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Extending the notion of pragmatic completion: The case of the responsive compound action unit

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1. Introduction

Our understanding of the rules for conversational turn taking (Sacks et al., 1974) have significantly contributed to our understanding of social organization. One of these rules is that, once a person gains the right to speak, they are normally entitled to produce a single unit of talk, such as a single word, phrase, clause, or sentence. Conversation analysis has long recognized that, and attempted to describe how, this normal entitlement can be modified by pragmatic exigencies. Along these lines, this article demonstrates that a particular type of initiating action (referred to as a status inquiry) makes conditionally relevant a particular type of compound action unit (Lerner, 1991) that minimally contains two ordered pieces of information, each of which occupies at least one sentential unit. Data are audiotapes of 193 calls between one of five customer-service representatives and customers calling an electronics organization to check on the status of equipment that they have previously sent in for repair. This article contributes to our understanding of how pragmatic concerns can uniquely structure participants’ understandings of what constitutes a possibly complete ‘unit’ of talk, as well as ‘allowable’ places for speakership.

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ABSTRACT

An important rule of turn taking is that, once a person gains the right to speak they are normally entitled to produce a single unit of talk, such as a single word, phrase, clause, or sentence. Conversation analysis has long recognized that, and attempted to describe how, this normal entitlement can be modified by pragmatic exigencies. Along these lines, this article demonstrates that a particular type of initiating action (referred to as a status inquiry) makes conditionally relevant a particular type of compound action unit (Lerner, 1991) that minimally contains two ordered pieces of information, each of which occupies at least one sentential unit. Data are audiotapes of 193 calls between one of five customer-service representatives and customers calling an electronics organization to check on the status of equipment that they have previously sent in for repair. This article contributes to our understanding of how pragmatic concerns can uniquely structure participants’ understandings of what constitutes a possibly complete ‘unit’ of talk, as well as ‘allowable’ places for speakership.

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1 For various elaborations on the notion of turn constructional unit, see Ford (2001a), Lerner (1991), Selting (2000), and Schegloff (2006).
a particular type of compound action unit (Lerner, 1991). In the following introduction, we review prior work dealing with compound action units and highlight potential contributions of the present article.

The concept of a compound action unit was originally formulated by Lerner (1991), whose article was primarily focused on a different concept, that of the compound turn-constructual unit. However, toward the end of his article, Lerner observed: "Not only are some turn-constructual units available as compound units, but larger, internally segmented actions are as well" (p. 453, emphasis added). Lerner went on to argue that, "the sequencing of actions in conversational interaction can also supply features that betoken a compound action unit" (pp. 454–455, emphasis added). Recognizing that there can be different types of compound action units, one of them involves responsive actions (vs. turns, per se) that are projectable, by virtue of the conditional relevance rules associated with their initiating actions, as having two or more components that each are constituted by at least one lexical, phrasal, clausal, or sentential unit.2 For example, in a subsequent publication, Lerner (1992) offered the example of the story prompt as an initiating action (e.g., "Oh you haftuh tell'm about yer typewriter honey," p. 251) that makes conditionally relevant a story (or some type of pre-structured extended telling), which is a type of compound action unit (in this case, a responsive one). For another example, see Extract 1. Referring to a play, Nancy prompts Hyla to produce an extended telling: "Can yuh tell me what it’s about?" (line 2).

Extract 1:

01 Nan: Kinda looking forward to it. What um, (1.0)
02 --> Can yuh tell me what it’s about?=
03 Hyl: =.hhhhhh[Yeah. It take-]
04 Nan: [O: r would it- uh-]
05 (.)
07 Hyl: [ No. It takes] place, in, t (0.2) in nineteen thirties
08 Nan: (){ }
09 Hyl: in Oklahoma a,
10 Nan: [ Uh huh,–]
11 Hyl: =.hh A:n’, .hhh .t.hhh (0.2) It’s just like the
12 psychological backgroun’ behind all these different people
13 in this; f’am’ ly.]=
14 Nan: [Mm hm:=]
15 Hyl: =.hh Li:ke, the husband... (Hyla continues)

Hyla projects a multi-unit responsive turn, which she ultimately produces across lines 3–14, with a long and pronounced in breath (symbolized in the transcript by h’s preceded by a period; line 3; Schegloff, 1996). Nancy’s continuers (at line 9, “Uh hu:h,” and at line 13, “Mm hm:”) display her orientation to Hyla as producing an extended telling (Schegloff, 1982).

Initiating actions, like the story prompt, that make conditionally relevant compound action units are virtually unstudied within conversation analysis (but see Lerner, 1991, 1992). The uniqueness of such a practice can be appreciated in light of a variety of ways in which initiating actions are implicated in providing for the relevance of multi-unit responsive turns that do not represent compound actions (although a responsive compound action unit is, by definition, a multi-unit responsive turn, the reverse is not always the case). What follows are three examples.3 A first way in which an initiating action can provide for a multi-unit responsive turn involves the conditional-relevance rule, which normatively obligates a particular type of response (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; Schegloff, 2007). If an initial, responsive unit of talk (e.g., a word, phrase, clause, or sentence) does not constitute a relevant response, then its possible completion does not constitute a place where the responsive turn is possibly complete because a relevant response is still ‘due.’ As such, these responsive turns typically end up being constituted by multiple units. This is the case in Extract 2 (which was analyzed by Heritage, 1984b:266).

Extract 2:

01 B: Uh if you’d care to come over and visit a little while
02 this morning I’ll give you a cup of coffee.
03 --> A: Hehh Well that’s awfully sweet of you,
04 I don’t think I can make it this morning
05 .hh uhm I’m running an ad in the paper and– and uh
06 I have to stay near the phone

2 Houtkoop and Mazeland (1985) might have called this a closed (vs. open) discourse unit.

3 Although there are a variety of explanations for how responsive turns (or second-pair parts) come to be composed of multiple turn constructional units – for example, via the practice of the rush through (Schegloff, 1987) or the abrupt-join (Local and Walker, 2004) – here we are only concerned with explanations involving social structures associated with initiating actions (or first-pair parts), such as rules associated with conditional relevance and preference organization.
A's initial responsive unit, an expression of appreciation, “that’s awfully sweet of you.” (line 3), is a projectably incomplete response because it does not constitute a conditionally relevant response type (e.g., acceptance or rejection of the offer), which gets produced in the second unit: “I don’t think I can make it this morning” (line 4). In this case, it is not that the initiating action, per se, makes conditionally relevant a compound action (as did, for example, the story prompts discussed above). Rather, the initiating action makes conditionally relevant a responsive action that can be accomplished in a single (i.e., non-compound) unit (e.g., “I don’t think I can make it this morning”), but the responsive turn (vs. action) ends up consisting of at least two units (i.e., the first and the second) by virtue of the conditional-relevance rule.

