



Doing disaffiliation with *now*-prefaced utterances

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ABSTRACT

Like prosody and gestures, discourse markers are part of the contextualization cues (Gumperz, 1982) that signal subtle meanings in interaction. In this paper, I detail a particular type of utterance that involves one such marker – *now*. Using data from audio and video recordings from various contexts, I investigate what *now*-prefaced utterances (NPUs) are used to accomplish in interaction. The methodology is predominantly conversation analytic, complemented by acoustic readings. The findings show that NPUs are important resources for doing disaffiliation, either self-directed or other-directed.

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1. Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed a burgeoning body of research on discourse markers (e.g., Antaki, 2002; Bolden, 2006; Clift, 2001; Condon, 2001; Gardner, 1997, 2007; Heritage, 1984; Hutchby, 2001; Jefferson, 1985, 1993; Raymond, 2004; Schourup, 2001; Stivers, 2004; Tree and Schrock, 2002; Tyler, 1992; Waring, 2003). Despite the substantial number of empirical endeavors, there seems to be a lack of agreement on how discourse markers may be defined (Schiffrin, 2001). Waring (2003) uses “discourse marker” as a cover term for “those words or expressions that rise above their semantic/referential meanings to take on complex interactional duties” (p. 416). Bolden (2006) calls discourse markers the “little words that matter” (p. 661). These little words can be adverbs (e.g., *actually*, *also*), conjunctions (e.g., *and*, *then*, *or*, *so*, *but*, *because*), particles (e.g., *well*, *now*, *look*, *whatever*), response tokens (e.g., *mm*, *no no no*, *oh*, *okay*, *right*, *lovely*) or conventional phrases (e.g., *I know*, *I mean*, *I'm just saying*). Schiffrin (1987), in particular, identified the following two functions of the marker *now*: (1) focus on the speaker and upcoming talk as in “Now I don't hate gentile girls”; (2) highlight interpretive glosses as in “Now that's ridiculous.”

It is worthy of note, however, that *now* as a marker is almost never used in isolation in actual interaction, and what is perhaps more relevant for participants' understandings is not the specific meaning of *now*, but that of *now*-prefaced utterances. Put otherwise, it is *now*-prefaced utterances, not *now*, that we produce and respond to in the reality of talk. Following other conversation analysts who have investigated particular turn-types prefaced by various markers such as *oh*-prefaced responses to inquiries or assessments (Heritage, 1998, 2002), *look*-prefaced turns (Sidenll, 2007), and *and*-prefaced formulations (Bolden, 2010), in this paper, I detail the use of *now*-prefaced utterances in both ordinary conversations and institutional discourse, using NPU as a shorthand for cases where *now* prefaced either one or more utterances. In particular, I show how NPU is used in environments of disaffiliation, where such disaffiliation may be either self-directed or other-directed.

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2. Background on disaffiliation

In this paper, the term “disaffiliation” is used synonymously with “disalignment,” “disagreement” or “dispreference,” as it is often so in the literature (Steensig and Drew, 2008, p. 9). In the conversation analytic tradition, preference is an organization in which alternatives that fit in a certain slot are not considered equal: some are preferred, and others dispreferred. Preferred actions are the “normal,” expected, or seen-but-unnoticed. In response to an invitation, for example, acceptance is preferred and rejection dispreferred. Typically, dispreferred actions such as disagreement are disaffiliative and produced in a dispreferred format that features delay, mitigation, or accounts (Pomerantz, 1984; Sacks, 1987). Variations, however, may be found in different contexts. In her study of urban black children conducting play activities, for example, Goodwin (1983) discovered that aggravated corrections and disagreements are what children work to achieve rather than to avoid.

Some scholars have investigated how disaffiliation is managed in various institutional settings (Clayman, 2002; Greatbatch, 1992; Vehvilanen, 2001). In panel news interviews, for example, the interviewer can affiliate with one panelist but disaffiliate with another by engaging in a variety of practices such as using broad smiles vs. serious facial expressions, accepting one panelist’s position but challenges another’s, and consistently placing one in the position of going second and another going first (Clayman, 2002). Disagreements among panelists are typically addressed to the interviewer or produced before or after one’s response to an interviewer’s question (Greatbatch, 1992).

