Scenarios where a question and continuation can be used to resolve interactional challenges in an extended piece of discourse

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Abstract: This article uses conversation analysis to examine the role of turn construction, consisting of a question and continuation (QAC), by recipients of an extended discourse, such as personal experience stories, in English conversation. Continuations have traditionally been classified in the literature as strategic resources to manage certain interactional pitfalls. One common usage is when a question or assessment receives no precise or immediate uptake, so the questioner elaborates in order to solicit a response from the recipient. This study will focus on different types of continuation sequences, including those that: (1) indicate when a listener is disappointed with a story's unfolding and its lack of a satisfactory climax; (2) attempt to interrupt what is becoming a monologue instead of a dialogue by demonstrating that the listener is knowledgeable about the topic under discussion; and (3) empathize with a character in the story. Thus, there are several potential uses for this approach: to prevent a monologue, and to confirm to the speaker that the listener hears and understands the speaker's story.

Keywords: continuation, conversation analysis, English, question, stories, turn-taking.

1. Continuations in conversation[1]

The aim of this study is to investigate the properties of a turn construction consisting of a question and continuation (QAC) from recipients of extended pieces of discourse (i.e., personal experience stories) in everyday English conversation. A QAC, unlike a single sentence question, is generated as an extended stretch of speech. It might include an expression of feeling or emotion and employ interactional strategies dressed up as a question. The listener takes the opportunity to contribute, to tell the speaker about how the talk is progressing and being received by becoming a questioner.

In order to illustrate how questioners may choose not to stop talking, and instead add elements to further the turn constructional unit (TCU) (Selting 2000: 478; Betz 2008: 40), it is useful to introduce some concepts from the literature of conversation analysis (CA). There can be: (1) the "continuation" of a turn through the production of a new TCU; and (2) an "increment" that is a continuation of the host TCU (Schegloff 1996: 59). A continuation is the expansion of a turn that is accomplished by the introduction of a new TCU (Ford et al. 2002). A new TCU would include changes in syntax (how the words in a sentence are structured) and semantics (subtle differences in meaning and intention). Therefore, a new TCU constitutes a new action (Couper-Kuhlen & Ono 2007: 514-515). An increment is a grammatically fitted continuation of a turn in a conversation (Couper-Kuhlen & Ono 2007: 515). It retains the syntax of the host TCU (Heritage & Roth 1995: 24-25) and is heard as a continuation of the host TCU rather than the creation of a new TCU, in part because it does not include a new beginning (Schegloff 1996: 90). A later study by Schegloff (2000) demonstrated how increments can occur in three positions relative to the prior turn: (1) after a gap (post-gap increments); (2) after a brief interpolation from a coparticipant (post-other-participant's-talk increments); and (3) immediately upon bringing the talk to a possible completion (next-beat increments) (Walker 2004: 150).

Same-questioner continuations have typically been found to aid the progression of the interaction and increase participant uptake. They have also been found to modulate or soften the

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Research article

relative abruptness of their first request (Thompson & Couper-Kuhlen 2005: 495-496), prompted by certain aspects of the conversation in its context (Schegloff 2007: 141), and not as a result of the failure of another party to self-select (Wong & Waring 2010: 44-45). The example below is taken from a story that includes a discussion about automobiles at a backyard picnic in the 1970s in Ohio.

Automobile Discussion (Schegloff 1996: 59) (See the Appendix for the transcription conventions of CA.)

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01 Carney:      (...hear the same story),

02 Pam: →       .hh Oh yeah you've gotta tell Mike tha:t. Uh-cuz they

03              [want that on fi:lm.

04 Carney:          [Oh: no: here we go ag(h)     [(h)ain o(h)o(h)o        ] .hh=

05 Curt:            [Huh huh huh huh.    ]

06 Gary:        = I    [don't thin     [k it's that funny.

07 Carney:          [O  h  :         [:,

08 Pam:             [I gotta go t'the

09              joh    [       n before I hear tha     [t again.

