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On assessing situations and events in conversation: 'extraposition' and its relatives



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ABSTRACT Recent research provides strong evidence that the syntacticization of recurrent multi-actional and interactional patterns for accomplishing social actions is quite a general phenomenon. Drawing on a body of audio and video recordings, we consider three pervasive conversational patterns whereby English speakers carry out the assessing of an event or situation, and the interactional contingencies which give rise to these patterns. We propose that one of these patterns (known as 'extraposition') can be revealingly understood as having syntacticized to a grammatical and prosodically unified construction as an amalgamation of the other two patterns, which are interactional routines. We suggest that the 'extraposition' construction provides a particularly elegant instance of how grammar emerges from the recurrent interactional practices which make up the fabric of our daily lives.

KEY WORDS: *assessments, constructions, conversation, extraposition*

1. Introduction

A recurrent social action among humans in interaction is to engage in the assessment of people, events, and situations.¹ Sequential formats for doing assessing in conversation have been discussed by Goodwin (1981, 1986, 1996), Goodwin and Goodwin (1987, 1992), Pomerantz (1984) and Schegloff (2007), among others. Here is a well-known example of an assessment sequence from an American English telephone call between two friends:²

(1) Doll (NB 017, 1)

(Edna and Margy are talking about the guests who were at a recent luncheon party that Margy gave.)

1 Edn: that Pa:t isn't she a do: [lI?]

2 Mar: [yea]h isn't she pretty, (.)

This example instantiates a syntactic construction known to grammarians as ‘extraposition’, which has received a good amount of attention in the literature (Berk, 1999; Biber et al., 1999; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Collins, 1994; Erdmann, 1990; Hopper, 1999; Huddleston, 1984; Huddleston and Pullum, 2002, 2005; Hudson, 1971; Jespersen, 1965; Mair, 1990; Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973; Quirk et al., 1985; Rosenbaum, 1967). In these treatments, constructions having the form of lines 16–18 in (2) are always considered as a member of a PAIR of constructions between which speakers are presumed to have a choice, as exemplified by this pair from Rosenbaum (1967):

- (4) a. **That John quit his job** surprised me →extraposition
 b. It surprised me **that John quit his job**

Although not all the above researchers explicitly posit a transformation which ‘extraposes’ a clausal subject to the end of the sentence, they do take the position that the grammar, meaning, and usage of utterances of the form of (4)b are best considered in terms of those of (4)a.⁸

In this article, we make no such assumption. We focus our attention instead on a range of practices which accomplish the social action of providing an assessment (X) of an event or situation (Y), specifically on routines and formats which involve the forms *it* or *that*. As we shall see, one format involves the ‘extraposition’ construction, as illustrated in (2).

In our discussion we distinguish between ‘patterns’ and ‘constructions’ as follows: we use the term CONSTRUCTION as in much recent research on constructions, namely to refer to grammatical abstractions that have emerged as more or less fixed templates, comprising some lexically open slots and some lexically fixed forms.⁹ For example, researchers have identified as constructions such expressions as these:

- (5) the A-er the B-er (Fillmore, 1989)
the more the merrier
 NP Verbed NP’s way directional preposition NP (Goldberg, 1996; Jackendoff, 1990)
she ate her way through the birthday party

What we are calling a PATTERN, on the other hand, is a recurrent interactional practice which has not become sedimented as a *grammatical* format, but is instead a *pragmatic* routine for assessing a situation or event in social interaction.

In this article we will argue that syntactic assessment CONSTRUCTIONS as schematized in (3) above are related to, and are mutually reinforced by, the pragmatic assessment PATTERNS recurrently found in everyday conversations.¹⁰

2. Data

Our database is a moderately large collection of patterns and constructions in which the X-part is a semi-fixed evaluative phrase tied in one way or another to the Y-part, a formulation of some situation, event or series of events. These exemplars have been culled from our audio and video records of American English telephone and face-to-face conversation, respectively.¹¹

In constructing this collection, we have endeavored to be as inclusive as possible, so as to consider the widest possible range of practices for doing assessments of situations and events.

3. Assessment patterns and constructions

In the following, we discuss three pervasive patterns in interaction for carrying out the assessment of an event or situation and examine the interactional contingencies which give rise to these patterns.

3.1 RETROSPECTIVE X

One of the most frequent patterns for assessing events and situations documented in our collection is that illustrated in the following fragment:

(6) *Insane* (Game Night, 8)

(Abbie is explaining how her mother has been getting anxious about Abbie's sister and her husband's plans for Christmas.)

- 1 Abbie: a:nd in- (0.9) <where they spend most of their time>, is like
 2 this major bone of contention about whether they spend
 3 time at my parent's house or his parent's house?
 4 (.) six blo[cks,
 5 Maureen: [six blocks away?
 6 Abbie: °yes.° (1.0) °it's insane.° (.) so, (1.5) I already wa:rned my
 7 sister I said look Mo:m's out there and she's CRANKy
 8 so (.) whate:ver you DO, just be careful.=

Here the situation being evoked is Abbie's mother and sister not being able to agree on how much time the sister should spend at her in-laws' place at Christmas. This situation is introduced in lines 1–3 and expanded in line 4 with the detail that the in-laws live only six blocks away from Abbie's mother. Following the proffering of a candidate understanding by Maureen (line 5), Abbie confirms and now proceeds to assess the situation with *it's insane*, a semi-fixed or formulaic phrase built on the pattern:

(7) *it/that* + BE + evaluative adjective/noun

This pattern, with *it* or *that* referring to an assessable which has been previously introduced and is now to be assessed, is standard for backwards-oriented assessments of situations in conversation.¹² We shall call it the RETROSPECTIVE X pattern.¹³ In the retrospective X pattern, the *it* or *that* is referential, however diffuse its 'antecedent' might be.¹⁴

Here are three further examples:

(8) *Euphoric* (Chinese dinner, 27, 11.30)

(John is responding to the question of what it feels like to give up smoking cigarettes and specifically of whether he has any negative feelings.)

