

**Interactional prosody:  
High onsets in reason-for-the-call turns**

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ABSTRACT

The present study demonstrates how prosody – specifically, onset level – is deployed in situated interaction to cue frames of interpretation for talk. It shows not only that final pitch level in intonational contours is a relevant parameter, but also that, under certain conditions, INITIAL pitch level may provide a situationally specific contextualization cue. In calls to radio phone-in programs, for instance, there is a so-called anchor position where callers can be expected to announce the reason for their calls. Close empirical analysis of data from such a program reveals that it is here that the first turn-constructive unit is routinely formatted with high onset. The studio moderator displays an orientation to this kind of prosodic formatting by withholding further talk until the caller has made a recognizably complete statement of the reason for the call. On occasion, turn-constructive units in anchor position are heard to lack a high onset. When this happens, the moderator responds in a way that shows he is NOT treating callers' talk as the reason for the call, but rather as a preface to the statement of reason. (Prosody, intonation, conversational interaction, radio talk, onset level, contextualization theory, multi-unit turn construction, spoken paratone)\*

Recent years have seen a surge of interest in the analysis of informal interaction (for a recent introduction, see Hutchby & Wooffitt 1998) and in intonational phonology, in particular as it applies to discourse (e.g. Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990), yet these two research traditions have worked to a large extent independently of one another.<sup>1</sup> In Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 1996, a plea was made for integrating the fields of conversation analysis and prosodic study on the grounds that each could gain in ways that would ultimately enrich both. The following investigation of interactional prosody is an attempt to put into practice the approach and methodology advocated there. It focuses on a specific type of verbal interaction – the radio phone-in – through analysis of one actual radio phone-in program. The message this report conveys, however, goes well beyond the bounds of this specific program or of radio talk as a whole. Generally, it speaks to the

question of how much attention should be paid to non-verbal – especially, prosodic – dimensions of talk in interaction. And, since the answer to this question is “significantly more than usual,” it shows how this attention should be directed in order to get maximal benefits. The argument is that prosody impinges crucially on conversational structure: A consideration of only the verbal side of turns and turn sequences obscures systematic kinds of interactional organization. The latter can be appreciated only if turns, together with their prosodic formatting, are considered in their sequential environment.

Briefly, there are two questions to be asked when we set out to examine prosody from an interactional perspective (see also Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, eds., 1996). First, what are the tasks that participants must accomplish in the type of speech event at hand? Second, what contribution, if any, does prosody make to the accomplishment of these tasks? In this article, I address these two questions with respect to data gathered from approximately four hours of talk on a local radio phone-in program broadcast in Berkeley, California, during the Gulf War crisis in 1991. The speech event that recurs often in these data can be labeled “calling in on a radio phone-in program”; there are approximately 45 instances of this event in the material I have examined. The phone-in program was recorded shortly after the first bombings in Iraq, when numerous peace protests and rallies were taking place in the United States, some of which had erupted into violence. It was in part because of this escalation that studio lines were open for callers to phone in – as the moderator, Leo Laporte, put it – “(to) talk about what’s going on overseas and ... in the Bay Area ... and give people a chance to express their feelings and their fears and ‘move on’.”

#### THE TASK OF INTRODUCING THE REASON FOR ONE’S CALL

In private telephone communication, as Schegloff & Sacks 1973 have shown, one of the tasks incumbent on the person initiating the call is to establish why it is being made. Callers have routine ways of letting their interlocutors know why they have called. This may be done explicitly – “The reason I’m calling is ...,” “I’m calling to ...,” – or more implicitly, through sequential positioning. In the latter case, the reason for the call is recognizable by the location of some mentionable in a particular slot: typically, the crucial slot comes after completion of the identification sequence and the greeting sequence, in what Schegloff 1986 refers to as ANCHOR POSITION. Speakers are, however, not obliged to present their reason for calling in anchor position; there are ways of talking past anchor position which often prove useful in interactionally delicate situations.

In radio talk, the medium constrains both time and topic to a much greater extent than it does in private telephone conversations. Calls to a radio phone-in program are typically restricted to one topic, and anchor position is *a fortiori* the locus for the introduction of this topic. The following are typical examples from the radio phone-in under investigation:<sup>2</sup>

(1) Franklin (17B, 51.53)

1 Leo: FRANKlin.  
 2 uh YOU'RE next on the giant sixty eight kay en bee ar,  
 3 from san rafaEL.  
 4 Franklin: helLO.  
 5 Leo: hi FRANKlin–  
 6 Franklin: HI.  
 →7 uh FIRST i wanna say that uh –  
 8 i'm one of the PROtesters and; (.)  
 9 i wanna say RIGHT up front that;  
 10 uhm (.) I support; (.)  
 11 the SOLDiers OVER there.  
 12 uhm and the THING is is that;  
 13 I THINK (there is) something that isn't said enough;  
 14 by US; (.)  
 15 uhm the PROtesters. (.)  
 16 the FACT–  
 ((turn continues))

(2) Bob (15B, 57.05)

1 Leo: BOB,  
 2 you're on the GIant sixty eight;  
 3 thanks for CALLing.  
 4 Bob: HI leo.  
 5 Leo: HI bob.  
 →6 Bob: uhm i WANTED to say something about uh –  
 7 a COUPLE of things about uhm –  
 8 the WAR;  
 9 our attack on uh iRAQ;  
 10 uhm a LOT of people are saying it's about OIL;  
 11 i think it's about uhm FREEdom.  
 12 uh the WORLD is a world commUNity now,  
 13 it's gotten a lot SMALLer;  
 14 a:nd we can't take a an isoLationist (.) ATtitude;  
 15 and SIT over here and say it's not WRON::  
 16 i mean it's WRONG to FIGHT;  
 17 uhm how LONG can we aLLow: – (.)  
 18 EConomic sanctions to take EFFECT –  
 19 how LONG can we aLLow: – (.)  
 20 the people in Kuwait to SUFFer.  
 ((turn continues))

(3) Marie (16A, 8.52)

1 Leo: maRIE on the line from paCifica;  
 2 YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee ar;  
 3 thanks for CALLing marie.  
 4 Marie: HI leo.  
 5 Leo: HI.  
 →6 Marie: uhm I just had a comment about the: uhm PROtesters.  
 7 and i THINK,  
 8 I would rather last night have thought of ourselves as DEMonstrators?  
 9 as ONE of the people among the ten THOUsand.  
 10 a:nd uhm I was at mission and twenty FOURTH;  
 11 and (.) MOST of the group I was with which were;  
 12 PArents and TEACHERs and PROFESSIONal PEOPle  
 13 and YOUNG people that were concerned;  
 ((turn continues))

## (4) Julie (17B, 1.15.31)

- 1 Leo: JULIE on the line from PLEASanton.  
 2 YOU'RE on the Giant sixty eight KAY en bee ar.  
 3 Julie: HI leo.  
 4 Leo: HI julie.  
 →5 Julie: I'M calling because i have;  
 6 a really nice FRIEND;  
 7 real nice friend in ISrael.  
 8 and (.) i'm SURE lots of other people have FRIENDS; (.)  
 9 NOT (.) HERE.

