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A Relevance Rule Organizing Responsive Behavior During One Type of Institutional Extended Telling

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ABSTRACT

More research is needed on the organization of mid-telling sequential environments wherein the normal turn-taking rules for speaker transition are typically suspended. While there is research on the type, function, and consequences of recipients’ vocalized responses, we know less about bodily responsive behavior (e.g., nodding) and even less about how responses (or lack thereof) are organized around turn constructional unit boundaries. Using conversation analysis of face-to-face data captured by multiple, participant perspective camera angles, this article addresses these issues by documenting a relevance rule that organizes responsive behavior during international students’ problem presentations to university advisors. Data are in American English.

Conversation analysis (hereafter CA) has long studied extended tellings (for review, see Mandelbaum, 2013; Stivers, 2013). The bulk of this research has focused on: (a) the initiation and termination of such tellings, especially the suspension and resumption of turn-by-turn talk; (b) the actions that tellings accomplish; and (c) how tellings, as courses of action, sequentially organize subsequent action. Within this work, the mid-telling sequential environment has been relatively epiphenomenal, with one exception. One of the earliest contributions of CA, which contrasts with early sociolinguistic conceptualizations of storytelling (Labov & Waletsky, 1967), was empirically demonstrating that and how “the ‘audience’ is in fact the co-author … with recipient [responses] playing a crucial role in shaping and even constituting the ongoing course of the storytelling” (Mandelbaum, 2013; p. 501; emphasis original). Along these lines, there has been research on the type, positioning, function, and consequences of recipients’ (mostly vocalized) responses, including minimal ones (Gardner, 2001; C. Goodwin, 1986b; Guthrie, 1997; Jefferson, 1985; Schegloff, 1982; Stivers, 2008) and more disruptive ones (C. Goodwin, 1986a; M. Goodwin, 1997; Mandelbaum, 1989, 2010; Monzoni & Drew, 2009).

But questions remain about how mid-telling sequential environments are systematically organized. Even a brief examination of such environments suggests the following types of chaos. Although tellers do grossly progress toward telling completion (e.g., story endings, punch lines, etc.; regarding progressivity see Lerner, 1996), tellings are filled with apparently unprompted pausing, self-repair, clarification, backtracking, etc. And although recipients do sometimes respond, and do so in systematic positions—that is, around turn constructional unit (hereafter, TCU) boundaries (C. Goodwin, 1986b; Schegloff, 1982; Stivers, 2008)—there are numerous such places where recipients do not respond, vocally or bodily. Stated differently, although we know a lot about (minimal, vocalized) responses when they do occur, we know relatively little about when they do not occur. Sometimes this lack of response is oriented to by participants, but sometimes it is not. One is
left with a nagging suspicion that—somehow, someway, in some contexts—there might be a relationship between recipients’ lack of responsiveness (and/or the lateness of responses relative to TCU endings) and tellers’ pausing, self-repair, clarification, backtracking, etc., but nothing systematic has yet emerged. While we know that normal turn-taking rules regarding speaker transition are typically suspended during extended tellings (Jefferson, 1978; Mandelbaum, 2013), we know very little about other types of rules that might inform recipients’ conditional entry (Lerner, 1996) around TCU boundaries. In sum, what is missing from research on extended tellings is a description of relevance rules, if any, that organize the production of responsive behavior during the course of tellings, the accountability of such rules, and how this accountability might reflexively affect tellers’ construction of next TCUs.

Historically, CA has fundamentally relied on identifying, describing, and explicating relevance rules of both practices and actions (for review, see Robinson, 2016). Relevance rules involve both normative structures of reasoning and normative patterns of conduct (Heritage, 1984). As such: (a) Relevance rules have implications for interlocutors’ understandings of what just happened (and did not happen); and (b) Relevance rules associated with current conduct can make specific types of next conduct accountable, such that its omission is officially absent and thereby generative of sense-restorative inferences and behavior (Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 1968; Stivers & Rossano, 2010). A relevance rule regarding responsive behavior during extended tellings is exactly the sort of mediating phenomenon that could bring more systematic order to heretofore unexplained mid-telling pausing, self-repair, clarification, backtracking, etc.

Of course, the presence, absence, and nature of relevance rules for responsive behavior almost assuredly vary according to at least the nature of extended tellings as courses of action (e.g., jokes vs. stories vs. problem presentations) and their contexts (e.g., ordinary vs. institutional). If so, studying such rules in a rigorous fashion requires naturalistically controlling for at least these parameters. Furthermore, in order to document a relevance rule, it is necessary to examine a relatively large corpus of like tellings (Robinson, 2007). As such, the present article attempts to document a relevance rule, and its implications, from a corpus of extended tellings that are constitutive of one very particular institutional activity and context: International students’ problem presentations during university advising sessions. Admittedly, from a basic CA standpoint, this research would optimally be conducted on ordinary conversation. However, collecting enough data while controlling for the requisite parameters makes doing so currently infeasible and is a long-term goal for future research. We attempt to document a relevance rule in the present data as a proof of concept that provides guidance for future research in a range of contexts.

Specifically, we document the following relevance rule: In the course of students’ extended tellings, advisors are accountable for producing an acknowledging response either prior to, or in, the unmarked transition space (Jefferson, 1986) following each and every TCU ending. This rule is not intuitive and has not, to our knowledge, been previously considered in the context of extended tellings. That is, if normal rules regarding speaker transition are suspended during such tellings (Jefferson, 1978), then although it is certainly relevant for advisors to respond around TCU endings (C. Goodwin, 1986b; Schegloff, 1982)—especially considering that most minimal response tokens specifically pass on an opportunity to take (and are not) full-fledged turns (Schegloff, 1982)—it is by no means clear that advisors’ responses are accountably relevant. Support for our proposed rule could have wide-ranging implications for future research on extended tellings in a variety of contexts.

