The authors employ a conversation-analytic perspective, using a haphazard sample of recorded phone calls, to analyze the sequential placement of and turn construction manner for recipients' declinations of the request to participate in a telephone survey interview. Recipients regularly respond very early in the opening of the phone call, just after the "reason for the call" is stated. In constructing their declining turns, recipients are either polite (claiming the "bad timing" of the request or that they are "not interested"), or they are impolite, as when they abruptly hang up. Some declinations are without preamble and are minimalist, whereas others are expressive and contain some question about the nature or length of the interview. The distribution of declination types reflect interviewers' and recipients' coordinated social actions in their brief encounter. The authors explore implications for survey design and data quality.

Keeping the Gate
Declinations of the Request to Participate in a Telephone Survey Interview

DOUGLAS W. MAYNARD
Indiana University

NORA CATE SCHAEFFER
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Requests to participate in survey interviews have notoriously high rates of refusal. Given the practical concern this presents, it is surprising how little attention there is to the interactional dynamics of the initial, brief encounter that potentially results in an interview but so often does not. Our study, part of a broader inquiry into interaction in the survey interview (Maynard and Schaeffer 1996; Schaeffer and Maynard 1996), is an effort to understand these dynamics and has two main purposes. First, we have an interest in interactional structure and are intrigued with the orderliness exhibited in the opening portions of the telephone survey interview. Despite the brevity of particularly those encounters where no interview eventuates, they are dense with social action and organization (Schegloff 1986). We describe and analyze this organization according to conversational sequences that accomplish the activities of requesting, accepting, declining, identifying self and other, introducing closure, and terminating the encounter.

Our second purpose relates to the practical concerns of the survey enterprise. As we analyze actual, participant-produced orderliness in survey phone call openings, we will better comprehend the materials of which such phenomena as refusals consist. This is bound to be informative for survey design and interviewer training (Schaeffer 1991) and for understanding the effects of different types of recipients' responses on the quality of data (Couper 1995).

Our data consist of declinations of an interviewer's request to participate in a telephone survey. A feature of these declinations is how they represent efforts at "gatekeeping" or determining whether there will be a "sustained episode of interaction" (Schegloff 1986:113) between a survey interviewer/caller and a call recipient. In declining to participate, call recipients are closing the social gate between themselves and the interviewer and whatever survey enterprises the interviewer represents. They may do so, as Goffman (1963:105) argues, for a variety of reasons having to do with the claims that can be made on persons who make themselves interactionally available to others. We avoid speculating about such reasons and instead, by discussing the placement of and turn construction manner for declining actions, attempt to explore recipients' actual gatekeeping work.

AUTHORS' NOTE: Our thanks to Robert M. Cradock for valuable research assistance. This article was first presented at the annual meetings of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Chicago, May 1993. For valuable suggestions, we are grateful to participants in this and other conferences where the article has been presented, to the anonymous reviewers of this journal, and to Jeremy Freese for written comments on an earlier version. Support for this project was supplied by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Center for Survey Methods Research, through Joint Statistical Agreement (50-45).

SOCIOLOGICAL METHODS & RESEARCH, Vol. 26 No. 1, August 1997 34-79
© 1997 Sage Publications, Inc.
First, as discussed below, declinations occur in particular places, either earlier or later in the unfolding interaction. We concentrate on earlier declinations, which display the basis for recipients’ relatively immediate decision to halt progression toward commencement of the interview. Second, we examine a difference between polite and impolite declinations and also distinguish between those that are perfunctory or minimal and those that exhibit particular concerns about what is being requested and are thus expressive. Together, these turn construction and placement activities show aspects of the social organization of gatekeeping actions in relation to the survey interview.

DATA AND METHODS

The data in this report are tape recordings and transcripts of conversations between interviewers and recipients of the interviewers’ calls. The tapes were collected at the Letters and Science Survey Center (LSSC) at the University of Wisconsin. The calls we analyze can be best described as a haphazard sample or collection of calls: Interviewers were asked to tape-record all calls on their shift, and all declinations recorded during the data collection period were included in our collection. We examine primarily those calls that result in no interview for the present. Some declinations are only temporary; recipients may permit a later interview. We do not have information on which calls were followed up and how many were ultimately successful. Because of this, we do not know whether any given declination was a firm refusal or a temporary avoidance. Our interest is in how declinations are interactively organized regardless of participants’ intentions. While our collection includes both initial calls and callbacks (not related to the initial calls), we concentrate here on the initial calls. Our corpus of such initial declinations is 53, and the analyses in this article are based on scrutiny of all 53 cases.

To illustrate how declinations contrast with calls in which an interview does transpire, our analysis begins with an instance in which there is a granting of the request to participate. The social actions involved in securing an interview are a topic in their own right; here, we lay the basis for a more extensive comparative study between grantings and declinations. The bulk of this article is occupied only with the latter.

Our analytic orientation derives from the sociological subfields of ethnography and conversation analysis (Maynard and Clayman 1991; Maynard and Marlaire 1992). Briefly, our strategy is to identify patterns of interaction according to participants’ own displayed meanings, categories, and understandings. Whether some phenomenon is a “request,” “declination,” or “answer” is not resolved by referring to an independent body of theory or a list of necessary features but by examining how the participants exhibit the phenomenon’s features in their actual ongoing behavior and conduct (Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Heritage 1984:259; Maynard 1984:18-21). In other words, while it might be possible to define abstractly a request as any utterance asking someone to do something, such a definition does not exhaust the ways in which interactants perform and comprehend the task of requesting. As will be seen, call recipients regularly treat an interviewer’s self-identifying reason for calling (RFC) as a request to participate in an interview, and at this point (after the RFC), they launch a declination. Our analysis is warranted, then, not by a model or definition of requesting, granting, and declining that stipulates their necessary features but rather by what participants do to issue and understand these recognizable actions.

We transcribed these calls according to conventions in the field of conversation analysis (Jefferson 1974). The transcription excerpts in this article use these conventions, which are listed and described in Appendix 1.

REQUESTS TO PARTICIPATE: A SEQUENCE OF ACTION

We are using two terms—request and declination—that require explication. As noted, we mean to ground these terms in the analyses and characterizations that participants in these exchanges themselves make. For instance, our phrase “request to participate” (or “request,” for short) derives from the way that call recipients deal with an interviewer’s opening gambit.
now; some recipients genuinely mean to and do accept a return call and request, but others use such declinations as covers for or polite ways of refusing to participate altogether. Finally, our term *declinations* should be understood as shorthand for *projected declination* because declination of the request to participate is an achievement and regularly the outcome of practical interactive work rather than a unilateral declaration (but see the section on "impolite" declinations below). Sometimes, for instance, call recipients project declination by saying that they have little time for an interview or may even offer a declination that seems firm. Nevertheless, recipients may be persuaded to participate and may allow the interview to proceed to completion. So initial and projected declinations may result in eventual de facto grantings of the request to participate.

Although our interest here is primarily in declinations of the request to participate, we consider these to be part of a requesting sequence consisting of two parts—the first being the request to participate and the second being a turn in which the recipient grants or declines the request. As noted, how grantings occur are features of the ongoing interview is a topic in its own right. Provisionally we can note that they involve some sort of "go ahead" signal(s) on the part of recipients (see arrows in excerpt 3 below). The following excerpt takes up after the interviewer has introduced himself, checked the call recipient's telephone number, and randomly selected the "man of the household" (who is the call recipient and who has stayed on the line so far) as the interview target:

(3) LSSC/Nov. 26/Call A1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MR:</th>
<th>INT:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>What is this in regard to=</td>
<td>=hh sure hh uh&gt;like I said I'm calling&lt; from the University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>of Wisconsin and we conduct national public opinion studies all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>the time on a variety of topics hh&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>=(Is it gonna be)&lt; long? or-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uh well it dep- it depends from person to person, the shortest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>interviews I've done have taken about ten minutes but (.) a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>lotta people talk longer bercause they enjoy the=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>[(on the phone? Or-)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>=questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, our analytic vocabulary is meant to conform to participants' own terminology and understandings of their actions. Also, we use the term *declination* rather than *refusal*, which in survey research refers to a final determination that the recipient is not going to participate. In excerpt (1), for instance, the recipient is at least declining participation
MR: On the phone you mean?
INT: .h Yes
(0.4)
MR: → Okay go ahead
INT: Okay yeah d- we don’t come to your house we don’t have any
[ - idc- that’s- ]
MR: → [() you ] wanna do it right now let’s do it
INT: Okay terrific .hh Awl::right and before we begin I want to
assure you ...

In this excerpt, after asking for and receiving some explanation about the survey, the recipient says “go ahead” (first arrow) and, after the interviewer provides another component of explanation, seems to urge the interviewer to get on with it (second arrow).

