverer and recipient, according to exhibited commonsense knowledge,
pronounce the news singly or collaboratively, just how good or bad the news is, and other matters.

These conditions as achievedly displayed in and as an actual telling accord each conversational news delivery a particularity that represents participants’ moment-by-moment interactional work. As the joke at the beginning of this article illustrates, procedures of informing do not envelop, for delivery and receipt, preconstituted, already-valenced news. Consider one last example, from a real medical setting, that shows that the argument in this article applies to the more specialized setting as well as to more mundane conversational situations. The patient, Ms. E, in talk that occurs both before and after excerpt (27), expressed a concern to leave her present job, either through qualifying for disability or by taking a medical leave of absence. Prior to this present visit, Ms. E had been referred to two specialists, one in psychiatry for a possible diagnosis of depression, and one in cardiology for a potential heart condition. Dr. D, a general internist and the patient’s personal physician, so far had a report from the psychiatrist but not the cardiologist, and the patient’s line 1 question is in regard to the psychiatrist’s report:

(27) DP6.2-P2:57

1 Ms. E: Will what did Doctor Huntington tell you?
2 Dr. D: Well? He said: he in the letter pretty much: he
3 what you told me. He: he had a chance to look
4 over your medical records (1.3) before he wrote the
5 letter. (1.0) hh (0.5) and he does not think
6 that (hh) ah depression is an important part of your
7 illness right now.
8 (1.5)
9 Dr. D: I think that’s good news.
10 (1.5)
11 Dr. D: >I mean< if he’s right.
12 (2.5)
13 Dr. D: "If he’s right." It’s good news. hh And he’s
14 pretty good at (1.5) figuring these things just out=
15 Ms. E: Y’il well-
16 Dr. D: =I think.
17 Ms. E: Obviously I’ve been having: occasional: (0.5)
18 periods of depression but whether they’re (2.5)
19 whether they’re caused by the: (1.0) jumpy legs

The News Delivery Sequence

20 and the sleeplessness or whether
21 Dr. D: [Erright]
22 (0.8)
23 Ms. E: it’s: (1.3) the depression that er: (1.3) is
24 causing:
25 (0.5)
26 Dr. D: Yes:: an: that’s what "he was concerned with.
27 (1.3)
28 Dr. D: He doesn’t think you have a consistent major
29 depression as: psychiatrists ordinarily think of
30 it.
31 Ms. E: "Hm"

After Dr. D delivers the news that the psychiatrist disconfirmed a diagnosis of depression (lines 2–7), the patient is motionless and silent (line 8). The doctor then proposes an assessment of “good news” (line 9), and the patient remains still (line 10). Subsequently, Dr. D suggests a contingency (“if he’s right,” line 11) to his good news assessment. Yet another silence occurs (line 12), followed by the doctor’s repeating the contingency and characterizing the specialist’s competence, although in qualified fashion (lines 13–14, 16). Finally, at lines 15, 17–20, and 23–24, Ms. E asserts having experienced depression, and then exhibits a vacillating stance about whether it was cause or consequence of “jumpy legs and the sleeplessness.” Dr. D, at line 21, acknowledges the psychiatrist’s concern with this issue and, at lines 26–29, redelivers the news that this doctor does not think the patient has a “consistent major depression.” At this point, the patient produces a most quiet and minimal acknowledgment.

Excerpt (27) illustrates how there may be disjunctiveness in medical clinics when, in the course of diagnosis, something is proposed as news and as news of a particular kind.14 Dr. D’s delivery appears as another instance of problematic presumptiveness. Though she asked what the psychiatrist had told the doctor, Ms. E appears not to accept that report and claims to have depression after the psychiatrist is quoted as saying that depression is not an “important part” of her illness. Nor does Ms. E affiliate with the doctor’s characterizations that the report was “good news,” perhaps because she was very anxious to “get out” of her job, and the psychiatrist’s report would mean that she does not have a diagnosable condition to justify disability or leave. Whatever the reasons, Ms. E’s silences and talk indicate strong although subtle resistance to the
psychiatrist’s report and Dr. D’s interpretations. Whether the psychiatrist’s report is to be accepted and just what kind of news it represents are left interactionally unsettled.