Data and method

This research was approved by a University’s Human Subjects Protection Committee. In all data presented, verbal identifiers were made anonymous and permission was granted to use video images. Data are drawn from a corpus of videotapes of 20 naturally occurring, consecutively collected, advising appointments held in an Office of International Affairs of a large, Northwestern university. None of the appointments was prescheduled; they were held during drop-in hours. Appointments were
conducted in English between one of three native English-speaking university advisors from the division of International Student and Scholar Services (one male and two females) and one different nonnative English-speaking international student (researchers were not present). Students were predominantly Asian (89%) and an average of 26.7 years old (Range = 20–33; SD = 3.6). On the whole, students were proficient in English, having been speaking English (in either their native country or the United States) for an average of 12.4 years prior to this study (Range = 1–25; SD = 6.6).

Appointments were conducted in one of three rooms, all of which were similarly configured such that advisors and students tended to face one another (sometimes with an intervening desk), and advisors had ready access to a computer to their left (see Figure 1). All appointments were recorded with two video cameras (one behind each participant facing the other) that were synchronized (see Figures 1 and 2a–2b).

The specific data for this article are students’ problem presentations ($N = 20$; described in the following), which were transcribed for vocal behavior as well as nodding and gaze orientation (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013). Data were independently transcribed and reconciled by two conversation analysts to ensure reliability (Roberts & Robinson, 2004). The primary method used is CA (Sidnell & Stivers, 2013), which informed the coding of data (Stivers, 2015) and facilitated distributional support for our claims (Robinson, 2007).

**Analysis**

This section leads up to, and ultimately supports, our proposed relevance rule. Our analysis has nine subsections involving: (a) an example of a problem presentation as an extended telling; (b) defining
TCU endings; (c) controlling for participants’ body orientation; (d) the frequency and type of advisors’ responses; (e) the positioning of advisors’ responses relative to students’ TCU endings; (f) defining student progressivity from TCU to TCU toward telling completion; (g) the relationship between the positioning of advisors’ responses and student progressivity; (h) analysis of possibly disconfirmatory cases; and (i) final statistical evidence.

An example of a problem presentation as an extended telling

For an example of the focal phenomenon, see Extract 1, lines 6–31 (this transcript does not include advisors’ nodding):

Extract 1 [#3–#29]

01 ADV: Hi. (.) Come on in.
02 STU: "Thanks."
03 (2.0) ((Student sits down))
04 ADV: So: (.) what’s goin’ on.
05 (0.3)
06 | STU: So I’m graduating, (.) this term,
07 | ADV: [This] term?
09 | ADV: Mm hm,
10 | STU: Uh: so I had a question about my travel,
11 (.)
12 | ADV: [Mm=hm,]
13 | STU: [Uhm]: it’s been a while since I went home.
14 | ADV: Mm hm[; , ]
15 | STU: [You know] [hh] I: already have an
16 | ADV: [Mm=hm,]
17 | STU: start [] that I can go and come
18 | ADV: [Mm=hm,]
19 | STU: offer,
20 | ADV: O[kay, ]
21 | STU: [To sta:rt [a job,]
22 | ADV: [Goo:d,]
23 (.)
24 | ADV: Good,
25 | STU: So: uh that’s in: (.) California.
26 | ADV: Mm hm,
27 | STU: Uh: (. ) e:=so: (0.3) >as soon as< I get my ‘O’ ‘P’ ‘T’
28 | card I=’ave: told them that I ‘ll join it [start ] thuh
29 | ADV: [Mm=hm,]
30 | STU: wor[k,]
31 | ADV: [Per]fect.
32 | STU: So: uh: .hh is there a (. ) way=that I can go and come
33 | back, i[n thuh] mean time.
34 | ADV: [Mm=hm,]
35 | ADV: There is.
In all 20 advising sessions, after advisors and students opened interactions—which involved both advisors and students greeting one another and bodily organizing themselves (e.g., sitting) in preparation for business (Extract 1, lines 1–3; Robinson, 1998)—advisors solicited students’ business in open-ended fashions: “So::: what’s goin’ on?” (line 4; Another common question was *What can I do for you?*). Very similar to physicians’ solicitations of patients’ problems (Robinson, 2001; Robinson & Heritage, 2005), advisors’ questions made conditionally relevant (Schegloff, 2007) students’ presentations of actionable problems/questions regarding academic issues and thus gave students the right to speak until doing so (see also Guthrie, 1997). Students’ problems/questions involved course scheduling, degree completion, enrollment, program admission, immigration, job eligibility, and travel restrictions.

In no cases did students answer with actionable problems/questions in their initial TCUs. Rather, students began extended tellings (Mandelbaum, 2013; Stivers, 2013) by variously introducing background information designed to facilitate advisors’ understandings of, or to justify, students’ problems/questions (similar to patients presenting doctorable problems; Heritage & Robinson, 2006; Robinson & Heritage, 2005). For example, in Extract 1, across the student’s first two TCUs, he informs the advisor: “So I’m graduating, (.) this term,” (line 6) and “And = uh: (.) I’m = a- I’m: starting my ‘O’ ‘P’ ‘T’ on July fifth.” (lines 9–10; O.P.T. stands for Optional Practical Training). These informing actions are recognizable to advisors as not constituting actionable problems/questions. Thus, even though it may have been relevant for advisors to enter students’ turn spaces around these TCU endings—for example with continuers (line 11; Schegloff, 1982)—such entry was conditional (Lerner, 1996) because students continued to hold the right to the floor to complete their tellings. This process continued until students completed their presentations by producing actionable problems/questions, as the student in Extract 1 does at lines 32–33: “So::: uh: .hh is there a (.) way = that I can go and come back, in thuh mean time.”

This article focuses on the mid-telling sequential environment of students’ problem presentations, including all students’ TCUs/actions leading up to (but not including) their final, completing TCU. Students presentations were composed of an average of eight mid-telling TCUs/actions (Mode = 5; Range = 2–35).