The calls on this program are opened in a remarkably similar fashion. They begin when the moderator announces the caller's first name and (in most cases) where they are calling from, and follows this up with the phrase *you're (next) on the giant sixty eight kay en bee ar* addressed directly to the caller. (Optionally, the moderator may identify himself with *i'm leo laporte* or thank the caller for calling.) This opening serves a dual function: to advise listeners of the upcoming call, and to let the caller, who is presumably on hold, know that the call has been put through. Routinely, an exchange of greetings follows: see, e.g. lines 4–6 in ex. 1, lines 4–5 in ex. 2, lines 4–5 in ex. 3, and lines 3–4 in ex. 4. Immediately thereafter, the callers announce the reason for their call: they have something to say, as in lines 7ff in ex. 1 or lines 6ff in ex. 2; or they have a comment to make as in line 6 in ex. 3. In ex. 4, the reason is slightly different: Julie's call, it turns out, is intended to let her friend's parents know that she is thinking of him. Yet whatever the reason for phoning in, the caller's statement of it is begun (if not completed) in a turn immediately subsequent to the exchange of greetings with the moderator.

On other occasions in this program, the reason for the call is introduced after a foreshortened greeting sequence, as seen in ex. 5.

## (5) Brad (16A, 26.38)

- 1 Leo: BRAD on the line from moRAga;  
 2 YOU'RE on the giant sixty eight KAY en bee ar.  
 3 Brad: HI.  
 4 uhm,  
 →5 i just WANT to say;  
 6 i don't (.) really agree with the PROtesters;  
 7 and what they're DOing but; (.)  
 8 i mean that's their preROgative;  
 9 they're allowed to PROtest. .hh  
 10 but just everyone's SAYing that; (.)  
 11 they think the SANctions;  
 12 would have WORKED;  
 13 but (.) what if you give hussein TI:ME a:nd; (.)  
 14 he works (.) on his chemical WEAPons;  
 15 and he takes over JORDan,  
 16 or (.) ISrael or something ELSE. (-)  
 17 well (.) he's DOing it.

Here, the caller issues a greeting in line 3 and proceeds directly (after a transitional *uhm* in line 4) to a statement of why he has called (lines 5ff).

Greetings are sometimes forgone altogether by the moderator and the caller, with the caller proceeding immediately (here, again, following an *uhm*) to a statement of the reason for the call, as in ex. 6.

(6) Karen (17B, 1.18.28)

- 1 Leo: KAren on the line from NEWark;  
 2 YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee AR;  
 →3 Karen: uhm I just want to talk about the: –  
 4 PROtesters; .hh  
 5 a::nd uhm a LITtle bit in terms of how we GOT here.  
 6 one– ONE of the things i'd like to

How do we know that the arrowed turns in the excerpts above are indeed introducing the callers' reasons for calling? Sometimes there is an explicit reference, such as *I'm calling because . . .* (ex. 4). In other examples, quasi-formulaic expressions such as *I'd just like to say* preface the turn and cue the caller's reason. But there is additional and more systematic evidence in the moderator's recipient behavior: in each case, Leo treats the action under way as requiring extended talk. That is, he does not come in at the first possible syntactic and prosodic completion point in callers' turns. Instead, he routinely postpones a recipient response until callers have made a recognizably full statement of their concern.<sup>3</sup> This is evident from the fact that there are transitional relevance points (TRPs) signaled by syntactic and prosodic closure – for example, in ex. 1 at lines 11 and 15 – where the moderator does not take over the floor. Similarly, in ex. 2 at lines 11 and 20, in ex. 3 at lines 6 and 9, in ex. 4 at line 7, in ex. 5 at lines 9 and 16, and in ex. 6 at line 5, the moderator passes up clear opportunities for turn transition.<sup>4</sup> He thus treats the anchor position of these calls as beginning a multi-unit turn, or a “big package,” which will involve more than one TCU before transition is relevant. Sometimes the turn at talk indeed projects verbally that a multi-unit project is under way; this may be done by reference to global organization (see *first* in ex. 1 or *a couple of things* in ex. 2), or by reference to upcoming actions like saying something (exx. 1, 2, and 5), making a comment (ex. 3), or talking about something (ex. 6).<sup>5</sup>

THE TASK OF INITIATING A PRELIMINARY TO THE REASON FOR ONE'S CALL

Although Leo routinely withholds talk at anchor position in cases like those above, he does not do so invariably. There is another set of calls (exx. 7–11) in which he comes in immediately, at the first possible completion point in caller's anchor position turn.

(7) Mike (15B, 1.07.47)

- 1 Leo: MIKE on the line from walnut CREEK,  
 2 you're on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee ar;  
 3 HI mike.  
 4 Mike: oh HI there.  
 →5 I have a little something to say about the: uh PROtests that are taking place,

- 6 Leo: oKAY,  
 7 Mike: uhm I kind of feel that uh – (.)  
 8 if PEOPle – (.)  
 9 i think there're a lot of REAsOnable people out there;  
 10 who WANT to uh – (.)  
 11 support PEACE;  
 ((turn continues))
- (8) Erica (15B, 1.11.21)
- 1 Leo: ERica on the line from alaMEda;  
 2 you're on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee AR;  
 3 Erica: HI.  
 →4 I'M just calling up to uh (.) TALK about the PROtesters?  
 →5 Leo: oKAY,  
 6 Erica: and uhm (.) I=don't=know=  
 7 I'M in I'M in the NAvy;  
 8 and there's a CHANCE that I could be called Over there.  
 ((turn continues))
- (9) Noel (16A, 41.51)
- 1 Leo: NOel on the line from san CARlos.  
 2 you're on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee ar,  
 3 i'm leo laPORTE.  
 →4 Noel: yeah i have a QUEStion for you.  
 →5 Leo: SURE.  
 6 Noel: uhm – (.)  
 7 if the THING in the–  
 8 the WAR in the gulf;  
 9 continues to GROW uhm;  
 10 are they gonna (.) START the DRAFT, or
- (10) Dustin (16B, 51.11)
- 1 Leo: DUSTin on the line from ANtioch.  
 2 YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee ar.  
 3 Dustin: hh you GOT me.  
 4 Leo: GOT you dustin,  
 5 Dustin: hhh HOW you doing Leo,  
 6 Leo: thanks for CALLing;  
 7 GOOD.  
 →8 Dustin: uh i got an oPINion question for you.  
 →9 Leo: ALright.  
 10 Dustin: ((tsk)) is (.) sa– sadDAM husSEIN; (.)  
 11 is he is he PLAYing naive?  
 12 or is he just STUpid.
- (11) Marshall (16A, 41.40)
- 1 Leo: MARshall on the line from CONcord;  
 2 YOU'RE on the giant sixty eight kay en bee ar.  
 3 Marshall: HI.  
 4 Leo: HI marshall.  
 →5 Marshall: i'd LIKE to uh take a STEP to the (.) inVASion<sup>6</sup> here.  
 →6 Leo: alRIGHT,  
 7 Marshall: and uh;

In these cases, the moderator does not wait until callers are heard to have made a recognizably full statement of their concern before he comes in. Instead, he produces a recipient response at the first transition relevance point in callers'

anchor-position turn. In other words, he treats the first turn-constructional units of these callers – announcements about having something to say (ex. 7), wanting to talk about something (ex. 8), having a question to ask (exx. 9–10), or wanting to take a stand on something (ex. 11) – as requiring some uptake. Because next turns engage in precisely these actions, the sequential organization is characteristic of a PRE-SEQUENCE (Schegloff 1979), and specifically, one that prefigures a particular type of next turn. The anchor-position turns in exx. 7–11 are heard as prefiguring the action that is the reason for the call.<sup>7</sup>

Pre-sequences, or preliminaries, have been discussed in the literature as a type of turn that serves as a testing ground for some specific – often delicate – activity. They provide a slot for ratification by the interlocutor before the action itself is carried out. When problems are encountered, the action can be modified, re-routed, or abandoned altogether (Levinson 1983). In the examples above, the callers appear to be understood as requesting ratification of the action announced before it is carried out. Once the moderator has provided a ratification token (*okay, sure, alright*), they proceed directly to the projected action of asking a question (exx. 9, 10), or indirectly – via additional preliminaries – to the projected action of saying a little something as in ex. 7, talking about the protesters (ex. 8), or taking a stand on the invasion (ex. 11).