A second way in which an initiating action can provide for a multi-unit response involves preference organization, such that many initiating actions 'prefer' particular answers over others (e.g., an invitation 'prefers' an acceptance over a rejection; re. 'preference,' see Pomerantz, 1984a; Schegloff, 2007). As such, dispreferred (albeit conditionally relevant) responses frequently 'require,' and thus project, additional actions, such as an account for the dispreferred response (this observation has been extensively supported: Ford, 2001b; Robinson, 2009). For example, return to Extract 2 (above). As noted earlier, A's initial expression of appreciation, "that's awfully sweet of you," (line 3), while perhaps foreshadowing a dispreferred response, is not itself a conditionally relevant response type (e.g., acceptance or rejection of the offer). A's rejection, "I don't think I can make it this morning" (line 4), is a dispreferred response type, and as such projects an account for the rejection, which is produced next: "I'm running an ad in the paper and- and uh I have to stay near the phone" (lines 5–6). Again, in this case, it is not that the initiating action, per se, makes conditionally relevant a compound action. Rather, the initiating action makes conditionally relevant a responsive action that can be accomplished in a single (i.e., non-compound) unit (i.e., “I don't think I can make it this morning”), but the responsive turn ends up consisting of a third unit (i.e., the account) by virtue of the conditionally relevant response being dispreferred.

A third way in which an initiating action can provide for a multi-unit response involves the fact that some initiating actions can be ‘double barreled’ (Schegloff, 2007). In these cases, an initiating action (e.g., an offer), which makes conditionally relevant a responsive action (e.g., acceptance/declination), is implemented through a grammatical vehicle (e.g., a Yes/No-interrogative; Raymond, 2003) that itself makes relevant a particular type of responsive action (e.g., Yes/No) (see also Lindstrom, 1997). In these cases, such as Extract 3 (which was analyzed by Schegloff, 2007:76), responsive turns are frequently composed of multiple responsive actions, which are implemented through separate units of talk.

Extract 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01</td>
<td>Ali: You wan' me bring you anything?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02</td>
<td>(0.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Bet: No: no: nothing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04</td>
<td>Ali: Aw:kay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beth's multi-unit responsive turn (line 3) addresses the constraints made relevant by Ali's Yes/No-interrogative (e.g., "No: no:"), as well as the offer it implements ("nothing."). However, in the case of double-barreled actions, each of the action 'barrels' (e.g., the offer and the Yes/No-interrogative) makes relevant a responsive action that can be accomplished in a single (i.e., non-compound) unit, and the responsive turn ends up consisting of multiple units by virtue of the existence of multiple initiating actions (vs. a single initiation action, as in Extract 2, above).

In sum, although prior research has described a number of ways in which initiating actions are implicated in providing for the relevance of multi-unit responsive turns, we know very little about singular (vs. double-barreled) initiating actions that make conditionally relevant compound action units. Furthermore, although literature suggests an abundance of compound action units in ordinary (vs. institutional) contexts, such as giving driving directions and food recipes (Goldberg, 1975), we know extremely little about the organization of compound action units other than stories (and other pre-structured extended tellings; Jefferson, 1978; Mandelbaum, 2012). Even within institutional contexts, we know much more about activities, which tend to be defined as encompassing more than one sequence of action (for review, see Robinson, 2012), than we know about compound action units. The concept of a compound action unit continues to stretch our understanding of that of a turn-constructional unit (Sacks et al., 1974) beyond syntactic and prosodic parameters to include pragmatic ones (Selting, 2000).

In an attempt to fill some of these gaps, the present article examines a previously unstudied initiating action that is similar to the story prompt in that it makes conditionally relevant a compound action unit. This initiating action involves a customer, who is calling an electronics-repair organization, soliciting an update regarding the status of their equipment that is currently in some stage of the process of being repaired (for convenience, this action will hereafter be referred to as a status inquiry). The present article furthers our understanding of how social action – specifically, responsive compound action units – can be organized (Schegloff, 2007) and, relatedly, how pragmatic concerns affect the social organization of turn taking (Ford and Thompson, 1996).

4 Responsive compound action units can also be prefigured as such by the organization of non-ordinary (e.g., institutional) speech-exchange systems. For example, in the context of broadcast news interviews, interviewees are “expected to produce elaborated answers” to interviewers’ questions, that is, elaboration beyond mere Yes/confirmation or No/disconfirmation (Clayman and Heritage, 2002:252).
In order to preview our argument, we present one of these calls in its entirety, which is Extract 4 (in transcripts, “REP” stands for customer-service representative, and “CUS” stands for customer). The customer solicits a report of the status of their equipment with, “I need tuh check thuh status of my:: repair laptop,” (lines 4–5), which is responded to by the representative at lines 17–20.

