

## Error correction as an interactional resource<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

This paper considers some small errors which occur in natural talk, treating them as matters of competence, both in the production of coherent speech and the conduct of meaningful interaction.

Focusing on a rule-governed occurrence of the interjection 'uh', a format is described by which one can display that one is correcting an error one almost, but did not, produce. It is argued that there are systematic ways in which someone who hears such talk can find that an error was almost made and what that error would have been.

Two broad classes of error are considered, both of which can be announced by and extracted from the occurrence of an error correction format. These are 'production' errors; i.e. a range of troubles one encounters in the attempt to produce coherent, grammatically correct speech, and 'interactional' errors; i.e. mistakes one might make in the attempt to speak appropriately to some co-participant(s) and/or within some situation.

Focusing on interactional errors, it is proposed that the error correction format (and other formats for events other than error) can be used to invoke alternatives to some current formulation of self and other(s), situation and relationship, and thereby serve as a resource for negotiating and perhaps reformulating a current set of identities. (Conversational analysis, discourse devices (metalinguistic, attitudinal markers), U.S. English.)

### ERROR CORRECTION AS A SYSTEMATIC PHENOMENON

I will focus on a phonetic detail of natural speech, one which turns out to be rule governed and to illuminate a range of possible systematicities in the conduct of conversational interaction.

The phonetic detail is this: In standard English there are two alternative pronunciations of the definite article 'THE'. Both occur in the general run of talk and neither is problematic or particularly noticeable, probably due to an automatic phonetic rule which provides for just such alternation.<sup>2</sup> That is, when

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[1] Revised version of a section from unpublished doctoral dissertation, 'Sequential analysis of two types of conversational disruption' (University of California, Irvine 1972). Section One: 'Almost-Verbalized Errors', pp. 5-42.

'THE' precedes a word beginning with a consonant, it is properly pronounced 'THUH' (as in 'run') and when it precedes a word beginning with a vowel, it is properly pronounced 'THEE' (as in 'see').<sup>3</sup>

Those occurrences of 'THE' which we do notice tend to be exceptions to the rule for standard English or specifiable variations of standard English. In either case, their noticeability permits them to carry a range of meaning not otherwise implicit in a definite article. So, for example, cognitive meaning is conveyed when 'THEE' is used, regardless of what follows, to express uniqueness or significance:

[From a telecast of a college football game]<sup>4</sup>

Sportscaster: They have played in *thuh* Rose Bowl many times. But they say they'd like to play in *thee* Rose Bowl.

In this case, the shift from 'thuh' to 'thee' distinguishes between a local stadium used by a local team, and the site of an annual championship game.

A range of social meaning is extractable from the occurrence of 'THUH' regardless of what follows. It is attributable to such variations of standard English as, e.g. Regional Dialect, Cultural Level, Degree of Formality, Age, etc. So, for example, the noticeable occurrence of 'THUH' instead of 'THEE' (and 'uh' instead of 'an')<sup>5</sup> contribute to our hearing the following talk as Child-like:

[DN Materials: a six year old]

Rachel: hhh It says t'draw uh picture about *thuh* story. Well I don't know how t'draw uh elephant. I-hh I like *thuh* elephant best in *thuh* story. 'hh An' I don't know hatta spell el- 'hh I don't know how to draw uh elephant.

[2] The rule provides that one short vowel does not follow another, and inserts a glide between two such consecutive vowels, preserving the short vowel when it is followed by a consonant.

[3] I will use 'THEE' to indicate the phonetic [ðe] or [ðej] and 'THUH' to indicate the phonetic [θu], to avoid the awkwardness of interspersing phonetic with standard orthography.

[4] The materials shown are drawn from two types of sources. One is a collection of existing corpi, designated as [X Materials] via collector or a title assigned to the collection. Collections and collectors are identified in the Appendix. Examination of these materials yielded observations leading to analyses. The materials were used because they were at hand, and no claim is made as to their representativeness, nor is any claim made that the excerpts characterize a corpus. The fragments are simply things that actually happened. The other source is constituted by snatches of talk caught in passing from overheard conversations, radio and television broadcasts, etc. These were collected after initial observations and analyses had been made, as, e.g. 'a good instance of X' or 'an interesting instance of X'.

[5] Clearly, the phenomenon does not reside solely in 'THE', but as well in 'A', and a range of other words which, formally and/or in actual conversational usage, have alternative pronunciations depending upon the talk in which they are embedded.

## ERROR CORRECTION AS AN INTERACTIONAL RESOURCE

In so far as a range of variations can be seen in terms of social environments for speech, discrete phonological events can be turned to the service of the social world. People can use such events to decide who they are dealing with and how to deal with them.

I will consider a particular kind of meaning which can be conveyed through variation in the pronunciation of 'THE'. Let me first elaborate on some consequences of the automatic phonetic rule.

The fact that a word beginning with a vowel is properly preceded by 'thee' means that it is partially predicted by 'thee'. The standard phonetic relationship of an article to the vowel-begun or consonant-begun word it precedes provides that by the time someone has used the article he will necessarily have had in mind some aspect of the word to follow. At some level he knows (and a hearer can know) that it begins with, for example, a vowel. Crucially, at least one feature of the projected word has been explicitly *stated* by the article. For example, the occurrence of 'THEE' states that the next word will start with a vowel. That the article can carry such information turns out to serve as a resource for conversational interaction.

I will approach this interactional potential by considering a specific application of the rule. That application yields an orderly feature of speech which I will roughly characterize and situate within a corpus of similar features.