10 Carney:                 [       You'll like it, you'     [ll rilly like it.

11 Curt:                        [You do too y  [ou laugh like

12              hell you hhuh! [

13 Phyllis:                    [°ehheh huh
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The turn is designed to come to completion (designed and realized completion) at *tell Mike tha:t* (line 2). It is potentially complete from a syntactic, pragmatic, and intonational standpoint. However, Pam moves to extend the conversation in this turn as a new TCU, i.e., as a continuation (lines 2-3), by using a post-positioned 'because-clause' (Ford 1993). Such post-positional accounts (in this case, grounds or justification) seem to demonstrate that the questioner (Pam) anticipates a differing opinion from the respondent (Carney) (Schegloff 1996: 59-60). The questioner uses the continuation to try and shift an emerging disagreement or rejection into a collaboratively achieved agreement.

Syntactically, subordinate clauses are normally thought to project turn continuation (Couper-Kuhlen 2012); continuation initiators such as *but*, *and*, *or*, *with*, *because*, and *well*, or a combination thereof, such as *and eh*, are often used to organize both the completion of the host TCU and to secure the continuation for the next TCU, allowing for continuity between the two units. The word choice also establishes the type of coherence between the two TCUs. For example, *but* would project that the action in the upcoming TCU would be a reformulation of the host TCU, while *because* would precede an explanation of the host TCU. Retrospectively, these new elements constitute a part of the

prior unit.

2.   Listeners in stories

Conversation analysts have drawn attention to the pivotal role of listeners in conversational stories, and how the telling is always situated within the observable dialogic, interactional, and sequential structure of conversation. Listeners engage in the construction and co-construction of collaborative experience through response tokens such as *mm hm*, *uh huh*, *mm*, *yeah*, *oh*, *right*, *okay*, and *all right* (Gardner 2001, 2007), and markers of listenership are often prefaced by discourse markers such as *well* and *yes but,* assessments such as *it's interesting/fun* or *it's scary,* and clarifying questions or information-seeking questions to mark themselves as paying attention to the speaker. These practices are tied to the specifics of the local interactional business being carried out, as listeners display their opinion of the tellability of a story. Listeners consider whether the quality and context of a story make it worth telling, and evaluate story components (Norrick 2005) as affiliative, neutral, or disaffiliative. Additionally, the telling performance may not reach its conclusion or may take a different trajectory as listeners may intervene in the telling, thereby derailing or diverting it (Mandelbaum 2013: 502-503; Barraja-Rohan 2015: 274).

3.   Method

The study at hand uses six hours of audio recordings collected in the Canberra area of Australia. Analysis is based on both transcripts and close listening to the audio recordings. Two recorders (a Sony IC Recorder ICD-SX813 and an Olympus Voice-Trek DS-750) were placed in front of participants (friends and intimates) who were having casual conversation in their home, office, or other public space. The age of the participants ranged from twenty-three to fifty-two, and they spoke Australian or New Zealand English. The conversations were of a non-technical nature, with each ranging from eight to twenty-five minutes. The transcript is taken verbatim from the voice recording, performed by a British CA practitioner. The text is written in lowercase letters only, including proper nouns.

The use of naturally occurring conversational data, rather than relying on interviews, is a norm derived from CA theory's naturalistic stance (Mondada 2013: 32-34). The idea is to capture social life as it is lived, especially activities that would have taken place regardless of whether they were recorded (Hoey & Kendrick 2018). Yet any analytical techniques that attempt to use naturally unfolding events as data must confront limitations on resources and other practical constraints, such as the impact of the recording device. A commonly cited limitation of recorded data is that participants might not behave as naturally and freely in the presence of recording technologies as they would under ordinary circumstances. However, many recent studies have confirmed that while participants may notice and initially orient themselves to the recording device, participants typically return to their natural (unmonitored) speaking behavior over time (Speer & Hutchby 2003; O'Reilly et al. 2011). This is why audio recordings, and not video recordings, were used for this study.

4.   Data analysis

Excerpt 1 illustrates how a listener expresses disappointment due to a perceived lack of value, such as a surprise or climax, as a story continues. This conversation was recorded at Deborah's house. Jo tells a story about trying to get Vegemite during a ski training session in Colorado. Jo was going to get her teammates a six pack of beer in exchange for a jar of Vegemite, an Australian food spread made from brewers' yeast. As she was only twenty years old at the time, and the drinking age in Colorado was twenty-one, she obtained a fake ID before going into a convenience store. When she tried to buy beer, the store manager suspected that her license was fake and called the police.