EARLIER VERSUS LATER DECLINATIONS

Not all declinations of the request to participate occur at the same point in these telephone encounters. Approximately half of our total of 53 occur earlier (28), and half occur later (25). To appreciate what we mean by earlier and later, it is useful to consult Appendix 2, which contains the sequence of Computer-Aided Telephone Interview (CATI) screens that the interviewer reads. When recipients place their declinations later, it may be after the phone number verification question (2 of 25 or 8%), the statement of needing to select an adult man or woman in the household (8/32%), the announcement of having selected the man or woman (10/40%), the statement about confidentiality (1/4%), or the question about permission to tape record the interview (4/16%). We can observe that later declinations occur after a call recipient, through the interviewer’s statements and questions, has had an opportunity to hear more about what participation requires in terms of giving demographic information, and about the capacity in which one will be answering subsequent questions. We will return to this point.

Early declinations show very definite patterning. They are positioned at one of two points in the opening of a call and show something of how the request to participate is constructed and heard. Recall from Appendix 2 that when interviewers telephone potential respondents, they have before them a computer screen:

(4) Computer Screen

RESIDENTIAL VERIFICATION SCREEN

Hello, I’m calling from the University of Wisconsin as part of our national public opinion study. We are trying to reach people at their home telephone numbers? Is this a residential number?

1. YES : residential only
2. YES : but also non-residential
3. NO : non-residential
7. DON’T KNOW

Early declinations occur before or immediately after interviewers can finish this screen. Here are two examples of what we are calling early declinations:

(5) LSSC124
1 FR: Hello
2 INT: ((tch)) Ah Hello: this is Greg Johnson calling from the
3 University of Wisconsin as part of our national public opinion
4 study? (.) .hh[hh ]
5 FR: [We’re] not interested thank you very *much*=
6 INT: =O::kay say ma’am? ma’am .hh Um if I caught you at a bad
7 FR: (((hang up)))
8 INT: ti:me

(6) LSSC146
1 FR: Hello?
2 INT: Hello I’m Joseph Lewi:is calling from the University of
3 Wisconsin? as: part of our national public opinion study? .hh
4 Um we’re not [tryin- ]
5 FR: [I’m sor]ty we- we don’t have the time right now.:=
6 INT: =Oh really? Okay we’ll try you back thank you.
7 (0.5)
8 FR: (((hangup)))
9 INT: [Bye bye ]
In both episodes, a recipient declines participation almost immediately after the RFC utterance, “we’re doing a national public opinion study.” This is at lines 3 through 4 in (5) and at lines 2 through 3 in (6).

A related type of early declination nevertheless occurs at a slightly different point. Excerpt (1) is an example; in it, the interviewer is able to ask the residential verification question at lines 4 through 5. Notice, however, that the recipient pauses (line 6), replies to this question (“Uh yes,” line 7), and then moves to decline the request to participate. This follows a pattern identified by Sacks (1987), in which there are two questions asked of a recipient, who answers them in reverse order. Contiguous to the second question (here concerning residence) is its answer; the second answer (about not having “any time”) deals with the interviewer’s prior “national public opinion study” declaration or RFC, after which recipients may decline more immediately, as in excerpts (5) and (6).

Interviewers and recipients do give evidence of parsing the opening turn into smaller components than those turns that include name plus institutional identification plus RFC. For instance, in excerpt (6) above, INT raises intonation on both his name and the “University of Wisconsin,” which may be a way of soliciting an acknowledgment or other item that would encourage continuation. While FR does not talk at either of those points, the recipient in excerpt (7) below does respond at least after INT’s self-identification.

(7) LSSC116

1 FR: Hello?   
2 (0.6)  
3 INT: Hi:::  (0.2) I’m-[ ]  
4 FR:  [Hi. ]   
5 (0.5)  
6 INT: [I’m-]  
7 FR: [Hel-]  
8 (0.6)  
9 FR: Hello?  
10 INT: Hi: Can you hear me okay?  
11 (0.2)  
12 FR: Yes  
13 INT: OH: Okay. hh I’m (.) Karen Smith and I’m calling    [You’re] who?  
14 FR: (0.5)  
15 INT: Karen Smith?  
16 FR: . Oh you just called a few minutes ago.  
17 (1.0)  
18 INT: [Oh]  
19 FR: [Re]garding Penney’s?  
20 (0.5)  
21 INT: No:: I’m calling from the University o’ Wisconsin.  
22 (0.8)  
23 INT: And (.) we’re doing a national (0.4) public opinion study?  
24 (0.5)  
25 FR: Oh no I don- I’m not interested.  
26 INT: OH: Okay=  
27 FR: =Thank you  
28 INT: Alright [bye bye. ]  
29 FR: [Bye bye.]  

That is, FR at lines 17 and 20 responds to the interviewer’s name by claiming recognition on the basis of it. The interviewer corrects the recipient’s proposed identification of her, as being from “Penney’s,” by offering the identification that she is “from the University of Wisconsin” (line 22). At line 23, the recipient waits for more talk from the interviewer before doing or saying anything, but recipients sometimes will simply say yes or otherwise acknowledge this self-identifying utterance (see line 5, arrowed, below):

(8) LSSC117

1 FR: Hello?  
2 (0.5)  
3 INT: h Hh: (0.2) I’m Karen Smith and ↓ I’m (.) calling from the University of Wisconsin?  
4  
5 FR: → [Yes?]  
6 INT: [hhh ] And we’re doing a national public opinion study. hh  
7 ( )  
8 INT: and we’re trying to r-[ ]  
9 FR: [I’m just] on my way out the door.  
10 INT: [OH: okay ]  
11 FR: [Thanks for] calling.  
12 INT: I’m sorry  
13 FR: (((hang up)))
Again, the INT in this excerpt produces her institutional identification (line 4) with upward intonation, and FR places her acknowledgment just there. Hence, interviewers and recipients can parse the interviewer’s opening turn into a series of discrete components. Rather than declining after just any of these components, recipients place their declining turns at a precise lateral point in an utterance series. In all of our initial calls, recipients’ earliest declinations occur after the interviewer has proffered the reason for the call.

“ORDINARY" PHONE CALL OPENINGS: GATEKEEPING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

To repeat and summarize, declinations occur when recipients come to know the reason for the call, which is a definable place within survey interview call openings. Most often, this means that declinations do not happen any earlier than after the utterance, “we’re doing a national public opinion study,” and approximately half of our declinations occur just there. The high number of earlier declinations has been observed in other research (Oksenberg, Coleman, and Cannell 1986; Smit and Dijksstra 1991; Groves and Couper 1992) but without precise characterization of where and how, during the interaction, such declinations actually happen. Our argument is that only at this point does the interviewer’s turn become understandable as a particular type of request.

To fully explicate this argument, we wish to consider how participants structure the openings of phone calls generally, for three interrelated reasons. First, by reviewing the opening of ordinary phone calls, we shall be able to characterize more adequately the position at which these early declinations occur. This is because, second, for those who engage in a survey interview, it is not an ordinary phone call, at least in the sense of containing the quotidian inquiries, reportings, arrangement makings, and the like, which regularly occur among acquainted or related parties. Yet, that the survey openings differ from these more ordinary calls is something that emerges, in part, out of the same social interactional material as any phone call does (Schegloff 1986). Therefore, the declinations and openings of phone calls in which they transpire both deploy and depart from the routines of regular telephone openings, and an understanding of the latter serves at least as “brush clearing” for “particular” phone calls (Schegloff 1979:27), such as those involving survey interviews. Finally, as Schegloff (1986) argues, among the most important issues that participants manage in the openings of their phone call encounters, whether “ordinary” or unusual, bureaucratic or intimate, or involving friends, acquaintances, or strangers, are those of identification and recognition. In working to identify and recognize one another, co-negotiators make crucial decisions about gatekeeping or whether to grant access to someone who is seeking their aid in a particular endeavor.

To begin, we examine an ordinary telephone call. While “nothing much seems to be going on here,” as Schegloff (1986:114) remarks, we can nevertheless appreciate the utterly routine nature of this episode as an achievement produced from a structured set of possibilities.

(9) Schegloff (1986:115)\(^{13}\)

00 Ring
01 Jim: Hallo,
02 Bonnie: Hello Jim?
03 Jim: Yeah,
04 Bonnie: ’s Bonnie.
05 Jim: Hi
06 Bonnie: Hi, how are yuh
07 Jim: Fine, how’re you
08 Bonnie: Oh, okay I guess
09 Jim: Oh okay.
10 Bonnie: Uhm (0.2) what are you doing New Year’s Eve.