- 1 John: tch! no I, I find I just get very euphoric.
 2 (0.7)

- 3 Ann: you get euphoric?
 4 → John: yeah. i[t's really nice.
 5 Ann: [you'd think you'd ha- be depressed because of,
 6 [the lack of nicotine.
 7 John: [no no becau:se:.hh nicotine is a depressant.

Here the *it* of John's turn in line 4 is understood as referring to the situation of getting euphoric.

Whereas in (6) and (8) the Retrospective X is produced by the same speaker who introduced the assessable, in the following case it is a co-participant who assesses the situation which another speaker has introduced:

(9) **Good idea** (Chinese dinner, 52, 22.01)

(Beth's husband John has just announced to their friends Don and Ann that they are looking at houses.)

- 1 Beth: we're= we're proposing ourselves as uh
 2 prospective homebuyers to see what they're [gonna (do).
 3 Ann: [oh (h)ho ho:::
 4 → Don: °() – **that's a good idea.**

As (7) indicates, there are two ways to retrospectively refer to an assessable, either with *it* or with *that*. The literature is rich with discussion of whether and how each of these two forms is anaphoric or deictic (see e.g. Ehlich, 1982; Gundel et al., 2005; Levinson, 1983, and references cited in these works). However, none of these researchers specifically considers *it* versus *that* in 'Retrospective X' assessments. Our work with such assessments in conversational English suggests that these two forms are often, though not always, interchangeable. Where they are not, the difference seems to be that *it* refers to the assessable directly (however diffuse it may be [e.g. see just below]), while *that* refers to a FORMULATION of the assessable ('what you/I have just said/might say'). For example, in (8), John's *it's really nice* attributes *nice* to his euphoric feeling, whereas in (9), when Don says *that's a good idea*, he is positively assessing what Beth and her husband *said* to the relevant parties involved in purchasing a house. This distinction, however, does not seem to affect our argument about the 'Retrospective X' assessment pattern.

In examples (6)–(9), the X phrase is formulaic and patently retrospective, proffering an evaluation of some state of affairs mentioned or talked about in prior talk. Sometimes, however, there is no clear 'antecedent' for *it* or *that*, as in line 13 of the following case:

(10) **Spooky** (Cutie Pie, 8, 273)

(Jill is talking about an Early Pregnancy Test (EPT) which she recently took but which turned out negative.)

- 1 JILL: and then I thought,
 2 (H) of cour- --
 3 like I'm=- know I .. wouldn't .. have .. it or anything,
 4 but I thought if the slight chance .. I would have it,

- 5 and it r=eally became a person someday,
 6 (H) [would]n't they love to see .. the photograph of the
 7 EPT.
 8 JEFF: [X]
 9 JILL: with the positive sign on it?
 10 ... knowing that .. that was like its first sign of life.
 11 JEFF: unhunh=.
 12 [$\langle @$ Oh my g- \rangle (H)].
 13 → JILL: [(H) I know] **it's kind of –**
 14 [2@@@ .. @2]
 15 → JEFF: [2**kind of .. spooky**2].
 16 JILL: @@@@
 17 JEFF: it's not my idea of a good time [right now sweetie].
 18 JILL: [(H) Oh],
 19 [2sorry.
 20 JEFF: [2@@@@@@@@@@@@@
 21 JILL: @@@@@@@@@@@@@ (H)2]
 22 JEFF: (H)= maybe2] somewhere down the road,
 23 [3but3] right now it kind of makes me sick.
 24 JILL: [3%3]
 25 JEFF: [4@(1)4]
 26 JILL: [4right-,
 27 I know I know=,
 28 (H) me too4].

In this case the assessable is rather diffuse. In fact, the *it* of line 13 only becomes interpretable if it is thought of as retrospectively 'creating' a referent from the preceding talk.¹⁵ In the case at hand, this referent can be understood roughly as the hypothetical situation of Jill's being pregnant and taking a picture of the positive test results for the baby to see when it grows up.

We will schematize the format of assessments like those in (6)–(10) as follows:

(11) Retrospective X pattern



What we attempt to capture with this schematic representation is that the pattern has an assessing phrase produced *after* talk about the referent being assessed¹⁶ and that the assessing carried out by X is an action separate from the evoking of Y in prior talk. Often, as illustrated in (9) and (10), more than one speaker is involved in the production of this pattern.

3.2 INCREMENTAL Y

Another pattern for assessing events and situations which we encounter in our data is brought about when there is some problem with the reciprocity of a Retrospective X assessment – for instance, if the recipient of an X does not respond immediately to the assessment or moves to initiate repair on it. If the producer of the assessment now adds a bit of talk to make the assessable explicit in a way which continues prior talk and extends its action, the Y is produced as an

increment to the X¹⁷ and ends up coming *after* it.¹⁸ Here is a case in point, from the same conversation as (8):

(12) **Able to do that** (Chinese dinner, 32, 13.45)

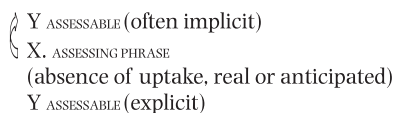
(Much earlier in this conversation, John announced to his friends Don and Ann that he recently gave up smoking.)

- 1 John: so that- that was really=
 2 → =that was really nice. hh
 3 (0.5)
 4 → (I mean- to be able to do that)=
 5 Ann: =and you don't have any bad feelings.