**Defining TCU endings**

According to the rules for turn taking (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), recipients normally position their contributions around possible TCU endings, and this holds for extended tellings (C. Goodwin, 1986b; Schegloff, 1982; Stivers, 2008). The possible ending of a TCU and its action has at least three dimensions: syntax, intonation, and pragmatics (here we are referring to the pragmatics of individual TCUs’ actions, not that of tellings as courses of action; Ford & Thompson, 1996). Ford and Thompson (1996) demonstrated that responses are most commonly positioned around places where TCUs possibly end syntactically, intonationally, and pragmatically (i.e., in combination, even though syntax alone can be exploited for turn incursion; Lerner, 1996; Sacks et al., 1974). In this article, we defined possible TCU endings as having all three dimensions; we did so for purposes of coding (Schegloff, 1993), as these were places where responses were arguably relevant (but not necessarily mandatory) for students and advisors, even if conditionally so (Lerner, 1996). For example, in Extract 1, at lines 9–10, there is a possible TCU ending after “fifth.”: “A::nd = uh: (.) I’m = a- I’m: starting my ‘O’ ‘P’ ‘T’ on July fifth.” While this unit comes to a possible syntactic and pragmatic ending after “‘O’ ‘P’ ‘T’”, it does not end intonationally, as the student blends together the acronym “‘O’ ‘P’ ‘T’” and the next word “on” into a single intonation unit (DuBois, Cumming, Schuetze-Coburn, & Paolino, 1992). For another example, at line 15, there is a possible TCU ending after “home.”: “Uhm:: it’s
been a while since I went home.” While this unit comes to a possible syntactic ending after “while”, it does not come to a possible pragmatic ending insofar as “it’s” is (so far) a semantically empty subject (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973). Across all 20 student problem presentations, we identified 185 possible TCU endings (Mean = 8; Mode = 5), hereafter referred to simply as TCU endings.

**Controlling for participants’ body orientation**

Research suggests that, compared to situations where interactants are oriented toward each other with their torsos and legs, relatively asymmetrical situations differentially affect norms of participation (for review, see Robinson, 1998; Schegloff, 1998). Although students’ torso/leg positioning toward advisors remained constant throughout problem presentations (largely a result of students sitting in nonwheeled chairs oriented toward advisors), advisors (who sat in wheeled, swivelable chairs) sometimes oriented their torsos/legs away from students toward adjacent computers (see Figure 2b). For the purpose of making valid comparisons between advisors’ responsive behaviors, this article only deals with the 163/185 TCU endings (88.1%) in which advisors’ and students’ were facing each other with their torsos/legs (see Figure 2a). In every case where advisors were oriented toward computers, they were also not gazing at students at TCU endings (Figure 2b), which also affects norms of participation (for review, see Rossano, 2012) and which further warrants the exclusion of these 22 cases. In the focal 163 cases, advisors were gazing at students at TCU endings (which is normative in the context of extended tellings; Rossano, 2012). In the vast majority of these cases (155/163; 95.1%), students were also gazing at advisors at TCU endings, such that advisors and students were mutually oriented toward each other with their gaze and body (In the following we discuss students’ gaze withdrawal at TCU endings).

**The frequency and type of advisors’ responses**

The beginnings of support for our proposed relevance rule are grossly distributional: Advisors are much more likely to respond in some way around the focal 163 TCU endings (147/163; 90.2%) than to not respond at all (16/163; 9.8%). This distribution begins to suggest that responses are not simply relevant but that they are accountably relevant. A total of 144 of these 147 responses (98%) were minimally acknowledging responses (Gardner, 2001), including: (a) vocal continuers (e.g., Mm him, Uh huh; 82/144; 56.9%; See Extract 1, lines 11, 14, 16, 26, etc.); (b) stand-alone head nods1 (33/144; 22.9%; see Extract 7, line 78); (c) the word Okay (19/144; 13.2%; see Extract 1, line 20); (d) variants of Yeah (6/144; 4.2%; see Extract 1, line

1Stand-alone head nods were produced and treated as continuers (Schegloff, 1982; Stivers, 2008; Whitehead, 2011). For example, in Extracts A and B, advisors’ nods are positioned early and on time relative to students’ TCU endings (which come after “O’ “P’ “T?” and “situation.” respectively, and in both cases students treat nods as continuers by progressing their presentations in next TCUs (with “h but I changed my...” and “uh: I had applied for...” respectively; regarding progressivity, see later subsection in main text).

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Extract A  [#2–#13]

10  STU: I was: (.) not (.) applied to (thuh)
11  ‘O’ ‘P’ ‘T?’ .h but I changed my...
12  ADV: [ ((Nods)) ]

Extract B  [#2–#27]

03  STU: Uh: (0.2) thing is mine is (0.2) kind of (.) different
04  situation. [uh: I had] applied for...
05  ADV: [ ((Nods)) ]
20); (e) brief assessments\(^2\) (C. Goodwin, 1986b; e.g., Good, Perfect; 3/144; 2.1%; see Extract 1, line 31); and
(f) the word Right (1/144; .07%). The remaining three nonminimal responses (3/147; 2.1%) were other initiations of repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977; see Extract 5, line 15).

**The positioning of advisors’ responses relative to students’ TCU endings**

In order to fully support our proposed relevance rule, we examined where advisors’ responses were positioned relative to students’ TCU endings: 87.8% of all responses (129/147) were positioned at least on time, that is, either before TCU endings (i.e., early; 97/129) or immediately after them within unmarked transition spaces (i.e., on time; 32/129; Jefferson, 1986). While nodding never co-occurred with other initiation of repair, it frequently co-occurred with most other responses, including: (a) vocal continuers (77/82; 93.9%); (b) Okay (18/19; 94.7%); (c) Yeah (6/6; 100%); (d) Right (1/1; 100%); and (e) brief assessments (1/3; 33.3%). In cases where nodding co-occurred with, and preceded, vocal responses, we considered the beginning of the nod to constitute the beginning of the response (Schegloff, 1984).\(^3\) A total of 12.2% of all

\(^2\)Participants treated brief assessments as minimal acknowledgement tokens oriented toward students continuing their tellings. For example, in Extract C, the advisor, who produces “Good.” (line 74), orients to the student continuing by immediately producing a continuier, “Mm hm,” (line 75), after which the student continues to progress his telling in his next TCU (line 77; regarding progressivity, see later subsection in main text).

Extract C [#1–#21]

72 STU: (I’m:) (0.5) I think I’ll end
73 up with all ays. [this time bu]t (“A” grades))
74 → ADV: [Good. ]
75 → ADV: Mm hm,
76 (0.7)
77 STU: Now this=’s a vgr big mess...