Excerpt 1: Vegemite

01 JO: SO I RAN ACROSS THE ROA::D, (.)

02   .hhhhhh and ↑sta:rted >trying t-<

03   hitch'ike (.) and this ↑<u>person</u>

04   ↑picked me up, (.) an-, (0.4) they

05   didn't <u>pull</u> off the ↑roa:d far

06   enough, (0.4) when they came to

07   pick me ↑<u>up</u> so they got pulled

08   over by the po↑li::ce,

09 DEB: HA HA   [HA HA HA HA::H   ]

10 JO: [hhh °hu:::h° .hh   ] and

11   ↑↑↑THE::Y ended up going to

12   ↑<u>cou</u>::rt, (0.4) because they

13   ↑<u>hadn't</u> (.) come off the <u>ro</u>a::d

14   enou:gh

15 DEB: o:h,

16 JO: to pick me ↑u::p

17 DEB: °yea:h°

18 JO: and so >i felt< (.) ↓pretty ba:d

19   about tha::t

20   (0.4)

21 DEB: [.hh <u>ha</u>::h ha   ] >↑ha ha ha ha ha<

22 JO: [°hu:::h .hhh°]

23 DEB: .hhhh [w-   ]

24 JO: [so   ] (.) i ↑don't think I've

25   hitchhiked ↑↑£since£ hu::h .hh

26 DEB: →   but you didn't end up having to

27   show your ai <u>dee</u> (.) and you

28   didn't [(get)   ]

29 JO: [<u>No</u>   ]

30   (.)

31 DEB: →   and you didn't get (<u>bee</u>r)

32 JO: £no£ ↑ha ha   [huh ha   ] ha ↑ha ha=

33 DEB: [huh huh   ]

34 JO: =ha ha .hhh but i think i ended up

35   with the vegemite

36 DEB: [huh huh   ]

37 JO: [.hh ha   ] ha ha ha

38 DEB: that's al<u>right</u> then,

39 JO: °yeah°

40 DEB: so that's a happy end↑ing,

41 JO: yeah,

In the conversation that leads up to the laughter (Jefferson 2004a) in lines 21-22, it seems that Jo is embarrassed because she inadvertently got someone in trouble. Jo and Deborah are laughing about the incident, but Jo knows that as she did not succeed in getting beer for her teammates, her story ends on an anticlimax, and Deborah seems disappointed by this lack of positive outcome. Deborah's disappointment comes from Jo's inability to end the story in an engaging way. It seems like Deborah is expecting Jo to explain how she got in trouble, or to share an embarrassing story (as friends do). Instead, the story becomes somewhat boring and pointless. They start speaking simultaneously in lines 23-24. Deborah then drops out (Jefferson 2004b: 45) while Jo completes her utterance *i ↑don't think I've hitchhiked ↑↑£since£* (lines 24-25), where the adverb *since* produces a feeling of finality. At this possible conclusion to the story, Deborah produces questions to clarify missing or unarticulated elements in the preceding comments (Bolden 2010: 7) in a multiunit turn consisting of a QAC (lines 26-28) (Heritage & Roth 1995: 17).

The host TCU, yes/no declarative (YND) (Raymond 2003, 2010) *but you didn't end up having to show your ai dee* (lines 26-27), is a but-prefaced assertion concerning Jo's expert knowledge, which addresses an unexpected problem with her story. Deborah appends another question TCU in the form of an YND, a continuation *and you didn't (get)*, but it gets cut off as Jo comes in to produce a non-expansive response *no* (line 29) to the YND of lines 26-27. Deborah reproduces the continuation when she says *and you didn't get (beer)* (line 31). It seems that Deborah was expecting a story about Vegemite, beer, Jo, and her fake ID. The story took an exciting turn when the unnamed driver was pulled over by a police officer (who might have asked for Jo's ID), but the conclusion was disappointing because it did not involve Vegemite, beer, Jo, or her fake ID. In line 32, Jo provides a non-expansive response *£no£* and adds laughter, and Deborah joins in (line 33). Jo admits in the next turn that she did not achieve her goal of getting beer *.hhh but i think i ended up with the vegemite* (lines 34-35). Jo seems at least a bit embarrassed that the story came to little in the course of the conversation, which would suggest that she is picking up on Deborah's feelings about the story. Deborah says, *that's alright then,* (line 38), which provides a positive assessment of Jo's last statement. The inclusion of *then* does the work of closing that part of the conversation (Hutchby & Wooffitt 2008: 225).