The interjection 'UH' occurs massively in natural speech. In terms of the phonetic rule which inserts a glide between two consecutive short vowels, it appears that some occurrences of 'UH' are rule-governed. Simply enough, when a noun and its article are separated, or intruded upon, by 'UH', the article will be phonetically fitted to 'UH' regardless of what noun follows. The result is equivocal in the case of articles which precede vowel-begun nouns (e.g. '... thee uh avenue') because the long 'e' form, though apparently fitted to 'UH', might in fact be fitted to the vowel-begun noun. However, the result is evident in the case of articles which precede consonant-begun nouns. When the pair is intruded upon by 'UH', one has, for example:

[NB Materials: II:1]

Leslie: I c'n have thuh garment left next door, at thee uh, jeweler's shop.

[JG Materials: III:1]

Pat: This is Pat thee uh f-fellow from down at thee uh drum corps.

[JG Materials: 6:8:6]

Maggie: I'm you know work late in thee uh store an' everything.

The above set was selected because for each instance there is an identical article-noun pair not intruded upon by 'UH', as follows:

[NB Materials: II:2]

Leslie: I'll have yer uh g-garment uh- at thuh jeweler's next door ...

[JG Materials: III:1]

Pat: This is Pat from down at thuh drum corps . . .

[JG Materials: 6:8:6]

Maggie: . . . an' I *have* thuh responsibility of course of all thuh facets of thuh store.

The unintruded pairs in the second set reflect the standard rule for vowel-consonant progression; the 'UH'-intruded pairs in the first set reflect the standard rule for vowel-vowel progression.

This should clear the way for a consideration of "THEE UH" as an orderly product of a canonical rule for vowel sequencing, independent of such issues as a particular speaker's personal style or speech community. In other words, the fact that 'UH' turns out to have been correctly projected and partially stated by the article which happens to precede it, indicates that 'UH' is a rule-governed phenomenon; is at least a projectable syntactic unit with the article selected by reference to 'UH's forthcomingness; is perhaps characterizable as having the status of a word in the English language.<sup>6</sup>

By recognizing "THEE UH" as a product of a specification of a rule (that when "THE" precedes "UH" it will be in the phonetic form "THEE"), we can recognize a phenomenon which might go unnoticed if one were to treat 'UH' as haphazard. In the first place, applying that rule one notices utterances in which 'UH' is preceded by "THUH". The following fragments are excerpted from recordings of Traffic Court hearings:

(1) [PTC Materials: I:41]

Wiggins: . . . so, and, uh, I turned, onto THUH- UH' left lane . . .

(2) [PTC Materials: I:42]

Skolnick: Well I was borrowing THUH- UH, motorcycle.

(1) [PTC Materials: I:71]

Parnelli: I told that to THUH- UH- officer.

Now we have a collection of 'UH's preceded by "THEE" and a collection of 'UH's preceded by "THUH". And sometimes a consonant-begun word, separated from its article by 'UH', seems to be properly projected by the phonetic contour of the article and merely intruded upon by 'UH' (e.g. 1 and 2), and sometimes neither 'UH' nor the noun are projected by the article (e.g. 3).

[6] Taking as a most general form of the rule that "THUH" is replaced by "THEE" when the next word begins with a vowel, then this rule of English recognizes 'UH' as a word with the same status as other words. If, on the other hand, we consider it as an automatic low-level phonetic rule which inserts a glide between two consecutive short vowels, we still have to note the phonetic change from "THUH" to "THEE" which recognizes 'UH' as consequential. (W. Labov, personal communication)

[7] I use the symbol [-] to indicate a 'cut-off', which is generally characterizable by the phonetic symbol [ʔ], indicating a glottal stop.

Suppose that the latter collection captures a specific feature of speech, a form of *error correction* in which the correction is made after the occurrence of the article and before its projected, partially stated, consonant-begun subject. That is, the words which actually occur (in the first place 'UH', and secondly 'left', 'motorcycle' and 'officer') are *not* the ones which were initially projected. So, for example, in (1) Wiggins was about to say 'I turned onto thuh right lane' and corrected it to '. . . left lane', and in (3) Parnelli was about to say 'I told that to thuh cop' and corrected that to '. . . officer'. In each case, the wrong or inappropriate word is cancelled just prior to delivery, resulting in "THUH- UH".

Such a characterization locates "THUH- UH" as a feature of speech; that feature discovered by application of the rule for "THEE UH". In so far as "THUH- UH" constitutes a recognizable and orderly feature, it may be said to utilize rather than controvert the rule. In an attempt to demonstrate that "THUH- UH" is an indicator of error correction, I will situate it in a corpus of utterances which I claim to constitute similar events, differing from "THUH- UH" only in terms of degree of error, as far as their co-status as error corrections is concerned. To provide a sense of the natural place "THUH- UH" might have in such a corpus, I arrange it by diminishing degree of error.

[PTC Materials: I:41]

Wiggins: I wz- made my left, uh my right signal . . .

[SFD Materials: IV:71]

Desk: He was here lay- uh earlier, but 'e left.

[GTS Materials: I:1:43]

Louise: A twelve-year-old guy comes over I say whose y- older brother is he?

[PTC Materials: I:41]

Wiggins: . . . so, and, uh, I turned, onto THUH- uh left lane.

