Standardization and Tacit Knowledge

Interaction and Practice in the Survey Interview

EDITORS

DOUGLAS W. MAYNARD
HANNEKE HOUTKOOP-STEENSTRA
NORA CATE SCHAEFFER
JOHANNES VAN DER ZOUWEN

WILEY SERIES IN SURVEY METHODOLOGY
Established in Part by WALTER A. SHEWHART AND SAMUEL S. WILKS

Editors: Robert M. Groves, Graham Kalton, J. N. K. Rao, Norbert Schwarz, Christopher Skinner

A complete list of the titles in this series appears at the end of this volume.
household for at least 4 days a week. This, of course, includes yourself. Then, I would like to have an interview with SO AND SO.

**Long Standardized Scripted Version**

Good morning, this is INTERVIEWER’S NAME speaking, from COMPANY’S NAME in CITY. You may know about us from television. We are currently conducting a research about reading magazines, watching television, shopping, and some current affairs. As you too, of course, do your shopping or watch television, we like to hear your opinion. Your opinion is important because we would like to get a clear view on the situation. For example, we would like to know which television programs you watch and which you don’t. And, of course, why you don’t watch these. The questions are quite simple and the interview will not take long. It goes without saying that your answers will be used confidentially. In order to decide whom I should ask the questions, I would like to know how many people live in your household for at least 4 days a week. This, of course, includes yourself. And did I dial telephone number 123456? Then, I would like to have an interview with SO AND SO.

---

**Chapter 10**

**Refusal Conversion and Tailoring**

*Douglas W. Maynard and Nora Cate Schaeffer*

Survey research centers distinguish between the substantive portion of the interview and what is called the *front end*, where interviewers call potential respondents, introduce themselves, select a member of the household to question, and request participation from that member. Potential respondents decline these requests at notoriously high rates. The higher the refusal rate, of course, the more costly it is to administer the survey and the more threat there is of biasing the results. That is, the accurate measurement of attitudes and opinions itself may be compromised when success rates are low. The chapters in this volume not withstanding, there is little interaction-based research on the front end.¹

In this chapter, we examine an episode of refusal conversion. This is a single-case analysis, and the case comes from videotaping interviewers at the Survey Research Center of Indiana University when a study concerning the role of television in two-party adult relationships (how much TV they watch, whether and what they watch separately or together, and so on) was underway. As in other studies, interviewers sometimes met with declinations of their initial requests to potential respondents. With some of these declinations, interviewers arranged call backs, but others were refusals. After an initial refusal, rather than dispense with the household and the respondent, the survey center may retain the phone number for calling back at a later time, when an interviewer will attempt to “convert” the former refusal into a complete interview. Here, we examine the second in a series of three telephone calls to a single household. In the first one, the male recipient firmly refused to participate in the study. In the second call (our focus), this same recipient agrees to a later callback. In the third call, his wife answered and, after conveying the request to her husband, relayed another refusal from the husband. However, if the initially selected respondent refused participation, the design of this study permitted asking the wife or partner. In this instance, the wife, after a
persuasive appeal from the interviewer and subsequent to the husband’s refusal, agreed to the interview. It was completed and the overall refusal conversion effort succeeded.

The question is, how, especially in the face of a firm previous refusal from the husband or male recipient in this household, was the interviewer able to reengage him in a subsequent call and obtain permission for yet another, later, call — during which the wife agreed to participate in the interview? What interactive skills were involved in this conversion effort?

TAILORING

Survey protocols for soliciting participation, like other aspects of interviewers’ standardized instructions, are often not helpful when interviewers meet the individuality and particularity of respondents whom they attempt to recruit. Survey methodologists recognize this problem of particularity in suggesting that interviewers can tailor instructions for recruitment to specific concerns and objections that potential respondents may raise. Successful interviewers, Groves, Cialdini, and Couper (1992:487) suggest, engage in a continuous search for cues about a householder who answers the door or telephone. They should be able to “size up a situation quickly,” and apply the appropriate persuasive messages (Couper and Groves, 1992:267). Experienced interviewers themselves are aware of their tailoring:

I give the introduction and listen to what they say. I then respond to them on an individual basis, according to their response. Almost all responses are a little different, and you need an ability to intuitively understand what they are saying. Sometimes, the words they are saying are not the true reasons they are refusing. I attempt to discern what the situation is and respond to it.