Extract 4[Call 26]:

01 (Ring)
02 REP: Jack Camera. Kendra speakin', how may I help you.
03 (0.4)
04 CUS: Hi. hhhh uh:: (. ) I need tuh check thuh status of my:: repair laptop,
05 (0.5)
06 REP: What's thuh repair number?
07 (21.0) (CUS locates number)
08 CUS: Sorry for that. two three two, eight zero. sorry for that.
09 REP: Two three two, eight zero #nine. #
10 CUS: Yeah.
11 (3.2)
12 REP: Rashad Oni?
13 CUS: >Yeh=right.<
14 (.)
15 ->> REP: Okay. (0.2) That is in line with thuh technici:an
16 ->> waiting to be worked on: n .. hhh repair times usually run
17 ->> approximately fifteen: n .. hh to thirty business days
18 ->> from thuh date #that it was logged into our system. #
19 (0.7)
20 CUS: Oh:. okay. So: (0.5) e=--this is your policy fer: aroun'
21 one month,
22 (0.4)
23 REP: .tch Ye:s.
24 (0.4)
25 CUS: >Okay. y.
26 (.
27 REP: >Okay? y
28 CUS: >Okay.< >thanks.<
29 REP: A right. your we [ loc ] me.
30 CUS: [ By e. ]
31 REP: Bye.
32

Although the customer explicitly solicits the “status” (line 4) of his “repair laptop,” (line 5), there is no verbalized indication (at least from lines 1–15) of what constitutes ‘repair status’ for participants. We argue that status inquiries make conditionally relevant a compound action unit that minimally contains two, ordered pieces of information, each of which occupy at least one sentential unit of talk. The first piece of information is what we are calling current-location status, or the current location of the equipment within the repair process, which can be seen in Extract 4 (above) as: “That is in li:ne with thuh technici:an waiting to be worked on?:” (lines 17–18). The second piece of information is what we are calling repair-completion status, or an estimation of when the repair will be completed, and can be seen in Extract 4 (above) as: “repair times usually run approximately fifteen: n .. hh to thirty business days from thuh date that it was logged into our system.” (lines 18–20). The present article is concerned with how participants understand and navigate the possible completion of representatives’ responsive turns (i.e., lines 17–20 in Extract 4). We argue that the pragmatic requirements of customers’ status inquiries structure interaction such that the possible grammatical completion of the initial status component, current-location status, does not constitute a place where representatives’ turns are possibly complete; Rather, it constitutes a place of possible local pragmatic completion (Ford and Thompson, 1996), which, in Lerner’s (1991) terms, constitutes a place of
conditional entry for next speakers. In contrast, the possible grammatical completion of the final component, repair-completion status, does constitute a place of possible global pragmatic completion (Ford and Thompson, 1996), and thus of turn completion.

2. Data, method, and background

2.1. Data and method

Data were collected from the in-house repair facility of a mid-sized organization located in the Northeastern United States that sells and repairs cameras and other electronic goods. We refer to this organization by the pseudonym Jack Camera. Data are audiotapes of 193 calls between one of five customer-service representatives and customers calling to check on the status of equipment that they have previously sent in for repair. Our analytic method is conversation analysis (for review, see Heritage, 1984b; Drew and Heritage, 1992). All calls were transcribed in their entirety using Jefferson’s transcription system (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984).

2.2. Background

Data were collected as part of a five-month field observation of Jack Camera. Ethnographically, we know that the two types of status that makes up representatives’ responses — that is, current-location status and repair-completion status — are thoroughly institutionalized. As such, the compound action unit being described is likely not ‘generic,’ but rather specific to the present institution. Current-location status involves information about the current location of customers’ equipment in the repair process. Prior to responding to customers’ status inquiries, representatives locate customers’ repair orders on computers (see Extract 4, above, lines 7–15, and particularly line 8, where the representative accesses the computer). Computerized repair orders reveal current-location status, which involves one of seven organizationally technical categories, including: ‘logged in’ (i.e., into the organization’s computer system), ‘in line’ (i.e., assigned to a technician), ‘on bench’ (i.e., on the technician’s workbench/shelf), ‘on hold’ (for parts), ‘quality control,’ ‘shipping ready,’ and optionally ‘manufacturer’ (i.e., the equipment was sent to its manufacturer to be repaired) (see Fig. 1 in Appendix A, which is a computer screen shot). Representatives’ deliveries of current-location status lexically reflect these categories, such as “in li:ne” (Extract 4, line 17).

Repair-completion status involves an estimated timeframe for when repairs will be completed or returned. This type of status is institutionalized via a large whiteboard, which is prominently displayed to, and utilized by, all representatives during calls. This whiteboard lists estimated repair-completion times for nine types of equipment (see Fig. 2 in Appendix A). Representatives’ report these timeframes during the delivery of repair-completion status, such as “fiftee:n .hh to thirty business days” (Extract 4, above, line 19).

3. Analysis

Our central argument is that customers’ status inquiries make conditionally relevant a compound action unit that minimally contains two, ordered types of status: (1) current-location status; and (2) repair-completion status. The following analysis section provides two types of evidence for this argument. First, we provide a variety of ways in which representatives orient to their own responses as involving both current-location status and repair-completion status. Second, we provide customers’ orientations. Note that, although this article centrally attempts to demonstrate that customers’ status inquiries make conditionally relevant a responsive compound action unit (and attempts to describe this unit’s organization), in section 4 (Conclusion) we provide an explanation for why this might be so in this particular institutional context.

3.1. Representatives’ orientations

In this subsection, we provide two types of ways in which representatives orient to their own responses as involving both current-location status and repair-completion status. First, we demonstrate that representatives orient to current-location status as not completing their responsive turns. Second, we demonstrate that representatives orient to repair-completion status as completing their responsive turns.

3.1.1. Representatives’ orientations to current-location status as being incomplete

In a variety of ways, representatives design their talk to show that the completion of current-location status does not constitute a relevant place for turn transition. First, although representatives sometimes pause in between their production of
of current-location status and repair-completion status (with silence and or breathing), in many cases representatives produce current-location status and repair-completion status in immediate succession, as in Extract 5.

Extract 5[ Call 20] :

02 CUS: Uh:m I’m calling tuh=f- get a little bit mo:re
03 information o:n thuh repair of a digital camera
04 I sent in about a week ago,
((8 lines omitted; REP locates customer’s order))
13 —>> REP: Mkay. .hh Uh:m th[ at’s on thuh technician’s shelf
14 —>> waiting to be worked o:n, >thuh repair< ti:me (0.2)
15 —>> runs approximatel[y ten tuh twen’y business days fr[o m
16 —>> thuh date that it’s logged into our system.
17
t(1.1)
18 CUS: So::: fro:m: (.) we’[ re about- ]
19 REP: [ >Twen’y nin th.