Now, degree of error will turn out to matter for subsequent considerations, but it is not relevant here except in so far as an object like 'lay-' must be demonstrated not only to be a possible beginning of 'later', but a systematically *recognizable* possible beginning of that word; i.e. in so far as a range of little noises do constitute recognizable errors in varying degrees of verbalization. I will argue that each instance, whether fully verbalized, partially verbalized, or merely projected, achieves its status as a recognizable error through the systematic use of a device<sup>8</sup> available to conversationalists, and that it is from that device that such noises as 'Y-' or such projections as "THUH- UH" or such fully verbalized words as 'left' derive their status as recognizable errors.

Obviously a sound like 'Y-' could be any number of things, including a random

[8] Following Sacks (1972) I use the term 'device' to refer to a collection of components and rules for their application (i.e. production and interpretation).

noise. It becomes a recognizable word-beginning, and specifically a recognizable error-beginning, as a product of interaction between speaker and hearer, utilizing their common knowledge of a device which can be called an Error Correction Format, consisting roughly of the components [WORD<sub>1</sub> + HESITATION + WORD<sub>2</sub>], that format operative in displaying that some object is an error and some other object its correction.

In the first place, people can, and do, orient to the occurrence of some bit of sound as a word-beginning. So, for example, in each of the following fragments a hearer/next speaker displays the sense he has made of a brief sound in the prior speaker's talk.

(1) [GTS Materials: 3:33]

Ken: I like driving. I really do. I enjoy it very much.

Louise: I used to like it until I became the complete sl- uhm,

(1.0)

Ken: 'Slave'? Yeah.<sup>9</sup>

(2) [GTS Materials: 3:62]

Louise: My father's six foot two feet he's *large* an' he's a very s-

Ken: ehheh

(1.0)

Ken: 'St(hh)able *per* son' yea(h)h.

Sta- mm hm,

(1.0)

Louise: Stable or not, he's uh (1.0) aggressive<sup>10</sup> kind of person,

In (1) Ken displays the sense he has made of Louise's '. . . sl-'; i.e. 'slave', and in

(2) he displays the sense he has made of '. . . s-'; i.e. 'stable'.<sup>11</sup>

Secondly, whether or not such a word-beginning constitutes an *error*-beginning appears negotiable and partially format determined. In these data, a next speaker appears to be proposing that the sound was the beginning of a perfectly correct, appropriate word. That proposal may be in the first place responsive to the fact that the hesitation component, the cut-off marker, is followed by a pause rather than a second term (e.g. '. . . an' he's a very s- aggressive kind of person') which

[9] Such constructions as 'Slave? Yeah' and 'Stable person yeah' are among a set of devices for showing that current talk is a quote of directly prior talk. Some consideration of these devices appears in Jefferson (1972).

[10] Transcript notes: Elapsed time is shown by tenths of seconds; these pauses are of one and no-tenths second's duration. A single bracket shows the point at which two utterances overlap. [(hh)] shows within-speech laughter.

[11] At a different level, people can and do orient to a projected unit and can propose a candidate instance of that unit and place it precisely where it belongs in someone else's developing utterance. For example:

[GTS Materials: 1:1:56]

Louise: No a Soshe is someone who

drinks Pepsi.

Roger:

constitutes the Error Correction Format, and may be thereby proposing an alternate speech event which does not necessarily involve error. That is, next speaker's proposal that the word is not necessarily an error may be responsive to prior speaker's having proposed just that in the first place, via the use of an alternate format which may signal that the word is being reassessed, but has not yet been rejected.

That such a distinction can be systematically consequential for conversation is suggested in the second instance, where, whether or not Louise intended to say 'stable', whether or not she accepts it as a correct interpretation of her '. . . s-', she first agrees to it as correct and then specifically revises it to 'aggressive'. Her series of actions may be organized to take into account the fact that her co-participant has applied the correct procedure for interpreting [cut off+pause] in alternation to [cut off+correction].

This suggests that the occurrence of some second word is crucial to the operation of the Error Correction Format; that is, to the hearing of some object (projected, partially verbalized, fully verbalized) as an error. So, for example, something like 'y-' can be heard as a corrected error when followed by a term which stands as a correction for some word it now locates. The occurrence of 'older' displays that 'y-' was the beginning of 'younger'; 'younger', now, displayed as an error; an error for which 'older', now, stands as a correction. The operation of the second word is particularly clear in the environment of fully verbalized errors. That is, were someone to say 'I made my left, uh -' and did not immediately start on a correction, a hearer might take it that what was being hesitated over was a *subsequent* term, and might offer, e.g. '. . . turn?', '. . . signal?' etc.

Further, the cut-off marker or pre-correction hesitation is an operating component of the Error Correction Format itself, independent of possible involvement in some word search. It is part of the recognizable presentation of 'an error and its correction'. Were it not for that marker separating an error and a correction, a hearer might treat the utterance as correct in the first place and look for its sense as it stands. He might, for example, search for the sense of such an apparent word as 'yolder'. While that is perhaps a trivial instance, the work of pre-correction hesitation is especially clear in the case of fully verbalized errors, and is most easily seen when the errors are Contrast Class Errors<sup>12</sup> because

[12] Fromkin (1971:46) describes and gives instances of a class of error which '. . . involve semantic features in common, or substitution of antonyms; i.e. words having the same features with opposite values'. These are the sort of errors I refer to as 'contrast class errors'. The initial corpus of errors (p. 185) are all contrast class errors in varying degree of error, and Fromkin's collection of fully verbalized errors include the following:

'I really like to- hate to get up in the morning'

'This room is too damn hot- cold'

To which we can add:

'Hi. I'm Carol's sister- uh brother.'