\(^3\)Nodding either preceded or started concurrently with, but never started after, vocal responses (Schegloff, 1984). When nods co-occurred with vocal responses, there is evidence that students treated nods as continuers (Schegloff, 1982) independent of vocal responses. For example, in Extracts D and E, advisors begin to nod prior to students’ TCU endings (i.e., prior to “point.” and “question,” respectively), and students begin to progress their presentations in next TCUs either before (with “an...” in Extract D), or concurrently with (with “Uh:m...” in Extract E), advisors’ production of vocal continuers (regarding progressivity, see later subsection in main text).

Extract D [#1–#21]

70 → STU: I’ve not lost even a single po:[int. an’]=
71 → ADV: [(Nods)]
72 ADV: =[Mm hm, ]
73 ADV: =[(Nods)] (Continued from line 71)
74 STU: (I’m:) (0.5) I think I’ll end...

Extract E [#2–#22]

02 STU: Uh::m yeah I (hav’)=j’s’: (0.4) a small ques[tion, ]
03 → ADV: [(Nods)]
04 → ADV: [Mm hm?]
05 → STU: [ . Uh:]m:] (0.5) .hh () basically::...
06 ADV: [(Nods)] (Continued from line 3)

In line with this evidence (e.g., Extracts D–E), we coded advisors’ responses as beginning with their nodding, and thus the advisors’ responses in Extracts D and E (above) were coded as being positioned early relative to TCU endings.

The majority of the 97 early responses (54.6%) were positioned within the last word of TCU endings (see Extracts D–E). Earlier positioning was largely a by-product of advisors targeting possible syntactic TCU endings (e.g., “working” in Extract F) to which students added more than one word (Jefferson, 1986; in the main text, see also the advisor’s nod at line 78 in Extract 7, which targets the student’s “mess” at line 76).

Extract F [#2–#15]

15 → STU: It’s thuh same place where I been
16 → working [for=(th’) past=h six months, [s:o: ]
17 → ADV: [(Nods)]
18 ADV: [Mm hm]
responses (18/147) came late, that is, after unmarked transition spaces (Jefferson, 1986; e.g., In Extract 2, the students’ TCU ends after “India.” at line 4, and the advisor’s response is delayed by a micropause at line 5). In 9.8% of all cases (16/163), there was no response at all, vocally or bodily (e.g., In Extract 7, the students’ TCU ends after “week.” at line 79, and there is no response by the advisor, vocally or bodily).

**Defining student progressivity from TCU to TCU toward telling completion**

Related to the positioning of advisors’ responses around TCU endings, we also examined the incidence of students progressing their tellings as courses of action after TCU endings (regarding progressivity see Lerner, 1996). The presence (or absence) of progression is one form of evidence for whether students do (or do not) orient to advisors as having understood (or at least adequately attended to) the actions implemented in prior TCUs (Schegloff, 1982). After arriving at TCU endings, students did not progress their tellings in 33/163 cases (20.2%). In line with prior research (see the following), we considered students to have not progressed if they continued speaking in one of four ways that operated on prior talk/TCUs: (a) self-repairs (12/33; 36%); (b) understanding checks (1/33; 03%); (c) increments to prior TCUs (17/33; 52%); and (d) answers to advisors’ initiations of repair (i.e., repairs; 3/33; 09%). In all of these cases, while students may have progressed prior TCUs (e.g., by adding clarifying information), they did not progress their tellings as courses of action. In all other cases (130/163; 79.8%), students progressed tellings by producing new TCUs that introduced apparently novel aspects of background information that did not constitute repair. For example, in Extract 1, the students’ actions implemented through the TCUs at lines 6, 9–10, 12, 15, 17–19, 25, and 27–30 were all considered to have progressed the telling. This was not the case for the student’s increment (Schegloff, 2016): “To start a job,” (line 21; see the following). Next we discuss the four types of nonprogression.

**Self-repair.** Transition space, self-initiated, self-repair (Schegloff et al., 1977) represented cases in which students halted telling progressivity in order to fix problems/troubles in prior TCUs. For example, see Extract 2. The student’s unit “Uh:: (0.4) yeah. uh: (0.2) actually uh (0.2) uh: (.) .hhh I’m an international student (.) from India.” (lines 3–4) comes to a TCU ending after “India.” (line 4).

Extract 2 [#1–#21]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>ADV: So:: wh’t=can I do for you.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>STU: Uh:: (0.4) yeah. uh: (0.2) actually uh (0.2) uh: (.) .hhh I’m an international student (.) from India.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>ADV: [(( Nods ))]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>STU: =[(Mm hm,)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06</td>
<td>STU: =[(Nods)] (continued nod from line 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>ADV: =[(Mm hm,)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08</td>
<td>ADV: [((Nods))] (continued nod from line 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>ADV: =[(Nods)] (continued nod from line 7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>STU: =[.hhh]hh Uh: (0.7) I’ve taken eleven credits:.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After a micropause at line 5—during which the advisor continues to gaze at the student but otherwise does not respond vocally or with a nod—the student engages in self-repair by producing, “a (.) undergraduate student.” (line 6), which modifies and clarifies/specifies his previous characterization: “an international student” (Schegloff, 2013). Simultaneous with the student’s self-repair, the advisor nods (line 7), which is thus responsive (albeit late after the micropause at line 5) to the student’s prior unit (at lines 3–4). Note that, immediately after the student’s self-repair (i.e., after “student.”; line 6), the advisor responds with, “(Mm hm),” (line 8), after which the student does progress his telling: “Uh: (0.7) I’ve taken eleven credits.” (line 10). An argument can be made that the student’s self-repair (line 6) is a practice for soliciting a response from the advisor (Bolden, Mandelbaum, & Wilkinson, 2012).
**Understanding checks.** Students also delayed the progressivity of tellings when they continued speaking by initiating sequences of talk designed to check/confirm advisors’ understandings of telling elements in prior TCUs. For example, see Extract 3. The student’s unit “A:n’ (0.7) there’s another: (. ) program (. ) called ‘E’ ‘T’ ‘M’,” (lines 9–10) comes to a TCU ending after “‘E’ ‘T’ ‘M’,” (Engineering and Technology Management).