Here, the representative moves directly from current-location status, “that’s on thuh technician’s shelf waiting to be worked o:n,” (lines 13–14) to repair-completion status, “>thuh repair< ti:me...” (lines 14–16), separated only by a normal transition space (Jefferson, 1984; Sacks et al., 1974), which is symbolized in the transcript by a single, empty space between “. . .o:n,” and “>thuh...”. This observation is highlighted by a negative observation, which is that the representative does not utilize special practices for securing additional units of talk, such as the rush through (which occurs in Extract 7, below; Schegloff, 1987) or the abrupt-join (Local and Walker, 2004). In the present context of an ordinary speech exchange system in which turn transition would normally become relevant after a single, possibly complete sentential unit (Sacks et al., 1974) – for example, after current-location status – this first observation provides some evidence that representatives orient to their production of current-location status followed by repair-completion status as constituting parts of a single responsive action.

For another type of evidence, representatives frequently end current-location status with rising intonation that, at least in the sequential context of a response to an initiating action, is not typical of turn-final pitch movement. Doing so can be a practice for projecting more talk, and thus for projecting that the completion of current-location status does not constitute a relevant place for turn transition (Szczepke-Reed, 2004). We saw an example of this in Extracts 4 and 5 (above). In Extract 4, the representative ends the first component, “That is in li:ne with thuh technici:[ an waiting to be worked o:n?” (lines 17–18), with strong rising intonation at the end of “o:n?” (symbolized in the transcript by the question mark). As projected, the representative immediately begins to draw breath in preparation for producing repair-completion status, “.hhh” (line 18), which she then delivers: “repair times...” (lines 18–20). A similar pattern occurs in Extract 5 (above). The representative ends current-location status, “that’s on thuh technician’s shelf waiting to be worked o:n,” (lines 13–14) with slight rising intonation at the end of “o:n,” (symbolized in the transcript by the comma), and immediately proceeds to deliver repair-completion status: “>thuh repair< ti:me...” (lines 14–16). Extract 6 provides a third example:

Extract 6[ Call 13] :

05 CUS: Check on a repair pl[ e:se.
((5 lines omitted; REP locates customer’s order))
11 REP: Okay sir th[ at has been: assigned to
12 —> a technician tuh work o:n, hh repairs
13 usually run approximatel[y ten tuh uh:
14 twen’y business days.
15 (1.3)
16 CUS: Ten tuh twen’y da:y(s)?

The representative ends current-location status, “that has been: assigned to a technician tuh work o:n,” (lines 11–12), with slight rising intonation at the end of “o:n,” (symbolized in the transcript by the comma). As projected, the
representative immediately begins to draw breath in preparation for producing the second component, "...hh" (line 12), which she then delivers: "repair[s usually run..." (lines 12–14).10

Yet another type of evidence that representatives orient to their responses as consisting of both current-location status and repair-completion status can be found in very rare (perhaps deviant) cases where representatives end current-location status with falling intonation that, in the sequential context of a response to an initiating action, is typical of turn-final pitch movement. Doing so can be a practice for marking turn completion (Szczepki-Reed, 2004) and is at odds with (i.e., it constitutes a ‘mixed signal’ regarding) the compound nature of representatives’ responses. When this occurs, as it does in Extract 7, representatives employ practices for staving off turn transition, thereby working to secure the compound nature of responses.

**Extract 7 [Call 4]:**

04 CUS: Yeah I wanted duh check on ay:uh: a repair status.

((13 lines omitted; REP locates customer’s order))

18 REP: Well it looks like it was entered into our

19 system on thuh ten:th, (0.4) a:nd- (0.4) currently

20 -> been in li:ne since the eleventh.<these repairs are

21 taking fifteen tuh thirty business days. "Right now.")

22 CUS: Sh::ew. Go:ld.

The representative begins the delivery of current-location status by reporting a past-tense location status: “We’ll it looks like it was entered into our system on thuh ten:th,” (lines 18–19). As found in other service-industry contexts, the practice of beginning to respond to first-topic solicitations with events framed in the simple past tense is a practice for projecting a multi-unit response that will be complete upon the production of present-tense events (Robinson and Heritage, 2005). By beginning with a past-tense report of location status – as happens in Extract 7 (above), when the representative says “it was entered...” (line 18) – representatives project more talk involving current-location status, bringing the report up to date. This claim is supported in Extract 7 (above) by the fact that: (1) the representative ends the past-tense report of location status with rising intonation at the end of “ten:th,” (line 19), which can indicate a lack of turn-transition relevance (Szczepki-Reed, 2004); (2) the customer does not intercede throughout the representative’s 0.4-s inbreath (at line 19); and (3) the representative continues to produce current-location status: “asnd- (0.4) currently been in li:ne since thee eleventh.” (lines 19–21).11

In contrast to Extracts 5 and 6 (above), in Extract 7 (above) the representative ends current-location status with falling intonation (symbolized in the transcript with a period) at the end of “eleventh.” (line 20), which can be a practice for marking turn completion, and thus for projecting the relevance of turn transition (Sacks et al., 1974). The representative orients to this possibility, as well as to the relevance of producing repair-completion status, by rushing through the transition space (symbolized in the transcript by the ‘less-than’ sign; Schegloff, 1987) to produce the second component: “these repairs are taking..." (lines 20–21).

A final type of evidence is that, when customers produce tokens, such as Okay, that index their ‘acceptance’ of current-location status and might otherwise propose sequence closure (Beach, 1993; Schegloff, 2007), representatives do not treat them as doing so, and instead proceed to produce repair-completion status. For example, in Extract 8 the representative treats the customer’s Okay as a continuer (Guthrie, 1997):

**Extract 8 [Call 34]:**

04 CUS: ‘Reah I was wondering if there’s any way of getting

a more detailed update on thuh status of my: uh camera,

((4 lines omitted; REP locates customer’s order))

10 REP: Okay? on thuh twen’y ni:nth it was sent o:ut

11 to Casio manufacturer fer thuh repa:ir?