In this example John is still focusing on his having quit smoking, offering the assessment *that was really nice* (line 2) in a move towards topic closure (indexed by *so* in line 1 [see note 23]). This utterance is produced as a complete turn-unit, both prosodically and grammatically, which indicates that a transition-relevance place ('TRP'; Sacks et al., 1974) has been reached. But as line 3 shows, no one comes in with a next turn. Given the lack of uptake, John now adds on a Y to formulate his assessable explicitly: *I mean- to be able to do that*. This Y is produced prosodically and grammatically in a way which ties back to his just-prior turn:¹⁹ prosodically it matches the end of *nice* in pitch (Walker, 2004), and grammatically it carries dependent morphosyntax in the form of an infinitive verb form.²⁰ Thus we have both prosodic and grammatical evidence for the claim that Y, naming the assessable, is designed to be a *continuation* of what has gone before. It extends the action of assessing begun with X in lines 1 and 2.

Incrementing allows speakers to create a new transition-relevance place for the next turn and at the same time to add more talk elaborating, clarifying, and specifying the prior unit, and thus facilitating a relevant next turn. We call this pattern the 'Incremental Y' pattern and schematize it as follows:

(13) **Incremental Y pattern**



This schema is intended to show that the assessing phrase is initially produced *retrospectively*, that is, *after* talk about the assessable. The period indexes the fact that the speaker's turn is designed to be complete. However, in the (real or anticipated) absence of uptake by an interlocutor, an explicit, syntactically dependent formulation of the assessable is then added to the prior assessing phrase. In this way a dependent assessable Y comes to be post-positioned with respect to an assessing phrase X.²¹

The Incremental Y pattern is seen in extracts such as the following:

(14) **Nice though** (Chinese dinner, 71, 30.28)

(Beth has been talking about the differences between her first and her anticipated second pregnancy, saying that having been through one pregnancy, she can enjoy anticipating the phases of the second one more than she could the first time.)

- 1 Beth: I just pretend like I'm really going to,
 2 really- looking forward to every little aspect of the thing.
 3 Ann: are you pregnant now?
 4 Beth: nno:, no, but we c- probably will be before, long,
 5 Ann: yeah?!=
 6 Don: =hmm.=
 7 Beth: =mmhm?
 8 Ann: wo:w.
 9 Beth: so it's really,
 10 a→ **it's nice though.**
 11 y'know,²² (0.5)
 12 b→ **to be able to say like**
 13 c→ **no:w you start into the new phase and,**
 14 Ann: mmhm::.
 15 that's [nice.
 16 Beth: [yea:h.

In line 10, at arrow a, Beth moves to wrap up talk about her anticipated second pregnancy with the assessment *it's nice though*.²³ Immediately afterwards, she adds *y'know*, appealing to her interlocutor to acknowledge her assessment. However, after a 0.5-second pause, Beth now adds on *to be able to say like now you start into a new phase* as an increment, clarifying what exactly she is predicating *nice* of and thereby extending the prior action.

Note that in (14), the reciprocity problem involves uptake having been invited, by the speaker's *y'know*, with no response occurring. In the next example, however, the trouble is of a slightly different nature. Here the assessment comes as a question, *isn't that disturbing to you?*. After a 0.3-second silence indicating a reciprocity problem, two things happen at once: J adds a Y-increment to 'remedy' the problem and B prompts a 'remedy' with her other-initiated repair indicator *what*.

(15) **Having a break** (Housemates, 19)

(Jennifer has been complaining to her housemates about the noise of drums, which can be heard in the background.)

- 1 → J: **isn't that disturbing to you?**
 2 (0.3)
 3 → J: **ne[ver having**
 4 B: [(what.)
 5 → J: **a b: (1.0) break.**
 6 (0.7)
 7 a respite, or whateve(h)r.
 8 J: from the (0.4) from the noise?
 9 (1.0)
 10 T: (I feel like you guys are) [really (.) close.
 11 J: [doesn't that bother you?
 12 T: looks like ([]
 13 J: [will somebody a(h)nswer my(h) que(h)stio(h)n?
 14 T: the noise?=
 15 =I didn't even notice it.

When Jennifer gets no uptake on the assessment she proffers at line 1, she makes explicit what it is she finds disturbing by saying *never having a break* at lines 3 and 5.²⁴ By incrementing onto her prior turn, she reinvokes the action, suggesting that a response is still forthcoming. When this incrementing strategy, pursued again (following a 0.7 sec. gap in line 6) in line 7, still doesn't lead to a response, she is ultimately forced to take a more direct tack: *will somebody answer my question?* (line 13).

The next extract provides an especially nice illustration of how the Incremental Y pattern after repair can be manipulated in the service of a particular social action:

(16) **Cranky** (Game Night 8, 8:36)

(This is the continuation of example (6) from above.)

- 1 Abbie: it's insane. (.)
 2 so (1.5) I already warned my sister,
 3 I said look MOM's out there and she's CRANky
 4 so (.) whate:ver you DO, just be careful.=
 5 Maur: e(h) HA ha ha ha ha
 6 <CR Mom's out there and she's cranky:: CR>.
 7 Abbie: yeah.
 8 yeah,
 9 it's too bad.
 10 (2.5) **it's too ba::d.** (to Terry, who's just walked in)
 11 .. don't you think?
 12 (1.0) (Terry comes back into room and sits down)
 13 Terry: about:
 14 Abbie: **that my mom has to be so cranky?**
 15 (0.5)
 16 Terry: oh YEAH.

Summarizing Lerner's (2004: 163) discussion of this example, Abbie has been complaining about her 'cranky mother' to Maureen. Then, just as Terry returns to the dining room from another part of the house after a three-minute absence, Abbie asks Terry to confirm her evaluation of her mother's behavior. In one sense, this is a device for re-engaging Terry in the conversation (Szymanski, 1999) – or even perhaps drawing her back to sit at the table with them. But, of course, Terry has no idea what *it* could be referring to, since she was not present for any part of the troubles-telling.²⁵ The query has been specifically 'mis-designed' for this recipient, specifically produced to elicit repair initiation as a way to bring a just-entering party into an ongoing conversation. And indeed, Terry initiates repair with an 'increment-elicitor' (Lerner, 2004), namely *about:*, terminating it with strongly projective prosody.