Extract 3 [#2–#5]

07 STU: .hhhh An’ I: actually I talked with my advisor?
08 ADV: =Mm hm?
09 STU: A:n’ (0.7) there’s another: (. ) program (. )
10 called ‘E’ ‘T’ ‘M’,
11 (. )
12 → STU: [Uh ( ) (you) hear about that. [(    )]]
13 ADV: [ ]
14 ADV: [ ((Nods))]
15 STU: [It’s: there] a= if I can do a dual major, or something,  
16 ADV: [ {{Nods}}] {{(continued nod from line 14)}}
17 .hh I’ll be: (. ) I think it’s really helpful.
18 ADV: Mm hm?

After a micropause at line 11—during which the advisor continues to gaze at the student but otherwise does not respond vocally or with a nod—the student requests confirmation that the advisor has heard about the ETM program: “Uh ( ) (you) hear about that.” (line 12). The advisor orients to this as such by confirming: “Mm hm?” (line 13). Note that, immediately after the advisor’s confirmation, “Mm hm?” (line 13), the student does progress his telling: “It’s: there a- if I can do a dual major,...” (lines 15–17). Here the student’s understanding check is an explicit practice for soliciting a response from the advisor.

**Increments.** Just over half of the cases constituting lack of progressivity (17/33; 52%) involved the addition of increments (Schegloff, 2016) to prior units. While increments may progress prior TCUs (Lerner, 1996), increments delay the progressivity of tellings as courses of action insofar as increments delay the production of new TCUs/actions headed toward the production of actionable problems/questions. For example, see Extract 4. The unit “As soon as she: posts thuh grade I will submit my (.) graduation (.) petition.” (lines 9–10) comes to a TCU ending after “petition.” (line 10).

Extract 4 [#2–#35]

01 STU: Last time I was here I (. ) uh advised to: change my pee aych  
02 ((Ph.D.)) (. ) ee deh dee ((Ed.D.)) to (1.0) em ay? ((M.A.))
03 [(0.3)]
04 ADV: [{{Nods[s ]}}]
05 ADV: [Okay,]
06 ((lines omitted))
09 STU: As sgon as she: posts thuh grade I will  
10 submit my (. ) graduation (. ) petition.
11 (0.3)
12 ADV: [Okay, ]
13 → STU: [{{S}o I can]} (. ) eh: graduate as a master’s, (. ) student,
14 (0.8)
15 ADV: In thuh summer?

At line 11 there ensues a .3-s pause. During the first .2 s of this pause, the advisor continues to gaze at the student, but otherwise does not respond vocally or with a nod. During the last .1 s of the pause, while keeping his head still, the advisor shifts his eyeballs to the left, which can communicate thinking/processing (M. H. Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986) and thus may bodily index some type of trouble (e.g., nonunderstanding). At line 12, the student adds the increment: “(S)o I can (. ) eh:
graduate as a master’s, (.) student,” (line 13). Insofar as the student has already indicated that they are receiving an “em ay?” (i.e., M. A.; line 1) and that they will be submitting a “graduation (.) petition” (line 10), the increment does little more than recapitulate already presented information. As Schegloff (2016) observed, increments positioned late—that is, after the duration of an unmarked transition space (which was the case for 11/17 increments; 64.7%)—are typically responsive to the absence of talk where talk by another was due. Along these lines, it can be argued that the student’s increment in Extract 4 (line 13) is a practice for soliciting and facilitating a response from the advisor (Bolden et al., 2012). Note that the majority of students’ increments functioned to somehow specify/clarify prior talk and in that sense served repair-like purposes. For example, in Extract 1, the increment “this term,” (line 6) specifies the time frame for graduation, which had apparently been unclear to the advisor, as evidenced by their repair initiation: “This term?” (line 7). Similarly, the increment “To start a job,” (Extract 1, line 21) specifies “offer,” (line 19).

Answers to advisors’ initiations of repair. The three instances of advisors responding by initiating repair delayed the progressivity of students’ tellings, and thus students’ answers/repairs also constituted such delay. For example, see Extract 5, which is a continuation of Extract 4. The completion of the student’s increment, “(S)o I can (.) eh: graduate as a master’s, (.) student,” (line 13), brings their telling to another TCU ending.

Extract 5 [#2–#35]

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09</td>
<td>STU: As sgon as she: posts thuh grade I will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>submit my (.) graduation (.) petition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>(0.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>ADV: [Okay, ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>STU: [(S)o I can] (.) eh: graduate as a master’s, (.) student,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>(0.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>ADV: In thuh summer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>ADV: Or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>→ STU: Uh:: [(.) they s]ay:: t:=you can still apply for (.u)h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>ADV: [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>→ STU: Spring.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the relatively long pause at line 14, the advisor’s head and body remain oriented toward the student, the advisor’s eyeballs remain shifted to the left (possibly communicating thinking/processing), and the advisor does not respond vocally or with a nod. Eventually, the advisor initiates repair: “In thuh summer?” (line 15). The student answers at lines 18–20, and this answer did not constitute progression insofar as it operates on the student’s prior TCU/action (line 13) by correcting the advisor’s understanding of the term in which the student will graduate.

Extracts 2–5 (and 6) have in common that advisors respond late relative to TCU endings and that students’ immediately subsequent talk: (a) halts the progressivity of tellings as courses of action, (b) deals generally with repairing advisors’ understanding of prior talk, and (c) provides advisors with second chances (sometimes even mandates) to respond. Relative to our proposed relevance rule, these are deviant cases that interactionally expose and explicate the rule’s accountability.

The relationship between the positioning of advisors’ responses and student progressivity

Table 1 displays the relationship between the positioning of advisors’ responses (y-axis) and whether or not students progressed tellings after TCU endings (x-axis). As seen in the upper left quadrant, in 119/163 cases (73% of all TCU endings), advisors positioned their responses either early or on time relative to TCU endings, and students progressed tellings in immediately next TCUs. As seen in the lower right quadrant, in 23/163 cases (14.1% of all TCU endings), advisors positioned their responses
late relative to TCU endings (or did not produce any vocal or nod-based response), and students did not progress tellings in immediately next TCUs. Rather, students continued speaking by engaging in self-repair, seeking confirmation of advisors’ understandings, adding increments to prior units, etc. (Extracts 2–6 fall into this lower right quadrant).