12 -> CUS: Okay,

13 REP: A::nd (. ) right now Casio their turn around time

14 is approximately about ten tuh—fifteen business days,

Across lines 10–11, the representative completes current-location status: “on thuh twen’y ni:nth it was sent o:ut to Casio manufacturer fer thuh repa:ir?” Although the customer ‘lexically’ claims to accept current-location status with ‘Oka:y,” (line 12; Beach, 1993; Schegloff, 2007), he designs the Okay with slight rising intonation (symbolized in the transcript by the comma) so as to treat the representative’s turn as ongoing (Guthrie, 1997). The representative proceeds to deliver repair-

10 For additional examples of representatives ending current-location status with rising intonation, see Extract 8: “...fer thuh repa:ir?” (line 11); Extract 9: “...worked o:n;” (line 37); and Extract 11: “...shipping department?” (line 11).

11 This claim is also supported by the fact that the representative prefaces her initial responsive unit, which involves the past-tense report of location status, with Well: “We’ll it looks like it was entered...” (line 18). As Schegloff and Lerner (2009) argued, this is a practice for alerting the customer that the forthcoming response will not be straight forward.
completion status: “A:::nd (.), right now Casio their turn around time is approximately about ten tuh fifteen business da:y’s.”. Extract 8 provides evidence that participants orient to the possible completion of current-location status as a place of possible local (vs. global) pragmatic completion (Ford and Thompson, 1996), which constitutes a place of conditional entry for next speakers (Lerner, 1991). The possible completion of current-location status does not constitute a place of possible sequence closure, and thus customers’ Okay’s (at least ones that intonationally embody an orientation to possible continuation) are neither produced nor understood as proposing sequence closure. In these places of conditional entry, aside from claiming to accept current-location status, customers can also be found claiming registration of current-location status with continuers (Schegloff, 1982) and, in rare cases, initiating repair (Schegloff et al., 1979).

3.1.2. Representatives’ orientations to repair-completion status as completing the responsive action

Whereas representatives design their talk to show that the completion of current-location status does not constitute a relevant place for turn transition (see section 3.1.1), representatives orient to the completion of repair-completion status as constituting the completion of a response to customers’ status inquiries, and thus as constituting a relevant place for turn transition. A first type of evidence is that, while representatives routinely end current-location status with rising intonation (see above), which can be a practice for projecting further talk and thus that the current responsive turn is not yet complete, representatives routinely end repair-completion status with falling intonation (symbolized in transcripts by a period), which is a practice for marking turn completion (Szczepk-Reed, 2004). For example, in Extract 4 (above), repair-completion status is possibly completed with “…logged into our system,” (lines 18–20), in Extract 5 (above) it is possibly completed with “…logged into our system.” (line 16), in Extract 6 (above) it is possibly completed with “…ten tuh uh: twen’y business days.” (lines 13–14), and in Extract 7 (above) it is possibly completed with “…fifteen tuh thirty business days.” (line 21).

Another type of evidence is that, after representatives bring repair-completion status to a place of possible completion, they treat their response as complete by remaining silent. For example, in Extract 4 (above), the representative brings repair-completion status to possible completion after “system.” (line 19). The representative remains silent for 0.7 s (i.e., the silence at line 20) until the customer eventually claims to be informed by (Heritage, 1984a), and then to accept (Beach, 1993; Schegloff, 2007), repair-completion status: “Oh: okay.” (line 21). In Extract 5 (above), the representative brings repair-completion status to completion after “system.” (line 16). The representative then remains silent for an extremely long 1.1-s (at line 17; Jefferson, 1984). In Extract 6 (above), the representative brings repair-completion status to possible completion after “days.” (line 14). The representative then remains silent for an extremely long 1.3-s until the customer eventually indexes his surprise at 10–20 days as an amount of equipment-turn-around time by producing a repeat-based repair initiator: “Ten tuh twen’y da:y’s?” (line 16; Jefferson, 1972). By remaining silent, representatives embody ‘waiting’ for customers to make a next move.

Our argument that representatives ‘wait’ for customers to respond is reinforced by yet another type of evidence, which is that, in cases such as Extract 9 where marked silences follow the possible completion of repair-completion status, representatives sometimes recomplete it, which can be a practice for re-establishing the relevance turn completion/transition (Pomerantz, 1984b).

Extract 9[Call 24] :

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>03</td>
<td>Cus: .h Uh yes.-I don’t have (a/uh) computer: uh access right now=&gt;an’ I was tryin’ tuh&lt; find out about a repair.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05</td>
<td>((30 lines omitted; REP locates customer’s order))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Rep: ‘Ka:y, that’ s in line with thuh technician, waiting to be worked o:n, .hh repair times run ra- approximately ten tuh twen’y business days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>(0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>→ Rep: [ From ] thuh time that it’s logged into our system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Cus: [ Wo:w. ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>( )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Cus: Oh, (.) Okay.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon the possible completion of repair-completion status (i.e., after “days.”; line 38), there occurs a 0.5-s silence (line 39), which is structurally similar to those found in Extracts 4–6 (above, at lines 20, 17, and 15, respectively). Prior to the customer beginning to speak – but simultaneous with the customer’s negative assessment of the repair-completion status, “Wo:W.” (line 42) – the representative produces a grammatical increment (Ford et al., 2002; Schegloff, 2000) to her repair-completion status: “From thuh time that it’s logged into our system.” (line 41; This increment clarifies the start date for the 10–20 days turn-around time). The production of this type of increment in this sequential location, especially one that is ended with

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12 For example, see Extract 11: “Mm=hm,” (line 13); and Extract 12: “Uh hu:h” (line 36).
13 For more examples, see Extract 9 (below): “…business days.” (line 38); Extract 10 (below): “…business days.” (line 30); and Extract 11 (below): “…this week.” (line 15).
falling intonation (i.e., "system.", line 40), is a practice for re-establishing the relevance of turn completion/transition by re-completing the turn (Schegloff, 2000), and displays the representative’s orientation to the relevance of the customer speaking next. Along these lines, the customer proceeds to propose closure of the status-solicitation course of action by producing "Oh." (line 43), which claims a change in his state from unknowing to knowing (Heritage, 1984a), and “Okay.” (line 43), which claims to accept the repair-completion status (Beach, 1993; Schegloff, 2007).

A final type of evidence is that, in instances such as Extract 10, when customers claim to accept repair-completion status, most commonly with the token Okay (Beach, 1993; Schegloff, 2007), representatives treat such claims as proposing closure of the status-solicitation course of action.