To summarize the discussion so far, we have seen that anchor position turns in these telephone calls fall into two groups. In one group (exx. 1–6), the caller engages immediately in a turn that is hearable as being in its own right the reason for the call, and the moderator withholds talk until the action that constitutes the reason for the call has been recognizably completed. In the other group (exx. 7–11), the caller prefaces the turn that is the reason for the call with a preliminary turn in anchor position; the latter is heard as leading up to and projecting an upcoming action that will itself be the reason for the call. The moderator treats this turn as a request for ratification of the projected action, which he provides at the first opportunity for turn transition. The caller then proceeds directly or indirectly to the projected action (statement, question, comment, etc.) in next turn.

#### CUEING THE STATUS OF TALK IN ANCHOR POSITION

Notice now that turn-constructional units (TCUs) in anchor position are not intrinsically reasons for the call or preliminaries (“pre-preliminaries”) to them. We cannot determine from the wording alone whether the anchor-position turn is actually engaged in the action that constitutes the reason for the call, or whether it is merely projecting that action. This becomes clear when we compare the anchor-position TCUs in the two sets. There is nothing in the wording of ex. 6, for instance, to signal that *i just want to talk about the: protesters* is engaging in the action that is the caller’s reason itself, while in ex. 8, by contrast, *i’m just calling up to uh talk about the protesters* is a preliminary to the talk that will constitute the caller’s reason for calling. Nor is there any way to tell from the wording in

ex. 2 that *i wanted to say something about uh – a couple of things about uhm – the war* is part of a multi-unit turn that constitutes the reason for the call, whereas in ex. 11, *i'd like to uh take a step to the (.) invasion here* is a preliminary to the reason. Moreover, even in the first set of examples, the callers' initial TCUs in anchor position do not directly engage in the action that is the reason for the call: in ex. 1, for instance, Franklin announces in his first TCU that he is one of the protesters. This bit of information establishes his social identity with respect to the events in question, but it does not yet qualify as the reason proper for his call. Likewise, Bob's *i wanted to say something about uh – a couple of things about uhm – the war* (ex. 2), Marie's *i just had a comment about the: uhm protesters* (ex. 3), or Karen's *i just want to talk about the: protesters* (ex. 6) are not yet the relevant comment or talk itself. Nevertheless, they are heard and treated as being part of a multi-unit project, whereas the TCUs in exx. 7–11 are not. Thus, although the two sets of TCUs differ in interactional status – as evidenced by the fact that they receive different sequential treatment from the moderator – this cannot be attributed to differing verbal design.

How can the moderator's interpretations be accounted for, if not in terms of verbal design? One hypothesis is that there is something about the PROSODIC configuration of the two sets of turns that cues divergent interpretations. To prove this hypothesis, we must identify one or more prosodic features that are systematically present in one set but absent from the other. A long tradition in intonation research regards FINAL PITCH configuration as an important cue for transitional relevance. In one recent proposal within a framework for discourse transcription, DuBois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming, and Paolino 1993 distinguish "period" and "question mark" intonation from "comma" intonation. Period intonation in English typically involves a fall to low pitch and has final transitional continuity; question mark intonation in English is realized by a rise to high pitch and has an appeal function. Both are said to mark that a speaker's discourse business is finished; in conversation, they signal the relevance of turn transition. Comma intonation, in contrast, may involve a fall to mid, a slight rise, or a level pitch in English; it is said to signal that a speaker's discourse business will continue, and thus to forestall turn transition. However, different final pitch movements – period/question mark vs. comma intonation – cannot explain why the moderator treats these anchor-position TCUs differently. In ex. 3, for instance, Marie uses period intonation at the end of her first TCU, but Leo does not come in. The same thing happens with Julie in ex. 4. In fact, in all six instances in the first set of data, Leo forgoes opportunities to take over the floor following TCUs that end in period intonation. In the second set of data, by contrast, Mike uses comma intonation following his first TCU in ex. 7, but the moderator comes in despite this contour, even though it has been characterized as a marker of continuation. Therefore, a distinction in terms of continuing (comma) vs. transition-relevant (period/question mark) intonation does not account for the moderator's behavior, nor do other attempts at grouping final pitch contours; for example, the relevant TCUs in the



second set of data have both rising and falling contours, and, although rises and falls are not documented in the examples above, both are also attested in the first set (see Couper-Kuhlen 1998).

HIGH ONSET VS. ITS ABSENCE AT ANCHOR POSITION

I wish to argue that pitch at the BEGINNING of a caller's anchor-position TCU is a more reliable cue to the way that TCU is treated by the moderator than is pitch at the end. By pitch at the beginning of a TCU, I mean specifically the height of the onset, or first stressed syllable, in the first intonation phrase of a caller's TCU (see also Couper-Kuhlen 1986, Couper-Kuhlen, to appear). In each of the examples in the first set of data, the caller's onset is noticeably HIGHER at anchor position than it is in a prior same-speaker TCU. See, for example, the pitch track for Franklin's anchor-position TCU in ex. 1 (Fig. 1), and the pitch track for Bob's in ex. 2 (Fig. 2).<sup>8</sup> In the repeated examples below, I represent these high onsets with an upward arrow before the stressed syllable in question:

(1) Franklin (17B, 51.53)

- 1 Leo: FRANKlin.
- 2 uh YOU'RE next on the giant sixty eight kay en bee ar,
- 3 from san rafaEL.
- 4 Franklin: helLO.
- 5 Leo: hi FRANKlin –
- 6 Franklin: HL.
- 7 uh ↑FIRST i wanna say that uh –
- 8 i'm one of the PROtesters and; (.)
- 9 i wanna say RIGHT up front that;
- 10 uhm (.) I support; (.)
- 11 the SOLDiers OVER there.

(2) Bob (15B, 57.05)

- 1 Leo: BOB,
- 2 you're on the GIant sixty eight;
- 3 thanks for CALLing.
- 4 Bob: HI leo.
- 5 Leo: HI bob.
- 6 Bob: uhm i ↑WANTed to say something about uh –
- 7 a COUple of things about uhm –
- 8 the WAR;
- 9 our attack on uh iRAQ;
- 10 uhm a LOT of people are saying it's about OIL;
- 11 i think it's about uhm FREEdom.

(3) Marie (16A, 8.52)

- 1 Leo: maRIE on the line from paCflica;
- 2 YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee ar;
- 3 thanks for CALLing marie.
- 4 Marie: HI leo.
- 5 Leo: HI.
- 6 Marie: uhm ↑I just had a comment about the: uhm PROtesters.
- 7 and i THINK,
- 8 I would rather last night have thought of ourselves as DEMonstrators?
- 9 as ONE of the people among the ten THOUsand.