The core opening sequences Schegloff (1986) describes are four. First is the summons-answer sequence, directed to making interaction possible for the two parties (caller and recipient). Above, this is represented in the ring of the phone (line 00) as a summons and Jim’s answering “Hallo” (line 01). Next is the identification/recogniton sequence, where the parties make their identities evident. Because the recipient’s initial “hallo” presents a voice sample for the caller to inspect, identification/recogniton can be of immediate relevance at
the first turn of talk, but the overt sequence occupies lines 02 through 05. If the caller does recognize the recipient from the initial sample, she should display that recognition in the next turn, as Bonnie does at line 2. Subsequent to such a turn, which reciprocally provides the caller’s voice sample to the recipient, it is possible for the recipient to show recognition of the caller (Jim might have done so at 03 with “Yeah, Bonnie?”). Instead, Jim only confirms his identity at 03, whereupon his caller self-identifies (04).

Greeting sequences are interwoven with identification/recognition, for it is through greetings that identification/recognition is claimed or affirmed. In excerpt (9), after Bonnie self-identifies, Jim greets her (05) and then receives a return greeting (06). Following Goffman (1963), Schegloff (1986) notes that greetings help put participants into a “state of ratified mutual participation” such that “the talk can proceed” (p. 129).

The fourth component of telephone openings is the “how-are-you” sequence, which can develop extendedly if one of the parties, in responding to the question, issues something other than a relatively neutral “fine.” Regularly, the sequence involves a reciprocal exchange between the parties, as at lines 06 through 09 in excerpt (9). On completion of the how-are-you sequence, the parties have positioned themselves to start the first topic of talk. This occurs at line 10, which appears to be a preinvitation or inquiry that helps ascertain whether to offer an invitation subsequently.

In all, participants build the routine character of phone call openings through sequences and the series of turns comprising them, although participants can preempt the sequences or turns to proceed to variously urgent “tellables,” topics, or reasons for calling.

GATEKEEPING IN CALLS REGARDING THE SURVEY INTERVIEW

In survey telephone calls, participants implement two of the four core sequences. In line with ordinary phone calls, there is a summons-answer sequence, consisting of a ringing phone and the recipient’s answer. After that answer is an initiation of the identification-recognition sequence. As in ordinary conversation, this occupies the second turn of talk, or the caller’s first turn. To reiterate, the identification-recognition sequence is of central importance in the openings of phone calls because of its generic relevance to parties’ gatekeeping decisions about whom to further engage in interaction (Schegloff 1979:71). In ordinary phone calls, recipients are expected to show recognition of a caller, either from the caller’s voice sample or caller’s self-identification. In our survey calls, an interviewer’s offering of a personal name is constituted not as asking for personal recognition but as part of a stream of talk providing for who it is that is calling in a nevertheless institutional or organizational capacity. In this respect, the recipient’s claiming to recognize “Karen Smith” in excerpt (7) (lines 17-20) is not only a substantive mistake (Karen Smith is not from Penney’s) but a sequential one as well. That is, the interviewer ends up presenting her institutional identification (line 22) as a correction to the recipient’s claim of recognition rather than as part of her (the interviewer’s) self-identifying turn, as would have happened had that turn proceeded to another completion point (as occurs in excerpt 8, for instance). Put still differently, while the recipient in excerpt (7) attempts a show of recognition at a point that would be relevant in more ordinary conversation, in this call such a show rather gets in the way of the interviewer displaying her institutional identification.

The import of this is that at a very early point with these calls, recipients can obtain a sense of what type of call it is simply because interviewers, in the second turn of talk and just after the call recipient’s answer, self-identify in a way that only asks for recognition in a relatively impersonal way—recognition not of the person who is calling but of the institution or organization (or type thereof) under whose auspices the call is initiated. That recognition of this identification still can be an issue is evident in the following excerpt. This is a callback—contact has already been made with this particular recipient—and although it is not part of our main collection of initial calls, we include it here to illustrate our point:

(10) LSSC155
1  FR: "Hello."
2  
3  INT: Uh hello may I speak with _L_ottie please?
FR: (tch) Who’s callin?
INT: hh uh this is Greg Sanders calling from the University of Wisconsin?
FR: From where?
INT: hh The University of Wisconsin in Madison Wisconsin.
FR: Kay: speaking?=
INT: =Oh::kay .hh well () on an earlier call to this household we selected you () hh as the adult with- that we would like to speak with for our national public opinion study.

When the interviewer asks to speak to a specific member of the household (line 3), the recipient asks the interviewer to self-identify, whereupon he produces a standard version of his name and institutional affiliation (lines 5-6). Subsequent to a silence (line 7) that may indicate a problem of recognition, FR asks him (line 8) to repeat the institutional identification, which he does (line 9). There is a longer silence (line 10), and then FR acknowledges (line 11) that she is the “Lottie” for whom he asked in the first place. Thus, the recipient’s own self-identification and furthering of the interaction are produced as contingent on her being able to inspect the interviewer’s institutional affiliation; allowing the call to proceed would seem to indicate hesitant acceptance/recognitions of the proffered identity.17

If recipients do inspect the interviewer’s self-identification, it suggests that they could immediately move to close or terminate the call. At this point (after an interviewer’s self-identification), recipients are under no particular obligation to continue, as they might be in other circumstances. When parties are acquainted and personally identifiable to one another, as Schegloff (1979:26) and Goffman (1963) have both observed, they may be required to enter into interaction with one another without any further reason.14 That basis for an interviewer to expect a recipient to feel compelled to continue has been removed by the time that the interviewer has produced and the call recipient has heard the self-identification (name plus institution). And yet, interesting enough, we have no occurrences of termination occurring just there.

When the interviewer’s self-identification is not at issue (as in almost all of our data), it is coupled, as we have said, with an utterance that provides a “reason” or purpose of the call: “as part of our national public opinion study.” As compared with ordinary phone calls, this means that interviewers regularly move into first topic or the reason for the call in a way that shows the other two core opening sequences—“how are you” and greetings—to be not relevant for the type of call these are constructed to be (Schegloff 1986:141). That is, in the survey calls, interviewers self-identify in a way that marks the call at an early point (turn 2), which is the caller’s first opportunity to talk as involving a “business” rather than personal matter (Schegloff 1986:122; Whalen and Zimmerman 1987). In short, subsequent to the self-identification, interviewers may immediately produce a characterization of the particular matter at hand, and it is after this RFC that recipients overwhelmingly place earlier declinations. This is true even for instances of early “hangups,” in which the recipient unilaterally terminates the call:

(11) LSSC205
FR: Hello?
INT: Hello. My name is Bill Collins and I’m calling from the University of Wisconsin as part of our: national public opinion study .hh we aren’t selling anything at all it’s purely academic public opinion [research
FR: "((hangup))"
INT: .hhh and hello ma’am.

Unlike some calls (see excerpts 6, 7, and 8 above), this interviewer does not pause or upwardly intone subcomponents of the scripted introduction. Rather, INT moves quickly to the reason for the call and starts to add an unscripted explication of the RFC when the call recipient hangs up. The explication (lines 4-5) repeats “public opinion” from the RFC (lines 3-4), and FR’s hangup therefore seems to respond to that particular component of INT’s opening.

That our earliest terminations and opening up of closings occur at or just after the RFC is due, then, to two interrelated reasons. First, what we are calling the request to participate is probably not hearably complete until this point. That such a request is hearably complete at this point is evidenced, as noted earlier, in such replies to the interviewer’s opening, as occur in excerpt (1). Recall that MR’s declining
a request to be interviewed. Second, we might conjecture that, insofar as one's duties as a member of the public—or citizen, for short—and as a research subject are diffuse, ill-defined, or heavily volitional, as compared with those duties that accrue to being summoned into interaction as a friend or relative, the social motivation to continue the encounter is very weak. Finally, using this analysis of earlier declinations, we wish to comment on those that are produced "later." We said that the later declinations are spread across questions having to do with such things as whether the interviewer has reached a home or residence, has reached the correct phone number, can randomly select and speak to a particular member of the household, and so on. These questions appear to make increasingly visible the anonymity with which the recipient is being approached. Such anonymity may provide assurance that the recipient's answers to survey questions would be confidential. On the other hand, it may mean that as these preliminary statements and questions proceed, the recipient's identity for this encounter as a citizen is reinforced with other abstract qualities that loosen rather than tighten the social motivation to grant the request for participation.

