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Authors

Whitehead, Kevin A.
Lerner, Gene H.

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Referring to *Somebody*:

Generic Person Reference as an Interactional Resource*

Kevin A. Whitehead

Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara;

and School of Human and Community Development, University of the Witwatersrand,

Johannesburg, South Africa

Gene H. Lerner

Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara, USA

Corresponding author:

Kevin A. Whitehead

kwhitehead@soc.ucsb.edu

Department of Sociology

Social Sciences and Media Studies Building

University of California

Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9430

USA

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Abstract

A growing body of research, examining a wide spectrum of reference forms across diverse languages, cultures, and identities, has shown how references to persons can be selected for context-specific interactional outcomes. This report describes how even such simple forms of person reference as *somebody* (along with *someone* and *a/the person*) can be selected on the basis of their relevance for the specific interactional context in which they are employed. We consider how the particular circumstances of some person reference occasions can make these generic person reference forms specially relevant (even when other, more elaborated forms of reference, either recognitional or non-recognitional, were evidently available to the speaker), and we demonstrate how even these barest forms of person reference can be called on to perform delicate, context-sensitive interactional work. Specifically, we show that speakers can select these generic reference forms for non-recognitional references that a) contribute to the formation of the action of a turn, and, when used in a story, b) contribute to the story's telling. Finally, we show how a generic person reference can be selected in place of a recognitional reference, thereby openly concealing a referent's identity.

Keywords: word selection, non-recognitional reference, indefinite pronouns, Membership Categorization Devices

Introduction

Conversation analytic research on person reference begins with Sacks' (1972) seminal insight: There is never only one correct way to refer to a person, and thus relevance – and not accuracy or correctness alone – can inform the selection of a reference form. As a result, members must consider – and thus analysts should also consider – what relevancies are involved in selecting one reference form over other available reference forms.

Sacks and Schegloff (1979) subsequently developed a broad outline of the organization of reference to persons in conversation, and Schegloff (1996) then augmented this by describing both a basic set of referring practices and the distinctive circumstances of their use (also see Schegloff, 2007a). These pioneering investigations, and particularly Schegloff's (1996) 'Partial Sketch of a Systematics' have sparked a growing body of work on referring practices in talk-in-interaction.[1] This work includes studies across a range of languages and cultural contexts (e.g., Enfield & Stivers, 2007; Hacohen & Schegloff, 2006; Hayashi, 2005; Levinson, 2005; Oh, 2007), focusing on a range of reference forms, including self-reference (e.g., Hepburn, Wilkinson, & Shaw, 2012; Jackson, 2011; Land & Kitzinger, 2007; Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; Oh, 2007; Schegloff, 2007b), recipient reference (e.g., Hepburn et al., 2012; Lerner, 1996; Oh, 2007), and references to persons other-than-speaker/recipient (e.g., Jackson, 2013; Kitzinger, Shaw, & Toerien, 2012; Klein, 2011; Lerner, Bolden, Hepburn, & Mandelbaum, 2012; Whitehead & Lerner, 2009).

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[1] Schegloff (1996, p. 471) notes that what he provides 'picks out just a few themes (and not always the most basic ones) out of a complicated tangle', and thus that it is 'really only a sketch'.

Much of this research uncovers how systematically-available reference forms are deployed in the service of context-specific interactional outcomes, thus addressing the intersection of what Schegloff (1996, p. 467; emphasis in original) calls 'the *systematics* of person reference' and 'the ensemble of *interactional* exigencies' that participants encounter on specific occasions.[2] Key findings with respect to the systematics of person reference concern participants' displayed orientations to recipient(s)' knowledge of the referent. Thus, a referent is shown to be known to a recipient when a speaker employs a 'recognitional' reference form – most commonly names (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979). In contrast, 'non-recognitional' forms ordinarily convey 'you don't know this person' (Schegloff, 1996, p. 459).[3]

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[2] In a neighboring line of research, psycholinguists have investigated the cognitive challenges associated with recipiency of different forms of person reference (see, e.g., Ryan, 2016).