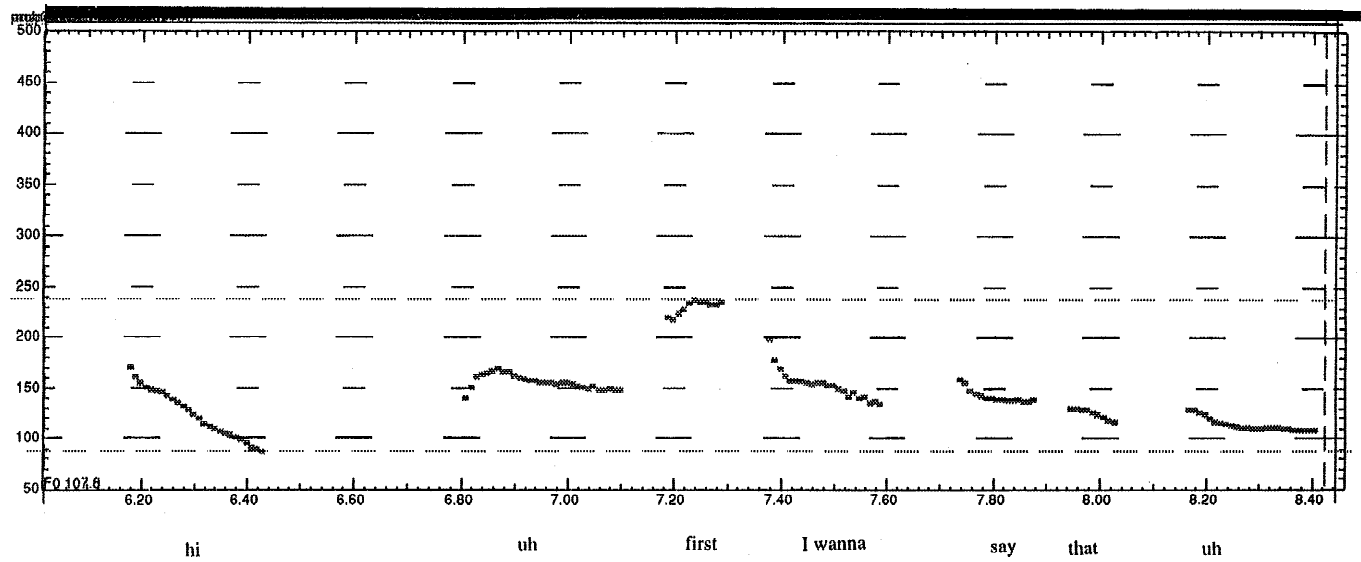


FIGURE 1: Pitch track for ex. 1, lines 6–7.

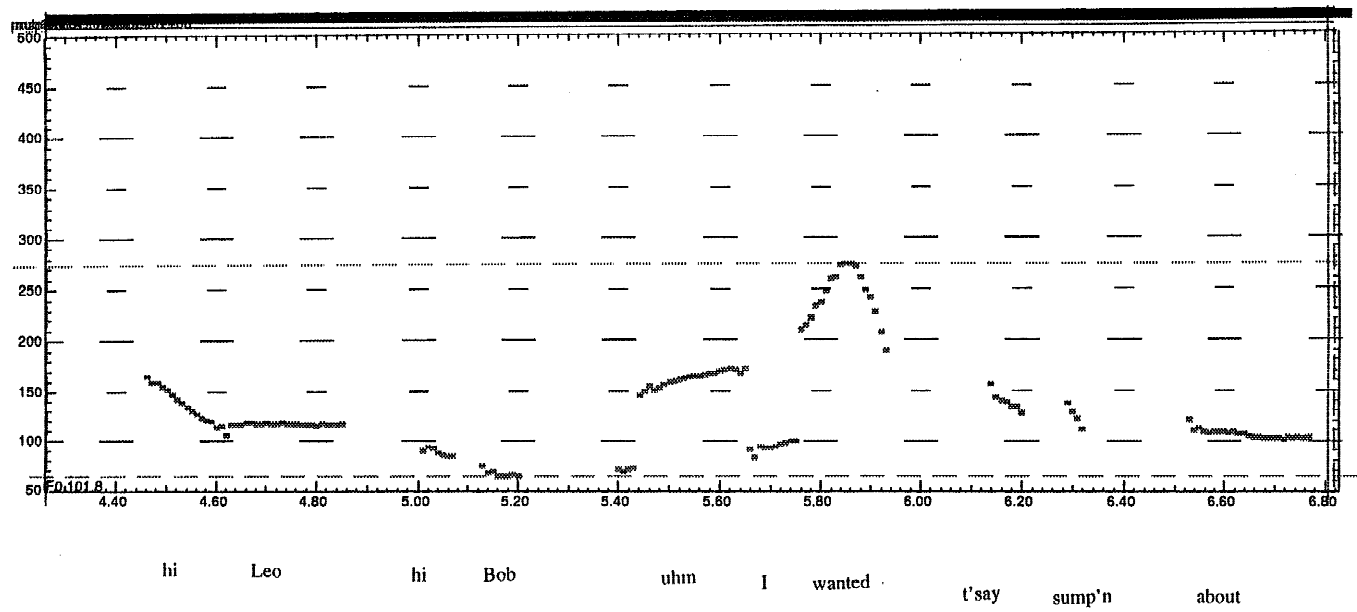


FIGURE 2: Pitch track for ex. 2, lines 4–6.

## (4) Julie (17B, 1.15.31)

- 1 Leo: JULie on the line from PLEASanton.  
 2 YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee ar.  
 3 Julie: HI leo.  
 4 Leo: HI julie.  
 →5 Julie: ↑I'M calling because i have;  
 6 a really nice FRIEND;  
 7 real nice friend in ISrael.  
 8 and (.) i'm SURE lots of other people have FRIENDS; (.)  
 9 NOT (.) HERE.

## (5) Brad (16A, 26.38)

- 1 Leo: BRAD on the line from moRAga;  
 2 YOU'RE on the giant sixty eight KAY en bee ar.  
 3 Brad: HL.  
 4 uhm,  
 →5 i just ↑WANT to say;  
 6 i don't (.) really agree with the PROtesters;  
 7 and what they're DOing but; (.)  
 8 i mean that's their preROgative;  
 9 they're allowed to PROtest. .hh

## (6) Karen (17B, 1.18.28)

- 1 Leo: KAREn on the line from NEWark;  
 2 YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee AR;  
 →3 Karen: uhm ↑I just want to talk about the: –  
 4 PROtesters; .hh  
 5 a::nd uhm a LITtle bit in terms of how we GOT here.

By contrast, the onsets in the sequences in which the moderator comes in immediately after the first TCU of a caller's anchor-position turn are NOT higher than prior onsets by the same speaker: see, for instance, the pitch track for Mike's anchor-position turn in ex. 7 (Fig. 3), and the pitch track for Dustin's anchor-position turn in ex. 10 (Fig. 4). What distinguishes the anchor-position TCUs of these speakers from those in the first set is the fact that their first stressed syllable LACKS a high onset: speakers refrain from using high pitch on the first stressed syllable of their turns. The first stressed syllables of the second data set consequently lack upward arrows in transcription (illustrated below for ex. 7; anchor-position turns in exx. 8–11 would also lack upward arrows).

