

## P4 2009: Studying “So” in Research Interviews is Interesting

**Supervisor:** Mr Steven Christensen  
Phone: 07 4631 2707  
Email: [christen@usq.edu.au](mailto:christen@usq.edu.au)

**Research Purpose:** To examine so-prefaced utterances produced in research interviews.

**Research Description:** This project makes the qualitative research interview a topic of research. It does this by treating an interviewer’s utterances as a topic of interest, and by treating an interviewee’s answers as jointly produced by the interviewer and the interviewee.

So-prefaced utterances are regularly used by speakers in mundane, everyday conversations. Typically, they allow speakers to (a) mark the completion of a long turn to talk, (b) provide an upshot of their earlier comments, and (c) limit the range of next-actions from their respondents (Raymond, 2004).

Studies have examined so-prefaced utterances in sociolinguistic interviews (Schiffrin, 1987), spontaneous, experimentally unstructured conversations (Muller, 2005) and various conversations captured in large corpora of spoken English (Blackmore, 1988). Schiffrin, for instance, found that speakers used so at potential transition locations to (a) offer hearers a turn to talk, (b) complete an incomplete proposition, such as answering a question, and (c) change the topic of conversation.

For example, so-prefaced upshots are used by speakers to open sport psychology conversations (Christensen, 2008). For instance, Stephanie (S) provides a so-prefaced upshot to link the various components of her reason for consulting a sport psychologist (P) in the following extract.

P: Mhm=  
S: =So uhm  
I was hoping I could just  
tell you a little about th:at.  
P: Sure go ahead=  
S: =°that’s ok°  
Well uhm >I’m a junior<

Few studies have examined so-prefaced utterances in qualitative research interviews. Thus it is unclear whether they are an ancillary method for coordinating the conversation between interview participants. However their utility for linking a range of matters in interactions suggests that participants may find them useful for coordinating where they are in an interview.

This is a new, exploratory project. It is using observation as a basis for theorising about interviewee-interviewer interaction in qualitative research interviews (cf., Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000, p. 20). It examines whether so-prefaced turn construction units are a feature of qualitative research interviews. If so, then what form and functions do they serve in establishing joint understanding of actions and events in the interaction?

**Participants:** An archival data base will be used for this project so the student will not be required to recruit research participants.

**Methodology:** The archival data base used for this project is from the transcript of New Zealand Interview 2 (see van den Berg et al., 2003, pp. 232-261).

This interview was originally conducted for a large-scale research project on race and race relations in New Zealand by Margaret Wetherell in the mid-1980's. Wetherell and Potter (1992) display the methods and the findings of this earlier study.

The original audiotape of this interview was recently re-transcribed in fine detail for a new project displaying different discursive approaches for analysing talk produced in research interviews. So the student will not be required to transcribe the original interview audiotape for this project.

**Data and Analysis:** A qualitative analysis will be used in this project. It will examine the sequential organisation of talk produced by the interviewer and a respondent in New Zealand Interview 2 (van den Berg et al., 2003, pp. 232-261). This project will focus on a new sequence of conversation about New Zealand role models (pp. 238-242). This data set begins with the following question.

I: Yes (1.6) Mhmm (1.4) So uhm (1.2) I- If I asked you to think of (0.6)  
I: particular New Zealanders that you admire or you'd like to (0.6) say have  
I: your children use as models for their own behaviour wha- what people (0.6)  
I: stick out in your mind as great New Zealanders (1.4)  
R: Well of course there's always Sir Edmund Hillary I[:  
I: [Yeah

The data will be analysed in three steps. Firstly, it will be screened for the serial, sequential, and adjacency organisation. Secondly, so-prefaced turn construction units will be identified. Thirdly, the sequence of turns prior to, during, and after the so-prefaced utterance will be examined to see how speakers simultaneously manage activities internal to this turn and the turn's participation within a larger course of action.

The student will be expected to work closely with the supervisor and other Honours students working on related discursive analysis projects during the analysis phase of this project.

The student will gain the skills and confidence in conducting the analysis by completing the conversation analysis module from the D843 Discourse Analysis course which is offered by The Open University (UK) in the Master of Social Sciences Programme (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001a, 2001b). The supervisor will be responsible for providing this training in conversation analysis.

**Student Friendliness:** This project is suitable for external and on-campus students. However the student must be available to meet with the supervisor before, during, or after the scheduled Honours Workshop Program so that training in conversation analysis techniques can be conducted. Weekly supervision sessions will be required during the project. These supervision sessions can be conducted by telephone and email, and will vary in length and content to reflect the student's progress.

**Further reading:** Blakemore, D. (1988). "So" as a constraint on relevance. In R. M. Kempson (Ed.), *Mental representations: The interface between language and reality* (pp. 183-195). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Christensen, S. A. (2008, September). *Opening the sport psychology consultation: Lessons from Giges, Ravizza, and Murphy*. Paper presented

at the 43rd APS Annual Conference, Hobart, Australia.

Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. (2000). *Interaction and the standardised survey interview: The living questionnaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Müller, S. (2005). *Discourse markers in native and non-native English discourse*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Raymond, G. (2004). Prompting action: The stand-alone “So” in ordinary conversation. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 37, 185-218.

Schiffrin, D. (1987). *Discourse markers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

van den Berg, H., Wetherell, M., & Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. (Eds.). (2003). *Analyzing race talk*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wetherell, M., & Potter, J. (1992). *Mapping the language of racism*. London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. J. (2001a). *Discourse as data: A guide for analysis*. London: Sage.

Wetherell, M., Taylor, S., & Yates, S. J. (2001b). *Discourse theory and practice: A reader*. London: Sage.

**Research Outcomes**

Three research outcomes are expected from this project. The student is expected to: (a) submit his or her completed Honours Thesis to the USQ ePrints archive; (b) submit an abstract for a research poster to the 2010 APS Conference Scientific Committee; and (c) contribute to developing a Masters-level clinical psychology research proposal on so-prefaced utterances in clinical interaction.

**Ethics:**

- Ethical approval will be sought by supervisor; or
- Ethics approved – number EP2009002

**Resources:**

- Project able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit
- Project not able to be funded within \$150 departmental limit – additional funds will come from: \_\_\_\_\_

Filename: F92A8F79.doc  
Directory: C:\Documents and Settings\User\Local  
Settings\Temporary Internet Files\Content.MSO  
Template: C:\Documents and Settings\User\Application  
Data\Microsoft\Templates\Normal.dotm  
Title: Getting Inside Heads: Using Cognitive Mapping to  
Enhance Learning and Teaching  
Subject:  
Author: Faculty of Sciences  
Keywords:  
Comments:  
Creation Date: 11/24/2008 9:49:00 AM  
Change Number: 8  
Last Saved On: 2/6/2009 2:54:00 PM  
Last Saved By: Division of Information, Communication & Technolog  
Total Editing Time: 11 Minutes  
Last Printed On: 2/6/2009 4:02:00 PM  
As of Last Complete Printing  
Number of Pages: 3  
Number of Words: 1,175 (approx.)  
Number of Characters: 6,698 (approx.)