TURN CONSTRUCTION:
POLITE AND IMPOLITE DECLINATIONS

Our analysis shows two categories of declinations of the request to participate in a survey interview: Declinations can be done politely or impolitely. By polite declinations, we refer to devices by which recipients exhibit their action as dispreferred and observe the propriety of conversation closings (Schegloff and Sacks 1973) or systematically exiting a conversation. The "preferencing" and "differencing" of actions in conversation has to do with the systematics by which participants fashion their utterances depending on what from a set of alternative responses they employ. Preferred responses are done immediately, often in short turns or at the beginning of longer ones, while dispreferred ones are delayed by silence or by mitigating components, such as accounts, excuses, preferred responses, repair sequences, and the like (Heritage 1984; Schegloff 1988). For instance, we know that participants accept invitations, agree, and deny accusations in a pre-
ferred manner, while they reject invitations, disagree, and admit accusations in a dispreferred mode (Atkinson and Drew 1979; Davidson 1984; Pomerantz 1984; Sacks 1987). Recall excerpt (1) and notice how MR performs his declination (arrowed below). We already observed that the declination occurs after MR answers INT’s residential verification question. Accordingly, an “agreeing” answer appears early in MR’s turn, contiguous with its question, and the “disagreeing” declination is deferred to a lateral position and is not contiguous with the talk (the RFC) to which it responds (Wooton 1981; Sacks 1987). Furthermore, MR pauses before talking (line 6), apologizes (“I’m sorry”) after his answer to the residence question and before declining, and gives a reason for not participating (lines 7-8) rather than using a negative or rejecting term (“no”). All of these features are indicative of a dispreferred response:

(12) Excerpt (1) LSSC121

1 MR: Hello.
2 INT: .hh Ah hello; I’m Greg Sanders calling from the University of Wisconsin .hh as: part of our national public opinion study? .hh and we are trying to reach people at their home telephone numbers: is: this a residential number?
3 (0.8)
4 MR: → Uh yes it is but I’m sorry I d- I don’t have any time to (.)
5 answer any of your questions: [right now]
6 INT: [Oh : : : ]kay well we’d like to try you back at another time then would that be alright?
7 MR: That’d be fine.
8 INT: O::kay well thank you very much [sir. ]
9 MR: [Thanks.] Bye bye.

Polite declinations, then, exhibit the dispreferred status of the rejecting action they embody. When recipients decline politely, that also represents a first move toward the closing of their phone call encounter (Schegloff and Sacks 1973). It presents an opportunity for systematically and mutually discontinuing the encounter between interviewer and call recipient. Above, INT acknowledges (at line 9) MR’s bad timing claim, asks for permission to call back, which MR grants (line 11), and thanks his recipient. MR returns the thanks (line 13), and then there is a “terminal” exchange: the “bye byes” at lines 13 through 14.

Polite declinations fit two subcategories (bad timing and not interested) that we discuss below. Impolite declinations are those in which recipients, rather than employing turns of talk that exhibit the dispreferred status of their rejecting actions and enacting procedures for mutually and systematically closing and terminating the call, engage in activities that unilaterally disable pursuit of the interview then and there. The most straightforward way of disabling pursuit of the interview is to hang up:39

(13) LSSC276

1 FR: Hello?
2 INT: h tch Uh: hello: ma’am my name’s Edward Price? a:n I’m calling from the University of Wisconsin? as part of our national public opinion study? .hh uh we’re tryin to reach people: at their home numbers (.). Is this a residence ma’am?
3 (4.4)
4 FR: (((hang up))
5 INT: <Don’t hang up on me.>
6
After the call is over, interviewers often complain in a manner that exhibits the objectionable and violative nature of such acts (line 8).

Impolite declinations do not always occur early. For example, in one of our calls (LSSC172), the interviewer was able to work his way with a female recipient to randomly select “the youngest man of the household” as the respondent. When he came on the line, his only utterance was “hello.” He listened while the interviewer read the computer screen all the way through the confidentiality statement and hung up in the midst of INT saying, “Your participation in this is also voluntary.” In another call, a child first answered, gave the phone to an adult female (presumably the mother), who listened and responded to questions until INT asked about the number of adults over age 18 who lived in the household. After this there was no response. INT said, “Hello?” and a male voice was heard in the background saying, “Go hang it up.” After another “hello” from INT, the phone was hung up.

In this category of impolite, disabling declinations, we include such things as a recipient’s engaging in “silly talk.” In one call, the inter-
viewer got to the point with a male recipient of selecting the "oldest woman of the household" as the respondent and asked to speak with her. Eventually a different male voice came over the phone, the individual apparently using Japanese locutions (lines 3, 6) before preceding to nonsensical English queries (lines 10, 13):

(14) LSSC103

1 MR2: Hello.
2 INT: Hello?
3 MR2: Ah sah ((roughly, Japanese for "by the way"))
4 (1.2)
5 INT: Uh hi sir?
6 MR2: Moshi moshi ah no nay ((standard Japanese telephone greetings))
7 (1.4)
8 INT: Uh::::::
9 (0.5)
10 MR2: You like soup?
11 (0.4)
12 INT: Soup? Soup's pretty good?
13 MR2: Use gobbledy goop?
14 (0.5)
15 INT: HHHHH [*heh*] heh heh .hhh
16 MR2: [Bah ]
17 (1.0)
18 MR2: ((Hangup))
19 (2.0)
20 INT: .hhhh Uh:: owkay hhhhm

In the corpus, impolite declinations are rare, comprising 11% or 6 of the 53 calls, while 89% are polite declinations.

POLITE DECLINATIONS
BAD TIMING AND NOT INTERESTED

When recipients perform declinations politely, they give reasons for declining the request, usually employing two relatively abstract and formulaic devices that, as we have said, represent the first move toward closing the phone call encounter. A Type 1 device is one in which the recipient claims that the call comes at a bad time. A Type 2 device consists of a recipient's expression of disinterest. A feature of both types of polite declinations is that, although proposing to open up a closing, they nevertheless enable particular actions on the part of an interviewer that postpone closing and terminating the call.

TYPE I (BAD TIMING) DECLINATIONS

Excerpt (12) is an example of a bad timing declination. At lines 7 through 8, after his apology, MR reports, "I don't have any time to answer any of your questions right now." Recipients make such reports in a variety of ways and sometimes formulate the problem precisely as one of bad timing. In the example below, INT has reached a point of asking for permission to tape the interview (lines 1, 3). The recipient interrupts to claim that it is a bad time (arrowed):

(15) LSSC177

1 INT: . . . and your participation in this is also voluntary.
2 FR: [Okay ]
3 INT: . . . do we have [yer p- ]
4 FR: [Y'know ] (: ) I- I like what you're doing
5 INT: =Oh did I? O[kay . ]
6 FR: [Yeah . ]: I'm not going to be able to take the time
7 FR: to do it now.
8 INT: Okay . . . Uh:: when is a good time to reach you.
9 FR: tch Uh: hhhhh (0.3) usually maybe a little bit later on in the
10 evening?
11 INT: Okay uh we'll try back th::en.
12 FR: Òhhkay thanks
13 INT: Thanks
14 FR: Mm hm
15 INT: [Bye bye]
16 FR: [Bye bye]
17 FR: [Bye bye]

Thus, at line 9, INT asks when a "good time to reach" the recipient would be. If a recipient reports being "busy" (arrow 1 below), it may be the interviewer who formulates the problem as one of bad timing (arrow 2):
Type 1 (bad timing) declinations allow the interviewer to propose or request calling back. In excerpt (12), lines 9 through 10, the interviewer asks to “try you back” and receives permission from MR (line 11). In excerpts (15) and (16), interviewers propose a return call; there is a difference in the recipients’ responsiveness, however, as well as the way in which these two calls are terminated. In excerpt (15), FR appears to accept the proposal (line 13), and the participants proceed to a terminal exchange in lines 16 through 17, while in excerpt (16), the interviewer’s proposal receives no reply (silence, line 9), after which he thanks MR, who subsequently hangs up without a salutation. Accordingly, excerpts (15) and (16) illustrate how claims about the bad timing of an interviewer’s call may be more or less genuine. Indeed, the interviewer’s post-termination comment in (16) may be an ironic comment that indicates his orientation to the possibly disingenuous declination of his recipient.

**TYPE 2 (NOT INTERESTED) DECLINATIONS**

The overwhelming number of Type 2 declinations (12 of 18) are ones in which recipients claim that they “don’t think” they are interested, say that they are “not interested,” or otherwise overtly formulate disinterest.
Utterances that express disinterest can come in other forms, such as an apology plus some axiomatic assertion or accusation:

(19) LSSC248

1 MR: Hello?=
2 INT: =Hi: i'm Mary: calling from the University of Wisconsin? .hh as
3 part of our national public opinion study. .hh And we're try'in
4 to reach people at their home telephone num[b]ers
5 MR:  →  the wro:ng guy.
6 [I'm ] sorry you got
7 (0.5)
8 INT: Okay is this a: re[sid-]
9 MR:       [(Hangup)]
10 INT: Phh oh my-

The interviewer here nevertheless pursues the interaction by going to her scripted next question concerning the residential number (line 8), during which MR hangs up. Thus, she appeals the declination by invoking or performing the official protocol but is unsuccessful in her pursuit.