'The secret wasn't easy- wasn't hard for me to keep.'

routinely enough, fully verbalized contrast pairs occur contiguously in talk which is both correct and entirely unproblematic. For example:

[JS Materials: II:138]

Bill: It's a LITTLE BIG fer a candle.

[From a TV sports documentary]

Coach: Remember you guys I want you to talk it UP DOWN there.

[JG Materials: untranscribed]

Cathy: I bought a whole really IN OUTfit.

[Caught in passing]

Ralph: I was talking to a twenty-one year OLD YOUNG lady . . .

[GTS: I:1:38]

Roger: ((To Louise)) Take it like a MAN WOMAN,

[Caught in passing]

Amy: Turn LEFT RIGHT here.

[PTC Materials: I:45]

Howard: En, three cars pulled OUT IN fronna me, OFF ONtuh the shoulder  
a' the road.

[GTS Materials: 4:14]

Ken: I can't STAND SITting in one place . . .

The presence of a hesitation can instruct a hearer to treat a prior term as syntactically disconnected from a subsequent, and implicate an alternate system for interpreting the contrast pair which will not result in an attempt to make sense of, e.g. ' . . . left right . . . ' as co-components of a developing utterance.

These are some of the workings which indicate that error correction is a systematic feature of speech, and further, that it is achieved by the application of a specific device, the Error Correction Format, to the production and hearing of ongoing talk.

#### ERROR CORRECTION AS AN INTERACTIONAL RESOURCE

Examining actual talk in terms of the minimal form of the Error Correction Format (that which involves a projection, a cut-off and a correction) yields a collection of candidate instances of error cancelled just prior to delivery.<sup>13</sup>

- (1) Wiggins: . . . so, and, uh, I turned, onto thuh- uh left lane.
- (2) Grant: . . . en I was in thuh- inna *left* lane . . .
- (3) Skolnick: Well I was borrowing thuh- uh, motorcycle.

[13] These are all excerpted from the Traffic Court materials.



- (4) Howard: An' two cars were parked up on thuh- offramp.  
 (5) Parnelli: I told that to thuh- uh- officer.  
 (6) Barrows: Well? according to thuh- - thee officer . . .

Cases (2), (4) and (6) do not involve 'UH' but appear to be errors cancelled just prior to delivery, given that 'THUH' projects a consonant, and in each of the cases, either the contiguous term or the noun is vowel-begun. That is to say, 'THUH- UH' may be a specification of a more general occurrence, 'THUH- + VOWEL' as an index of error.<sup>14</sup>

I will focus on cases (5) and (6) as the sort of errors which figure significantly in the conduct of interaction. First, however, I will attempt to more systematically argue that these, and the others, are in fact possible instances of error. To do that, each instance will be displayed as if it were a fully verbalized error. This involves proposing a candidate word, a hypothetical error. I will argue that these hypothetical errors are not arbitrarily selected, that each represents a standard error type.

In (1) and (2), that the speakers in all probability started to say 'right' and corrected to 'left' is a matter of the contrastive relationship of those words, considered earlier (p. 187). It appears that once some semantic category is tapped, other members of the category are particularly available for delivery into speech, resulting not only in error, but in unmarked and apparently unintentional puns which occur in correct, unproblematic talk. For example:

[JS Materials: II:79]

Ben: Where's yer washroom.

Bill: RIGHT t'the LEFT.

[Caught in passing]

Steve: And you told him we were here, so he LEFT.

Gail: RIGHT!

[14] It appears that 'THUH-' has become an index of Cancelled Error in some independence of the phonological rule. Consider the following line, caught in passing from a made-for-TV-movie:

'... he's gonna be a real pain in thuh- - but don't let him get your goat.'

Now, even though there are two standard, alternative idioms 'pain in the neck' and 'pain in the ass', and even though 'pain in the neck' has its consonant-begun 'neck' properly preceded by 'thuh' and 'pain in the ass' has its vowel-begun 'ass' properly preceded by 'thee', there is no confusion as to what is being conveyed with 'pain in thuh-'; i.e. the character is not being coy about the euphemistic 'pain in the neck', as the phonological rule would have it, but about its more pungent sister. It may be that 'THUH-' has become a convention, a token which signals the occurrence of Cancelled Error, and its appearance in the context of a set of standard idioms, one of which is a euphemism of the other, instructs a hearer to find, crucially, that *some* term has been cancelled; i.e. censored, and then to locate that term by finding a *cancelable*. This operation is independent of, and perhaps overrides the proper vowel-consonant progression *vis-à-vis* 'THE', which would otherwise locate 'neck', given the occurrence of 'thuh-'.

[KL Interview Materials]

Answer: I voted for Cranston in the FALL, mainly because I couldn't STAND Rafferty.

[KL Interview Materials]

Answer: I'd be scared as hell if someone were POINTing a gun at me, and I was POINTing a gun, and firing at each other, to be BLUNT about it.

These utterances are not engaged in *asserting* the contrastive relationship which resides in the pairs, but are treating each pair member for some other sense it carries. So, for example, while 'tolerate' and 'autumn' are hardly classifiable as Contrast Class co-members, the synonyms for each, 'stand' and 'fall' do constitute such a pair, and that extra-contextual semantic relationship may have operated to select the terms by which the interviewee expressed his dislike of Rafferty. The regular occurrence of Contrast Class pairs, in errors and in correct talk, is the basis by which 'right' is proposed as the hypothetical but not arbitrary error for which 'left' is the correction.