Others have inspected disaffiliation as specifically manifested in particular disaffiliative activities such as blaming, complaining, and jocular mockery (Drew and Walker, 2009; Haugh, 2010; Pomerantz, 1978). According to Drew and Walker (2009), for example, the complaint often works to secure the other’s participation in co-constructing the complaint in a sequence of escalating affiliation. The co-participant may be the first to articulate the complaint but in so doing “going too far,” which results the complainant’s disaffiliation with the articulated version.

Still others have focused on how various linguistic or discursive practices are deployed to do disaffiliation in a variety of contexts (e.g., Egbert and Vöge, 2008; Emmertsen and Heinemann, 2010; Halonen and Sojonen, 2008; Heinemann, 2008; Heritage, 2002; Mozoni, 2008; Robinson and Bolden, 2010; Steensig and Larsen, 2008; Stokoe and Edwards, 2008; Waring, 2005). Heinemann (2008) describes a catch-22 yes/no question in Danish where the question is designed to get a confirming answer but cannot be answered confirmatively without displaying disagreement with the questioner. These questions, according to Heinemann (2008), function as a very strong challenge of a stance or a practice to which the answerer has committed herself. According to Waring (2005), repair initiation can act as vehicles for either affiliation or disaffiliation. Robinson and Bolden (2010) show that in both English and Russian, soliciting an account for human conduct with why-questions is systematically withheld and can be characterized as a dispreferred action. It conveys a challenging stance towards the warrantability of the accountable event and is frequently critical of and embodies disaffiliation with addressees.

In sum, prior work on disaffiliation in social interaction has offered important insights into: (1) how disaffiliation is managed in different settings and different activities and (2) how specific linguistic or discursive practices are engaged in implementing disaffiliation. Work in these two broad areas may be viewed as two sides of the same coin, with one beginning with the notion of disaffiliation and pursuing how it is accomplished in particular contexts and the other beginning with a particular practice and exploring how it implements disaffiliation in a somewhat “context-free” manner. This paper adds specifically to this latter body of work. By describing the use of *now*-prefaced utterances in doing disaffiliation, I hope to draw the readers’ attention to yet another practice that participants routinely deploy in performing disaffiliative work. In the course of the ensuing analysis, I also hope to show that disaffiliation need not be exclusively other-directed. It could be self-directed as well as one diverges from one’s earlier position, for example.

3. Data and method

Data for this study come from a variety of audio or video-recorded sources in American English including ordinary conversations, graduate seminar discussions, graduate peer tutoring, second language classroom interactions as well as other institutional contexts such as tutoring in an after-school literacy program and mediation encounters. A collection of 101 cases of *now*-prefaced utterances were built from these data sources. The data were transcribed using a modified version of the CA system developed by Gail Jefferson (see Appendix A). The transcription modifications are mainly made to specify the timing of nonverbal actions.

My method is predominantly conversation analytic (henceforth CA) supplemented by acoustic analyses that display the pitch contours of the specific segments of each case (using the PRAAT program). In particular, the pitch contours capture those of the marker *now* as book-ended by one to three syllables on each side. CA is a method of looking at interaction in its minute details without starting with any specific hypothesis except for general explorative questions such as “How does X work?” The goal is to “discover and explicate the practices through which interactants produce and understand conduct in conversation” (Drew, 2005, p. 75). Analysis is done inductively by repeatedly examining the audio or video recordings of naturally occurring interaction.

Explication of a few basic CA terms relevant to the following analysis is in order. TCU refers to turns constructional unit (Sacks et al., 1974). These are the units out of which turns are built. They can be a word, a phrase, a clause or a sentence. A multiunit turn is one that contains multiple TCUs. The possible completion of a TCU may be projected on grounds of grammar, prosody, pragmatics or nonverbal conduct (Wong and Waring, 2010). Adjacency pair (AP) is a sequence of two turns

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