(Couper and Groves, this volume, Chapter 7)

Tailoring is facilitated at the front end of the interview because interviewers are not required to adhere strictly to a standard introduction. However, with computer-aided telephone instruction (CATI), they do have routines or devices from two sources for fashioning the opening request for participation. One is the computer screen and a scripted introduction it provides. Another is a document that interviewers tape to their interview carrels that has preformulated answers to expected questions from householders. That is, survey research personnel, including principal investigators (researchers), those who design the instruments, and those who administer a survey center, anticipate queries about the purpose of the call, its funding, and who is responsible, plus declarations of disinterest and not having enough time.

At the center we studied, possible answers to these queries and declarations are on a sheet called “What the Respondent Might Like To Know” (WRMLTK, referred to as the “rumpletick”). While phrases on the WRMLTK are meant to handle concerns that householders raise, how, when, and in what manner call recipients raise them are contingencies that the WRMLTK as another docile set of instructions does not itself address. Interviewers as employees of the center (rather than researchers, survey designers, or administrators) must handle such contingencies continuously in real time. They often use the messages on the WRMLTK in a mechanical fashion that cannot be regarded as tailoring as such. Consequently, our analysis explores the relation between various computer- and WRMLTK-scripted devices and the actualities of their implementation that are particular to the household, the respondent, and the actual course of interaction between interviewer and call recipient.

PREPARING FOR THE CALL

In our case study, the second call requesting participation is the pivot between the initial very firm refusal and the later callback that ended in a complete interview. Our focus is on how the interviewer displays in his talk the unique positioning of the phone call (calling back a firm refusal) according to unscripted devices that depart from a standard opening script, and how he engages a rhetoric of recruitment to persuade the reluctant call recipient to participate. When the interviewer makes the second phone call, he is sitting at his carrel in the Center for Survey Research (CSR), which has a computer, monitor, and keyboard (see Figure 10.1).

The computer is his primary source of information about the interview he will attempt to make and the household he needs to call and is also his data entry point. In addition to videotaping the interviewer from a camera above the carrel, we registered on another camera, and by way of a digital-to-analog converter, successive displays on the computer screen. The interviewer is Bob Roth (pseudonym), who is a senior interviewer at the center. Refusal conversion is a task that is assigned to such experienced employees, and on the night when we taped the call in question, he was provided with a number of households for attempted conversion. At the center, CATI involves use of a software
program called CASES; as interviewers make a call and (if possible) go through an interview, they also page through a number of screens that have instructions and questions on them. With this particular call, as he sits at his workstation and reads himself, Bob first views a computer screen that provides him with the case number assigned to the household, the current time of day, the number of previous contacts (one) and what happened (respondent refused). The second screen, after he enters his interviewer number, verifies his identity (the screen asks, “You are Bob Roth, right?”).

By entering “1” (“yes”) on his keyboard, and hitting the return key, Bob next arrives at screen 3 (Figure 10.2). This screen has the “caseid” or case identification number (4673v), which we have fictionalized, the time of day in the right-hand corner, repeated as “CSR Time” below, and the “Household Time” (were the household in a different time zone than the CSR, this number would reflect that). The “Call Grid” below the time listings allows for coded entries for up to 20 previous contacts with the household. With this case, there has been only one, and its date (“320” or March 20) and time (“1904” or 7:04 p.m.) are noted. The ID is a number (we have substituted “xy”) that identifies who the previous interviewer was, and the outcome is selected from a table of codes that describe such things as having reached a business, a recorder, and household who asked to be called back, and so on. The code here (“referrer”) indicates that the previous call was a refusal done by the selected respondent.

Bob immediately moved to screen 4 (Figure 10.3), which has the case notes—a description of what happened in the first call—written by the previous interviewer (“dhoffer,” the computer username for a survey center employee we designate with the pseudonym Diane Hoffer). Bob can be seen reading these case notes for 18 seconds and thereby obtaining a sense of history for the telephone call he is about to make. We refer to this as preparing for the call.

In the case notes, observe that Diane uses a number of abbreviations, including “f” for female informant, “r” for respondent, “b/c” for because, “cb” for call back, “ref’d” for refused, “import” for important, “hu” for hung up, and so on. Although several of these are transparent in meaning, they also display the use of jargon and one way in which a community of understandings for mediated written communications among staff has developed in this center. Also of note is how firm, according to Diane’s case notes, the refusal was. Often respondents will claim that they are presently “too busy,” and agree to a later call back. Or they will state vaguely that they are “not interested,” and the call will close (Maynard and Schaeffer, 1997). Here the respondent is reported to have refused four different times, and given reasons for each refusal. The first refusal occurred as he was being informed that the interview would take “30 min,” when he said he was “not interested” because he “had to watch tv.” Next, Diane asked if his wife would do the survey and the respondent refused that because she was “watching tv too.” Third, Diane reports trying “to convert by saying we could cb [call back] at his convenience,” after which the respondent is said again to have “ref’d [refused].” Finally, after Diane quotes herself as saying that it was an important survey, that “most people enjoy it,” and that funds were limited so that it was important “to speak with people we reach,” the respondent related having been called “from New York” and later “getting things in the mail.” Even
though Diane suggested that they "weren't trying to sell anything" and told him how he could verify this, the respondent still "refused and hung up." This, then, was the fourth rejection in this call of the interviewer’s solicitations.