## (7) Mike (15B, 1.07.47)

- 1 Leo: MIKE on the line from walnut CREEK,  
 2 you're on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee ar;  
 3 HI mike.  
 4 Mike: oh HI there.  
 →5 I have a little something to say about the: uh PROtests that are taking place,  
 6 Leo: oKAY,  
 7 Mike: uhm I kind of feel that uh – (.)  
 8 if PEOPle – (.)  
 9 i think there're a lot of REASONable people out there;  
 10 who WANT to uh – (.)  
 11 support PEACE;  
 ((turn continues))

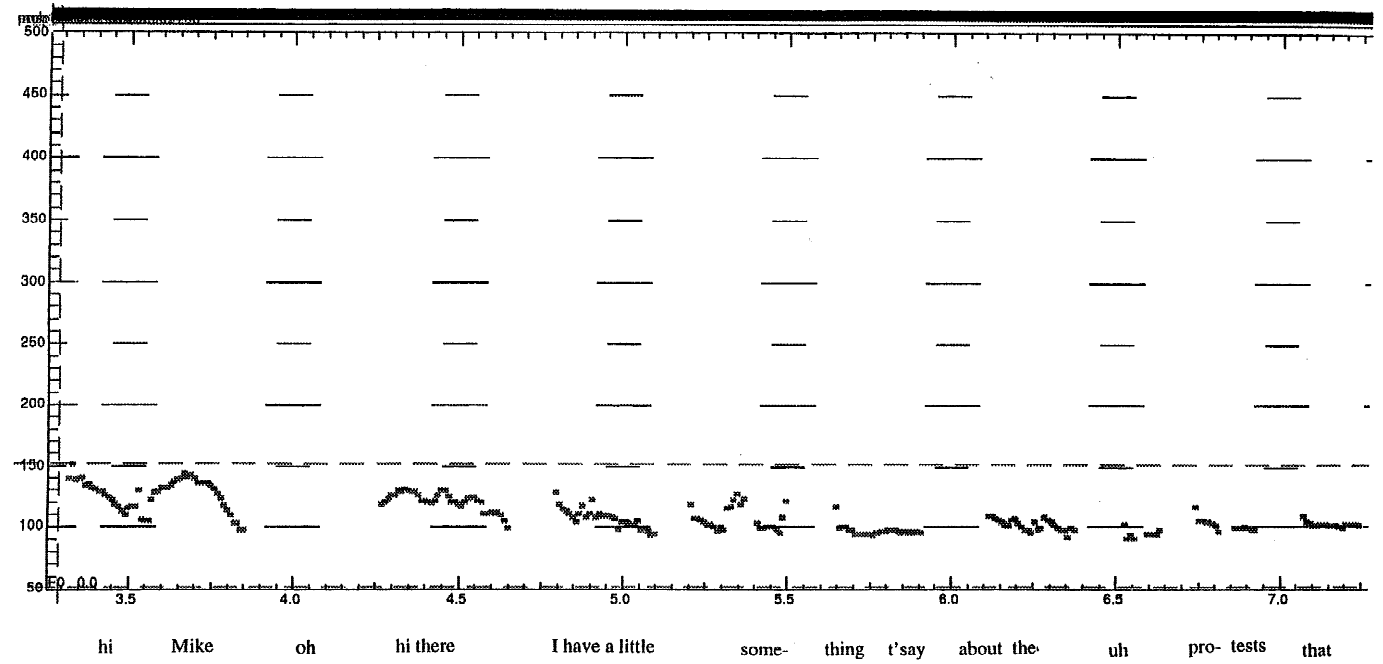


FIGURE 3: Pitch track for ex. 7, lines 3–5.

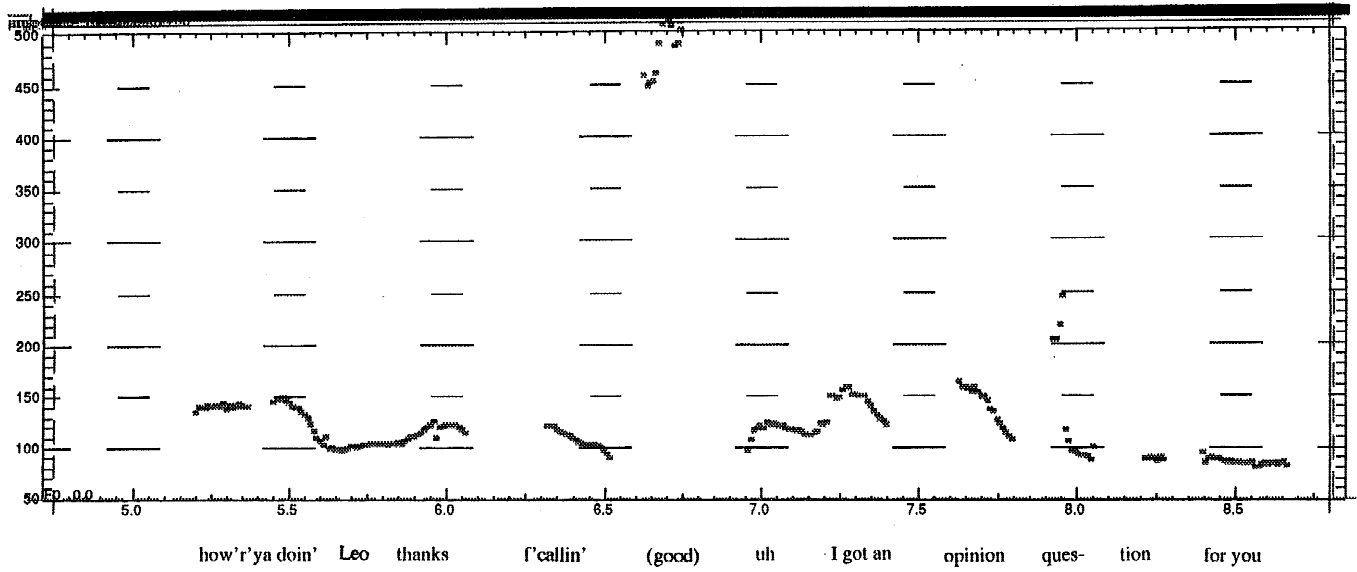


FIGURE 4: Pitch track for ex. 10, lines 5–8.

In summary, there is evidence that the height of the onset at the beginning of a TCU in this sequential position and in this particular kind of speech event cues the status that a current turn-at-talk is perceived as having. Anchor-position high onset (e.g. higher than the onset in the caller's greeting) appears to format the turn in such a way that the studio moderator perceives it to be engaging – directly or indirectly – in the action that is the reason for the call. His withholding of talk at following TRPs gives callers room to express their concerns as fully as they deem necessary. Lack of high onset, in contrast, appears to format the turn in question as a preliminary (or a pre-preliminary), inviting ratification from the moderator before the action that is the reason for the call is carried out. In this case, the turn can perhaps be thought of as doing the work of a preface, negotiating the right to a multi-unit turn at talk.

High onset functions not only with respect to the way the TCU is received by the moderator; it also functions with respect to the way talk is structured by the speaker. Beginning an intonation phrase relatively high in one's voice range allows room for subsequent intonation phrases to be positioned lower and thus affords the possibility of declination units (Schuetze-Coburn, Shapley, and Weber 1991), which can be used to structure a "big package." Because high onsets initiate pitch declination units, they can be thought of as projecting "more to come" – in this case, further intonation phrases within the declination unit. In this sense, they provide prospective prosodic cues to the "big package" that is under way.