Cases (3) and (4) are not obvious, until one returns them to the context from which they were extracted, in which case a hypothetical but not arbitrary error appears for each case; for (3), that Skolnick was about to say '. . . borrowing the car', and for (4), that Howard was about to say '. . . parked up on the shoulder of the road'.

(3)

Skolnick: Well I was borrowing thuh- uh, motorcycle.

Judge: <sup>What?</sup>

Skolnick: I was borrowing the motorcycle it wasn't mine. Becuz my car wasn't working . . .

(4)

Judge: Mister Howard yer charged with violating, twunny one seven fifty five, driving en passing on the right *shoulder*. I take it thetche heard'n understood my statement concerning yer legal rights didje?

Howard: Yessir.

Judge: Having that in mind are you ready fer yer plea?

Howard: Yessir.

Judge: En how d'you plead.

Howard: Guilty with en explanation.

Judge: Tell me about it?

Howard: Yah. Uh, I wz coming down, one oh one en traffic slowed down I wz in the left lane. An' then, there was some construction'r something going on. En left lane was closed off. So I merged into the right lane with the rest a' the traffic, en it had come to a stop now,

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end ih wz just before, the El Sueno, offramp. An' there's the two lines fer the offramp. En thee, there was en officer standing out there. At the point, where the two lines come tuhgether. An', two cars were parked up on thuh- offramp. En, three cars pulled out in fronna *me*, off ontuh the shoulder a' the road . . .

These appear to be expanded instances of a phenomenon described in the literature as 'anticipation'.<sup>15</sup> That is, in such syntactically continuous talk as Skolnick's 'X . . . because . . . Y' explanation, and Howard's 'X . . . and . . . Y . . . and . . . Z' course-of-events narrative, there is premature appearance (in these cases, cancelled just prior to delivery) of words which are scheduled to appear and do appear subsequently.

While (1), (2), (3) and (4) appear to be straightforward speech errors, their initial opaqueness a matter of degree of error, (5) and (6), while they may be intuitively obvious, are not so readily argued. To demonstrate the possibility that both Parnelli and Barrows were about to say 'cop' and corrected to 'officer', I offer a different mode of analysis; one which does not rely upon the hard core phonological/grammatical properties of talk so far invoked, but on the workings of interaction. I will argue that these are systematic phenomena by proposing that they are instances of the vast repertoire of conventional, standardized, abstract

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[15] The term 'anticipation' is used by Siminoni (1956:256). He provides a collection of such errors, including the classic 'At the ringside I see several ladies in GOWNless evening STRAPS' (Jimmy Powers, NBC-TV). Fromkin (*op. cit.*: 44) provides an instance of someone attempting to say '... a computer in our own laboratory' and producing '... a laboratory in our own computer'. She offers Nootboom's finding (1969: 130) that 'a mistakenly selected word always or nearly always belongs to the same class as the intended word [indicating] that the grammatical structure of the phrase under construction imposes imperative restrictions on the selection of words.' While the literature focuses on fully verbalized errors in a single sentence, Nootboom's constraint holds both for the following partially verbalized errors in a single sentence and for the cancelled errors in a more expanded environment instanced by the two cases being considered. For example:

[BP Materials]

Lena: I only know- knew im fer about two weeks.

Jeff: Two KIH- mad carefree weeks.

[JS Materials]

Joe: He can paint the house, 'n the G- windowaills'n the garage door.

[JG Materials]

Maggie: . . . then rilly have a S- good sound foundation.

The 'nearly always' escape clause might be invoked for the following, extracted from the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, in which Burt Lahr as the Cowardly Lion confides to Dorothy, 'My S- life has been simply unbearable', 'simply' and 'life' not representing the same word class. However, the fact that this is an error involving scripted dialogue may be relevant, tending to equalize the value of any word in a stream. On the other hand, it is possible that when partially verbalized errors and cancelled errors are systematically examined, co-class membership of mistakenly selected and intended words may be seen as but one of a range of errors.

mechanisms which people use to interact not only coherently and competently, but with some degree of finesse.

In interactional terms, an occurrence such as '... thuh- uh- officer' may be an elaborate act, serving as a resource for such interactional business as the proffering of identity of self and situation. So, for example, '... thuh- uh- officer' can convey not merely that someone happened to be on the verge of saying 'cop' and replaced it with 'officer', but that this is the sort of person who habitually uses the term 'cop' and replaced it with 'officer' out of deference to the courtroom surround; someone who is to be recognized as operating in unfamiliar territory, e.g. a regular guy talking to a Judge in a courtroom.

This can work in the following way. It appears that people distribute their talk in terms of appropriate environments for talk and appropriate users of talk. Although they may have access to a range of terms, they allot one set to themselves in their 'home' environment and another set to environments which are not familiar, and to those people for whom such environments are seen as familiar. Although the distinction can be made for various properties of talk, e.g. pronunciation, tone of voice, etc., I will focus on words, and specifically on words which are conventional markers of speech community.

Given one's presence in a specifiable environment, one can propose that it is familiar territory by using terms one presumes to hold for that environment. So, for example, one can propose 'I am like this and I am like you', selecting one's terms in the first place for such an activity, independent of whether they happen to belong to one's vernacular. In the following fragment, a newcomer to a teenage therapy group uses a term which may well have been selected with an eye to the others; i.e. is not his vernacular, and is informed that the term is not appropriate here.