Extract 10 [Call 94]:

04 CUS: My- uhm laptop was sent onta thuh: Toshiba factory from- uh:m other r’ pairs.=How
do I check thuh status of that.
((19 lines omitted; REP locates customer’s order))
26 REP: Okay. Yeah. It’s returned from thuh manufacturer as of t’ day. so:
it actually should be going back to you: .h uhm within thuh next two business days.
31 -> CUS: Oh. okay.
32 REP: Okay?
33 CUS: Thank you.
34 REP: No problem. [Bye:]
35 CUS: [Bye.]

The representative produces a possibly complete response to the customer’s status inquiry at lines 26–30. After a normal transition space following “days.” (line 30; Jefferson, 1984), the customer immediately produces, “Oh. okay.” (line 31), where “Oh.” claims a change in state from uninformed to informed (Heritage, 1984a), and “okay.” (line 31) claims to accept the status (Beach, 1993; Schegloff, 2007). The representative immediately orients to the relevance of possibly closing the call by initiating a pre-closing sequence: “Okay?” (line 32; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). In doing this, the representative treats the customer’s claim to have accepted the status as indicating possible completion of the status-solicitation course of action.

3.2. Customers’ orientations

In this subsection, we examine ways in which customers orient to the compound character of responses to status inquiries. As in the previous section, we demonstrate that customers orient to current-location status as not completing representatives’ responsive turns, and that customers orient to repair-completion status as completing such turns.

3.2.1. Customers’ orientations to current-location status as being incomplete

Customers also orient to responses to their status inquiries as being incomplete if they consist of only current-location status. A first type of evidence for this is that, after representatives possibly complete their report of current-location status, customers regularly withhold talk and ‘wait’ for representatives to produce more talk, which in each case involves repair-completion status. We have already seen versions of such ‘waiting’ in Extracts 4, 6, and 9 (above). There, customers withheld talk through representatives’ inbreaths that lasted three-tenths of a second (Extract 4, line 17) and two-tenths of a second (Extract 6, line 12; Extract 9, line 37) (In transcripts, a single ‘.h’ represents one-tenth of a second). Although these interactions are ‘institutional’ rather than ‘ordinary,’ they are nonetheless organized by an ordinary speech exchange system (Sacks et al., 1974). As such, although the grammatical possible completion of current-location status might otherwise make relevant turn transition, this is offset by the social organization of customers’ status inquiries, which make relevant responsive compound action units.

Extracts 4, 6, and 9 (above) are not the most convincing cases of ‘waiting’ because representatives’ inbreaths can project more talk (Schegloff, 1996), which can locally explain customers’ withholding of talk (e.g., in anticipation of representatives continuing). However, we also find examples such as Extract 11 where customers withhold talk even in the midst of silence.

Extract 11 [Call 77]:

05 CUS: Ye:as. (...) I wanna follow up o:n a repa:ir?
((4 lines omitted; REP locates customer’s order))
10 REP: Ma’m that’s shipping rea:dy? it’s in thuh shipping department?
At lines 10–11, the representative first produces a technical formulation of current-location status, “that’s shipping ready?” (line 10), which she then reformulates less technically: “it’s in the shipping department?” (lines 10–11). The representative ends her reformulation with rising intonation, which can be a practice for projecting more talk (see above). However, in contrast to Extracts 4, 6, and 9 (above), rather than immediately proceeding to draw breath, the representative stops speaking. There ensues an 0.2-s silence at line 12, which we argue is hearable as ‘belonging’ to the representative (i.e., the silence is a pause; Sacks et al., 1974), and thus is a place where the customer is waiting for the representative to continue. This is supported by the fact that the customer breaks the silence by producing a continuer, “Mm=hm,” (line 13), which treats (and thus orients to) the representative's responsive turn as not yet complete (Schegloff, 1982). In line with this analysis, the representative immediately continues speaking and produces repair-completion status (i.e., component 2): “Uh:m: that’ll probably go out by the end of this week.” (lines 14–15). A second case that illustrates this more convincingly is Extract 12:

Extract 12 [Call 178]:

05 REP: How can I help you.
06 CUS: Yes. I sent in: about a week er= (. .) more
ago, .hh Uhm: something to repair=If
08 I give my customer number would .hh you
be able s- check on thuh status.
{(24 lines omitted; REP locates customer’s order)}
34 REP: Okay. It is in line with our technician.
35 —> (0.2)
36 CUS: Uh hu:h.
37 (. .)
38 REP: [ So] it does take uh few weeks
39 CUS: [ >It’s ll< ]
40 REP: before{ theh repair=}
41 CUS: [ Few whee: ] ks,

At line 34, the representative produces current-location status: “It is in line with our technician.” Unlike Extract 11 (above), the representative ends this component with falling intonation, which can be a practice for indicating turn completion, and thus for marking the relevance of turn transition (Szczepak-Reed, 2004). As in Extract 11 (above), the representative stops speaking, which results in an 0.2-s silence, and the customer orients to this silence as the representative’s pause by producing a continuer: “Uh hu:h.” (line 36). As in Extract 11 (above), the representative proceeds to produce repair-completion status: “So it does take uh few wees…” (lines 38–40). It is important to register that the prolonged ‘spaces’ (in the form of inbreaths and/or silence) in between the production of current-location status and repair-completion status (as we saw in Extracts 4, 6, 9, 11, and 12, above) are likely collaborative achievements, insofar as they are products of the fact that the possible completion of current-location status is a place of possible local (vs. global) pragmatic completion (Ford and Thompson, 1996), and thus only a place of conditional entry for next speakers (Lerner, 1991). In other words, these prolonged ‘spaces’ are likely the interactive product of representatives allowing for the possibility of customers' conditional entry, and customers declining to enter.