Corroborating evidence for the hypothesis that high onset in an anchor-position TCU cues the fact that a speaker is undertaking a "big package," is found in the second set of data, in the prosodic configuration of the turns that FOLLOW the moderator's ratification:

(7) Mike (15B, 1.07.47)

- 1 Leo: MIKE on the line from walnut CREEK,
- 2 you're on the Giant sixty eight KAY en bee ar;
- 3 HI mike.
- 4 Mike: oh HI there.
- 5 I have a little something to say about the: uh PROtests that are taking place,
- 6 Leo: oKAY,
- 7 Mike: uhm ↑I kind of feel that uh – (.)
- 8 if PEOple – (.)
- 9 i think there're a lot of REAsonable people out there;
- 10 who WANT to uh – (.)
- 11 support PEACE;
- ((turn continues))

(8) Erica (15B, 1.11.21)

- 1 Leo: ERica on the line from alaMEda;
- 2 you're on the Giant sixty eight kay en bee AR;
- 3 Erica: HI.
- 4 I'M just calling up to uh (.) TALK about the PROtesters?
- 5 Leo: oKAY,

6 Erica: and uhm (.) I=don't=know=  
 →7        ↑I'M in I'M in the NAVY;  
 8        and there's a CHANCE that I could be called OVer there.  
 ((turn continues))

(9) Noel (16A, 41.51)

1 Leo: NOel on the line from san CARlos.  
 2        you're on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee ar,  
 3        i'm leo laPORTE.  
 4 Noel: yeah i have a QUESTion for you.  
 5 Leo: SURE.  
 6 Noel: uhm (.)  
 →7        if the ↑THING in the–  
 8        the WAR in the gulf;  
 9        continues to GROW uhm;  
 10       are they gonna (.) START the DRAFT, or

(10) Dustin (16B, 51.11)

1 Leo: DUSTin on the line from ANTioch.  
 2        YOU'RE on the GIant sixty eight kay en bee ar.  
 3 Dustin: hh you GOT me.  
 4 Leo: GOT you dustin,  
 5 Dustin: hhh HOW you doing Leo,  
 6 Leo: thanks for CALLing;  
 7        GOOD.  
 8 Dustin: uh i got an oPINion question for you.  
 9 Leo: ALright.  
 →10 Dustin: ((tsk) is (.)↑sa– sadDAM husSEIN; (.)  
 11        is he is he PLAYing naive?  
 12        or is he just STUpid.

In each case where anchor-position talk is heard as a preliminary, once Leo has produced a ratification token, next turns are configured with high onset: see, for example, the pitch track for Mike's next turn after the preliminary in ex. 7 (Fig. 5). These next turns proceed to carry out the action projected in the pre-sequence – indirectly (e.g. exx. 7–8) or directly (e.g. exx. 9–10).

Thus, in the examples above, the absence of high onset in turn-initial position can be observed to contrast directly with its presence. Anchor-position turns that are formatted WITHOUT high onset are treated as prefaces that are not yet the reason for the call, whereas immediately subsequent turns WITH high onset are responded to as genuine reason-for-the-call turns. Because reasons for the call are under institutional constraints to be located in anchor position, their delay is accountable, in the sense that it makes additional “work” necessary. The argument then is that ABSENCE of high onset functions as a kind of displacement marker: It cues the message that the turn in question is not the reason for the call. Note that, as a displacement marker, lack of high onset is interpretable only by reference to the fact that standard reasons for the call in this institutional setting routinely have high onset. It is a curious reversal of markedness theory, but in interaction, it works admirably well that a turn representing a departure from some routine pattern (and, thus, “marked”) should LACK a prosodic characteristic it would have if that routine were being instantiated.



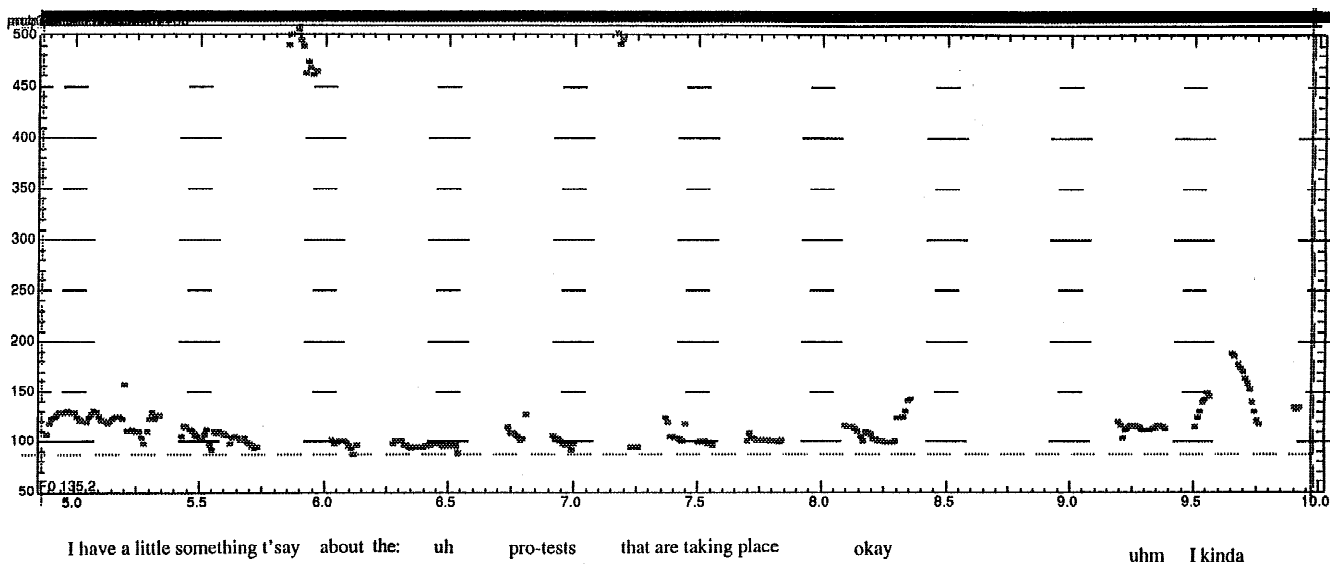


FIGURE 5: Pitch track for ex. 7, lines 5–7.

## EXPROPRIATING ANCHOR POSITION FOR OTHER BUSINESS

There is a third set of cases in which callers' anchor-position turns are configured without high onset but do not project a specific action that will constitute the reason for the call. Consider the following:

(12) Theresa (15A, 45.38)

- 1 Leo: theREsa's been hanging on from el graNAda;  
 2 theREsa THANKS,;  
 3 you're on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee ar.  
 4 Theresa: HI leo.  
 5 Leo: HI theresa.  
 →6 Theresa: I'M a first-time CALLer –  
 7 Leo GLAD you called.  
 8 Theresa: uhm: –  
 9 ↑I'M kind of unHA:Ppy;  
 10 because I DON'T feel (.) the media –  
 11 is ACCurately reFLECTing;  
 12 the feelings of MOST people;  
 13 reGARDing this persian GULF conflict.  
 14 (1.0)  
 ((turn continues))

Theresa's anchor-position turn, *i'm a first time caller*, is delivered without high onset (see the pitch track in Fig. 6), but it is not a preliminary in the sense that it prefaces and projects some upcoming action. On the other hand, it does not deliver her reason for the call either. (The reason is not introduced until line 9, after Leo has attended to the business initiated in Theresa's anchor-position turn.) The formatting of line 6 is similar to that of the anchor-position TCUs in exx. 7–11: By refraining from the use of a high onset, the caller signals a departure from the routine placement of a reason-for-the-call action. The difference is that the warrant for doing so is not the preface of an upcoming action that will be the reason for the call, but rather the necessity of attending to some other business that has priority over the reason for the call.