[3] Yet, in some sequential environments, generic non-recognitional forms can convey not that the referent is unknown to recipient, but rather that they are unknown to speaker. In the following instance, Randy employs *somebody* in asking whether a bathroom is occupied.

[137; SBC022]

01   RAN: **Some<u>bo</u>dy** in there?

02   LAN: (I) th<u>i</u>nk Laura went in there, °yeah.°

Here, this reference form, as compared to a negatively-polarized form such as *anybody* (cf. Heritage & Robinson, 2011), may convey Randy's expectation that the bathroom is indeed occupied, while nonetheless treating the identity of the occupant as unknown to him. This usage is thus informed by the 'epistemic gradient' (Heritage, 2012) established in asking a question – here establishing the referent as unknown to the speaker, yet possibly known to

In this report, we turn to those generic reference forms (such as *someone*, *somebody*, and *a person*) where nothing but reference to a person (*qua* person) is given by the *form* of reference. In each of these forms, everything else that a more elaborated reference form might convey about the person is left unspecified. Nevertheless, we uncover a range of interactional exigencies that seem to provide for speakers deploying one of these generic forms – even when more revealing forms are evidently available.

It may be useful to first distinguish the generic reference forms we examine here from a similar, but more encompassing set of reference forms Schegloff has occasionally mentioned, as in the following passage (1996, p. 459; emphasis in original):

> The prototypical simple *non-recognitional* reference forms are expressions such as 'someone', 'this guy', 'this woman', etc. (By characterizing them as 'prototypical simple non-recognitionals' I mean to note that they appear designed to do virtually nothing else but convey non-recognition-ality; they do just 'referring-as-non-recognizable.')

Here, Schegloff employs the phrase 'prototypical simple non-recognitionals' to collect such generic forms as 'someone', as well as such membership-categorical forms as 'this woman'. Subsequently, investigators (e.g., Kitzinger, 2007; Klein, 2011; Stockill & Kitzinger, 2007) have taken up the question of whether sheer 'non-recognition-ality' is always the result when employing gendered references, such as 'this woman', 'this guy', and the set of gendered pronouns. In this report, we examine forms of person reference that do not expose – in their composition – a membership category at all. We ask whether selecting a generic form of person

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his recipient. A speaker's treatment of a referent as unknown to themselves – but not unknowable – can thus be a method for eliciting a more revealing reference from their recipient (cf. Pomerantz, 1980).

reference can sometimes do more than 'virtually nothing else, but convey non-recognition-ality,' when we also consider the circumstances of its use at just this place in the talk on just this occasion.

Additionally, we focus our investigation on instances where the referent can be understood as a particular person. As such, we exclude generic forms employed to refer to a member of an identifiable class or group of persons, as in Extract A. In this case, the participants are discussing an upcoming skiing trip.

(A) [Kara, 33]

```
01   CLI:    What a n↑ightmare.

02           (.)

03   JIM:    >Tha- that'd be< like (.) that's be (.) somebody's

04           ta:sk for the whole trip, >↑all you have to< do ↓is

05           get the skis.

06   STA:    Mm heh!
```

Here, the job of collecting skis from the ski shop could conceivably fall to any person from among those who will be going on the skiing trip, so there are – at present – a (limited) number

of prospective incumbents of the reference.[4] Similarly, we exclude from our analysis generic

forms for which the referent could seemingly be any person at all, as in Extract B.

(B) [Farmhouse, 26]

```
01   MICH:   ↑She's such a ↓friendly nice dog, <she's so laid ba:ck,

02           y'kn[ow.

03   MOM:        [Uh huh

04           (.)

05   MICH:   She:: (0.3) someone could come in an- and assault us with a

06           rifle or something y'know, and she'd just s:it there and go

07           'Hoh? H[uh? Heh.'

08   LAUR:         [Hih hih hih hih
```


Here, in describing her dog's *laid back* (line 1) temperament, Michelle refers to a conjectural

someone who could *come in and assault us with a rifle or something* (lines 5-6), with the identity

of the referent in this case not being limited to a particular (albeit unspecified) person, or even to

some circumscribed class or group of people. By contrast, in what follows, we focus our

investigation on cases in which a generic reference refers to one particular, albeit otherwise

unspecified person.