A second type, and perhaps the strongest form, of evidence that customers orient to current-location status as constituting an incomplete response to their status inquiries involves cases where: (1) representatives bring current-location status to a place of possible grammatical completion; (2) representatives then employ practices that somehow mark possible turn completion; and (3) customers explicitly pursue repair-completion status. These deviant cases forcefully demonstrate that customers orient to repair-completion status as a next and required part of a complete response to a status inquiry, and thus that customers orient to representatives’ responsive actions as normatively involving two particular ordered components. For the first of two examples, see Extract 13.
Extract 13 [Call 32]:
06 CUS: I called a couple weeks ago:
07 to check on the status of repairs:
08 they told me: that it would
09 be coming back to me in
10 seven or ten days:—it’s been
11 a while. .hhh
((34 lines omitted; REP locates the customer’s order))

46 REP: Okay yeah. they’re still waiting
47 on a part to come in. <They said.
(0.2)
49 -> CUS: [Any] time frame at all,
50 REP: [So: uh:m ]
51 (0.2)
52 REP: Uh:m actually no. actually th- .hh
53 they have up until thirty days for
54 the part to come in. if it doesn’t
55 come in within the next week they’re
56 gonna send it out to Sony, and I’m
57 not sure whether they gonna do:
58 like a buy back or somethin’.
59 CUS: .hhh
60 REP: But they will contact you.
61 (0.2)
62 REP: You’ll be (.b) hearin’ somethin’ from
63 Mitch if they do something like
64 that.
65 CUS: (Oh) okay,

The representative brings current-location status to a place of possible grammatical completion with: “they’re still waiting on a part to come in.” (lines 46–47). The representative ends this unit of talk with falling intonation (i.e., “in.”, line 47), which can indicate possible turn completion. The representative rushes through (Schegloff, 1987) to produce a grammatical increment, “They said.” (line 47), which marks possible turn completion in two additional ways. First, it re-completes a responsive unit of talk (Schegloff, 2000), and second, it is ended with falling intonation (i.e., “said.”). Finally, the representative stops talking, and a 0.2-s silence follows (line 48).

After the representative has produced a number of indicators of turn completion, the customer solicits repair-completion status: “Any: time frame at all.” (line 49). By using the negative polarity item “Any”, the customer builds in a grammatical preference for a No-response (Sacks, 1987) and thus builds in a presupposition that the representative may not be able to provide repair-completion status. This is important because, in doing so, the customer orients to the accountability of the representative not providing repair-completion status. That is, if representatives do not provide repair completion status, perhaps they cannot provide it, and thus the customer orients to the accountability of the representative not providing repair-completion status. This is articulated by the representative in lines 52–58. Note that the representative prefaxes her No-response, “actually no,” (line 52), with actually, which orients to the lack of repair-completion status as running counter to expectations (Clift, 2001), and thus orients to repair-completion status as being an accountable part of a normative, two-component organization of status responses.

For a second example, see Extract 14.

Extract 14 [Call 38]:
03 CUS: I’d like to check on the status of camera repair please.
((10 lines omitted; REP locates customer’s order))
15 REP: Okay. I just checked up on the status uh:m
The representative produces current-location status with: “they started on thuh repair <as of> yesterday?” (lines 18–19). She ends this unit of talk with rising intonation at the end of “yesterday?” (line 19), which can indicate more talk. After a 0.2-s silence, in which the customer ‘waits’ for the representative to continue speaking, the representative re-completes her prior unit, and thus re-completes her presentation of current-location status; she does this through the use of a syntactic pivot construction (Betz, 2008) involving “<as of> yesterday...”, which ended the previous unit (i.e., they started on the repair as of yesterday), and which can be heard as beginning the next unit: “It was in repair at their repair facility.” (i.e., as of yesterday, it was in repair at their repair facility). Insofar as recompleting a responsive unit of talk can be a practice for re-establishing the relevance of turn completion (Pomerantz, 1984b), and insofar as the representative ends her re-completion unit with falling intonation (i.e., “facility.”), which can also be a practice for marking turn completion, the representative strongly indicates that she has completed her response to the customer’s status inquiry.

The customer orients to the representative’s possible response completion by proposing to accept the current-location status with: ‘Kay.” (line 22; Beach, 1993; Schegloff, 2007). However, the customer immediately proceeds to solicit repair-completion status: ‘ave-yuh got any expected time th’-it’s gunna be ou’t?” (lines 22–23). Note that, as we found in Extract 13 (above, and as we argued there), the customer uses the negative polarity item Any, which orients to the possibility that the representative is notable to provide repair-completion status, and thus to its lack of provision as being accountable. By soliciting repair-completion status, the customer orients to its relevance as part of a complete response to his status inquiry. The representative responds by providing repair-completion status (lines 25–31).

A final type of evidence is found in the single deviant case in our data where a customer actually treats current-location status as constituting a complete (vs. incomplete) response to their status inquiry (Extract 15, below). However, the customer orients to doing so as being accountable, and thus non-normative.
The representative possibly completes current-location status with: “...it's currently in repair with thuh technician,” (line 19). After an 0.2-s silence (line 20), the customer both claims to accept and positively assesses current-location status with “Okay excellent.” (line 21). These two lexical units (Okay and Excellent) are prosodically produced as a single unit of talk (Helasvuoto, 2001). The customer orients to this turn as being designed to treat current-location status as constituting a complete response to his status inquiry. Specifically, the customer proceeds to provide an account for doing so: “>-That’s all I need tuh know.</” (line 23). With his account, the customer orients to the fact that more information would normally be provided, and thus that current-location status does not normally constitute a complete response to a status inquiry.

3.2.2. Customers' orientations to repair-completion status as completing the response

There is also evidence that customers orient to the completion of repair-completion status as constituting the completion of a response to their status inquiries, and thus as constituting not only a relevant place for turn transition, but for beginning a new course of action, such as closing (in these largely mono-topical calls; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). We already saw an indication of this in Extract 10 (above), where, after the delivery of repair-completion status (at line 30), the customer and representative jointly collaborate in closing both the status-solicitation course of action and the call. In Extract 11 (above), after the representative possibly completes the delivery of repair-completion status, “Uh:m: that’ll probably go out by thee end of this week.” (lines 14–15), the customer claims to accept it with: “O:Kay.” (line 17). The customer then proceeds to thank the representative, “Thank you.” (line 17), which is a practice, in customer-service contexts, for initiating a call pre-closing sequence (Zimmerman, 2006; Wakin and Zimmerman, 1999; Raymond and Zimmerman, 2007). Thus, in Extract 11, the customer’s “Thank you.” (line 17) orients to his “O:Kay” (line 17) – which is a claim to accept repair-completion status – as projecting possible completion of the status-inquiry course of action.