We note that Abbie's X, *it's too bad*, is uttered with its own prosodic contour and a terminal pitch contour which falls to low, so that it could easily be taken as a complete turn. In fact, for Maureen, who has heard the prior talk, *it's too bad* is interpretable as a *retrospective* reference to the fact that Abbie's Mom is cranky, and is not projective of an upcoming Y. Abbie's question to the just-entering

Terry, *don't you think?*, designedly makes relevant an agreeing second from Terry. But since Terry has not heard prior talk, she cannot provide that agreement and instead interprets Abbie's X as *prospective*. With her *about* she prompts Abbie to supply the Y-piece, the assessable. By way of response, Abbie provides a finite Y, demonstrably tied to the assessment and Terry's *about* with the dependent complementizer *that* and pitch-matching to her own low pitch on *bad*. Here, then, we see the Incremental Y pattern used to great effect to accomplish the joint action of soliciting alignment with an assessment and re-engaging Terry.

In sum, the Incremental Y cases have in common that the X is produced in a turn-unit which, on its production, is complete and can be taken to be designed with retrospective reference. However, confronted with a real or anticipated problem of reciprocity, the current speaker then adds on an explicit formulation of Y as an increment to the just-completed turn, thereby extending its action. This provides the recipient with another opportunity for response. The Y is invariably formulated succinctly, that is, in one clause, and is grammatically and prosodically tied to the prior X. The result is a form in which Y, a dependent (re-)formulation of the situation being assessed, comes to be located contingently *after* X, the assessing phrase.

3.3 PROSPECTIVE X

The third pattern for doing assessments of situations in our collection is one in which an X assessing phrase is systematically located *before* Y and on production is clearly *prospective*, in that it projects an upcoming formulation of the assessable which has not figured in prior talk. Here is a typical example:

(17) One of the kids (NB008, 3)

(Nan, who is middle-aged, is telling her friend Emma about the other students in her night-school psychology class.)

- 1 Nan: they are so cute ↓yeah they really.
 2 they were just (.) ve:ry.hhhhh very very sweet with me:
 3 → a:nd it was so funny
 4 in fact one of the kids came up to me;
 5 (.) one of the young.hhhh fellas that (.)
 6 Ra:lph's about twenty two:.
 7 Emm: mm h[m:ç]
 8 Nan: [a:]nd he had been,h in, (.)
 9 one of my mi:cro groups right at the very beginning,
 ((25 lines omitted))
 34 Nan: .hhhhh en then afterwards Ra:lph
 35 came up and he said (.)
 36 I:'d like (.) Nancy? (0.2)
 37 he said I'd like to (0.2)
 38 take you over to Shakey's and buy you a ↓bee:r. (.)
 39 Nan: uhhhh ↓huh[↓huh .h]hhh
 40 Emm: [h o : w] ↓cu::te.

Nancy's assessment *it was so funny* (line 3) projects that upcoming talk will contain something assessable as funny. She then launches into a rather lengthy

and circuitous story, the upshot of which is that Ralph, one of the young men in her night-school psychology class, invited her out for a beer as a sign of his admiration. It is this rather diffusely reported situation which Nancy's interlocutor is being encouraged to retrospectively find *funny*. The climax of the story is cued by Nancy's laughter (line 39). Notice that Emma's evaluation *how cute* (line 40) picks up the same assessor which Nancy used in her story abstract (line 1).

We schematize a case such as in (17) as follows:

(18) Prospective X pattern



In the patterns which this schema represents, the X-assessment contains a 'prospective indexical' (Goodwin, 1996), projecting that upcoming talk will deal with something which will subsequently be found to be assessable in the way indicated. The projected Y-assessable, prototypically expressed with independent syntax, can be quite diffuse, extending over several turn-units and sometimes involving a whole set of events or an entire story.

In fact, the X-assessing phrase *it is/was funny* as in (17) occurs 16 times in our database, and each time it is prospective and serves as a preface to a story or a telling.²⁶ Here is a further example, in which the story-preface work being done by *it's funny* is made explicit. In this excerpt, two friends Margy and Edna are chatting on the phone. Following Edna's X, *you know it's funny*, at line 9 comes a lengthy story of which we give only the lead-in *Bud played at San Mar-*, as the story itself takes nearly two further pages of transcript:

(19) San Marcos (NB 017, 7)

- 1 Mar: =and uh-.h-.h it's just stuff I have to do for [° Larry,]
 2 Edn: [°ye::ah.]
 3 Edn: I [know and y [ou're do-]ing real good are [nt you.]
 4 Mar: [.t.hhh [a: nd] [I: ']m just
 5 so delighted I can do it E [dna cuz]
 6 Edn: [.hhhhh]
 7 if: I didn't do it we'd have [to hire it] do:ne,
 8 Edn: [well y'know]
 9 → Edn: **y-youknow it's funny** uh:: uh
 10 Bud played at San Mar-
 11 have you gotta minute?=
 12 Mar: =su: [:re.] °mm h m,
 13 Edn: [I'm] not gonna take too long .. hhhhh

By breaking off the lead-in of her story and asking Margy if she has *got a minute* (line 11), Edna displays through her behavior that what she is about to do is going to take time, that is, she projects a Y which will be long. It is the X-assessment *it's funny* which serves as a preface to, and foreshadows, this 'big package'.