The overwhelming distribution of cases into these two (upper left and lower right) quadrants of Table 1 (i.e., 87.1% of all cases) supports our proposed relevance rule. Specifically, when advisors produce responses that claim at least their attention to, if not their understanding of, students’ immediately prior units, and when these responses are at least on time relative to TCU endings, students progress their tellings (regarding claims vs. displays of understanding in an institutional context see Koole, 2010). In contrast, when advisors produce responses late (relative to TCU endings) or not at all—stated differently, when advisors fail to respond at least on time—students halt the progressivity of tellings in ways that provide advisors with second chances (sometimes even mandates) to respond. The disproportional distribution of cases into these two cells is statistically significant, Chi² (1, N = 163) = 59.78; p < .001.

In addition to cases like Extracts 2–5 and the distribution represented in Table 1, the accountability of our proposed relevance rule is further highlighted by cases where advisors respond late relative to TCU endings, these responses claim no problem, and students nonetheless do not progress tellings. For example, see Extract 6. At lines 3–5, the student’s unit, “Uh:m (2.2) li:ke = h a week ago? I got (.) thuh: (0.2) thuh (r) receipt,” comes to a TCU ending after “(r)receipt,” (line 6).

Extract 6 [#1–#6]

03 STU: Uh:m (2.2) li:ke=h a week ago[:? I [ggt (.)]
04 ADV: [ [Mm hm, ]
05 ADV: [ ((Nods)) ]
06 STU: thuh: (0.2) thuh (r)receipt,
07 (0.2)
08 ADV: [.mtch Okay.]
09 ADV: [ ((Nods)) ]
10 → STU: [From: ] (.) thuh: for thuh reinstatement,
11 ADV: [((Nods))] {(continued nod from line 9)}

The advisor’s response, “.mtch Okay.” (line 8, including the simultaneous nod at line 9) comes late, being delayed by a .2-s pause (line 7). This response claims to accept (Beach, 1993)—and thus tacitly claims to understand—the student’s prior informing. Had this Okay been positioned on time (e.g., within the unmarked transition space following “(r)receipt,” at line 6), we might have expected the student to continue to progress the telling. However, this Okay is not just any Okay, but a late one, and thus an accountable one in terms of our proposed relevance rule. Thus, despite the advisor’s nominal acceptance (lines 8–9), rather than progressing their telling, the student halts progressivity with an increment, “Fro:
m (.) thuh: for thuh reinstatement,” (line 10), which clarifies the nature of the “(r)receipt,” (line 6) and thus orients to the advisor’s late response as possibly indexing their trouble understanding.

**Analysis of possibly disconfirmatory cases**

Our proposed relevance rule is that, in the course of students’ extended tellings, advisors are accountable for producing an acknowledging response either prior to, or in, the unmarked transition space following each and every TCU ending. There are cases that possibly disconfirm this rule, most notably those in the lower left quadrant of Table 1 (11/163; 6.7% of all cases). Here, advisors positioned their responses late relative to TCU endings, or did not respond at all, and students nonetheless progressed tellings in immediately next TCUs. It turns out that eight of these 11 cases are what Schegloff (1997) called **boundary cases**, which “generally 'look like' our emerging phenomenon, even if they do not turn out to be instances of it” (p. 502). Boundary cases “are on both sides of the boundary, and in specifying the boundary, they help specify what belongs inside it and what does not” (p. 502, emphasis original). These eight cases are the only ones in the entire corpus in which students remove their gaze from advisors prior to, and during, TCU endings. Doing so communicates students’ temporary lack of immediate engagement with advisors (for review, see Robinson, 1998; Rossano, 2012). In all eight of these cases, advisors do not produce any type of response (vocally or bodily). For example, see Extract 7. The student’s unit, “Now this = ’s a very big mess which I have with me right now.” (lines 76–77) comes to a TCU ending after “now.” (line 77). The advisor responds by nodding (line 77), after which the student progresses to our focal TCU (at line 79).

**Extract 7 [1:#1–#21]**

76 STU: Now this=’s a very big mess
77 which [I have with me right now.]
78 ADV: [ ((Nods)) ]
79 → STU: (That is) [A] .hhhhh and I have mid terms this week. (B)
80 → and I’m spending .hh meeting all my professors...

The student begins his unit at line 79 gazing at the advisor (see **Figure 3a, Figure 3 first mention symbolized in the transcript as {A}**). As the student breathes in, “.hhhhh” (line 79), he begins to shift his head and gaze down and away to his left, culminating in **Figure 3b** (symbolized in the transcript as {B}). The student maintains his gaze aversion through the TCU ending after “week.” (line 79) and

**Figure 3.** Student’s removal of gaze through TCU ending.
into the beginning of his next unit (at line 80). The advisor does not respond in any fashion around “week.” and, without delay, the student begins a new unit that progresses his telling: “and I’m spending .hh meeting all my professors...” (line 80). In terms of our proposed relevance rule, these eight cases, as boundary cases, can be legitimately removed from our analysis. It appears that the practice of students removing their gaze from advisors leading up to, and through, TCU endings is one for at least relaxing, if not lifting, the accountable relevance of advisors responding.

Space prevents analysis of all three remaining cases in the lower left quadrant of Table 1, but one of them is Extract 8. The student’s unit, “It’s one that’s more secure.” (line 16), comes to a TCU ending after “secure.”