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[4] The use of a generic reference here may also contribute to Jim's observation being understood as an alternative to

offering to take on this responsibility himself – as well as avoiding ascribing responsibility for it to any other

specific party.

Generic Person Reference as an Account for Action

A growing body of research on non-recognitional reference has followed on from Sacks's (1972) seminal demonstration of the inference-richness of membership categories, that enables accounts for the actions of referents (and speakers) to be bound to the membership category selected in referring to a person (e.g., Kitzinger, 2005; Land & Kitzinger, 2005; Lerner et al., 2012; Whitehead, 2009; Whitehead & Lerner, 2009). Moreover, references to persons are sometimes even recalibrated, so as to fit an ascribed action (see Lerner et al., 2012).

Levinson (2013) and others (cf. Enfield & Sidnell, 2017) have used the term 'action ascription' to refer to a recipient's inferred understanding of what action (or 'main job') is being, or has been, produced by a turn at talk. For Levinson (2013, p. 104), the term is understood as '…the assignment of an action to a turn as revealed by the response of a next speaker, which … becomes in some sense a joint "good enough" understanding'. Here (and elsewhere: Lerner et al., 2012), we use this term to refer to an overt element of a turn's construction, whereby a participant explicitly attributes an action to a person.

In this vein, the inference-poor character of generic forms of person reference can result in them being treated as inadequately fitted to an ascribed action, as in Extract 1. In this case, Pat's house has recently burned down, and she has been complaining to her friend Penny about well-meaning people who have offered to lend or give her things she may have lost in the fire, but whose assistance she would prefer not to be offered. In recounting a specific instance of this, Pat initially employs a generic reference (*somebody*), before replacing it with a membership

category (*one a' the neighbors*) – thereby revealing the original form as having been inadequate,

and the categorical form as repairing this inadequacy.

(1)   [House Burning, 12]

01   PEN: [<u>O</u> k a y. .h h h]

02   PAT: [(Borrowing's too much)] t'do. <I guess I 'av too much

03   pride. h<u>h</u>uh <u>h</u>uh [.hhh]

04   PEN: [Yeah.] <u>N</u>o=<u>n</u>o I under<u>st</u>and that 'n I-

05   yeah. .hh-

06   PAT: ([   )]

07   PEN: [R:ight. En i- <u>it</u>] ne<u>ce</u>ssitates a relationship with people

08   that ya might not w- <u>wa</u>nt t'[ha-   ] <u>wa</u>[nt tih] have

09   PAT: [(Exac-)]   [(Yeah)]

10   PEN: one wi<u>:</u>th to be<u>gi</u>n with,

11   (0.2)

12   PAT: Ri:gh[t en I just-] I- yih- <u>I</u> don' know I just have too

13   PEN: [.hhhhh]

14   PAT: much (0.2) l<u>i</u>ke **somebody:, <u>one a' the neigh</u>bors**

15   imm<u>e</u>diately sent over three or four maternity sm<u>o</u>cks. .hhh

16   with Brad last <u>night</u>.=

17   PEN: =[Right.]

18   PAT: =[(When 'e)] came back. .hhh an' it was just like I <u>cou</u>ldn'

19   even look at them, I just didn't <u>wa:</u>nt them.=

Pat's reference to *somebody* (line 14) who brought over maternity smocks for her (she is pregnant), provides for a potential category-based puzzle with respect to the association between the referent and the action they have been reported to have carried out (cf. Whitehead, 2009). That is, the use of a generic person reference here can raise a question as to what type of 'somebody' both could and would offer this sort of (unwanted) assistance, while also being the sort of person that Pat (as Penny has suggested in lines 7-8) would not want to have that type of relationship with. By replacing *somebody* with *one a' the neighbors*, Pat orients to this as a puzzle by furnishing a solution to it, thereby treating *somebody* as too veiled to provide an account for the referent's action in the way that the membership category 'neighbor' can do – with the repair solution furnishing a type of relationship, grounded in geographical proximity, that can account for Pat's discomfort about these offers of assistance.[5]

In many cases, however, the contextual particulars surrounding a generic reference form expose characteristics of the referent beyond those provided for by the reference form alone, with such cases constituting what could be called 'context-informed' uses of these reference forms.[6] Thus, a membership category can be inferred from the thick particulars of content and context necessarily accompanying the use of a generic form, with the tacitly available

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[5] See Lerner et al. (2012, pp. 204-205) for a remarkably similar repair employed in upgrading the credibility of an information source.