THE TELEPHONE CALL: REVIEWING THE SCRIPT

Recall that Bob reads these case notes for 18 seconds in a preparatory way. After this, Bob paged through two more screens (5 and 6), which involved setting the reentry point, or place at which the interview should begin if the respondent were to participate. Next, he arrived at screen 7 (Figure 10.4), which gives him the phone number to dial and a billing number to use for calls that are long distance.

![Computer Screen 7](image)

**Figure 10.4**

Bob now dials the number, gets his recipient on the line, and starts talking to him before he pages to the next screen. Here is a transcript of the conversation (MR refers to the male respondent, MI to the male interviewer):

**I (CSR Refusal Conversion)**

1. (Ring)
2. (2.6) (Another interviewer audible in background)
3. MR: He:110?
4. MI: .hhhh Hi my name's Bob {Roth I'm calling from Indiana
5. {hit: '1', 'key': 'Someone answers'}
6. University in Bloomington .hhhh >an' we're doing uh<
7. {hit: 'return', 'and gets screen 8'}
8. research project with: Indiana residents for their
9. opinions about tee vee in their lives .hhhh we'd like
10. a chance tuh speak with any adult in your household who

is currently married (). divorced >or living with a<
partner: .
(0.4)
14. MR: >I'm an adult?< (0.1) but I'm eating dinner right now?
15. [and I'd rather not be inner-
16. MI: [okay. ]
17. (0.2)
18. MI: .hhhh
19. MR: [(It's- ) I understand this is gunna take a half
hour: ?
20. MI: [Yeah, well? >uh we c'n call yuh back \alter: - at
21. your convenience.. .hhhh Ah >I'd also like to stress that
22. we don't haftuh do the whole interview at once, we c'n
23. break it up intoh segments .hhhh an' just do a little bit
24. at a time if that's more convenient for you .hhhh Uh:
25. It's very important we >get a chance speak with
26. you>why'on'< (0.2) >why don' I try givin' you a call
27. back in a little while:.<
28. (0.3)
29. (0.2)
31. MI: Thank you very much sir.
32. (0.2)
33. MI: Buh bye.
35. (0.3)
36. ([click])

After Bob gets an answer at line 3, he starts an introduction (line 4) whose beginning precedes his viewing of the screen that has an introductory script. The interviewer has, of course, performed such introductions frequently before, so that he knows the opening routine without necessarily having to read it. In the middle of giving his name (lines 4, 5), however, he hits the keyboard code (the numeral 1, per screen 7, Figure 10.4) for having gotten an answer to his call. And next, in the midst of identifying himself as being "from Indiana University" (transcript lines 6, 7), Bob strikes the return key, which brings up the introductory screen 8 (Figure 10.5) and provides a script for him so that he can continue his introduction by reading from that screen.

Bob has seen the script on screen 8 many times and does not read the screen exactly or otherwise enact the scripted introduction.² We argue that he simply reviews the script, which is a resource and not something to be enacted mechanically. Differences between the script and what Bob actually says to his call recipient, rather than being accidental or haphazard, are doing work in relation to just this respondent and household on behalf of the attempt at converting a refusal into a completed interview. In other words, the script is an embedded feature in interactional work that encompasses both Bob’s efforts at garnering participation and the respondent’s reactions to those efforts. Bob fashions his efforts with devices of talk and social interaction that are useable again and again within the real time of soliciting participation. The discriminating deployment of these devices exhibits his particularized knowledge of the respondent and the interaction so far.
TAILORING THE SCRIPT

Personalizing the Call

One difference from the script is that instead of saying “Hello, I’m Bob Roth calling from Indiana University,” our interviewer says, “Hi my name's Bob Roth, I'm calling from Indiana University.” The “Hi” form renders the greeting as more informal than “Hello,” while “my name’s Bob Roth, I’m calling from…” appears to parse the opening into two parts—the interviewer’s introduction of himself, followed by a naming of the institution under whose auspices he is calling. The script, by contrast, blends the introduction and institution naming into a more seamless opening that rather suppresses the identity of the individual and asks for recognition of the institution (Maynard and Schaeffer, 1997:47). In short, these minute alterations of the script in the initial microseconds of Bob Roth’s first utterance may exhibit the work of personalizing his attempt at refusal conversion.