Interestingly, it is not unusual for prospective Xs like *it's funny* to be followed by *because*, a subordinate marker which may appear to suggest that what follows is a reason or explanation for the prior evaluation.²⁷ Yet considered in terms of social

action, a construction like *it's funny because*, if it projects a story, accomplishes the same social action as does a simple *it's funny* (as seen in (19)). To see this, consider the following fragment:

(20) Catholic (Cutie Pie, 11, 437)

1 JEFF: like,
2 .. yeah,
3 you know what,
4 → **and <X it's X> so funny,**
5 → cause he's,
6 .. he's a Catholic,
7 ... (TSK) a=nd,
8 (H) you know,
9 like I nailed him on the contradiction <X you know X>,
10 he's like pro-capital punishment,
11 ... but --
12 and .. pro-life? (*story continues*)

Jeff's prospectively oriented *and it's so funny* (line 4) projects a story, just as we saw happening in (19). Although what follows is introduced via the causal subordinating conjunction *because*, it actually details the set of events which Jeff is evaluating as funny: meeting a Catholic guy and confronting him with the contradiction in his faith between supporting capital punishment but opposing abortion. Thus, we favor treating a case like (20) as instantiating the Prospective X pattern.

Here is another example of a prospective X followed by *because*. In this case, the assessing phrase has a less fixed form.

(21) Powelton (Chinese dinner 53, 22.10)

(Beth lives in a town called Powelton and uses this as an assessor to characterize a set of events presented as being typical of the town.)

1 → Beth: **it's-it's-it's-it's an incredibly, Powelton, (0.5)**
2 → **sort of phenomenon**
3 becuz the company, (0.4)
4 the two people who run it are, (0.3)
5 this guy, (0.4)
6 George Wunderberger,
7 and this woman Leah Sanders ... (*story continues*)

Subsequent to Beth's prospective X *it's an incredibly Powelton sort of phenomenon*, the ensuing story details a set of events (Y) presented as deserving of this characterization. The *because* both provides a motivation for X, and at the same time introduces Y, much as the complementizer *that* would.

To summarize this discussion of the Prospective X pattern, our extracts bear witness to the fact that assessing phrases are often designed and understood as prospective indexicals, where the assessment projects an assessable to follow. In these cases, the prospective X functions as an action separate from that of detailing the Y, which, however, it strongly projects will happen next.

3.4 SUMMARY

What we have seen so far is that speakers doing assessments of events and situations make use of different recurrent linguistic patterns for accomplishing this work:

- In 3.1, we showed how they use assessing phrases which are designed to retrospectively assess an event or situation mentioned or evoked in prior talk. In this case the assessable may be quite explicit or diffuse; the assessing phrase is produced *after* it.
- In 3.2, we showed that assessing phrases may also occur in contexts in which there is apparent or anticipated trouble locating a prior assessable, where we find speakers adding explicit formulations of the assessable as increments. In this case the assessable comes contingently to be located *after* the assessing phrase, although the latter was retrospectively oriented on its production.
- Finally, in 3.3, we showed that assessing phrases with *it* or *that* can be produced *before* formulations of the assessable, when they are deployed as a preface to what is projected to be an upcoming tellable or story. In these cases they are designedly prospective, implying that subsequent talk will contain the assessable.

3.5 THE INTEGRATED Y CONSTRUCTION

With this background, we return to what has been known as 'extraposition', as illustrated by (2) in the Introduction (repeated here for convenience):

(2) Privacy (NB008, 2)

- 3 Emm: I won't even turn the tee vee o:n,h
 4 (.)
 5 Nan: well I had turned it on when I first got u:p just to see: how
 6 thin:gs were: progress:ng but the thing was so sad and all
 7 that horrible sad music they kept
 8 (.)
 9 Nan: keep [playing] all the [time you] know,
 10 Emm: [oh::::] [G*o:::d]
 11 Emm: they go on and o:n and o: [n with thi]:s
 12 Nan: [°y a: h,°]
 13 Emm: like yesterday showing them going in the chu- .hh I mean so
 14 much I: know it's sa:d but my God let's don't throw it at
 15 the public °constantl[y°
 16 Nan: [.t.hhh we:ll ↑I think it's sad that
 17 they don't uh:.h allo:w u-you know the families at least the
 18 decen [cy of hav]ing some privacy.
 19 Emm: [e e y a h]
 20 (0.4)

This example illustrates yet another resource for assessing situations, one in which the X-assessing phrase again has PROSPECTIVE orientation and the Y-assessable comes in a position AFTER the assessing phrase. However, as opposed

to the dual-action Prospective X pattern schematized above in (18), the two parts here are welded together, in that they are produced AS A WHOLE and the Y is formatted to be SYNTACTICALLY DEPENDENT ON X. We shall schematize this single turn unit as follows:

(22) **Integrated Y construction**

X ASSESSING PHRASE + Y ASSESSABLE

In the Integrated construction, the X-assessing phrase is fully prospective, just as it in the Prospective X pattern, and the projected assessable is given the same clause-size formulation as in the Incremental Y pattern. But now the prospectivity projects just to the end of the construction, and the two parts are fused together such that they create a single turn unit. This status is reflected in the fact that the Y-assessable cannot stand alone but depends syntactically upon the X. It is also attested to by the fact that, more often than not, the two components X and Y are produced as a prosodic whole. In other words, the Integrated Y construction amalgamates features from the two patterns we have just discussed, the Incremental Y and Prospective X patterns. Like the Prospective X pattern, the X in the Integrated Y construction is prospective. Like the Incremental Y pattern, however, the Y in the Integrated Y construction is typically a single clause, no more and no less; we suggest that this reflects the Integrated Y's emergence as a standard way for English speakers to assess situations and events which are nicely formulatable as clauses (Chafe, 1994; Thompson and Couper-Kuhlen, 2005), such as *never having a break*.