[6] Grammarians (e.g., Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985) classify some generic reference forms (e.g., *someone*) as 'indefinite pronouns'. However, as the cases we examine here demonstrate, their apparent indeterminacy can sometimes be reduced by participants, either through employing practices of self- or other-initiated repair (as in Extract 1), or by way of the ever-present contextual particulars of their use (as in Extract 2).

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membership category accounting for the actions being produced or reported.[7] This can be seen in

Extract 2, where Bee, who has been complaining about a professor who teaches a class she is

taking, refers to *someone* in the context of a report of events in the classroom.

(2) [TG, 7]

01	BEE:	He doesn't speak- (0.2) very lou:d anyway.=
02	AVA:	=Mm hm,
03	BEE:	Tch! An:', bo:y oh boy hhhhihhhnh! [.hhhh!
04	AVA:	[(There a lot'v
05		[people)
06	BEE:	[**Someone** said et the end a' the class, 'couldju plih- please
07		bring in a microphone ne(h)x'[time' .h h]=
08	AVA:	[Mhhh hha ha][.hh
09	BEE:	[=He got
10		very insu:lt'.

This classroom context and category-bound action about which she is speaking make it evident

that the referent is a student – and thereby furnish a warrant for the complaint she reports. That

is, the tacitly available category 'student' accounts for why the referent would be making the

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[7] Also see Kitzinger et al.'s (2012) analysis of locally initial indexicals used as a substitute for, or alternative to

category memberships of referents.

request they reportedly voiced – on the basis of their concerns as a student, struggling to learn from a professor who doesn't talk loudly enough.

When Do Speakers Select Generic References to Persons?

In considering the context-sensitivity of generic person reference forms, we describe how the circumstances of locally-initial reference occasions (Schegloff, 1996) can sometimes make one of these forms specially relevant – even when more revealing forms are evidently available, and therefore could have been selected.[8] When someone employs a generic person reference, they are recurrently offering up the referent as unknown to recipient(s) – i.e., as a non-recognitional reference. In addition, the local sequential environment (i.e., what is getting done in the turn-so-far and its sequence-so-far, and how 'what is getting done' is being accomplished) may, at the same time, establish the referent as either known or unknown to the speaker, as seen in the following pair of extracts.

In Extract 3, in response to Bee's question about a professor (known to both parties) at the college at which only Ava is still a student (line 1), Ava refers to *somebody* who is currently being taught by that professor (line 2). In prefacing the reference with *I know*, Ava explicitly formulates the referent as a person she knows (on top of the generic form showing that her recipient would not know them).

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[8] Although a number of these cases are, like Extract 2, evidently context-informed, we consider an array of additional context-sensitive interactional bases upon which they may be selected, independently of any potentially available inferences associated with the referent's membership in a category.

(3) [TG, 5]

01   BEE: °Oh,°=<Did they geh ridda Kuhleznik yet hhh

02   AVA: No in fact I know **somebody** who ha:s her [now.

03   BEE: [Oh my got hh hhh

And in a similar vein, in Extract 4, Dorothy explicitly formulates somebody as unknown to her
(on top of the generic form showing that her recipient would not know them).

(4)   [May 1.2, 27-28]

01 Dor: Yeh, **somebody** sai:d (nn=mm) >**I don't know who it was**<

02   when we were looking around Santa Cruz=I guess at Santa

03   Cruz they have uhm single sex (.) dorms¿

04 Ter: Ah huh,

05 Dor: an(h)d **so(h)mebo(h)dy** sa(h)id it's all fine and dandy for the girls…

In what follows, we demonstrate how the latter of these two possibilities allows generic
references to be deployed to claim the non-known-ness of the referent to the speaker in the
service of the ongoing action, even in circumstances where the speaker could have supplied a

more revealing form of reference.[9] Again, our question is, 'When do speakers select generic references to persons?'