Warrants for a departure from the routine, institutionalized placement of a reason-for-the-call turn are varied, but they tend to have in common that the business must be accomplished here and now: it is "urgent" in the sense that if it is delayed until later in the talk, it will no longer be relevant. One situation that may occasion an expropriation of anchor position for here-and-now business derives from the institutional organization of radio phone-in programs. Callers are given a preliminary screening and then put on hold until the moderator is ready to take the call. In the meantime, however, they often monitor the ongoing interaction on their own radios. If some new issue arises while the caller is on hold, this may generate a spontaneous mentionable which takes priority over the planned one that was initially responsible for the call. Consider, for example, ex. 13:

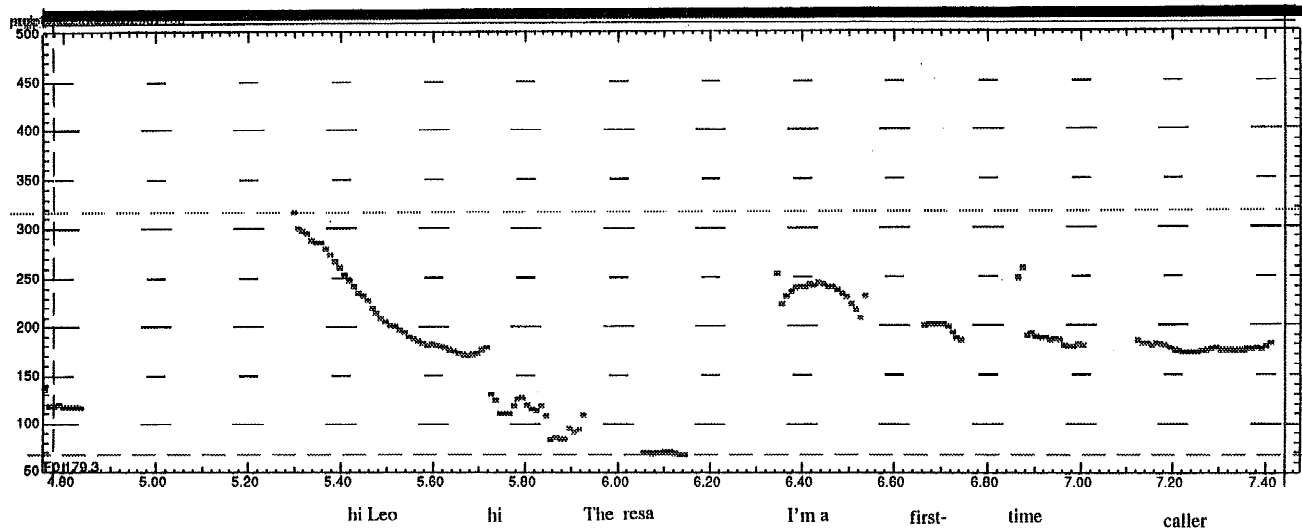


FIGURE 6: Pitch track for ex. 12, lines 4–6.

## (13) Debby (16A, 23.47)

- 1 Leo: DEBBie on the line from san joSE,  
 2 YOU'RE on the giant sixty eight kay en bee ar i'm leo laPORTE.  
 3 Debby: HI leo.  
 4 Leo: hi DEBBy.  
 5 Debby: uhm – (.)  
 →6 gee that GUY i just listened to;  
 7 that REALly really upSETS me.  
 8 Leo: [(why).  
 9 Debby: [uhm well the ↑REAson why i CALLED;  
 10 is I was uh – (.)  
 11 in san joSE –  
 12 on MONday,  
 13 downTOWN at the– the: uh (.)  
 14 DEMonstration that was going on THEN –  
 15 and it (.) was SUCH a different FEELing;  
 16 than from WHAT i'm seeing these last two DAYS.  
 17 it was so PEACEful – (.)  
 18 uh (.) YOU know;  
 19 PEOPle were down there to REALly supPORT each OTHer.  
 ((turn continues))

The anchor-position turn here lacks high onset; in fact, the whole unit is placed relatively low in the speaker's voice range (see Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 1996). In light of the discussion above, Debby's turn can be said to be cued prosodically as NOT being a statement of her "official" reason for calling. In this case, the warrant appears to be a spontaneous mentionable: just prior to this call, there has been a live report from an anti-war demonstration, in which the reporter has described how he is boxed in by demonstrators and policemen with tear gas. Debbie's anchor-position talk is interpretable as referring to this report. Placed in this position, its relevance (*Why that now?*) is construable through a relation of contiguity. Had it been positioned later, considerably more work would have been necessary to make it "fit in." In addition to its sequential location, it is the prosodic formatting – in particular, the absence of high onset – that cues the interactional status of this talk unit as NOT being the reason for the call.

Another kind of business that receives early mention in anchor position is announcing HOW the action that constitutes the reason for the call will be carried out:

## (14) Frank (16A, 227)

- 1 Leo: FRANK on the li:ne;  
 2 from walnut CREEK;  
 3 you're on the GIant sixty eight KAY en bee ar.  
 4 Frank: hi LEO,  
 5 HOW you doing.  
 6 Leo: HI frank,  
 7 i'm GOOD.  
 8 THANKS for calling.  
 →9 Frank: I'LL be really quick. uh (.)  
 10 ↑NUMber one is –  
 11 I don't THINK uh;

- 12 a lot of the aMERican uh;  
 13 ARMy men and,  
 14 NAVy and,  
 15 maRINES and,  
 16 AIR force,  
 17 would be there FIGHTing right now if they didn't, .hh  
 18 beLIEVE in the fact that;  
 19 they don't WANT no more TERRorists.  
 ((turn continues))

Frank's anchor-position TCU, *i'll be really quick*, is formatted without high onset; it contrasts prosodically with the next TCU, *number one is*, which has noticeably high pitch on *number*. That is, the metacomment on how Frank intends to make his contribution is displayed as NOT being part of the action that constitutes the reason for his call. Note, moreover, that Frank leaves room for Leo to respond to his preface by means of the *uh* and the micro-pause at the end of line 9. During this extended transition space, he can monitor for potential objections from Leo. Leo, however, does not treat Frank's metacomment as requiring uptake – nor, incidentally, as requiring repair, which might have been necessary, given the institutional constraints of radio talk, had Frank said something like “I'll be a bit long.” In the absence of repair initiation from Leo, Frank's proposal to be quick stands as uncontested, and he can proceed to the business at hand (lines 10ff).

As ex. 14 demonstrates, anchor-positioned NON-reasons for the call differ not only in terms of the kind of warrant they proffer, but also in terms of how strongly they implicate ratification by the moderator. Whereas preliminaries and pre-preliminaries such as those discussed in the second section of this article invariably receive explicit ratification, other types of action expropriating the reason for the call in anchor position do not always receive it. Speakers do, however, (as in ex. 14) regularly provide for other-initiation of repair when they depart from the institutional constraint of “reason for the call in anchor position.” When no ratification is forthcoming, their NON-reason-for-the-call TCUs stand as implicitly ratified.