[GTS Materials: IV:23]

Jim, the newcomer, has discovered that he has a friend in common with one of the old timers, Ken. Jim is telling a story about their mutual friend, who is 'bad'.

Jim: He went right down on that field, an' he was just sittin there talkin like a nigger, an' all the guys, an' y'know all these niggers are all up there an'

Roger: You mean Negro, doncha.

Jim: Well an' they're all-

Ken: An' Jig hehh

Jim: They're-

Jim: They're *all* up in the stands you know, all, the- these guys are just completely radical *I* think- I think Negroes are cool guys, you know?

Or, one may simply defer to the requisites of some environment by using terms appropriate to it, as for example, again and again, defendants in the courtroom

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use the term 'officer'. We might suspect that the term is not part of their vernacular, and it may protude a bit from the 'informal' talk in which it is embedded, but it is otherwise unmarked. For example:

[PTC Materials: I: 47]

Grant: ... en I was in thuh- inna *left* lane fer turning left en I saw from-some friends a' mine inna gas station en one of'm was gonna buy my car. He wannuh talk to me so I jus' *turn*'n officer was right buhine me.

Or, for example, one can propose 'I am not like this but am talking by reference to the fact that *you* are' by finding ways to show that the terms one produces are not the terms which first come to mind.

One means of achieving that display may be the production of just enough error to convey one's habitual terminology without inheriting complaints from its recipient (i.e. not having 'officially' produced the word in question) and then correcting it with a term which can be seen as selected by reference to one's situation or recipient. For example:

[TRIO: 10]

Jean: Well, she said that there was some *woman* thet-the-thet they were whh- had held up in the front there, that they were poin'ing the *gun* at, 'n everything, (0.4) a *k-Negro* woman.

This can be proposing 'I am not a liberal but am talking by reference to the fact that you are', '*k-Negro* ...' standing as an instance of the partially-verbalized Error Correction Format, starting to say 'colored' and specifically, recognizably, *substituting* 'Negro', and substituting it after a very slight degree of error has been made; that degree of error perhaps achieving a 'just in time' correction so that no supportable complaint can be made by its recipient.

In that regard, the following fragment is worth a bit of attention.

[PTC Materials: I:49]

Bassett: En I didn't read that ((description of violation the officer wrote on the ticket)). When thuh ku- offi\_cer came up I s-

Judge: [Red traffic signal approximately thirty feet east of the crosswalk, when signal changed tuh red.]

While an occurrence like '*ku-officer* ...' may not be subject to official complaint, it appears that the judge is making his unhappiness with it manifest in an alternative way; i.e. by interrupting the defendant mid word in her correction.<sup>16</sup> Whether or not '*ku-*' is an artifact of the 'cop'/officer' alternation, or an antici-

[16] The orderliness and informativeness of midword interruption is given some consideration in Jefferson (*op. cit.*).

pation error involving the subsequently appearing 'came',<sup>17</sup> the judge may hear it as a gross but still unofficial instance of the former and hear it as an insult. He may deal with both its grossness and its unofficial status by, e.g. producing a rudeness, perhaps specifically a reciprocal rudeness to be heard as unofficially admonishing the defendant for her insult.

One step down the degree of error continuum, Parnelli and Barrows might seek to escape the consequences of such a gross production and yet perform in such a way as to make it clear that they are not simply deferring to the strictures of this environment. They can acknowledge the courtroom surround without prejudice to their identity as regular guys by recognizing the relevance of the courtroom to their talk *no sooner* than 'just in time', and can seek to escape the consequences of the word they use to mark that identity by recognizing the relevance of the situation *no later* than just in time, by utilizing a conventional, available device; i.e. the format for errors cancelled just prior to delivery. It is via such considerations that 'cop' is proposed as the non-arbitrary hypothetical error in (5) and (6).

Now, if there is such a thing as an Error Correction Format with standard variants for producing different degrees of error, which, furthermore can be interactionally utilized in the sort of ways I have proposed, then it could be fruitful to address the issue of degree of error itself, and to scan for still lesser degree of error. So, for example, the initially observed phenomenon. 'THEE UH', can be seen as an artifact of a still more subtle device directed to *avoiding* a foreseen error or inappropriateness. This involves that a pause-marker is projected in advance of arrival at the problem, and conveys, e.g. 'I am thinking about how to put it'. Subsequently a term is produced which can be heard as a solution to the problem of how to put it. We can return, then, to the initial utterances and examine them as candidate instances of an Error Avoidance Format.

Leslie: I c'n have thuh garment left next door, at thee uh jeweler's shop.

Pat: This is Pat thee h f-fellow from down at thee uh drum corps.

Maggie: I'm you know work late in thee uh store an' everything.