Claiming Academic Auspices

Another difference from the script occurs with the second sentence on screen 8 (Figure 10.5). Rather than “We’re speaking with Indiana residents for their opinions about TV in their lives,” Bob says, at lines 6 and 8 on transcript 1, “we’re doing a research project with Indiana Residents for their opinions about TV in their lives.” The script suggests that the interviewer only identify himself as being from Indiana University, and in most of our other recorded introductions interviewers follow the script. However, in his actual introduction, Bob invokes “research project” and thereby can be more clearly offering an identity of the survey call as being under academic sponsorship, exhibiting his knowledge that during the earlier attempt, the respondent complained about getting a call from New York and a week later “getting things in the mail.” Just as in the earlier call the interviewer had “assured” the respondent that he wasn’t trying to sell anything, now, in the present call, interjecting that this is a “research project,” the interviewer may be proposing to counter as early as possible any inference by the recipient that this solicitation is a marketing ploy.

Soliciting a Favor

Still another difference from the script is that instead of saying, “May I please speak with an adult in your household who is currently married, divorced, or living with a partner” (screen 8, Figure 10.5), the interviewer says “We’d like a chance to speak with anyone adult in your household…” (lines 9–12, transcript 1). In most “fresh” or initial calls, interviewers use the scripted “May I please…” format for requesting the interview, although there are series of screens and other questions that are invoked before this request takes place.3 The crafting of his opening talk, and its departure from the more conventional script, can be working interactionally in at least two ways. First, “May I please…” occasions the relevance of a straightforward yes–no answer as a reply4 to the request for an interview, while “we’d like a chance…” implies different answering options, in particular the granting or withholding of an opportunity.5 More expressly than the “May I please…” introduction, “we’d like a chance…” is a device that thereby may invoke a sense of being solicited for a favor rather than simply being asked to comply with a request. The “we’d like a chance” device, accordingly, can more strongly compel a positive response.

Requesting Ambiguously

A second way this device may work has to do with the position of this phone call as a second approach to the household. At no point has this interviewer provided an official recognition of this, although such recognition is regularly displayed in calls where interviewers and recipients have agreed to a return call:

(2) [TD30:2399:025:JL]

1 MR: Hello.
2 (0.2)
3 MI: .hhh Hi: (0.1) My name's Bo:b Ro:th I'm ca:lling
4 back from Indi:a University. .hhh an we're speaking
5 with ad:Ly's who are currently mar:ried (.) div:orced
6 or living with a part:ner. .hhh Do:ing some academic
7 re:search to fi:nd ou:t the role that tea: vee: plays in
8 peop:es li:ves. .hhh (and we'd--)
9 MR: ((She's not here)) the one you
In a previous call that same evening, the female respondent in this case had told the interviewer that she was leaving “right now” and asked for a callback on the next night. The interviewer told her that this was the last night for the study and asked to return the call later that evening, to which the respondent agreed.

As excerpt 2 shows, when Bob performs the callback, he reaches the woman’s husband, and now announces that he is “calling back.” Unfortunately, the wife has not returned home. As in excerpt 1, Bob also says that the call represents “some academic research” (lines 6–7), which suggests that this is an unscripted but routine form that interviewers may invoke in a variety of circumstances.

To return to excerpt 1 and our focal episode, Bob is in a very different position. Far from arranging a callback, the previous call involved a firm refusal. In this circumstance, it may be that calling back and officially pronouncing oneself to be calling back is something to be avoided, for respondents can take umbrage if, after having refused an initial request, they get such a return call:

(3) [td16:2268:011:AK] Revised

In this call, Bob (the same interviewer as in our other excerpts) does not get to make a full-fledged request because the woman he has phoned, after he identifies himself at lines 3–4, displays an understanding of who he is and what he is calling about and refuses him by claiming to have told them that she “wasn’t interested” (line 6). The call recipient’s turn, in announcing that “you” had called before the previous interviewer was female, so the “you” here appears to refer to “Indiana University” and to be employed in a categorical rather than personal sense and reporting her own previous response, also exhibits a complaining quality. The utterance can be implying a failure: that the Survey Research Center did not heed her “not interested” response to the previous solicitation, which they could have done by ceasing to recruit her. It is notable that at line 4 with “we’re speak-,” the interviewer next appears to start a scripted introduction, rather than with the unscripted “we’re doing a research project...,” which he employed in excerpt 1, or with “doing some academic research,” as in excerpt 2.