A final example demonstrates that a conversational object such as *i'll be quick* in anchor position is not intrinsically extraneous to the multi-turn project which – in the speech event at hand – is the reason for the call:

(15) Jean (15B, 525)

- 1 Leo: JEAN on the line from FAIRfield;  
 2 you're on the Glant sixty eight kay en bee AR.  
 3 Jean: HI.  
 4 Leo: HI jean;  
 5 THANKS for the call.  
 6 Jean: .hhh uhm:: –  
 →7 i'll ↑MAKE this pretty quick;  
 8 [i uh–  
 9 Leo: [oKAY.  
 10 Jean: my COMments are merely about the PROtesters. (.)hh

- 11 i: (.) KINDa hesitate to LUMP them all toGETHer;  
 12 exCEPT that i think that uh – (.)  
 13 those who are supPOSedly PEACEfully PROtesting; (.)  
 14 .hhh WHEN they SEE::  
 15 what’s going ON;  
 16 ought to be BACKing OFF;

In this extract, Jean also places a metacomment about “being quick” in anchor position (line 7), but she uses high onset in doing so and thereby signals that a multi-unit turn is under way. When Leo comes in at the end of this TCU, a hitch results. Jean’s next TCU (line 8) is designed to be part of the “big package”: its timing is appropriate for a turn extension, and its pitch and loudness are geared so as to continue the declination unit begun in line 7. Moreover, her subsequent TCUs (lines 10–16) also lack high onset. Jean’s behavior is thus consistent with the hypothesis that high onset is being used to cue the beginning of a reason-for-the-call turn. Leo’s incoming in line 9, however, appears to treat Jean’s initial TCU as a preface requiring uptake.

The turn-taking hitch seen here provides an important lesson in understanding how interactional prosody works. As a contextualization cue in interaction, prosody can do no more than SUGGEST appropriate interpretations for the turn it accompanies (see also Auer & di Luzio, eds., 1992). It does so in conjunction with the verbal design of the turn, which itself is geared to “fit” in a particular sequential context. Turn production and design are, however, only one side of the coin in interaction; how they are interpreted is the other. Moreover, recipients may make inferences that differ from those cued by speakers’ prosodic formatting. When this happens, and it becomes noticeable – as in ex. 15 – that intersubjectivity is endangered, speakers will rely on the resource of repair to reestablish the interaction order. In ex. 15, reliance on this resource is evident when Jean, presumably having heard that Leo was attempting a ratification of something he interpreted as a preface (line 9), provides another opportunity for him to ratify or initiate repair at the end of her next TCU (line 10). The micro-pause and inbreathing here extend the possible transition space, giving Leo a chance to re-cycle and Jean a chance to monitor for such recycling. When Leo does not avail himself of this second opportunity, Jean can continue to expand on the reason for her call with the understanding that he (implicitly) acquiesces.

#### CONCLUSION

This study of calls on a radio phone-in program has revealed that speakers use contrasting prosodic designs – high onset vs. absence of high onset – to cue the status of their talk at anchor position. High pitch on the first stressed syllable of a TCU in this position is routinely associated with multi-unit turns that are designed and treated as carrying out – directly or indirectly – the action that is the reason for the call. Absence of high onset in a TCU at anchor position, by con-

trast, is routinely found in conjunction with turns designed and treated as NOT being the reason for the call in its own right, but rather as projecting this action or as having precedence over it because of some immediacy or urgency.

Although the explicit phrase “The reason I’m calling is . . .” is always accompanied by high onset in the data examined, with other phrases prosodic formatting is often as important as wording in cueing what callers are doing at this sequential position in their talk. This is particularly true of expressions such as “I’d just like to say . . .,” “I have a comment on . . .,” and “I’ll be quick,” where prosodic design often appears to be crucial in signaling whether or not they are being deployed as prefatory. The way in which prosody and wording interact at this particular sequential location in interaction is prototypical of the contextualization process as described by Gumperz 1982.

For prosodic theory, this study provides evidence that onset height is a factor that should not be neglected if we wish to understand how units larger than the intonation phrase (e.g. pitch declination units) are constructed. It relates to earlier work on the PARATONE in various forms of prepared speech (Couper-Kuhlen 1983) and shows that onset height is also an issue in more spontaneous kinds of talk. At the same time the study suggests that prosodic configuration in discourse cannot be dealt with “across the board,” independently of the context in which it occurs. The context that is relevant for appreciating interactional prosody includes the turn (or TCU), its verbal design, and the sequential location in which this turn is situated (see also Schegloff 1998). Interactional prosody makes relevant interpretations that are highly context-specific, as the present study testifies. Using high onset to cue an anchor-position turn as the reason for the call is relevant only in the context of radio phone-ins and does not necessarily transfer to other kinds of talk.<sup>9</sup> Whether reasons for the call in private telephone conversations are cued similarly remains an open question.

For practitioners of conversation analysis, the present study reveals to what extent prosodic patterning impinges on interactional organization. Without a consideration of onset height, the attested patterns would look like random alternatives for constructing turns at talk and presenting the reason for the call. Instead, the options have been demonstrated to be part of a set of complex structures deployed to deal with cueing and positioning the reason-for-the-call turn. The generalization appears to be that because high onset has a projective force (“more intonation phrases to come”), it can be deployed by speakers at strategic points in interaction – e.g. to signal that a “big package” is under way. This means that onset height can be thought of as one of a number of strategies – in this case, a non-verbal one – for managing the production of multi-unit turns.

The significance of these findings is rather far-reaching. They imply a heightened recognition of the role that prosody and, more specifically, intonation play in turn construction, and indeed in negotiating understanding in interaction generally. One compelling conclusion from this is that prosodic analysis must become a more integral part of the investigation of talk-in-interaction.

## NOTES

\*An earlier version of this article was presented at the Helsinki workshop on “Intonation and Grammar in Discourse” in summer 1997 and at LISO and CLIC meetings at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and University of California, Los Angeles, respectively, in fall 1997. I am grateful to participants in these groups for discussion and constructive criticism, as well as to Susanne Günthner, Margaret Selting, and two anonymous reviewers for comments on this version.

<sup>1</sup> See Swerts and Hirschberg 1998 for a recent statement along the same lines.

<sup>2</sup> Transcription conventions (adapted from Selting, Auer, et al. 1998).

Numbered line	Intonation phrase
SYLLable	Primary stress
Syl:lable	Lengthening
Syllab-	Cut-off
(.)	Brief pause, c. .2 sec.
(-)	Medium pause, c. .5 sec.
(- -)	Longish pause, c. 1 sec.
(1.8)	Measured pause
Phrase.	Final pitch falling to low
Phrase;	Final pitch falling to mid
Phrase?	Final pitch rising to high
Phrase,	Final pitch rising to mid
Phrase -	Final level pitch
↑	High onset
.h	Inbreath
h	Outbreath
[	Overlap
[	
=	Latching
( )	Uncertain transcription
((tsk))	Dental click

<sup>3</sup>This does not preclude the fact that he may come in on occasion “prematurely,” e.g. to initiate repair.

<sup>4</sup>This pattern of behavior may be a personal style of the moderator in question, although there is evidence from other radio phone-ins that the style has some currency among studio moderators. But even if it is merely a stylistic option, it is significant that the behavior in question is systematic. It thus creates a miniature social world in which participants adapt their own behavior and base their understandings accordingly.

<sup>5</sup>In the institutional setting of these radio phone-in calls, the need first to secure one’s right to a take a multi-unit turn in anchor position does not seem to be as compelling as in casual conversation.

<sup>6</sup>In context, this expression is understandable as “take a stand on the invasion.”

<sup>7</sup>In some cases, they are actually PRE-PRE’s (Schegloff 1980), since the projected turns also contain preliminaries: Mike’s next turn in ex. 7 does not yet say the little something he has projected; Erica’s next turn in ex. 8 does not yet talk about the protesters.

<sup>8</sup>These pitch tracks are raw fundamental frequency values obtained using X-waves software on a UNIX workstation.

<sup>9</sup>There is, however, initial evidence that high onsets are deployed in informal conversation for the introduction of topics “out of the blue.”

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(Received 22 February 1999, revision accepted 4 September 1999)