Technically, these may be instances of error avoidance. Interactionally, they may involve that each speaker is showing his recipient that the term by which he

[17] As an anticipation error involving the automatic adjustment of an article to a next word even though the next word is a misplaced verb, the more general rule for English speech may incline a hearer to operate in the terms described by Nootboom (*op. cit.*) and provide for a reading of such an occurrence as a co-class substitution, regardless of the actual nature of the error. As a gross instance of the 'cop'/'officer' alternation, it may be relevant that defendant is female. Produced by a female, '. . . thuh- uh' could be heard as projecting 'policeman', a term customarily used by women and children, which happens also to be consonant-begun and properly preceded by 'THUH'. If she wishes to present herself as a regular guy, her status as a recognizable female might force a more overt occurrence than 'thuh- uh' to be seen for that information. And that more overt occurrence, by its relative grossness, could make her heir to complaint. The bind here is that her alternatives are to 'under' do the correction or to over do it.

is identifying, e.g. the place next door, himself, his place of employment, is not the term by which he customarily identifies that thing, but has been selected in light of this interaction. Note for example, that the pause marker does not occur just anywhere, but in such a position as to locate rather precisely what is being thought about. In each case, a prepositional locator phrase is begun ('... at ...', '... from down at ...', '... in ...'), before 'UH' is produced, conveying much more than, e.g. thinking about some next thing to say (as might 'I c'n have the garment left next door, uh ...', 'This is Pat thee uh f-fellow uh ...', or 'I'm you know work late uh ...'). And of course for each, by the time 'THEE' appears, one projected occurrence is some noun. For one, then, the point of occurrence of a pause marker may not be determined by or indicative of the point at which a problem was foreseen and thinking-about-it was undertaken, but may be involved in the protocols of coherent, informative speech.

Now, 'THEE UH' is an artifact of a more general device, in that it is a specification for those error avoidances which involve, e.g. an article-noun set. The general device may be formatted as 'UH+[ ]'. I will consider this format briefly, focusing on its use in situations where a speaker relies upon a recipient's capacity to understand that an error or inappropriateness has been circumlocuted, to identify that object, and to deal with its relevance and the relevance of its having been avoided; focusing, that is, upon its interactional properties. So, for example, in the following negotiations for a visit between two women who are not well acquainted, an array of cautious talk occurs, including a pair of instances of the Error Avoidance Format.

[DA:4]

Beth: An' you expectuh come intuh thee uh city?

Alice: Ye-eh, yes. Yes. I will. I-I, uh ez a matter a'fact, uh, this friend a' mine, uh, - uh who's lived out here all these years. She lives in uh, the Valley? Sherman Oaks?

Beth: Mm hm?

Alice: Uh, d-she's gonna pick me up Thursday morning.

(1.4)

Alice: 'hhhh

Beth: Uh how early is she gonna pick you up.

Alice: I have no idea.

Alice: I mean if you uh *do* anything *definite* on Thursday, then d-uh, *don't* let me uh:::,

Beth: *No*. It ih-it-it *isn't* eh *tha:t*, it is, thet I have a *meeting*. But I could spend some time with you, until about twelve *thirty*.

Focusing on:

Alice: ... then d-uh, *don't* let me uh:::,<sup>18</sup>

[18] Transcript note: A row of colons indicates prolongation of the prior sound.

Beth: No. It ih-it-it isn::'t eh *tha:t*,

which can be formatted as:

Alice: . . . then don't let me UH+[     ]

Beth: No. It isn't EH+[THAT]

This pair is allusive to say the least. Now, by a fill-in-the-blanks procedure *vis-à-vis* a standard idiom, Beth could find that the continuation of ' . . . *don't* let me . . . ' is something like ' . . . *disturb* you'. And she could conceivably display her understanding of that in her next utterance (cf. p. 186 for a next-speaker display of understanding). However, she can also display an understanding of the use to which the format has been put; i.e., that it was intendedly allusive, by *not* explicitly stating her understanding of the avoided term and instead, producing a bit of reciprocally allusive talk. The reciprocative use of an avoidance format has its own consequences. It requires that the prior speaker find the sense of 'EH+[THAT]' in her own prior 'UH+[     ]', rather than giving her resources, and perhaps permission, to accept or reject whatever sense Beth has made of 'UH+[     ]', as would, for example:

Alice: . . . don't let me uh:::,

Beth: Oh you won't be disturbing me,

Alice: No no I didn't mean that!

And it might be pushing the boundaries of allusiveness a bit far to engage in a series which goes:

Alice: . . . don't let me uh:::,

Beth: No. It isn't *tha:t*,

Alice: Oh no no I didn't mean *that!*

That is, having designed her utterance to convey allusiveness, Alice may simply have to accept Beth's reciprocal allusiveness as understanding what Alice meant, whatever she *did* mean in the first place, and whatever Beth did understand. Such a chaining potential for allusive talk can mean that a current speaker ought to design his talk with an orientation to such a capacity of his recipient, in that he will be his recipient's recipient and may have to deal with talk which reciprocates his own tactics. Not only can such events as Error Correction, Error Cancellation and Error Avoidance be perfectly well understood, then, but they can have a range of interactional consequences. And the considerations so far indicate that a speaker can use the systematic features of error correction and avoidance, and the fact of co-participant orientation to such systematic features, to produce talk which, although it does not fully verbalize some materials, is to be understood for their relevance, and is to be heard as well for the action being done by partially producing them, cancelling them 'just in time', or suppressing them altogether.



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The *reductio ad absurdum* of such a format system is the occurrence of unmarked substitutions with no hint of error, no hesitation, no clues to a possible event of that nature in the utterance itself (cf., e.g. the use of 'nigger', p. 192, and the common occurrence of 'thee officer' in the Traffic Court materials). However, in so far as a single utterance is not an isolated phenomenon and may be consequential for subsequent talk, in so far as grounds have been developed for looking at serially occurring utterances in relation to one another, and in so far as a next speaker's utterance is possibly reciprocal to a prior, then an event may be located via that relationship of serially occurring utterances. Consider the following.

[JG Materials: II:1:6]

Cathy: Wul this could work you intuh the full *principalship* couldn't it?

Gene: Oh, if I wannida go that route I, don't know.

Gene: *Yih* know.