In rare instances, interviewers’ attempts to appeal not interested declinations may be successful, in that a recipient may, as a consequence of the interviewer’s effort, decide to participate in the interview. In our declinations corpus, an interviewer’s appeal may be met with reiterated versions of the initial declination (as in excerpt 18 above, and see excerpt 21 below). More regularly, the consequence of an interviewer’s appealing a not interested declination is that this act transforms an initial, relatively polite declination, which has the potential for occasioning systematic closure and termination, into a less civil exit from the call. Excerpts (17), (18), and (19) exhibit the pattern. In excerpt (17), FR hangs up toward the completion of INT’s appeal. In excerpt (18), MR, having declined twice, hangs up after INT completes his “not tryin’ to sell anything” appeal, and INT, by issuing a resummoning “hello,” has perhaps noted that there was no uptake. In excerpt (19), MR hangs up during INT’s pursuit of the question about having reached a residence. Across each of these instances, call recipients seem to hang up after listening to at least part of the appeal, in a way that suggests they were monitoring the interviewers’ activity for a reciprocating move toward closing the call. On discovering that no such move is underway, they hang up. In our category of not interested declinations, 12 of 18 calls are terminated in this way, suggesting that a large number of initially polite declinations are transformed into somewhat less than polite terminations because of the way that interviewers handle those declinations.

In only 1 instance out of 18 not interested declinations does the interviewer immediately accept the declination and allow for an undelayed, systematic progression toward the terminal exchange. Recall the latter part of excerpt (7):

(20) Excerpt (7) partial

1 INT: ...And () we're doing a national (0.4) public opinion study?
2 (0.5)
3 FR: Oh no i don- I'm not interested
4 INT: → OH: Okay=
5 FR: =Thank you
6 INT: Alright [bye bye. ]
7 FR: [Bye bye]

It may be that the use of “Oh no” at the beginning of FR’s declining turn, which is akin to the hesitating way in which participants initiate their vocalizations of preferred actions, may signal a degree of firmness in this dispreferred action to which INT is responsive (Wooton 1981:77-82).

Interviewers reject all 17 of our other not interested declinations with one or more appeals that attempt to persuade the recipient to participate. Above, we observed how this can result in a recipient hanging up after it is clear that the interviewer does not intend to reciprocate the move toward closing. More patient recipients may persevere in their actions until the interviewer accepts a declination. In the excerpt below, notice that the recipient produces three successive not interested declinations (arrowed). Each of these is preceded by at least a “well” and is built as a dispreferred action (although note that the latter two declinations are initiated in overlap with INT’s talk).

After each of the first two declinations (arrows 1 and 2), INT appeals the not interested claim (lines 19, 21-22, and 24-27, respectively):
TABLE 1: Types of Declinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type 1:</th>
<th>Type 2:</th>
<th>Impolite (Disabling)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bad Timing</td>
<td>Not Interested</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 (55)</td>
<td>18 (34)</td>
<td>6 (11)</td>
<td>53 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Percentages are in parentheses.

pursuit of the interview. Otherwise, 89% of declining recipients avow being too busy (Type 1, 55%) or not interested (Type 2, 34%).

That is, they give a reason as their declination, and in that way and others (hesitating, apologizing, etc.) exhibit the dispreferred character of their actions. Furthermore, polite declinations, according to type, occasion different interviewer responses. Bad timing declinations elicit requests or proposals from the interviewer to call back, while not interested declinations are usually rejected through interviewer appeals to make participation more attractive (Maynard and Schaeffer 1996).

**INTERPRETABILITY: MINIMALIST AND EXPRESSIVE DECLINATIONS**

When recipients decline the request to participate in a survey interview, they can do this in a manner that is more or less concretely susceptible of interviewer interpretation and diagnosis. Declinations that occur by themselves (i.e., with no questioning or declarative preamble on the part of a recipient) are minimalist in only allowing for interviewers’ interpretive guessing as to the basis for declination. In contrast to those of the minimalist kind, expressive declinations are those in which a recipient, before answering the request, exhibits some particular concern or reservation that interviewers address in their own next turn of talk. That is, the recipient asks a question that allows the interviewer to answer a specific concern the recipient has raised. However, interviewers go beyond just answering a recipient’s declination-precending questions or expressions of concern. In ways similar to their attempts to appeal an already produced declination, they propose to diagnose a problem in such expressions and provide a
TABLE 2: Interpretability of Declinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretability</th>
<th>Polite (Bad Timing)</th>
<th>Polite (Not Interested)</th>
<th>Impolite (Disabling)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimalist</td>
<td>22 (76)</td>
<td>14 (78)</td>
<td>6 (100)</td>
<td>42 (79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>7 (24)</td>
<td>4 (22)</td>
<td>0 (0)</td>
<td>11 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>29 (100)</td>
<td>18 (100)</td>
<td>6 (100)</td>
<td>53 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Percentages are in parentheses.

remedy that may convince the recipient to stay on the line and perhaps participate after all.24

Excerpt (3) is a call in which the recipient eventually grants an interview, and his inquiries are typical of calls wherein declinations rather than acceptances may eventuate. The recipient asks, “What is this in regard to?” “Is it gonna be long?” and “On the phone you mean?” The pattern involves INT providing positive or optimistic answers to the recipient’s questions. In answering “What is this in regard to?” he says that they “conduct national public opinion studies all the time on a variety of topics,” thereby suggesting that the request is a regular matter involving no particularly mentionable content. This may imply that other recipients routinely comply with the request and that the interview involves nothing objectionable. In dealing with the question about how long the interview would be, INT gives a numerical estimate for a lower boundary (“ten minutes”) and characterizes upward departures from this boundary not in numerical terms but according to an enticing reason for their occurrence: “people talk longer because they enjoy the questions.”

All six of the impolite declinations in our data are minimalist, while nearly one-fourth of our polite declinations are expressive or subject to prior interpretation by the interviewer. On the other hand, this also means that polite declinations are massively minimalist. Table 2 shows that approximately three-quarters of polite Type 1 and Type 2 declinations are minimalist, and when these are added to the impolite ones, the overall proportion of minimalist declinations is nearly 80%.

That is, most of our declinations are like excerpts (1), (5), (6), (8), (11), (12), (13), (17), and (18), in which recipients decline without a querying preamble. As an example of a polite, expressive declination,

in the next excerpt a Type 1 or bad timing declination is preceded with a question about how long the survey will take (see arrowed utterance).

(22) LSSC159

1 INT: Okay uh: this is Greg Sanders calling from the University of
2 Wisconsin is: part of our national public opinion study?
3 .hh[hh ]
4 FR: [Uh huh]
5 INT: And we’re trying to reach people at their home telephone
6 num-bers is: this is a residential number?
7 FR: .hhh Yc:.s?
8 INT: An: to be sure that I reached the number I dialed is this (.)
9 are[a code ]
10 FR: → [This is-] this is some type of survey that’s gonna take
11 a while? or hheh [hh ]
12 INT: [Y:.]eh ah it- it takes about ten ta fifteen
13 minutes [hh di- di- ]
14 FR: [Well I’m-] I’m just got home from work and I’m
15 really tired, really hungry an[:d eh heh heh]
16 INT: [O : k a y ] hh .
17 ()
18 FR: [We’d prefer] another number.
19 INT: [Uh:m we-]
20 INT: Yeah. Um well, weh we’d like to try you back . . .

At lines 12 through 13, the interviewer answers the timing question, after which FR produces a declination (lines 14-15, 18). Comparing this episode to excerpt (3), we can notice that the interviewer formulates the anticipated duration optimistically, using what would be a lower boundary for this particular study.

As mentioned, recipients express concerns about the purpose, time, and place of the interview. They also display other apprehensions. In excerpt (23) below, the recipient’s “we do not like to give out this kind of information sir” (arrowed, line 20) gives a reason for nonparticipation that clearly formulates the gatekeeping concerns of this recipient or her household:

(23) LSSC180

1 INT: Uh hello ma’am, my name is Edward Price an: I’m calling from
2 the University of Wisconsin as part of our national public
opinion study? hh (tch) Uh we are tryin' a reach people at their home numbers, is this a residence?

FR: Yeah

INT: O'kay. hh and to be sure that I didn't misdial then this is three nine seven two one four nine?