For this reason we wish to argue that 'extraposition' is a grammatical CONSTRUCTION and is best understood as a syntacticized amalgamation of the Prospective X and the Incremental Y patterns.²⁸ In other words, from the practice of designing X to project a subsequent Y, and from the practice of placing an explicit formulation of the Y-assessable after the X-assessment, emerges the practice of formulating the X-assessment and the Y-assessable in one integrated syntactic and prosodic turn unit. We emphasize that we are not speaking diachronically here, though a careful diachronic study might reveal evidence of such a development; rather, we note that the Integrated constructions and the Incremental Y and Prospective X patterns *co-exist and mutually reinforce* each other.

Although prototypically, Integrated constructions are produced as single prosodic units, this does not preclude their emerging contingently bit by bit.²⁹ For instance, in the following case, the speaker Darryl makes a prosodic break after the X component of an Integrated construction:

(23) **Pick up a book** (Book about Death 217.87)

(Darryl is telling Pamela about his aversion to reading a book about death.)

- 1 DARRYL: ... I come up with my own ideas about that stuff.
- 2 PAMELA: ... and where do you get the ideas.
- 3 DARRYL: ... thought.
- 4 PAMELA: ... and where do you get those thoughts?

- 5 DARRYL: processing what goes on around me.
 6 PAMELA: ... well?
 7 ... isn't= a book part of what goes on [around you]?
 8 DARRYL: [(H) well %],
 9 ... % more from an oblique sou=rce.
 10 you know,
 11 <X when X> you're reading fiction,
 12 or,
 13 .. (H) or articles,
 14 or history or something like that,
 15 (H) but .. but,
 16 **t- for me it's very difficult,**
 17 **to pick up a b=ook about d=eath.**
 18 .. (H) that someone's written about death,
 19 because it's [bullshit].
 20 PAMELA: [(H) <% Well --
 21 DARRYL: who knows what death is.

Having elaborated about 'coming up with his own ideas' about death, Darryl concedes in lines 9–14 that he's willing to read about death 'from an oblique source', in fiction and articles or history. He then produces a summary assessment *for me it's very difficult, to pick up a book about death. that someone's written about death, because it's bullshit*, using the Integrated Y construction but delivered bit by bit over a series of four intonation phrases.^{30,31}

Readers might wonder whether the bold-faced pattern exemplified in lines 16–17 would not be better accounted for as an instantiation of the Retrospective X pattern, discussed just above in 3.1. We would argue that it would not be: there are two pieces of evidence in the speakers' behavior that point to these lines clearly instantiating an integrated construction. First, line 16 is in no way retrospective; *for me it's very difficult* cannot be indexing anything in the prior talk. Second, the assessing phrase, *for me it's very difficult*, and the assessable, *to pick up a book about death. that someone's written about death*, are not two separate actions, as is the case with the assessing phrase and the assessable in the Retrospective-X pattern.

When X and Y are welded together into an integrated construction as in (2) or (23), this turn unit also carries out a single social action. In (2), for instance, Nancy uses the integrated construction to agree with Emma's prior assessment *it's sad* but at the same time to propose a mildly contrasting formulation of what it is that deserves this assessment. In (23) Darryl uses the construction to summarize his argument. In the following instance the action accomplished by an integrated construction might be characterized as 'proposing a summary assessment' (see e.g. Schegloff, 2007: 186):

(24) **Get in for free** (Housemates, 44)

(Teresa has been telling about recently going to a cheap-rate movie theater and not having to show her ticket.)

- 1 T: I hate myself mentally for go(h)ing there=
 2 J: =I know.

- 3 (2.0)
 4 → T: .hhh it is great that we got in for free though.=
 5 J: =mhmm.

In line 1 of this extract, Teresa makes a strongly self-critical remark which Jennifer empathetically acknowledges in the next turn. In line 4 Teresa then moves to register a redeeming aspect of the episode, *that we got in for free*, as part of an Integrated Y construction. This integrated construction serves to wrap up the prior topic and, together with *though*, prepare the ground for a subsequent shift to a new topic.

Summary assessments as seen in (24) are known for their role in sequence-closing sequences, which serve as resources for negotiating sequence and topic closure (Schegloff, 2007). Integrated constructions work well as summary assessments because they allow the speaker to propose a formulation of the gist of prior talk and advance an assessment of it in one go.³² Such an action can constitute a move towards closing down the topic and/or sequence currently underway by proposing an evaluative wrap-up of what has happened so far. If next speaker aligns with this action, that is, passes up an opportunity to re-engage topical talk or to provide a differing second assessment themselves, then the sequence-closing sequence is complete and a new topic or sequence can be launched next.

In our data integrated constructions are not infrequently used in the negotiation of sequence and topic closure in conversation. For instance:

(25) **Keep clean** – Game Night 1

(A group of friends, gathered at Terry's house to play a board game, notice Stacy's coat.)

- 1 Abbie: that's a great coat. (.) that looks very warm.
 2 Stacy: it is very warm.
 3 Abbie: I need a [coat] like that,
 4 ?: [what]
 5 Stacy: nobody told me I went to (Pasqua:lls with all the) [dust on it]
 6 Pam: [o : : : :] : h
 7 [I: (see)], ((telephone conversation))
 8 Maureen: [m huh] [huh]
 9 Abbie: [he heh] (.) sorry.
 10 Terry: (krugers)
 11 Abbie: we didn't even ↑see:n a du:st.
 12 Terry: [huh huh huh]
 13 Maureen: [ha ha ha ha ha ha]
 14 Terry: ya probably (.) walked up against the van 'r something
 15 [going down the driveway.]
 16 Abbie: [I was gonna say.]
 17 Stacy: o::h that could be. it's filthy:
 18 Terry: now it's clean though thanks.
 19 Abbie: e(h) ha ha [ha ha ha ha ha.
 20 Terry: [u(h) huh huh.
 21 Abbie: that white van is once again white.
 22 ?: oh

- 23 (3.0) ((background noise))
 24 Maureen: **it's hard to keep something clean around here,**
 25 (2.3)
 26 Terry: mmmm.