<u>When a Generic Reference Contributes to the Formation of an Action</u>

Lerner et al. (2012) have shown that speakers can recalibrate categorical person references to better fit the formation of an action – that is, to better fit what a speaker is accomplishing through a turn at talk. Our data show that in some cases the selection of a generic reference form is similarly tailored to considerations of action formation. This can be seen in Extract 5, in which James deploys a generic form (line 5) to refer to a referent for whom, prior to this extract, he has used a number of more revealing forms (*son of a bitch*, *that tenant*, and the gendered pronouns *he* and *his*). His use of a generic form here contributes to his demand to be told their identity, by underscoring his assertions of the present non-known-ness of the referent (to him).

(5) [Upholstery Shop, 50]

01   JAM: I WANDUH KNOW WHO DID IT thass all I wannuh

02   [know.

03   VIC: [Ja:mes I [didn't get the name, I'm sorry, I [(jis' told **him** off).

04   JAM: [Yeh.   [(>Bud=uh<) <u>you</u>

05   know **the pe<u>r</u>son** that di:d it.

---

[9] In both Extracts 3 and 4, the constitution of '(non-)known-ness to speaker' is formulated explicitly, but as we will show, this need not be the case.

06   VIC: Yes.

During Vic's preceding account of the aftermath of the broken glass, James has repeatedly shown that his only concern is with finding out who did it. This has occasioned a series of failed attempts at identification in which Vic has linked the broken glass to prior incidents involving starting a fire and writing on walls in the building, has identified the father of the perpetrator as a tenant who rides a bicycle, has described the tenant's height and hair color, has identified the floor the tenant's apartment is on, and has confirmed the tenant's son's hair color. By using the generic reference form *person* here, James effectively dismisses all these attempts at identification and renews his pursuit of the (still) unknown person's identity.[10]

In Extract 6, a generic reference form contributes to the production of a compliment response. Prior to the extract, Chloe and Claire have been talking about playing bridge, and Chloe has complained about how there tends to be too much crosstalk during the game in the group that they play with. She then, in line 1, links this to wanting to *still learn* about the game (which she implies is hindered by having too much talk going on during the game), and suggests that *you can learn from anybody you play with* (line 3). This occasions a compliment from Claire regarding something she learned from Chloe herself, followed by Chloe's use of a generic reference (*somebody*) in her compliment response.

(6) [SBL 3.3/2-2-3-L, 4-5]

01   CHL: A:nd I̲'d like tuh still ↑le̲a:rn.

---

[10] Having failed to name or adequately describe the person responsible, Vic eventually promises to *point 'im out*.

02   (0.3)

03   CHL: ↑You can learn from ↑anybody you play ↓with.

04   (0.5)

05   CLA: Oh yeah well I- g- I got to find out about that- (0.7)

06   one diamond ↑bluff becuz my God (I)ben playing with

07   yih all this time 'n ↑I didn' know. hh I just named my

08   suit, (h)w(h)'n yih say one club I name the best suit

09   I go↑::t.

10   (0.2)

11   CHL: Yah.

12   (1.0)

13   CHL: We:ll that's what I understood I learned that from

14   **somebody**.

By responding to Claire's compliment with *I learned that from somebody* (lines 13-14), Chloe deflects the compliment (cf. Pomerantz, 1978) by noting that she learned this from somebody else, thereby declining to take personal credit for what Claire claims to have learned from her. In this particular circumstance, if Chloe were to name a specific person who she learned this from, it would serve to treat that person as deserving the credit, thereby redirecting the compliment to that person – and that would undermine the point she had just made in saying that *you can learn from anybody you play with* (as opposed to learning from, for example, recognized authorities). The generic reference here, through its connection to Chloe's prior

reference to *anybody* (line 3), is thus tailored to the action Chloe is constructing: A compliment-deflecting agreeing response, in line with her just-previous assertion about how bridge is learned.