FR: Yeah

INT: Okay. hh uh we want the results of our study to represent the opinions of people all over the country so we need to select one adult to speak with in your household. hhh and just so we can make our selection, scientifically and random tly we first need to know how many adults (. ) eighteen or older live there?

FR: Uh...

INT: → We do not like to give out this kind of information sir.

FR: Uh pardon well all w- (. ) like I said ma'am, it's just an academic study r- that's being [done] by the University of=

INT: =Wisconsin?

FR: =[Yes ]

INT: And we're not asking any personal type questions we're basically just after your opinions?

FR: Yes=

INT: =Uh and it is all of course confidential.

FR: [ ( . )]

INT: [Uh the] the only reason we ask how many adults live there is because we have to gow (. ) and get a random sample so we get a- (. ) bout a equal number of men and women so: we don't ask for names or anything.

FR: No (0.4) But I'm sure- my husband and I don't like to give out that information.

INT: Okay you can't just (. ) tell me how many (. ) people live there so we can just pick one? and then we can just try the questions?

FR: No I'm sorry.

INT: Okay. (0.2) Have a good day.

FR: (hang up)

The interviewer appeals the recipient's suggested reason by submitting that the sought-after information is not "personal" (lines 26-27), is "of course confidential" (line 30), that the question regarding the number of adults in the household has to do with random sampling (lines 33-34), and that names are not needed (lines 35-36). Subsequent to these appeals, the recipient provides another version of her concern (lines 38-39), which the interviewer also appeals (lines 41-43). FR follows at line 44 with a firm declination and at line 46 produces the close-implicative expression of gratitude, whereupon the call is brought to termination.

AMB IG UITY AND PRE SUMPTIVENESS
IN MINIMALIST DECLINATIONS

In the polite declinations in our data, fully 77% of them are minimalist (36 of 47), while only 23% are expressive (11 of 47). Thus, not counting the impolite, immediately disabling declinations such as hang ups, interviewers are most often still presented with formulaic declinations that, in terms of the recipient's actual concerns or basis for declining to be interviewed, are relatively ambiguous (offering at least dual interpretations of their meaning) and presumptive (containing inferences about what the request to participate involves). To explicate this proposal, we wish to reconsider both Type 1 (bad timing) and Type 2 (not interested) declinations.

AMB IG UITY AND PRE SUMPTIVENESS
IN TYPE 1 (BAD TIMING) DECLINATIONS

That bad timing declinations are ambiguous has to do with the way they are structured to produce arrangements for a callback, a matter discussed elsewhere in more detail (Maynard and Schaeffer 1996). As noted earlier, when a recipient produces a version of "I don't have any time . . . right now," that is ambiguous as to whether it is really true
and whether the callback arrangement is genuine on the part of the recipient or whether recipients' assent to a callback means they do not ever want to participate and are simply using this device as a somewhat "soft" refusal.

Pertaining to the presumptiveness of these declinations, let us compare a minimalist bad timing declination, such as "I don't have any time to answer any of your questions right now" (excerpt 1), with an expressive one, such as those that occur in excerpts (2) ("How long will this interview take?") , (3) ("Is it gonna be long?") , and (22) ("this is some type of survey that's gonna make a while?"). The minimalist declination claims knowledge regarding the projected interview (i.e., that it will be longer than the recipient presently can afford to give) and is based on inference. The expressive utterance delays granting or declining the request to participate until the interviewer reveals estimated timing information. A subsequent declination will then be based on actual, acquired knowledge. Largely, recipients declare they are too busy without asking how long the interview will take.

**AMBIGUITY AND PRESUMPTIVENESS IN TYPE 2 (NOT INTERESTED) DECLINATIONS**

The presumptiveness of minimalist Type 2 appealable declinations claiming no interest is similar to that of bad timing ones. That is, when a recipient in some way suggests not being interested, it may be a claim based on inferential knowledge about interviews in general and displays no tie to particular features of the interview that may be objectionable. As described earlier, attempts at appealing not interested declinations often involve formulas indicating an interpretation that the recipient possibly infers the call to be a "sales pitch" and working to contradict that inference.

The ambiguity of not interested declinations is seen in the different types of appeals that interviewers use in countering such declinations. The appeals include assurances not only that the request for participation is not a sales pitch but also that recipients' opinions are needed and important, that their participation would be "appreciated," that governments and universities want their answers, that recipients need

### TABLE 3: Prior Interpretability of Declinations According to Placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Placement</th>
<th>Earlier</th>
<th>Later</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimalist</td>
<td>27 (96)</td>
<td>16 (64)</td>
<td>43 (81)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressive</td>
<td>1 (4)</td>
<td>9 (36)</td>
<td>10 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>28 (100)</td>
<td>25 (100)</td>
<td>53 (100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Percentages are in parentheses.

not answer undesirable questions, and so on. In short, interviewers must guess at the basis of recipients' resistance because the latter have provided no exhibit of that basis. The contrast between a formulaic not interested declination and an expressive one, such as in excerpt (23) above, is strong. Via deictic reference, the recipient's "we do not like to give out this kind of information" (line 20; our emphasis) displays a particular concern with the interviewer's just prior query regarding the number of adults in the household, although the reference to the "kind" of information suggests a broader concern as well. In any case, the declination is neither presumptive—it is tied to that question—nor ambiguous; it occasions the interviewer's subsequent particularistic appeals that, rather than guessing at the basis of the recipient's resistance, are designed to alleviate the recipient's concretely displayed concern.

We have mentioned that the large majority of declinations in our data are minimalist (79%) rather than expressive (21%). Table 3 cross-classifies declinations according to this dimension as well as the earlier/later distinction and shows that almost all (96%) of the early declinations are minimalist; when recipients decline later, they are about nine times more likely to produce an expressive declination, although the large majority of later declinations (64%) are still minimalist.

One more thing is of interest in Table 3: 27 of 53 or 51% of our declinations reside in the "earlier minimalist" cell. Thus, over half of the declinations are done relatively abruptly, most usually according to "too busy" or "not interested" formulas that are both ambiguous and presumptive. This provides a stark view of what interviewers are up against when confronting declinations of the request to participate in the survey interview.
CONCLUSION

The importance of the organization of interaction in the survey probably cannot be overstated. Indeed, Groves, Cialdini, and Couper (1992) propose that interaction is one of the critical elements in a theory of survey participation. Our approach is meant to elucidate aspects of the “interactional substrate” of the interview—those skills of the participants that allow them to ultimately generate answers as accountable items (Maynard and Marlare 1992). That is, the proper recording of attitudes and opinions for social scientific purposes is an achievement that depends on an organization of interviewers’ and call recipients’ concerted practical actions. From this substrate, both successful interviews and unsuccessful ones as well are consummated. We have examined sociolinguistic skills for opening encounters, making requests, accepting and declining requests, and closing and terminating the encounter. Through these skills, potential survey respondents exercise their gatekeeping capacity, either providing access to their attitudes and opinions or not. Our interest has been with latter cases, or what we call declinations of the request to participate.

As compared with behavior coding, which relies on external ratings of effectiveness and emphasizes interviewer behavior (Schaeffer 1991:374-77), our conversation-analytic approach concerns real-time conduct and examines this conduct as an interpersonal event in which both interviewers and call recipients are mutually involved and internally construct “meaningful actions and their boundaries” (Schaeffer 1991:375). We have seen that interviewers, using an on-screen scripted introduction, fashion the request to participate in discrete ways and that recipients respond to this request at specific points. Recipients respond mostly early and in a precise fashion according to the unfolding request, in a mostly perfunctory fashion and using ordinary practices (e.g., citing standard reasons for discontinuation), and mostly in polite ways that can provide for systematic termination of the call. Hence, when recipients of requests to participate in the interview close the gate on such requests, they do so in interaction with their interviewer callers and, accordingly, in strongly patterned, socially organized ways.

There may be many implications of this research for survey design and quality of data. We briefly explore just two. One derives from the finding that no declinations occur before an interviewer’s reason for the call (RFC) utterance. This may imply that there is a recruitment opportunity space between the recipient’s answering “hello” and that point; recipients do listen to and interpret what is being said up until the RFC. As an opportunity space, this segment certainly is not limitless, but it does appear possible to insert concise material into it that all recipients will hear. As an example from our data involving a callback, the interviewer, within his opening turn and before the RFC utterance, enclosed the claim of having previously “selected the man” of the household:

(24) LSSC131

1    FR:   Hello.
2    INT:  hh ah hello:: I’m Greg Johnson calling from the University of
3        Wisconsin. And on an earlier call to this household uh
4        selected the man as the adult we would like to speak with
5        there. hh for our national public opinion study? [hh]
6    FR:   [I–   I’m
7        sorry I wouldn’t be interested.
8
9    INT:  O::kay um is the man of the household [available? ]
10   FR:   [((hang up))]

While that report (lines 3-4) did not work to gain the recipient’s cooperation, this excerpt does show that she waited through the interviewer’s self-identification and the report to hear the RFC, and only after this did she produce a declining utterance. In the following script from a different survey, notice how the question about reaching a residence occurs before the RFC:

(25) Serpe/Stryker Commitment, Identity, Legitimation and Futures Questionnaire

Hello, this is _____ calling from the Social Science Research Center
at California State University, Fullerton. Have I reached [Read Respondent’s Number]? Your household has been selected at random to participate in a university research project for several of our faculty.