This episode centers around Stacy's having accidentally walked up against Terry's van, which she describes as *filthy* (line 17), and having dirtied her coat. Terry jokingly remarks that the van is now clean (line 18), whereupon Abbie concurs that it is *once again white* (line 21). In now producing the assessment *it's hard to keep something clean around here* (line 24), Maureen is extrapolating from the dirty van and the dirty coat to the situation of generally keeping things clean where they live. Her turn summarizes prior talk by generalizing and assessing it, thereby moving to close down the topic and sequence.

In part due to their neat packaging as single grammatical and prosodic units, Integrated constructions are handy devices. Like idioms, figures of speech, and proverbs (Drew and Holt, 1998), they are particularly well suited for expressing the upshot of a discussion in a nutshell. They can also be used subversively in order to 'force' curtailment of a topic. This is how Rose uses the construction in the following episode:

(26) *Sweet of you* – SBL 010, p. 1 (027.54)

(Bea has called up Rose, a registered nurse, to ask whether she would be willing to take on a patient who requires nursing care seven days a week, but Rose has declined.)

- 1 Ros: I uh I wou:ld if iks- if it weren't for the children.
 2 but it's too much for me,
 3 Bea: uh huhh. h ye[ah well,
 4 Ros: [ah hah,
 5 (.)
 6 Bea: I: know you said something about you< (.)
 7 preferred not working weeke:nds, hh
 8 Ros: ya:h. ah ha:h?
 9 Bea: but uhm (0.6) .t (0.6) uh this: uhm
 10 (0.7)
 11 → Ros: .tlk **it's sweet of you to think of [me though**
 12 Bea: [well of course
 13 eh- eh- ih if you found someone: uh hh
 14 to relieve you every weeke:nd it woul(h)d b(h)e(h) alright,

When we join this conversation, Rose is accounting for why she cannot take up Bea's offer of a full-time nursing job (lines 1–2). In the next turn Bea acknowledges this account, but refrains from finalizing the outcome of the sequence as rejection (Davidson, 1984, 1990). Instead she seizes upon the sticking point of working weekends (lines 6–7), and implies with her *but* in line 9 that there may be some alternative to it. Her lengthy interturn pausing suggests that she is casting around for a way to accommodate Rose's wishes (lines 9–10). For Bea then the matter is not yet closed. It is at this point that Rose throws in the summary assessment *it's sweet of you to think of me though*. With her positive evaluation of the situation, formulated in terms of Bea's thinking of her, Rose is proposing

to wrap up prior talk in a particular way.³³ She can thereby forestall further negotiation of the nursing job and preempt topic closure. It is this type of job which Integrated assessing constructions are particularly well suited to do.³⁴

4. Conclusions

Recent research provides strong evidence that the syntacticization of recurrent multi-actional and interactional patterns for accomplishing social actions is quite a general phenomenon. Hopper (2001, 2004) and Hopper and Thompson (forthcoming) argue that the apparently biclausal English 'pseudo-cleft' construction can be rewardingly analyzed as a syntacticized version of a multi-actional pattern whereby the 'X' piece (e.g. *what I did was . . .*) previews a long, often diffuse telling of an event. Similarly, Geluykens (1992) and Keenan Ochs and Schieffelin (1976a, 1976b) have shown that the construction known as 'left-dislocation' is best accounted for as a syntacticized version of a regular interactional pattern in which a speaker seeks confirmation of referent recognition before going on to detail something about that referent.

In this article we have considered three pervasive PATTERNS in interaction whereby English speakers carry out the assessing of an event or situation, the 'Retrospective X' pattern, the 'Incremental Y' pattern, and the 'Prospective X' pattern. We have examined the interactional contingencies which give rise to these patterns, and have argued that the syntactic CONSTRUCTION known as 'extraposition' can be revealingly understood as a syntacticized version of the Prospective X and the Incremental Y patterns in amalgamation, where the prospective assessment and the dependently formatted assessable are bundled together and tied to one another grammatically and prosodically. The assessing and formulating features of this construction make it particularly well suited for doing 'summary assessment' in the management of sequence and topic closure in conversation.

The much-discussed syntactic properties of the 'extraposition' construction are thus of less interest to an understanding of what grammar is than are their relationships to recurrent interactional practices which make up the fabric of our daily lives.

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NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper appeared in German as Couper-Kuhlen and Thompson (2006). For both versions we are indebted to Klocke (2002).