Excerpt 2, on the other hand, shows that the listener can interject and attempt to influence the speaker's story by transforming an introspective monologue into a collaborative conversation, by demonstrating that the listener also has knowledge about the topic and can participate meaningfully in the conversation. However, the speaker mostly deflects the listener's questions, and does not modify his discourse. Thus, the listener's attempt to influence the conversation is largely ineffective. This conversation was recorded at a botanical garden. John is telling Meredith a story about his experience of climbing Mount Cook with his companion Clive. Before the climb, John had spoken to several people who had made four or five attempts to climb the mountain, but had not succeeded, mostly due to weather.

Excerpt 2: Mount Cook

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01 JOH:      a:::::nd really that's, (0.6)

02           nainety percent of the time it's

03           because of the ↑weatha, (0.4) and

04           the ↑yea::r that clive and i

05           climbed it (.) >the weatha was<

06           actually quite ↑dodgy,

07 MER:      yeah=

08 JOH:      =and u:::m .hhhhhh (0.4) we just

09           pick'd a windo:w, (0.4) which

10           basically made it a weenter ascent
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11   of mount cook (0.4) which meant

12   that was (.) w's   [was really (hard)   ]

13 MER: [which made it a   ]

14   ↑↑<u>wh</u>'t?

15 JOH: a <u>wee</u>nter as↑<u>cent</u>?

16 MER: alright

17 JOH: which meant it was a <u>rea</u>sonably

18   <u>ha</u>:rd slog (.) there was a <u>lot</u> of

19   sno::w around the place >and it<

20   was quite ha:rd wo:rk

21 MER: →   °yeah,° (.) ↑so how much <u>pla</u>::nnig

22   did you have like looking >at

23   weather forecasts< <u>just</u> before you

24   (.) ↑↑<u>just</u> before you made your

25   climb >cos you would have had to

26   book< ai<u>:</u>r fa::res and ↑all that

27   ↑stuff,

28 JOH: well no:: w- we were ↑een mount

29   cook and we: (.) we (0.4) flew

30   into ↑<u>plateau</u> hu:t (.) which >is

31   at about< eight thousand <u>feet</u>, (.)

32   and this is on what they ca:ll a,

33   (0.4) a: plateau:: (.) ↑it's #e:r#

34   the grand plateau: and su↑<u>rrou</u>nding

35   that (.) you have mount <u>coo</u>k and

36   mount tasman and dixon and the

37   la:rgest of the (.) mou-'tains in

38   new <u>zea</u>land

39 MER: ↑yep,

Starting on line 21, Meredith provides a multiunit turn consisting of a QAC. The host TCU is an information-seeking wh-interrogative ↑*so how much pla::nnig did you have* (lines 21-22) that marks a topical shift from the information that came immediately prior, where the initial *so* functions as a topic developer or topic sequencer (Johnson 2002). This information-seeking wh-interrogative is the first reference to the topic of trip planning, at least in the several previous minutes of conversation. Meredith continues with a second TCU *like looking >at weather forecasts< just before you (.) ↑↑just before you made your climb* (lines 22-25), which is a continuation made with the discourse marker *like* (Fox Tree 2006), which elaborates on what is referred to in the host TCU. Meredith continues with a third TCU: *>cos you would have had to book< ai:r fa::res and ↑all that ↑stuff,* (lines 25-27). The third TCU is another continuation introduced with the adverbial conjunction *cos* (Ford 2004: 41).