In Extract 7, a generic person reference sustains a complaint Mark has made about not having been informed about or invited to an upcoming party to be co-hosted by Bob (see lines 1-13).[11] In line 18, Bob questions Mark's claim that he wasn't told about the party, thereby challenging the basis for the complaint, or at least treating the complainable matter as a mere oversight. In response, Mark backs down from the complaint, while minimizing the backdown by characterizing the putative invitation as amorphous, with his use of a generic person reference (*someone*, line 21) contributing to the formation of this action.

(7) [SF 2, 1]

```
01     MAR:    .hh- .hhhhh We:ll I talked to: JoAnne Rogers uh: hh long

02             distance last night?

03     BOB:    Uh huh?

04     MAR:    .t .hhhhhhh A:nd uh, hhh she said thet uh: you guys were

05             havin' a party Friday.h

06             (0.6)

07     BOB:    That's corre:ct,h

08     MAR:    We::ll uhhhhh: I (.) hwasn't clued in on tha:t?'n, hhhh

09             .hhhh[hhh         ]hh=
```

---

[11] In this case, *you guys* (line 4) evidently refers to Bob and his roommate – two people Mark has been close friends with since kindergarten.

10   BOB: [You <u>wer</u>en't,]

11   MAR: =e No<u>:</u> en, hhh I thought maybe: you didn't <u>w</u>ant me

12   t'<u>come</u> er some[thing.   ]

13   BOB: [<u>Oh</u>: Ma]rk you know better th'n that,

14   (0.4)

15   MAR: .hhhhhhhhh

16   (.)

17   MAR: W[e:<u>ll</u>?   ]

18   BOB: [Didn' we] tell <u>you</u>?

19   (0.4)

20   MAR: No<u>:</u> when t- t- dju uh, you <u>ment</u>- .hhhh a <u>long</u> time ago

21   **someone** <u>m</u>entioned <u>s</u>omething about havin' a <u>go:</u>in' a<u>way</u>

22   party.

23   BOB: .hh Oh <u>I</u> see. h

24   MAR: fer the [<u>Simon</u>(s)]

25   BOB: [Goin <u>whe</u>]:re.

26   (.)

27   ???:   .hhhhh=

28   MAR: =Fer th[e <u>Si:</u>mon(s).   ]

29   BOB: [W'l <u>this</u>'s a <u>wel</u>]come <u>home</u> fer <u>Simon</u>.=

30   MAR: =.hhhhh

31   (.)

32   MAR: Oh a <u>welcome</u> <u>ho</u>:me.

33   BOB: W'l a <u>we</u>lcome <u>h</u>ome b'fore 'e goes a<u>wa</u>:y. hh!

The collective self-reference (*we*) that Bob employs at line 18 serves to expand responsibility for the complainable matter to the hosting collectivity (cf. Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007). Mark begins his response by narrowing the formulation of the culpable party to his recipient, but then repairs that reference. The self-repair from *you ment-* to *someone mentioned* exposes Mark's choice of a generic reference form over a recipient reference form (whether referring just to Bob or to Bob and his roommate together, who are co-hosting the party). He thereby overtly treats the generic form as better suited to forming up the action of which it is a part. Mark's use of a generic person reference here contributes to his formulation of the reported informing as *a long time ago* (line 20) and *mentioned something* (line 21) by manufacturing an opaque reported speaker (*someone*) from among their circle of friends. Together, these turn-compositional features constitute the informing as having been too vague and too far in the past to have been understood as a proper invitation – or even as an adequate informing – while nevertheless moving away from his initial categorical *No* (line 20).

When a Generic Reference is Integral to a Story's Telling

Generic person references are recurrently employed in stories told in conversation. Some are evidently employed to lead recipients to regard a (minor) character as not particularly relevant or consequential for the thrust, and thus projected uptake, of the storytelling-in-progress (cf. Betz, 2015, pp. 153-165). In these cases, speakers seem to be guiding story recipients to disattend a

particular referent.[12] Whereas, a more revealing reference form could lead recipients astray –

possibly resulting in a recipient diverting or even derailing the story's telling (cf. Mandelbaum,

1989, 1991).