Episodes in which participants are contentious about the newsworthiness of some report or whether it is good or bad news are rare although far from absent in my data (see excerpts [10] and [25]). However, even when a deliverer and recipient converge on newsworthiness and valence, as they do in the bulk of instances, it is possible to appreciate that such convergence is nuanced, takes work, and therefore that bad and good news do not represent something fixed and existing objectively in the outside world. Rather, in progressive increments of interactively produced talk, participants propose and do or do not ratify such news, making the sense of objectivity an indigenous accomplishment. In and as their methods-in-detail (Garfinkel, 1988) of informing and responding, participants accord events-in-the-world their in situ newsworthy status and their in vivo valence as good or bad. Across the panorama of conditions that affect whether some event-in-the-world becomes good or bad news is an accomplished endogenous orderliness that resides in actual interactional practices.

NOTES

1 Because Leslie may already know about Geoff Haldan’s gout, this may be marking as news not the existence of the condition per se but that his “sickness” (line 5) on this occasion is the gout.

2 I draw on both Sacks’s (1992b, p. 573) and Jefferson’s (1981, pp. 62-64) discussions of sequencing in the delivery of news.

3 Bergmann (1987/1993, p. 95) argued that preannouncements of news are the basis for gossip proposals; what distinguishes the latter is an implicit moral stance toward the gossip subject.

4 As Bergmann (1992, p. 150) argued, the litotes, as a rhetorical form, is a device that participants in interaction can use for hinting or alluding to “delicate, touchy, or embarrassing matters.”

5 In subsequent talk, Sally and Judy continue to evaluate Vickie’s situation with her mother as not so bad. Sally tells a story about a friend of Vickie’s whose father collapsed from a brain tumor and “died the next day.” Judy’s response to this story is “I mean there’s reason to be upset on her part but there’s also reason to feel very lucky.” Then Sally suggests that Vickie’s mother had done everything in life that she reasonably was “going to do.” And so on. The continuing theme is Vickie’s inappropriate response to the situation. That this mutually critical attitude toward Vickie evolves from a series of announcements that could be taken as bad news concerning the mother and Vickie’s state may have to do with a feature of gossiping that Bergmann (1987/1993) elucidated: gossip producers themselves are in a morally compromised position. Consequently, approaching gossip is something that is done ambivalently. Here, Sally’s use of bad news allows for a sympathetic uptake as well as the skeptical one Judy employs. When Sally, having perhaps cued Judy that a skeptical stance is warranted (as through her preannouncement), also ratifies Judy’s skepticism, movement is made toward a full-fledged gossip episode.

6 Others had already been announced: two beds had been delivered but only one mattress, and the new beds had caused some “overcrowding of furniture.” See Jefferson’s (1988, p. 427) discussion of the “mattress” excerpt.

7 Heritage (1984, p. 339, footnote 13) referred to terms such as really? yer kidding, did you, and so forth as “assertions of ritualized disbelief” that systematically advance the news delivery.

8 For further, detailed consideration of the distinctions drawn between news receipts and newsmarks, and especially explication of prosodic features distinguishing the two forms, see Local (1996).

9 As Goodwin (1986, p. 214) observed, assessments can be done “with sounds such as ‘Ah:::‘ whose main function seems to be the carrying of an appropriate intonation contour.”

10 Similarly, Local (1996, pp. 188-189) examined an excerpt in which a teller, following a good-news receipt (arrowed), proposes to elaborate on her prior news announcement with an account:

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Rah:B.2JV(14):8

Jenny: I'm nna do s'm spaghetti n ( ) n eh : meatballs
       f'eatuh this lot now,
Vera: → Oh lovely.
Jenny: Cz they didn't have u only had fish finger's n chips fuh dinnuh,
Vera: "ee Yes."
Jenny: B'thuz no'thing in to w'an =
Jenny: =Mahrs' n s penchi's shelves w' e l e a : u h
Vera: [Well they wouldn't stay fer a meal.]
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Following the account, Vera produces a minimal response ("ee Yes.") and no further topical talk, thereby indicating "that her Oh lovely was indeed designed not to be a larger topic-extending turn" (Local, 1996, p. 189).
REFERENCES