One interpretation of this multiunit turn is that Meredith is curious, moderately engaged in the story, and at least a bit analytical (as in wanting to know about booking the flights to get to the mountain, the weather conditions, etc.). In other words, Meredith may be trying to make sure that she understands the story and is trying to tell John that he is not addressing all relevant facts. Another possibility is that Meredith, rather than simply being curious, is attempting to demonstrate her own knowledge about the topic. By discussing the weather and airfares, she is interjecting herself as a potential expert on the subject that John is trying to educate her in. Therefore, one way to read this exchange is that John is attempting to demonstrate his expertise, and Meredith counters with her own. Although John notices this feedback, he does not modify his course of action: *well no:: w- we were ↑een mount cook* (lines 28-29). That *no* (Heritage 2015: 91) indicates that there is no important information to be given, i.e., the purpose of the story is not airfares, and thus John deflects the question.

Excerpt 3 is a case in which the listener attempts to align himself with the speaker, as both the speaker and the listener relate to and empathize with the main character of the story. The participants and the fundamentals of the story are as follows: Kurt and Philip are acquaintances. This conversation was recorded at Kurt's university office. Kurt is telling a story about his brother Michael's experience working on a cruise ship. The management enforced strict rules such as forbidding cruise staff members from drinking beer directly out of the bottle. For this reason and others, Michael kept getting into trouble with the ship's band manager.

Excerpt 3: Cruise

01 KUR: ↑yeah yea:::h ye- that's ↑i::t if

02   you're gonna be drinking in a <u>pu</u>b

03   or in a ↑<u>ba</u>:::r where there's

04   passengers then you <u>can</u>'t drink

05   <u>beer</u> >out of a< ↑bottle you have

06   [to drink it out of a   ] gla::ss,=

07 PHI: [o:h that's ri::ght   ]

08 KUR: =(0.4) .hh if you're ↑walkin-

09   'round with a pair of ↑<u>shorts</u> on

10   >you've gotta have< long ↑socks

11   (.) >that're< pull'd ↑up, (0.4)

12   there's all these crazy ru:::lz.

13   (0.6) and so he'd been <u>ha</u>ving all

14   these sort of little run ins with

15   the <u>ba</u>::nd manager righ- with the

16   <u>ban</u>d manage:r (0.6) y'know someone

17   some↑how word >would get to the<

18   band manager that ↑<u>mi</u>chael'd been

19   <u>cau</u>ght with his <u>soc</u>ks do::wn or

20   had been <u>caught</u>   [drinking ↑beer   ]=

21 PHI: [↓msm::::::::::]

22 KUR: =↑HA ↑HA £ou- of a ↑↑gla(h)::ss£

23   ↑.hhh or some sheet like this so

24   <u>fi</u>nally, (.)

25 PHI: →   how fa:r do::wn (.) like >is there

26   sort of< a:: (.) illegally ↑do::wn

27   l'ke °y'know° (.) sort of like at

28

28   schoo::l where you're not allowed

29   to have <u>hai</u>::r like one inch below

30   your ↑<u>ea</u>::rs or some [thing]

31 KUR: [o:::h] ↑yea:h

32   yea:::h (so you ↑<u>thi</u>::nk) I'm ↑sure

33   there i:::s I'm sure there's some

34   (.) <u>exact</u>ly there's gotta be ↑<u>some</u>

35   (.) proportion of your <u>ca</u>::lf

36   [showing   ] or ↑something like ↑that=

37 PHI: [mm:::::   ]

38 KUR: =(.)   [it's   ] gonna have to be in the=

39 PHI: [mm::]

40 KUR: =rules, (0.4) ↑but ↑so::: (1.0) as

41   i say th- ↑<u>wor</u>d keeps getting

42   dow::n from whoever it is that

43   spots michael ↑<u>half</u> the times >he

44   reck'ns it's the< ↑<u>ban</u>d manager's

45   actually follow'ng him arou:nd to

46   try and git him in trouble >c'z he

47   doesn't like his< atti↑tude,

48   .hhhhhh (.) ↑so:: ↑u:::m, huh hu::h

Philip's overlapping nasal guffaw (line 21) signals that he thinks Michael's situation is ridiculous, and he is aligning himself with Michael in empathy. When Kurt takes a slight pause (line 24), Philip produces a host TCU in a multiunit turn consisting of a QAC (lines 25-30). The information-seeking wh-interrogative *how fa:r do::wn* (line 25) references the socks that Kurt mentioned earlier. Philip continues with *like >is there sort of< a:: (.) illegally ↑do::wn l'ke °y'know°(.) sort of like at schoo::l*