One might wonder if customers' status inquiries more strongly obligate repair-completion status (i.e., the project's end goal) relative to current-location status, which might be relevant-but-optional. However, in every case in our data, representatives respond to customers' status inquiries with current-location status, and do so prior to repair-completion status. Stated negatively, although the data contain deviant cases in which customers hold representatives accountable for 'failing' to provide repair-completion status (see Extracts 13 and 14, above), representatives never fail to provide current-location status. These facts suggest that customers' status inquiries make both types of statuses (i.e., current-location status and repair-completion status) conditionally relevant (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), rather than merely relevant.

4. Conclusion

This article identified a previously unstudied initiating action that is similar to the story prompt (Lerner, 1992) in that it makes conditionally relevant a compound action unit (Lerner, 1991). Specifically, we identified the status inquiry, which involved a customer, who was calling an electronics-repair organization (referred to as Jack Camera), soliciting an update regarding the status of their equipment that was currently in some stage of the process of being repaired. We demonstrated that status inquiries make conditionally relevant a compound action unit that minimally contains two, ordered pieces of information (i.e., equipment-location status and repair-completion status), each of which occupy at least one sentential unit of talk. Along these lines, we demonstrated that the possible completion of equipment-location status is a place of possible local (vs. global) pragmatic completion (Ford and Thompson, 1996), and thus only a place of conditional entry for next speakers (Lerner, 1991), whereas the possible completion of repair-completion status is a place of possible global pragmatic completion that constitutes a place of possible sequence closure. Although this compound action unit is likely specific to the present institutional context (vs. generic to conversation), our findings raise the possibility that, in addition to sentential units being ‘semi-permeable’ (ala, Lerner, 1991, 1996), so are larger units, such as entire turns. In the case of sentential units, it is (largely) grammatical organization that provides for recognizable places of conditional entry (ala, Lerner, 1991, 1996), whereas in the case of compound action units, it is (largely) pragmatic organization (of course, the organization of pragmatics is simultaneously conditioned by that of syntax and prosody).

It is worth attempting to explain how or why customers' status inquiries make conditionally relevant this particular type of compound action unit. Ethnographically, we know that, when customers send equipment in for repair, they are informed about the organization's website and encouraged to check the progress of their repair online. This ethnographic claim is supported by the fact that customers sometimes orient to the website in their status-inquiry turns. For example, in Extract 5 (above), the customer solicits “a little bit more information” (lines 2–3) on his camera, that is, more than what is currently provided on the website; In Extract 9 (above), the customer prefaces his solicitation by claiming to not have “computer: uh access right now” (lines 3–4). The website provides customers with equipment-location status.

Thus, upon calling, customers may (but only may) know about current-location status. Customers sometimes orient to knowing current-location status in their status-inquiry turns. For example, in Extract 10 (above), as background to his request, the customer says: “My– uh: m laptop was se:nt onta thuh: Toshiba factory from- uh:m other r'pairs.” (lines 4–5). Much more frequently, though, status-inquiry turns do not reveal whether or not customers know about current-location status. For example, customers frequently solicit status with “I need tuh check thuh status of my:: repair laptop,” (Extract 4, above, lines 4–5), “Check on a repair:r plea:se” (Extract 6, above, line 5), and “I wanna follow up o:n a repai:ir?” (Extract 11, above, line 5).
There is an interactional rule that one should not ask for information one already has (Heritage and Robinson, 2006; Levinson, 2000). In the present context, customers are likely to know about current-location status from the website, and thus are likely to be soliciting some type of additional information. Due to this interactional rule, customers’ status inquiries are produced and understood as making conditionally relevant (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973) another (or at least a different) type of status. As is made evident by how participants conduct themselves during responses, this additional/different status turns out to be repair-completion status.

In sum, the action of sending electronic equipment in to Jack Camera to be repaired sets in motion what Lerner (1998) might call a completable project, which has a projectable, goal-oriented ending of the equipment being repaired. Thus, when customers call, prior to the completion of the repair, to check on the ‘status’ of their equipment, customers’ status inquiries are produced and understood as ones regarding at least the end-goal of the project, which is repair-completion status. That said, customers are calling prior to the realization of the project’s end goal – that is, prior to having received their equipment back – and thus current-location status is also relevant.

As reviewed by Selting (2000), within conversation analysis, the term turn constructional unit is frequently defined syntactically (e.g., a word, phrase, clause, or sentence) and, more recently, prosodically as well. However, Schegloff (1996) clarified: “By ‘turn-constructional unit,’ it may be recalled, we meant to register that these units can constitute possibly complete turns; on their possible completion, transition to a next speaker becomes relevant (although not necessarily accomplished)” (p. 55, emphasis added). The present article contributes to literature demonstrating that, in addition to syntactic and prosodic schemata, participants rely on pragmatic schemata – including what Selting (2000) referred to as activity-type-specific schemata – for understanding what constitutes a turn constructional unit (Selting, 2000, p. 512).

The concept of a compound action unit, which can be achieved within the confines of a single sequence of action, can be differentiated from the concept of activity, which literature tends to define as being achieved across more than one sequence of action (for review, see Robinson, 2012). However, like activities, compound action units are associated with particular sets of inferential schemata that inform the nature and organization of their sub-parts (Levinson, 1992). Literature suggests the presence of other, more ordinary (vs. institutional) compound action units, such as giving driving directions and food recipes (Goldberg, 1975). If Sacks (1995) was correct that “[a] culture is an apparatus for generating recognizable actions” (p. 226, emphasis original), then compound action units are (like other types of overall structural organization) a critical component of culture in need of further analytic attention.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A

Fig. 1. Computer screen shot of repair status.

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14 The corollary to this rule is ‘do not tell people information they already know’ (Heritage and Robinson, 2006; Maynard, 2003; Terasaki, 2004).
15 Another projectable ending is that the equipment cannot be repaired, but this is arguably not customers’ (or the institution’s) primary goal.
References