Another feature of excerpt 3 is that, after the respondent has reformulated that she is not interested, Bob, at line 8, produces the “we’d like a chance to speak” device, after “well” (which regularly precedes utterances that disaffiliate from a previous one). By referring to this as a device, we mean it is a form that an interviewer uses across contexts, again and again. In excerpt 3, the device is used to plead with a respondent who has just firmly said that she is not interested and complained about having been approached again. As Sacks (1992:637–638) has observed about complaints, they set up a sequence in which some explanatory or other response is required. “We’d like a chance to speak...” in offering to account for the callback in a kind of minimal way, is such a response, and now portrays the call as an appeal, not as a first request but as a second one that is justified by the need it formulates. This is further evidence that the device is being used to ask for a favor from a resistant recipient. Similarly, in excerpt 1, instead of requesting in the first place, the “we’d like a chance to speak” device can be appealing a request that has been turned down (but at a much earlier time).

However, in the context of this call — our focal excerpt 1 — it is working to avert a complaining announcement, such as “you called me once before.” That is, as an account, it may propose to preempt a complaint to which it might otherwise have to respond.

However, the “we’d like a chance” device may also stand as a request in its own right, having its own integrity, for example, when there is a delay in the contact between a respondent and an interviewing organization. The call in excerpt 1 is taking place 5 days after the original request was refused. Accordingly, if the request is potentially hearable as either a second or a first request, the device may be purposely ambiguous, and be precisely fitted to the circumstance of calling back a firm refusal, where the interviewer may want to avoid announcing himself as calling back and yet potentially provide for the fact that he is doing so. As a device, therefore, it is cloaked with significations of the real-time field in which it operates.

Our interviewer appears to provide for the ambiguity — whether this is a request in its own right or a pleading appeal — to be resolved according to how his call recipient elects to respond. Initially, the man appears to treat the request in its own right, announcing himself at line 14 to be an adult, thereby responding to the “speak with any adult” formulation. Then he fashions a refusal, using a “bad timing” claim. He says he’s eating dinner (line 14), and by giving this excuse, still appears to treat the request as having its own integrity. Bob Roth receives this with an “okay” at line 16, while MR continues at line 15 in what appears to be a protest against being interrupted. But he stops in the midst of that utterance and in the middle of the projected word “interrupted” and restarts his turn at line 19, saying he understands “this is gonna take a half hour?” This is evidence that he now discerns the interviewer’s request to be related to the earlier call. In the midst of his bad-timing refusal, that is, he appears to revise his understanding of this request, displaying a recognition of its relation to the earlier call and an orientation to the appeal embedded in the interviewer’s “we’d like a chance” request.
COMPLETING THE CALL

As the respondent announces his recollection that the interview would take half an hour (line 19), and just at the point where the half hour is being articulated, in overlap with the latter part of the word “hour,” Bob intersects his recipient’s turn to acknowledge the time it will take (“Yeah” at line 20). So the case notes on screen 4 may have been informative in a way that partially motivates the interviewer to grab a turn of talk at just this point in the respondent’s refusal, in an attempt to answer the respondent’s objection immediately and before any other move toward closing and terminating the call (Maynard and Schaeffer, this volume, Chapter 8).11 The acknowledgment “yeah” prefaces a long turn of talk containing a set of persuasive bids to garner the respondent’s cooperation.

Persuading Verbally

At line 21, Bob starts a response that interviewers regularly use to announce the bad timing of a solicitation, offering a later callback at the respondent’s convenience, which can address the recipient’s concern about the length of the interview. At line 26, he produces another version of the “we’d like a chance” request, this one suggesting that it is important that they get this chance with the respondent. Recall that the previous interviewer had also mentioned the importance of the interview. The interviewer ends his turn in line 28 with an escalated version of the offer to call back with which he started his long turn of talk. That is, whereas at line 21, the interviewer says “we can call yuh back to your convenience,” here he says, “why don’t I try giving you a call back in a little while,” thus proposing more specifically who would make the call and when.