where you're not allowed to have <u>hai</u>::r like one inch below your ↑t<u>ea</u>::rs or something (lines 25-30). Philip is interjecting to ask if there is a specific rule about how low the socks have to be before their wearer is reprimanded. It sounds like Philip is expressing empathy for Michael by highlighting the absurdity of the possibility that Michael's employers might have a rule in which they would measure sock height in order to penalize their employees. Philip references the requirement at some schools that hair be a certain length. Philip is poking fun at those sorts of rules and sort of laughing at the absurdity of groups that would make such rules. One thing that might be relevant is that it is Kurt who first introduces the idea of school rules into the conversation (he makes reference to all these rules like at a boarding school) and then Philip reintroduces school rules with his reference to measuring the length of hair. Since neither Kurt nor Philip appear to have any experience working on a cruise ship (or maybe even being on a cruise ship), they need to discuss the situation in terms of something they are both familiar with—attending school. Kurt's immediate answer sounds like he is agreeing with Philip about the absurd rules that govern Michael's working life on the cruise ship: *o*:::*h ↑yea*:*h yea*:::*h (so you ↑thi*::*nk) I'm ↑sure there i*:::*s* and so on (lines 31-33).

5. Discussion

The QAC can operate as a turn-holding device, used by the listener while rushing into the next TCU, to demonstrate understanding of the experiences shared by the speaker and the perspective represented in the telling. The QAC can also be an attempt to prevent or interrupt a monologue. Thus, a QAC can serve two purposes: to support the speaker and to alter the direction of conversation. The listener uses the QAC as an encouraging and pubic attempt to benefit the transactional enterprise of holding a conversation. The benefits of using the QAC include: (1) the listener being able to convey disappointment after waiting for an expected story climax, and being rewarded with an unsatisfactory conclusion; (2) the listener being able to interrupt the speaker's monologue with an interjection that does not significantly disrupt the flow, but demonstrates that the listener knows enough about the conversation topic to contribute to a dialogue; and (3) the listener being able to express empathy for the troubles described in the conversation.

Thus, the QAC is notable because it is more than an accompaniment to the speaker's story. After hearing, listening to, and processing the story being told, the listener uses the QAC to encourage the speaker to continue while simultaneously bending the conversation in a desired direction. Such adjustments are incredibly hard to introduce in conversation, which is where the QACs provide utility. They are a positive form of social interaction that help the conversation progress by being unobtrusively encouraging. The listener asks a question and uses a continuation to influence a conversation while simultaneously giving the impression that they are not interrupting the speaker. The speaker is then able to continue the story, confident that the listener is actively engaged.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions – compiled from Sacks et al. (1974), Atkinson & Heritage (1984) and Jefferson (1984).

.	falling intonation, not necessarily the end of a sentence
,	low rising/continuing intonation, not necessarily between clauses or sentences
?	rising inflection, not necessarily a question
¿	rising inflection, weaker than that indicated by a question mark
-	cut-off
=	connecting talk
> <	talk is faster than surrounding talk
< >	talk is slower than surrounding talk
° °	a passage of talk that is quieter than surrounding talk
SO	a passage of talk that is louder than surrounding talk
* *	creaky voice
# #	sympathetic talk
£ £	talk while laughing/smiling
↓↑	marked falling and rising shifts in pitch
(h)	plosive quality
:::	extension of a sound or syllable
( )	transcription doubt
(( ))	analyst's comments
(1.0)	timed intervals
(.)	short untimed pause
hh	audible aspirations
.hh	audible inhalations
so	emphasis
[ ]	overlapping utterances or actions
→	marker to indicate something of importance