Cathy: [W'wuh wd *that* 'nvolve. More schooling,

Gene: → *Oh* yeah it's justa buncha crap y'know? Cathy, en it's, I uh,

Cathy: Wul is the money there though Gene tuh compensate, you?

Gene: Yeah, there would be, there's quite a- there's good money 'n-they're - talkin now about goin up tuh thiridy one *grand* ez a principal.

Cathy: Oh rilly?

Gene: Yeah.

Cathy: Wul knowing *you* you'd *have* thiridy one en, thousan and a *nickel*,

Gene: hhh! heh-heh-heh-heh

Cathy: → [Shit y- I think y'got the *original* nickel.

Gene: hheh-heh-heh-heh-heh-heh

Commonly enough the use by one speaker of obscenity or blasphemy turns out to be a first occurrence, in that a recipient produces a reciprocal second.

[NB Materials: IV:1:6]

Olive: An' uh we'll say well c'mon let's fish here. Y-you think he'd go fish there, God *no* he wouldn' go there.

Edna: Hell no! *He* wouldn' go there.

Olive: Just fer damn meanness.

Now, there appears to be a conventional hierarchy of offensiveness by which, for example, 'God', 'Hell' and 'Damn' may be seen as equivalently valued and as such, as simply reciprocal. In the first interchange, 'crap' has less obscene value than 'shit', and Cathy's usage may stand as a reciprocal second obscenity which happens to measure higher on the scale.

A rather more complex operation may be involved; i.e. Cathy could be hearing Gene's utterance a *replacement* for his customary usage, geared to the fact that he

is talking to her. In her subsequent talk she provides the object which, she takes it, he suppressed on her account. In so doing, she not only accepts, understands, and reciprocates whatever the use of obscenity can do interactionally, but deals with the fact that he provided a situationally selected version, now proposing that he saw the situation as more formal, their relationship more distanced, than he need have.

It appears, then, that obscenity, among other things, can operate as an indicator of intimacy, and can, among other things, operate to formulate, preserve, disrupt, reformulate the status of a relationship. As such, it can be affiliated to the use of Address Terms, to which the literature ascribes similar work (cf. e.g. Brown and Ford 1961). That is, rudeness, blasphemy and obscenity can operate as indices of intimacy, their occurrence in some ongoing talk constituting an offered formulation of degree of intimacy, that formulation being negotiable in subsequent talk. So, for example, it may be no mere coincidence that embedded in the same talk as the obscenities is a pair of address terms, the first offered by Gene directly after his mild obscenity and reciprocated immediately thereafter by Cathy.<sup>19</sup> In this case, both names are on the same plane of the hierarchy (in contrast, e.g. to 'Catharine'/Gene' which are not equally valued and are analogous perhaps to 'crap'/'shit' in terms of indicating relational distance vs. closeness).

It should be noted that 'intimacy' is a formulation people use to characterize and construct their relationships, not a rock bottom fact of the matter. The operative assumption appears to be that it is the fact that people know each other well, or the fact that some people are members or representatives of speech communities or membership categories which constitute 'special interest groups'<sup>20</sup> which enables them to grasp the import of minute speech events; anonymity and/or non-membership being equivalent to interactional denseness, and interactional sensitivity being equivalent to or tantamount to intimacy and/or membership. In fact, it appears that people can and do utilize anonymous, abstract mechanisms to achieve and recognize 'intimacy'. A range of standardized devices serve as resources by which interactants may simultaneously seek out, rely upon and negotiate a range of situationally and/or categorically pre-specified sensitivities (these sensitivities involving utterly anonymous understanding of the operation of abstract devices), to offer, receive, decline, interpret, etc., such activities as rudeness or courtesy, by which such conditions as interactional distance or closeness are formulated, negotiated and secured.

As it happens, one mechanism used in that work involves the set of error correction and avoidance formats which were illuminated in the first place by an

[19] In Jefferson (*op. cit.*) is a consideration of reciprocal address terms.

[20] For example, a judge, as member or representative of the special interest group constituted by the category Law Enforcement Personnel, or members and professed representatives of minority groups, are presumed to be and are treated as, especially sensitive to the merest hint of insult.

inquiry into the orderliness of 'UH' and which turn out to heavily utilize its rule-governed properties. While 'UH' is generally seen as a trivial, haphazard occurrence in spoken English, or, worse, as a matter of communicative incompetence, it is in fact to be understood as deeply implicated in the competence required for and displayed in the conduct of interaction.

## APPENDIX

- DN Materials. David Nasseter (1964). Several hours of talk by young children in home and play situations.
- NB Materials. (1968). An extended corpus of telephone conversations.
- JG Materials. Joanne Goldberg (1970-2). An extended corpus of telephone conversations. (J.G. 6:8:6 was transcribed by Miss Goldberg)
- PTC Materials. Melvin Pollner (1967). Traffic court sessions.
- SFD Materials. Emmanuel Schegloff (1964). Telephone calls at a metropolitan fire department.
- GTS Materials (1964). Five group therapy sessions of two-hour duration.
- JS Materials. James Schenkein (1971). Several hours of family conversation.
- KL Interview Materials. Karl Lamb (1971). Prolonged interviews geared to collection of socio-demographic data.
- BP Materials. Elizabeth Parker (1971). Conversations in an experimental setting.
- TRIO Materials (1967). A series of three interrelated telephone calls.
- DA Materials (1967). A telephone conversation between two women who are not acquainted but are mutual friends of a woman who recently died.

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