In our data, the residence verification question occurs after the RFC; consequently, many recipients declined participation before this check
could be made. In the Serpe/Stryker interview, we would predict that nearly all recipients would hear this question because of its particular placement. While including such a question before the RFC may not improve response rates, other sorts of inserted material might be able to do so. Requests in our data, we said, display institutional identities for interviewees and call on public and abstract recipient identities; in the recruitment opportunity space, there may be ways to increase the visibility of more particular identities for both parties and heighten a recipient’s sense of the survey’s legitimacy (Morton-Williams and Young 1987). Or if, as Groves et al. (1992) argue, requests that emphasize the rare opportunity of “making your voice heard” and “having your opinion count” may enhance compliance, then the recruitment opportunity space may be a locale in the opening at which to do that. This is a speculative question that can be answered with future research, perhaps employing an experimental design.  

Another implication derives from the numbers in cells outside of the upper-left quadrant of Table 3, which represent declinations that recipients produce later or in a more expressive way than with earlier minimalist ones. They are over half (54%) of the declinations. We observed that when later declinations occur, it is after a series of procedural questions that emphasize the anonymity of the interview and probably loosen rather than bind the potential participant to its purposes. Furthermore, in dealing with recipients’ interpretable expressions of concern, interviewers largely rely on standard answers that are informally posted or conveyed by way of the interviewer subculture. We wonder whether there are ways in which the procedural questions of the interview and the responses to expressed concerns can be better “tailored” (Groves et al. 1992) to recipients and perhaps thereby convert potential declinations into acceptances. As we observed earlier, granting the request to participate often does not occur with a discrete act or at a particular point but involves going along with the interviewer until the survey commences and proceeds to completion. It may be that an interviewer, as Groves et al. (1992) suggest, “does not maximize the likelihood of obtaining a ‘yes’ answer in any given contact but minimizes the likelihood of a ‘no’ answer over repeated turn-taking in the contact” (p. 489). Doing so, they further argue, involves “maintaining the interaction.” Knowledge about how interviewers maintain the interaction requires comparative research on their successful querying and persuasive strategies and on ways that recipients, rather than or even after declining, respond positively to these strategies. Our research on declinations, gatekeeping, and the interactional substrate of the telephone interview can be a contribution to such comparative investigations.

**APPENDIX 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcribing Conventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Overlapping speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Oh you do? [really]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: [Um hmmm]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Silences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: I'm not use ta that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Yeah me neither.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Missing speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Are they?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Yes because ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sound stretching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: I did ok:-y.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Volume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: That's where I REALLY want to go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Emphasis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: I do not want it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: You didn't have to worry about having the .hh hhh curtains closed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Laugh tokens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Tha(h)t was really neat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Explanatory material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Well ((cough)) I don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Candidate hearing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: (Is that right?) (</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Left-hand brackets mark a point of overlap, while right-hand brackets indicate where overlapping talk ends. Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time in tenths of seconds. Ellipses indicate where part of an utterance is left out of the manuscript. Colon(s) indicate the prior sound is prolonged. More colons, more stretching. Capital letters indicate increased volume. Underline indicates increased emphasis. The “h” indicates audible breathing. The more hs, the longer the breath. A period placed before it indicates inbreath; no period indicates outbreath. The “h” within a word or sound indicates explosive aspirations (e.g., laughter, breathlessness, etc.). Materials in double parentheses indicate audible phenomena other than actual verbalization. Materials in single parentheses indicate that transcribers were not sure about spoken words. If no words are in parentheses, the talk was indecipherable.
11. Intonation
   A: It was unbelievable. I had a
       three point six? I think.
   B: You did.

12. Sound cut off
   A: This- this is true
   B: "Yes." That's true.

13. Soft volume
   A: "Yes." That's true.

14. Latching
   A: I am absolutely sure. =
   B: =You are.
   A: his is one thing [that I=
   B: [Yes?]
   A: =really want to do.

15. Speech pacing
   A: What is it?
   B: >I ain't tellin< you

A period indicates fall in tone, a
comma indicates continuing intonation, a question mark indicates
increased tone. Up arrows (↑) or
down arrows (↓) indicate marked
rising and falling shifts in intonation
immediately prior to the rise or fall.
Dashes indicate an abrupt cutoff of
sound.

Material between degree signs is
spoken more quietly than surrounding
talk.

Equal signs indicate where there is
no gap or interval between adjacent
utterances.

Equal signs also link different
parts of a speaker's utterance
when that utterance carries over
to another transcript line.

Part of an utterance delivered at a
pace faster than surrounding talk is
enclosed between greater than and
less than signs.

---

APPENDIX 2
L & S Survey Center Introductory and
Respondent Selection Questions or Statements (Partial)

The question # or screen # is signified by @@# (e.g., @@0h); screen titles in
capital letters are for descriptive purposes in this appendix and are not seen by
the interviewer.

@@0h RESIDENTIAL VERIFICATION SCREEN
Hello, I'm (.: I) calling from the University of Wisconsin
as part of our national public opinion study. We are trying to
reach people at their home telephone numbers?
Is this a residential number?
1. YES : residential only
2. YES : but also non-residential
3. NO : non-residential
7. DON'T KNOW
9. REFUSED

@@0j PHONE # VERIFICATION SCREEN
(Hello, I'm (: I) calling from the University of Wisconsin
as part of our national public opinion study.)
To be sure I reached the number I dialed, is this (: B)?
1. YES
2. NO
3. NO, and I don't wish to re-dial again
9. REFUSED to verify #

@@0k SCREEN TO IDENTIFY # REACHED IF NOT THE ONE DIALED
What number did I get?

@@0l RESPONDENT SELECTION INTRODUCTION SCREEN
Because we want our results to represent the opinions of people all
over the country, we need to select one adult to speak with in
your household.

(PRESS TO CONTINUE)

@@0m RESPONDENT SELECTION SCREEN FOR ODD #D SAMPLE #S
To make this selection scientifically, we first need to know
how many adults, 18 or older, live there. First,
how many MEN, 18 or older, live there?
0. NONE
1. ONE
2. TWO
3. THREE OR MORE
7. DON'T KNOW
9. NOT ASCERTAINED / REFUSED

@@0n RESPONDENT SELECTION SCREEN FOR ODD #D SAMPLE #S
And how many WOMEN, 18 or older, live in your household?

0. NONE
1. ONE
2. TWO
3. THREE OR MORE
7. DON'T KNOW
9. NOT ASCERTAINED / REFUSED

@@0o RESPONDENT SELECTION SCREEN FOR EVEN #D SAMPLE #S
To make this selection scientifically, we first need to know
how many adults, 18 or older, live there. First,
how many WOMEN, 18 or older, live there?
0. NONE
1. ONE
2. TWO
3. THREE OR MORE
7. DON’T KNOW
9. NOT ASCERTAINED / REFUSED

@@0q RESPONSENT SELECTION SCREEN FOR EVEN #’D SAMPLE #’s
And how many MEN, 18 or older, live in your household?
0. NONE
1. ONE
2. TWO
3. THREE OR MORE
7. DON’T KNOW
9. NOT ASCERTAINED / REFUSED

@@0t SCREEN TO ASK FOR SELECTED RESPONDENT (FOR FIRST CALLS)
May I speak with the (:
D) of the household? (NOTE: RESPONDENT SELECTION GETS INSERTED IN THE (:
D) SPOT)
1. Informant is R and willing to start interview
2. Informant is R and not able to start interview now
3. YES: respondent comes to the phone
4. NO: respondent is not available
9. REFUSED

@@0u SCREEN TO ASK FOR SELECTED RESPONDENT (FOR LATER CALLS)
May I speak with (the) (:
D)? (SEE NOTE ABOVE)
1. YES: Informant is R
2. YES: R comes to the phone
3. NO: R is not available OR not willing to start now
9. REFUSED

NOTES

1. Although telephone interviews have become more prevalent as compared to face-to-face contact, Smirnoff and Dijkstra (1991) observe that participation rates have diminished.
2. Our studies are also related to previous interaction-based research on the survey interview. See Suchman and Jordan (1990) and Houtkoop-Steenstra (1995).