The recipient’s “all right” at line 30 appears resistive: it is delayed, and very muted. Nevertheless, it is enough to be heard as granting the offer/proposal and to be counted as a callback, which Bob Roth codes on screen 8 (Figure 10.5; see the “x” next to the arrow at the bottom of the screen). So the interviewer has been successful in this call; the household has been upgraded from a refusal to a callback.12

Performing the Rhetoric

Parts of Bob’s talk are done in a kind of rush through or with fast-paced speech, exhibiting his manipulation of the prosody of his talk. Additionally, a topic we can only partially address is how his persuasive work is embodied. In systematic ways, he engages movements of his torso, head, and arms in conjunction with the talk and its pacing, tone, and other prosodic features to help render its rhetorical features. And although the respondent cannot see these gestures, they may be available at least in the prosody of the talk that he hears.

From the videotape of this telephone call, we have selected 12 frames because they help highlight the systematics of Bob’s movement. Roughly the episode can be divided into two parts. The first part (frames 1–6; Figure 10.6) consists of the first six frames or so, during which Bob positions himself before the computer

Figure 10.6  Tilde (~) in utterance indicates where video frame occurs in the speech stream.
in a way that allows him to gesture as he answers and deals rhetorically with the respondent’s query about how long the interview will take. It is as if, having read the case notes, he is priming himself to deal with a resistive call recipient not only with his mind but with his body. The second part of the episode (frames 7–12; Figure 10.7) involves Bob’s persuasive talk at lines 21–28. His head and arm movements during this persuasive talk are not haphazard occurrences but are systematic in relation to that talk (Erickson, 1982). In fact, the gesturing that occurs is batonic; particular gestures co-occur with points of emphasis or other prosodic aspects of the talk (Ekman and Friesen, 1969; Feyereisen, Van de Wiele, and Dubois, 1988; Kendon, 1994; Schegloff, 1984). But let us begin with frames 1–6 and how Bob positions his body during the opening request.

1. Frame 1 (Figure 10.6) shows how, after dialing the phone number, Bob positions himself in a kind of “rest” position as the phone is ringing. He is within reach of the keyboard, and with his hands in lap, he can initiate a variety of movements.

2. In frame 2, which occurs just after Bob has responded to his recipient’s “hello?” by identifying himself, he is ready to hit the return button on the keyboard with his right hand, while his left hand is moving toward the phone to adjust the volume.

3. Then, after adjusting the volume and hitting the return key, and while saying “we’re doing a research project,” Bob moves his torso back, not quite to where it was before but in a slightly forward position, and his hands come back to his lap, as we see in frame 3.

4. Now while he is in this position, Bob starts rubbing his legs a little, and next, as he continues with the script about “tv in their lives,” he adjusts himself in his chair, as frame 4 shows.

5. At this point, he pops himself off of the chair a few inches and then back on. Next, he swings himself to the right and back to the center again while rubbing the tops of his legs and saying, “we’d like a chance to speak with any adult who is currently married or living with a partner.” See frame 5. While doing this lateral movement, he keeps his head turned toward the computer screen.

6. Then, as frame 6 shows, during the brief silence after this request, and while the respondent is saying that he is “an adult,” Bob once again moves his hands up to the table, with his right hand resting to the right of the keyboard, and his left hand momentarily grabbing the WRMLTK, which is the source of prepared answers to concerns that a respondent might raise.

Summary of Frames 1–6 (Figure 10.6)

These frames correspond to Bob’s making the request to participate. Bob appears in a posture of readiness, insofar as his movements represent (metaphorically) a way of preparing his body for the response of someone who can be anticipated to resist the resolicitation for interview participation. As we move to frame 7 and Figure 10.7, the respondent is now talking in response to Bob’s request.

(7) Line 12
MR: ...I'd rather not be inner...
MI: 'hhh[ ]
MR: [It's-] I understand...

(8) Line 17
MR: ...this is gunna take a half hour[?]
MI: [Ye-ah, well? uh we c'n call yuh back...

(9) Line 19
MI: a:n I'd a-also like to stress...

(10) Line 19
MI: ...that we don't haftuh do the whole interview at once.

(11) Line 20
MI: We c'n break it up intuh segments 'hh-hh an' just do a little bit...

(12) Line 28
MI: Thank you very much– sir

Figure 10.7 Tilde (~) in utterance indicates where video frame occurs in the speech stream.
7. Frame 7 is at the point where Bob, with his “okay” token, acknowledges the busy-right-now claim and begins self-grooming gestures. As Bob says “okay,” and as the respondent is saying “I’d rather not,” he lifts his left hand to his nose; then he moves his hand and grabs the left joint of his glasses and pulls them up.