Extract 8 [#1–#14]

13 STU: .hhhhhh But thuh thi::ng i::s in Romania they cha:nge (.)
14 uhm (. ) thuh system of like (. ) issuing passport?
15 ADV: [Mm: hm,]
16 → STU: [It’s o:ne that’s more secure. >an’ li[ke e:verybody’s]
17 ADV: [ (Nods) ]
18 STU: [renewing th[eir passp]ort,]
19 ADV: [ `(mtch Yeah.) ]
20 ADV: [ ((Nods)) ] ((Continued nod from line 17))

This case actually supports our proposed relevance rule insofar as the advisor does respond with a stand-alone head nod (line 17). The fact that this response was coded as being late is an artificial by-product of the fact that the student begins the next TCU, “>an’ like<...” (line 16), with a relatively quick pace (symbolized by inward-pointing angle brackets), such that it is squeezed into the unmarked transition space after “secure.” (Jefferson, 1986; Schegloff, 1988). An argument can be made that the advisor targeted her nod at the unmarked transition space, which she slightly missed due to the student’s fast-paced continuation (Jefferson, 1986).

Another set of cases that accord with our proposed relevance rule, yet still need to be explained by reference to it, are in the upper right quadrant of Table 1 (10/163; 6.1% of all cases). Here, although advisors respond either early or on time relative to TCU endings (as proposed), students do not progress tellings in immediately next TCUs. In these cases, students’ lack of progressivity can be independently explained in terms of a separate, and arguably more basic, relevance rule involving repair (Schegloff et al., 1977). Research has demonstrated that speakers are accountable for making sense (Robinson, 2016) and labor under this accountability even when recipients claim to understand talk that is possibly unclear, erroneous, etc. (Jefferson, 2007). Along these lines, when students speak in ways that possibly endanger sense making, even when advisors tacitly claim to understand this talk (e.g., by producing continuers, which pass on an opportunity to initiate repair; Schegloff, 1982) and even when these claims are produced early or on time relative to TCU endings, students nonetheless work to repair themselves (via self-correction, the addition of a clarifying increment, etc.), which stalls the progressivity of tellings.

For example, see Extract 9. As context, international students must apply for, and receive, special permission to be employed in the United States. The student initially refers to this in terms of applying for their “...right of work.” (line 6), which possibly ends the TCU.

Extract 9 [#1–#14]

02 STU: Uh:m (. ) I have like uh: (0.8) <delicate,> qu[estion, ]=
03 ADV: [ ((Nods))]
04 ADV: =[`Kay. ]
05 ADV: [((Nods))] ((Continued nod from line 3))
06 → STU: .hhhhh I applied for my [uh:m right of wo:rk. r[ight of]
07 ADV: [ ((Nods)) [ ]
08 ADV: [ ]
09 → STU: employment, a::nd uh::: (. ) .hh I think I’ll be...
Although the advisor begins nodding at the onset of “uh:m” (lines 6–7) and nods continuously through the unmarked transition space after “wo:rk.” (lines 6–7), the student does not progress his telling. Rather, the student immediately engages in self-initiated, self-repair (Schegloff et al., 1977), replacing the less-official term, “right of wo:rk.” (line 6) with the more official term: “right of employment.” (lines 6–9; Schegloff, 2013). Evidence that the student orients to “right of wo:rk.” as being part of a repair process is found in their immediately prior, vocally stretched “uh:m” (line 6), which is a “[preindication] of a repair, especially a search, upcoming” (Schegloff, 1979, p. 273). In sum, these cases can be explained by the independent organization of self-repair, insofar as speakers hold themselves accountable for making sense despite recipients’ tacit claims of understanding.

**Final statistical evidence**

Using two-level hierarchical generalized linear modeling clustered by advisor (i.e., controlling for possible advisor level variance), we performed two tests to support our proposed relevance rule. Data were the 155 core (i.e., nonboundary) TCU endings in which advisors and students were mutually oriented toward each other with their bodies and gaze (i.e., These tests excluded the 22 cases represented by Figure 2b, as well as the eight cases represented by Figure 3b/Extract 7). The first test showed that, at least by the completion of unmarked transition spaces after TCU endings (i.e., at least on time but not late), advisors are significantly more likely to produce acknowledging responses (e.g., a vocal continuer, stand-alone head nod, Okay, Right, Yeah, or brief assessment) than they are to either produce no response at all or initiate repair (which is a type of response that is arguably motivated by the more basic organization of repair; OR = 4.66, CI = 1.66–13.06, p = .023). The second test showed that advisors’ production of acknowledging responses that are at least on time (vs. late responses and other initiations of repair; see previous) are significantly, positively associated with students progressing tellings (vs. not, such as engaging in self-repair, soliciting understanding, adding clarifying increments, etc.; refer to Extracts 2–6; OR = 113, CI = 33–383, p < .001). 4

**Discussion**

Relying on basic CA, coding, and statistically significant distributional trends, we documented the following relevance rule: In the course of students’ extended tellings, advisors are accountable for producing on-time acknowledging responses (e.g., stand-alone nods, Uh huh, Okay, Yeah, Right, and brief assessments) following each and every TCU ending. On-time responses are ones that are positioned either prior to, or in, unmarked transition spaces relative to TCU endings (Jefferson, 1986). Both students and advisors orient to the violation of this rule as being accountable, such that absent responses, as well as ones that are late relative to TCU endings (i.e., positioned after the duration of normal, unmarked transition spaces), are procedurally consequential (Schegloff, 1992) and generative of secondarily elaborative inferences (Heritage, 1984). Specifically, absent and late responses are treated as indexing (tacitly or explicitly) advisors’ possible trouble understanding students’ prior TCUs/actions and engender its remediation. For example, students’ halt the progressivity of their tellings as courses of action to self-repair, confirm advisors’ understandings, or add clarifying increments, and advisors act similarly by initiating repair.