3. In short, we wish to explicate facets of the interactional substrate (Maynard and Marlaire 1992) that make interviewing possible in the first place. By interactional substrate, we refer to the organized, concerted, practical actions of interviewer and recipient that allow them to arrive at “accountable,” or objective, verifiable, valid, and properly achieved answers to survey questions.

4. Throughout this article, we call those participants who answer an interviewer’s phone call respondents because they do receive the call, and this term is descriptive of the “discourse identity” they adopt for the duration of their interaction with the interviewer (cf. West and Zimmerman 1985). We avoid the term respondent because that identity is only a potential outcome of the interaction. It might be said that participants are respondents (in that they answer a telephone summons), but they also become answerers of specific questions both before the interview commences and during the interview if it does commence. Finally, some initial call recipients do not turn out to be the selected interviewee (should the call go so far as to select a potential respondent). Hence, a “switchboard request” (Schegloff 1979:46) is made, and the selected party may then come on the line. Alternatively, the present call recipient may decline on behalf of the other party, as when an interviewer in one episode, talking to a female recipient, announced, “we’ve randomly selected the man of the household” as the interviewee. The woman said, “just a second” and then could be heard off of the phone talking to a man. When she came back on the line, she said, “He doesn’t want to answer the questions.” Thus, the woman remained the main interlocutor for the interviewer but was not her potential respondent or designated answerer. While the term recipient is not without its difficulties as a description of discourse identity, it seems to have the least pitfalls in comparison to alternatives.

5. In our data, institutional and organizational callers are attempting to gain access to the lives of laypeople, who have control over that access. For a discussion of a reverse situation, in which counselors as “institutional gatekeepers” have the ability to restrict the access of students to different channels of social mobility, see Erickson and Shultz (1982). Similarly, it may be said that research on 911 emergency calls to the police are a reverse situation (e.g., Zimmerman 1992), in that call-takers for the police and other agencies are institutional actors keeping the gates with respect to services for lay callers.

6. However, see the informative article by Groves et al. (1992).

7. As Sacks (1992:73) argues, phone calls are “accountable actions,” and when agencies call somebody they give an account or “reason for calling.” Regularly, the RFC is offered in “anchor position” or after a set of core opening sequences (Schegloff 1986:117), including, here, the summons-answer and identification-acceptance sequences. The opening sequences in telephone conversations are reviewed more extensively below.

8. Recipients are designated in these transcripts according to whether they are male (MR) or female (FR). Interviewers are designated with the abbreviation INT.

9. For an extensive consideration of the organization of request sequences between parents and children, see Wooton (1981).

10. A complexity to goings of the request to participate is that recipients often just produce “continuers” (Schegloff 1981) such as “uh huh” and “okay” or token answers (such as “yes”) in response to initial statements, and they answer particular questions about the phone number reached, the number and gender of household residents, and so on in ways that permit progression to a point at which the interviewer defines an interest in the recipient’s opinion, reads a confidentiality statement, asks for permission to record the interview, and proceeds to ask the survey questions. Thus, the granting of a request to participate is not necessarily accomplished in a single request-response sequence but involves the recipient going along with interviewer-initiated statements and inquiries. Hence, rather than discretely granting the request to partici-
pate, it is as though some recipients go along with an interviewer's initial requests and queries until the interview itself is reached and then further allow the survey to be completed.

11. In excerpt (5), the declination takes place slightly later than completion of the turn that ends with "national public opinion study." However, it interrupts the interviewer's turn-in-progress ("Um we're not tryin'"), which is abandoned, so that the declination appears to be responsive to the prior and completed turn.

12. See Whalen and Zimmerman (1987), Whalen, Zimmerman, and Whalen (1988), and Zimmerman (1992) for other work that compares phone calls involving institutional settings (in this instance, 911 emergency centers) to the openings and routines in ordinary telephone encounters.

13. See also Whalen and Zimmerman's (1987) use and explication of this example.

14. In some cultures, self-identification on a recipient's part may occur when asking the summoning ring of a phone. The predominant way of answering a phone in the Netherlands, for example, is with a name such as "It's Reina de Wind?" (Houtkoop-Steenstra 1991:234-35). Swedish practices are similar to the Dutch (Lindström 1994).

15. Although line 02 begins with a "prototype greeting term," it is not a greeting per se but rather is involved in the recognition display (Schegloff 1986:128).

16. In ordinary conversation, second turns that initiate identification-recognition fit into nine collections, according to Schegloff (1979:32), with the "overwhelming majority" being either collection 1 (greetings—"hello"), collection 2 (other's name interrogative—"Jim?"); collection 3 (other's name declarative—"Jim"), or a combination of collections 1 and 2 ("Hello Jim?") or 1 and 3 ("Hello Jim"). Given the predominance of these collections in Schegloff's (1979) corpus, it can be suggested that most calls people receive are from acquaintances, friends, or relatives, who exhibit their relationship to a coparticipant by proposing their recognition of the recipient's turn 1 voice sample and by implicitly asking for recognition in their turn 2. Type 7, "self-identification," is a rare event (cf. also Schegloff 1979:45), and this is the collection into which survey calls fit.

17. Despite this being a callback, the recipient ultimately declines participation in the interview. Also, because this is a callback, it is not otherwise included in our analysis or the enumerations in tables.

18. Goffman (1963) has remarked, "One might say, as a general rule, that acquainted persons in a social situation require a reason not to enter into a face engagement with each other, while unacquainted persons require a reason to do so" (p. 124).

19. Our way of identifying these types is both in terms of how they are produced as "turn constructional units," or "sentential clausal, phrasal, and lexical constructions" (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974:702), and in terms of their "sequential implicativeness" (Schegloff and Sacks 1973b) or the range of consequences they project for subsequent talk and interaction. In another article (Maynard and Schaeffer 1996), we discuss in detail the topic of sequential implicativeness. In this article, we concentrate on the produced nature of these devices and further consider how they are placed in the developing stream of talk.

20. Also see excerpt (1).

21. Interviewers' appeals often derive from lists of "possible answers to reasons for refusals" posted in the Survey Center. Lists are posted on walls and cabinets surrounding the interviewer's work station.

22. Goffman (1971:142, fn. 33) argues that "thank you" is a "sign" of gratitude, which seems paradoxically to be used in adverse circumstances, such as when a motorist says thank you to a police officer who has just given that person a ticket. "The point, of course," says Goffman, "is that we are not dealing here with 'politeness,' but rather with rules for opening and closing encounters and interchanges." See also the article by Zimmerman and Waklin (1995), which describes the use of "thank you" in the closings of 911 emergency calls. 23. For yet another sort of appealable declination, see excerpt (23) and the recipient's claim at line 20 that "we do not like to give out this kind of information."

24. For an analysis of other environments in which speakers attempt to make sense of recipient responses by diagnosing what is wrong and proposing remedies, see Pomerantz (1984).

25. We would like to thank Sheldon Stryker, who made this script available to us.

26. Efforts to manipulate introductory remarks have had little success. For an earlier study, see Dillman, Gallegos, and Frey (1976). More recently, a study by Houtkoop and van den Bergh (1995) examined the effects of four different introductions, three of which were scripted and one of which was a more informal, "agenda-based" introduction on response rates. The researchers found that the agenda-based introduction induced higher response and appointment rates than any of the scripted introductions, whose effects on response and appointment did not differ from one another greatly. By and large, none of these studies has examined the placement and sequencing issues we have examined here.

REFERENCES


Houtkoop, Hanneke and Huub van den Bergh. 1995. "Effects of Introductions in Large Scale Telephone Interview." Unpublished manuscript, Free University, the Netherlands.


Maynard, Douglas W. and Nora Cate Schaeffer. 1996. "Closing the Gate: Routes to Call Termination When Recipients Decline a Telephone Survey Interview." Unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology, Indiana University.


Maynard, Schaeffer / KEEPING THE GATE


Douglas W. Maynard is a professor of sociology at Indiana University, Bloomington. With general research interests in conversation analysis and ethnomethodology, his substantive concerns include the giving of bad and good news in everyday life and interaction in the survey interview. Recent publications are on the "forecasting" of bad news and on cognition as an interactional phenomenon in survey interviews.

Nora Cate Schaeffer is a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where she conducts research on issues in survey design and questionnaire development. She has served on the Panel to Evaluate Census Methodology for the National Research Council of the National Academy of Science, on the American Statistical Association Technical Advisory Committee on the Survey of Income and Program Participation, and on the National Science Foundation Advisory Committee for the Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences. Recent publications consider sources of error in self-reports about child support and interaction between the interviewer and respondent.