8. Next, during the respondent’s “take a half hour,” Bob moves his left hand from his glasses hinge to his right brow, as seen in frame 8, so that from the camera perspective his face is shielded. While this can be another grooming gesture, it emerges as something different from that. From this point, Bob begins literally to launch his verbally rhetorical bid to elicit the respondent’s participation, and he also launches gestures that coincide with the stress that he puts on key parts of his utterances.

9. As he starts to say “I’d also like to stress,” his left hand moves out from his brow in a kind of hat tip gesture. The height or acme of that gesture is exactly at the point where he says “also” with stress on that word, as shown in frame 9.

10. Immediately, Bob lowers his left hand to the keyboard so that both hands are at rest position on the desk on either side of the keyboard momentarily. From there, both hands rather “bounce” up and then back down in shortened movements in correspondence with the next verbal stress on the “don’t” of “don’t haftuh do the whole interview at once.” This is at frame 10. Bob’s head also dips to the right as he does this. After this, his hands return to the rest position on the desk and his head moves back to center position.

11. Bob has a brief little gesture with the fingers of his left hand being extended upward when he says “We can break it up intoh segments,” but then his hands are at rest position on either side except for two times when both hands flash up to a kind of cocked position. The reason for this term is that the hands go up during Bob’s taking a breath before “an’ just do a little bit at a time” and before “Uh: it’s very important,” so that the hands are then coming down during the utterance and correspond to the slight stress that occurs on the initial units in those utterances. One of these instances is at frame 11. Bob also does this hand flash during the “WHY don’t:” that precedes “why don’ I try givin’ you a call back in a little while:” (lines 25–26 on the transcript).

12. Then Bob’s hands are at rest position until at “Thank you very much sir” on frame 12, he reaches for the phone and hangs up after the respondent’s “bye bye.”

Summary of Frames 7–12 (Figure 10.7)

These frames are from the segment of the interaction where Bob is listening to his respondent’s reply to the request to participate and where Bob makes a fast-paced persuasive effort to gain cooperation. The grooming gestures to his nose and to adjust his glasses and to hold his brow represent a kind of transition between frames 1–6 and 7–12 at the point where the respondent replies to Bob’s request for participation. Grooming, however, emerges as the incipency of batonic gestures that occur during Bob’s next turn of talk. As frames 8–12 show, after getting resistance from his recipient, and when he verbally counters the respondent’s bad timing declination and possible complaint about the half hour, he gestures in ways that seem to help with the emphasis and therefore the expressiveness with which he produces the rhetorical appeal to the respondent. Although the respondent has no visual access to these batonic gestures, they may help infuse his talk with its hearable emphasis. In a sense, Bob is performing the rhetoric that is his persuasive talk.

CONCLUSION

The situated and particular work whereby interviewers obtain respondents is not an incidental part of the survey enterprise. It is this work that enables obtaining a legitimate and accountable sample of cases for purposes of large-scale analysis in survey research. The numbers of those who accept or decline is a product, at least in part, of the effectiveness of interviewers in soliciting participation both at the initial call stage and in the attempt at refusal conversion. Moreover, the manner of solicitation can affect the type and quality of responses to interview questions that occur within successfully consummated interviews. That is, the tacit practices and personal or commonsense knowledge deployed to obtain completed interviews not only make it possible to assemble a sample of respondents; insofar as they intertwine with what survey methodologists refer to as nonresponse and measurement error, these practices and forms of knowledge affect the very content of those completed interviews and, accordingly, the ultimate quality of data and findings that interviews generate. For these reasons alone, it seems important to study these practices and forms of knowledge.

The practices and forms of knowledge investigated in this chapter have to do with an interviewer’s successful effort at refusal conversion, and another way of describing such practices and knowledge is in terms of the skill and competence this interviewer exhibits. In a sense, Bob Roth is a master at tailoring his callback to the particularities of the case, the household, and the interactive situation in which his callback is attempted. While using his computer-based instructions and the WRMLTK, Bob deploys unscripted devices that specialize and individualize his attempt to convert the respondent. These include preparing (reading the case notes carefully), personalizing the introduction, reviewing the script, claiming the academic auspices of the interview, soliciting a favor, requesting participation ambiguously, persuading verbally, and performing the rhetoric.