2. Our conversational extracts use the transcription system of the original transcriber. The transcription systems seen in this article include: the Jeffersonian system (Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Ochs et al., 1996), modified to standardized orthography; and the Du Bois et al. (1993) system for the Corpus of Spoken American English (Du Bois et al., 2002–5). All the extracts use the Jeffersonian system except those labeled ‘Cutie Pie’ and ‘Book about Death’.
3. The assessors that we will focus on in this article are all so-called predicate adjectives or predicate nominals. The adjectives are evaluative. A noun phrase assessor either has an evaluative adjective accompanying it (*pretty girl*) or is evaluative itself in nature (*doll*).
4. Although assessables are actually part of the world and a referring expression like *Pat* is part of language, for the sake of brevity we shall say that *Pat* is the assessable.
5. We note that ‘assessment’, in this sense, is one specific instance of what other researchers have considered under the headings of ‘appraisal’, ‘evaluation’, and ‘stance’.
6. In the following we adopt the convention of putting all constructions for assessing situations and events in bold.
7. For the purposes of providing a general schematization for the bipartite construction, we have ignored the contribution made by such pragmatic particles as *well*, *you know*, and *I mean*, readily acknowledging that they play a significant role in the interaction. We will return to this later.
8. They of course do not deny that there may be a difference between (a) and (b) in terms of what is being presupposed and what is being asserted.
9. For an entry into the rich literature on constructions, the readers is referred to [<http://www.constructiongrammar.org/bibliography.htm>].
10. We strongly expect that the construction could be shown to be a historical grammaticalization of the recurrent use of the non-integrated forms, but we have not systematically investigated the diachronic processes involved.
11. We are thus restricting ourselves to data in which we have essentially the same access to interactional cues as do the participants themselves.
12. This format was first identified as such by Goodwin and Goodwin (1987), whose seminal work we acknowledge.
13. We purposely avoid the term *anaphora* because of its association with *antecedent*, by definition an explicit noun phrase or clause to which an anaphor is said to refer. As we argue below, many of the cases of *it/that* in our data do not have an explicit antecedent but instead work to ‘instruct’ recipients to create one. By the same token, we shall also avoid speaking of *cataphora* in cases of forward-looking orientation (see later).
14. We shall return later to the issue of *it* versus *that* in exemplars of the pattern schematized in (7).
15. We thank Jack Du Bois (personal communication) for this formulation.
16. As noted above, in cases like (10) this ‘referent’ may not be reified as such until an *it* or *that* occurs.
17. For further discussion of increments, the reader is referred to Ford et al. (2002), Couper-Kuhlen and Ono, eds (2007), and references cited therein.
18. The designation ‘right dislocation’ might come to mind for instantiations of the Incremental Y pattern. For the study of grammar in real-time talk-in-interaction, the term ‘right-dislocation’ is, however, clearly inappropriate. We align ourselves with scholarship showing that incrementing is a favorite cross-linguistic practice for

- doing self-repair (Couper-Kuhlen and Ono, 2007; Gelyukens, 1987), as illustrated in (12)–(16).
19. On 'tying', see Goodwin (1990), Mazeland and Huiskes (2001) and Sacks (1992: II, 348–59), *inter alia*.
 20. We treat *I mean* here not as a complement-taking predicate (Thompson, 2002) but rather as a discourse marker signalling something akin to transition-space self-repair. See also Fox Tree and Schrock (2002) and Imo (2005).
 21. The assessable may of course morph imperceptibly such that on the second occurrence of Y it has become something slightly different. We nevertheless feel justified in considering the Y that the participants are oriented to to be the 'same'.
 22. Our database reveals several instances of retrospective X being followed by the formulaic *you know* (see Erman, 2001; Fox Tree and Schrock, 2002, and references cited therein, *inter alia*). In these cases *you know* seems to be produced in pursuit of a response, corroborating our analysis of X as transition-ready.
 23. Note that the social work of projecting topic closure done by Beth is evident in two ways. One is by her use of *though*; see Barth-Weingarten and Couper-Kuhlen (2002), who argue that a frequent interactional function of *though* in conversational English is to return to an earlier topic in order to close it off. The other is by her *so* in line 9 (see Raymond, 2004, on *so* used to 'articulate an upshot').
 24. It is worth noting in this connection that *never having a break* can be heard as a formulation of the assessable situation but at the same time as an account for why the situation should be assessed the way it is. We return to the fact that formulations of 'content' shade off into formulations of 'reason' later.
 25. On troubles-telling, see Jefferson (1988).
 26. See Labov and Waletzky (1967) on 'evaluation' in oral narratives and Schegloff (1980, 2007) on story prefaces.
 27. Quirk et al. (1985: 1392, n. (c)) comment on the tension between an analysis involving 'extraposition' and one involving an 'adverbial clause': in pointing out the use of clauses introduced by *if* or *when* following something like *it would be a pity*, they argue that these should not be treated as extrapositions because the *if/when*-clause cannot function as the subject of 'is a pity'. By assuming a transformational analysis of these grammatical formats, then, they have little choice but to opt for treating them as adverbial clauses.
 28. When Y is an NP, the integrated X + Y is reminiscent of Michaelis and Lambrecht's (1996a, 1996b) 'nominal extraposition' (their 'NE'). Using constructed examples such as *it's amazing the odd people my sister knows*, they argue that the NE construction 'is not simply a subcase of clausal extraposition' (p. 231), but that it is rather best analyzed as a 'formal idiom' belonging to the class of 'exclamatory constructions'. Our conversational collection includes two examples of Y as an NP, one of which can be seen in the following:

(i) **these drums** (Housemates, 17)

→ J: it's really kind of annoying to me.

(0.3)

→ J: these drums.

Although *prima facie*, *these drums* might appear to refer to an entity, the prior context, talk about the noise of the drumming, makes it clear that this extract involves assessing a situation rather than an entity. It thus also illustrates an instance of our Incremental Y pattern. We prefer this characterization to Michaelis and Lambrecht's because instantiations of this pattern, whatever the syntactic

- categorical status of Y might be, all share the interactional property of being found in environments of problematic reciprocity following the preceding assessment. Describing an utterance as 'exclamatory', on the other hand (as Michaelis and Lambrecht do), is not an empirically motivated claim, particularly in the absence of any account of what a social action of 'exclaiming' would be.
29. For further discussion of integrated constructions emerging bit by bit, see Ono and Thompson (1995).
 30. We note that line 18 is arguably a self-repair elaborating 'a book about death' to 'a book that someone's written about death'.
 31. In the Integrated construction, Y may be finite (as in (22)) or non-finite (as in (23)).
 32. Despite their prospective indexical, they do not project any further action by the same speaker, but instead make only a minimal, aligning response by co-participant expectable next.
 33. Here too, as in (24), the particle *though* is part of the endeavor to close down the topic.
 34. It is true that Rose is not wholly successful. In fact, the topic of the nursing job continues to be pursued in subsequent talk but is ultimately brought to a close by the renewed use of the Integrated Y construction *it's sweet of you to think of me* several minutes later.

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