Our finding is striking because it is not at all intuitive given at least the following three facts. First and foremost, as responses to advisors’ solicitations of actionable problems/questions, students’ mid-telling TCUs (involving, e.g., provision of background information) do not complete tellings as courses of action and thus do not make advisors’ responses conditionally relevant in terms of providing solutions. Both advisors and students arguably understand that, upon TCU endings,

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4From a multilevel modeling perspective, these tests should be interpreted cautiously given the point estimates and large confidence intervals. The relatively small amount of data (N = 155) did not permit analysis/control of a second level of clustering involving individual observations (i.e., multiple TCU endings) being nested within unique advisor-student dyads.
students continue to hold rights to telling turns and thus to continue speaking. Second, students’ mid-telling TCUs are addressed to advisors who are already claiming attention with both their gaze and body orientation (see Figure 2a). Third, at least in ordinary telephone conversation (which is admittedly different from the present, face-to-face, institutional data), there is evidence that, in the context of multiunit turns (which can be different from extended tellings, per se), responsive behavior at TCU endings is neither omnirelevant nor necessary in terms of recipients understanding prior talk (Robinson, 2014). While advisors’ minimally acknowledging responses around TCU endings are certainly relevant (C. Goodwin, 1986b; Schegloff, 1982), our finding that such responses are accountably relevant is at odds with what is perhaps a conventional assumption that “mid-telling responses are generally not normatively required, recurrently, at TCU completions” (Stivers, 2013, p. 201).

Before jumping to conclusions—literally and figuratively—it is important to qualify our finding and explore its vulnerabilities. Caution is urged on a number of fronts related to the specificity of our data. We examined solicited (vs. self-initiated) tellings and a specific institutional context (e.g., international student university advising), complete with a specific combination of roles, identities, rights, responsibilities, and inferential frameworks (Drew & Heritage, 1992). For example, advisors’ solicitations (akin to physicians’ offers to serve; Robinson, 2001) make conditionally relevant students’ problem presentations (vs. stories, jokes, etc.), which themselves make conditionally relevant advisors’ solutions (vs. news receipts and evaluative stances; Stivers, 2008, 2013). Students were nonnative English speakers, albeit proficient ones (with an average of 12.4 prior years speaking English). While our finding might be idiosyncratically explained in terms of native English-speaking advisors interculturally overaccommodating to nonnative English-speaking students (Zuengler, 1991), this possibility is tempered by the fact that second-language identities were rarely, if ever, made explicitly relevant in the data (Hellermann & Lee, 2014). We only examined TCU endings when tellers and recipients were co-oriented with their bodies and gaze. Although this was, by far, the most frequent participation framework, variations clearly resulted in different norms of participation.⁵ Finally, there may have been subtle aspects of action formation in/within students’ TCUs that we did not measure that may have independently contributed to advisors responding at TCU endings: for example, involving students’ prosody (Stivers & Rossano, 2010), epistemic stance marking (Heritage, 2012), and other embodied actions (Heath, 1992; Iwasaki, 2009).

All of the aforementioned cautionary notes both expose gaps in, and highlight future directions for, CA research on extended tellings. In terms of mid-telling sequential environments, up until the present study, there have been no systematic analyses of responsive behavior, that is, analyses that simultaneously examine: (a) many tellings (vs. a single, or even several, tellings); (b) a same telling activity (e.g., all dirty jokes, all sad stories, etc.); (c) when responsive behavior both does, and does not, occur around each and every TCU ending; (d) where responsive behavior is positioned around each and every TCU ending; and (e) the implications of participants’ gaze and body behavior and co-orientation around each and every TCU ending. Part of this gap can be filled by recording tellings with multiple, synchronized, participant perspective camera angles, as opposed to single camera angles (for review of these methodological issues, see Rossano, 2012). Thus, although we believe we have found something (i.e., a relevance rule), both questioning and explaining it are extremely difficult given the lack of existing, comparable analyses. One context in which we expect our finding to be replicated is the problem-presentation phase of acute, physician-patient visits (Heritage & Robinson, 2006; Robinson & Heritage, 2005).

Our proposed relevance rule is likely an element of face-to-face-talk’s organization designed to facilitate intersubjectivity above and beyond the generic organization of repair (Robinson, 2014). We

⁵See main text regarding students’ gaze aversion. In the 22 omitted cases in which advisors’ bodies and gaze were oriented away from students (e.g., toward computers) at TCU endings, the results are strikingly contrary to our finding: In 16/22 cases (72.7%), advisors’ produced minimally acknowledging responses that were late (vs. early or on time) relative to TCU endings, and in 15/16 of these cases (93.8%), students nonetheless proceeded to progress their tellings, thereby treating advisors’ late responses as being normative.
draw this conclusion based on the fact that advisors’ late or absent acknowledging responses (relative to TCU endings) are strongly associated with either students halting the progressivity of tellings to some-how clarify or repair prior talk or with advisors initiating repair. These efforts by students either directly or indirectly solicited acknowledging responses from advisors and, upon receiving them, students progressed tellings. With these cases in mind, we are able to see that participants rely on our proposed relevance rule to make sense of normal responses (i.e., ones that are at least on time relative to TCU endings). Specifically, when advisors respond at least on time, students progress tellings as courses of action in ways that orient to advisors as having understood prior TCUs. Thus, as suggested by Schegloff (1982), above and beyond claiming attention, minimally acknowledging responses—and, more specifically, ones that are positioned at least on time relative to TCU endings—claim understanding by “betokening the absence of [repair related] problems” (Schegloff, 1982, p. 88).

If our finding is generalizable, it improves our understanding of the organization of turn taking, as well as its intersection with sequence organization. Note that the turn-taking problem still applies to mid-sequential contexts of extended tellings because it generally involves “[w]ho should talk next and when should they do so” and how these issues affect “the construction and understanding of the turns themselves.” (Schegloff, 2004, p. 207). The sequence-organizational problem involves at least the relevance of responding to actions implemented through TCUs (Schegloff, 2007; Stivers & Rossano, 2010). On the one hand, our proposed relevance rule is fully compatible with claims regarding the temporary suspension of normal turn-taking rules associated with speaker transition during extended tellings (Jefferson, 1978), insofar as none of the advisors’ minimally acknowledging responses constituted new, full-fledged turns (Schegloff, 1982). On the other hand, we found that responses are accountably relevant around each and every TCU ending and are so in the same positionally sensitive manner found in non-telling-organized talk; that is, responses are normally adjacent to (i.e., on time and not late relative to) TCU endings (Jefferson, 1986; Sacks et al., 1974). Thus, in contexts where tellers have rights to continue speaking, that they progress from TCU to TCU—or that they instead halt progressivity to repair or clarify themselves—may be even more of an “achieved outcome” (Schegloff, 1982, p. 89), and even more of an organized one, than previously imagined.

References