A final point about the embodiment of this refusal conversion effort—the rhetorical performance. We have examined other episodes for interviewer gesturing and movement. Although this inquiry is not yet systematic, it seems that the more that interviewers are tethered, via their gaze to the terminal and via their hands to the keyboard, the less they engage in gross arm and
hand movements, and, significantly, the more their voices sound like “reading voice.” Conversely, the less interviewers are tethered, the more they engage these movements, and the more their speech is informally articulate and also tailored to the circumstances of a specific respondent, including the here-and-now specifics of what the respondent says to just this request or just this interview question. Accordingly, what we have discussed as tailoring, on the one hand, and embodied action and batonic gesturing, on the other hand, sometimes go together in intricate and intimate ways.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much of the work for this chapter derived from the Sociological Research Practicum (SRP) in the Indiana University Department of Sociology. The SRP is supported by the Department of Sociology and by the College of Arts and Sciences at Indiana University. We thank Jeremy Freese, Bob Moore, and Robert Soto for valuable research assistance, and the participants in the SRP for stimulus and discussion. Particular gratitude goes to Dr. John Kennedy, the director of the Indiana University Center for Survey Research. Data collection was aided by the generous support of the Institute for Research on Learning, in Palo Alto, CA; Jack Whalen, Marilyn Whalen, and Erik Vinkhuyzen were instrumental and indispensable. A different version of this chapter was previously published as part of a longer work by Maynard and Schaeffer (2000), in the journal Social Studies of Science, 28:281–300, copyright © Sage Publications Ltd. Republication is according to the publisher’s agreement with authors.

NOTES

1. Cicourel (1974:79, 84) observes that survey measurement reflects the structure of interaction in various ways. Such interactional structure includes “negotiating” the recruitment of subjects and “the need to convince the respondent to complete the interview.” See also Maynard and Schaeffer (1997).

2. Because this is the front end and not the substantive interview, the ordinary requirement to read the wording from screens literally is relaxed. Speaking of a computer form that 911 emergency call takers must use when talking to callers, Whalen (1995:196) remarks that “the trajectory of the encounter cannot be treated as the straightforward realization of some standardized agenda, technology, or policy; instead, because contributions to interaction are subject to the independent actions of others, the actual course of a call (or any other social encounter) will be a fundamentally interactional achievement.”

3. Here is one example, which we have excerpted from the interaction at a point when the interviewer is at screen 10 in her call to a “fresh case.” The arrow below points to where the interviewer uses the scripted “May I please...” request:

4. However, “yes” answers and “no” answers are not equivalent in terms of interactional organization. See Wooton (1981).

5. We are basing this assertion on the inspection of other materials in which participants invoke the notion of “chance” when making requests or describing how they or others have obtained a courtesy. See also the discussion of sales appeals in Jefferson and Schenken (1978:169, fn. 3).

6. Bob attempted to recruit the husband for the interview, but he was “getting ready to go to work.” After that, Bob asked when the wife would be returning, and the husband said that it would be in about 20 minutes. This would be after the end of the shift in the Center for Survey Research, and because this was the last night for the study, Bob said to the husband that they “probably won’t be calling back,” and the two parties hung up.


8. See also Schegloff (1988:122).

9. That is, it does not propose to apologize for the callback, or explain it in so many words, or otherwise invoke a more elaborate remedy for the offense. See Goffman (1971:118–122).

10. Observe also that MR’s utterance at line 14 exhibits features of a “dispreferred” (rejecting) response: the first part (“I’m an adult”) agrees with part of the previous turn; that is followed by a brief pause, a contrast marker (“but”), and an account for a rejection rather than a rejection per se. See Pomerantz (1984).

11. Also see Schegloff and Sacks (1973).

12. As mentioned, Bob did call the household back an hour later, and the wife answered. When she checked with her husband about participating, he refused once again, which illustrates a point Maynard and Schaeffer (this volume, Chapter 8), make about the spuriousness of some callback arrangements, which are outcomes of interactional structures rather than substantive agreements.
However, in this case, the wife then agreed to participate and did complete the interview.

13. See Kendon (1994) for extended discussion of batonic gesturing. For experimental evidence on how “unseen” gesturing relates to a speaker’s expressiveness, see Rimé and Schiaratura (1991). For a collection of studies that examine the relations among interaction, bodily comportment, and computer usage in work settings, see Engström and Middleton (1996).

14. For extended discussion of how rhetoric is designed for performance in scientific presentation, see Ochs and Jacoby (1997).

15. It is also the case that such study means opening for further inquiry an infinitude of orderlinesses in the concrete human activities that, in this case, happen to be situated in survey research centers as one utterly ubiquitous and pervasive institution of modern society. That is, aside from the practical questions emerging from the study of survey interviewing, there are topics of intrinsic ethnmethodological interest. See Maynard and Schaeffer (2000).

REFERENCES