In Extract 8, Tricia, after being prompted by Kelly in line 1 (see Lerner, 1992), tells a

story of the events of the previous night, including getting *kicked out of* a nightclub *within ten*

minutes of arriving (lines 11-12) because she was drinking (lines 15 and 19). In accounting for

how she, as a person presumably not of legal drinking age (such that she could be ejected from a

bar for drinking), came to be in possession of a drink, Tricia selects *someone* to refer to the

person who she recruited to buy the drink for her (line 22).

(8) [Sorority Breakfast 2, 7-8]

01   KEL: >I take it (you did a lot of)< b<u>a</u>rs last night.

02   (0.5)

03   TRI: Went to bars (fer like) (0.8) went to <u>Madison</u>'s fer

04   a little bit,

05   (1.0) ((Tricia waving at camera))

06   KEL: Uh huh hu[h]

07   TRI: [U]h::: and then: u::m:: (1.2) >the'we went<

---

[12] This referring practice might be compared to the literary device known as 'aptronym', whereby a character's name

is fitted to their personal characteristics (see, e.g., Cuddon, 2012), thereby drawing the reader's attention to how

these characteristics may emerge as consequential over the course of the story. In contrast, using a generic reference

in storytelling may encourage recipients to focus their attention elsewhere.

08   t<u>o</u>: u:m ($eighteen over) cl<u>u</u>:b,$

09   (.)

10   BAR: uhh [huh huh huh .hhhh huh huh huh]

11   TRI: [$which I$ pr(h)oc(h)e(h)ed(h)ed $to] get <u>kick</u>ed

12   <u>out</u> of: within <u>ten</u> minutes.

13   (.)

14   KEL: ↑Why?

15   TRI: [Cuz I wuz dr<u>i</u>nking.]

16   BAR: [Oh, (that's   )]

17   (0.3)

18   BAR: ↑O[h:.   ]

19   TRI: [°Cuz I] wuz drinking.°

20   (.)

21   KEL: O[:h:]

22   TRI: [.hh I] h<u>a</u>d **someone** get me a drink. In <u>ten</u> minutes.

23   (0.5)

24   KEL: Wh<u>e</u>re was it?

25   (0.3)

26   TRI: U::m, Las Palmas?

27   (.)

28   KEL: ↑Oh.

By employing this form here, Tricia conveys to her recipients that the referent is of only incidental relevance to the upshot of the story (being kicked out for drinking), and thus that they need not know anything more about them than the age category ('legal drinking age') made implicitly available by their reported action of purchasing a drink for her. This can forestall other potentially relevant inferences that may be available, and could be heightened by the use of a categorical (e.g., gender) reference form – for example, inferences of a potential romantic connection that might arise from the ascribed action of drink-buying, and could derail Tricia's telling if pursued by her recipients.[13]

Evidence of an orientation to this possibility on Tricia's part can be seen in the course of her subsequent telling of the same story to a different set of recipients, shown in Extract 9. In this iteration of the telling, Tricia initially refers to the referent as *some guy* (line 3), but employs a generic reference (line 7) after a recipient initiates repair (line 5).

(9) [Sorority Breakfast 2, 35-36]

```
01    TAR:    =Why did you get kicked out?
02            (0.2)
03    TRI:    >C'z I had some guy buy me a drink.<
04            (0.6)
```

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[13] Also see Goodwin's (1986) analysis of how recipients of a nascent storytelling attempt to cast an incident (a 'big fight') as being a rather routine occurrence. Although Goodwin does not consider the contribution of the generic person references (*somebody bumped somebody*) to this, his analysis is consistent with our findings. This can be contrasted to the use and solicited recognition of named antagonists in the main story Goodwin considers.

05   TAR: You did <u>what</u>?

06   (1.0)

07   TRI: (I) had **someone** buy me a dr↑<u>ink</u>.

08   TAR: Mm:.

The shift in reference form in this case is the reverse of that in Extract 1 (line 14) above, where a generic form was repaired to one that included a membership category, thereby treating the repair solution as making available germane inferences about the referent that the original form did not provide for. In contrast, in this case Tricia's modified repeat of her prior turn replaces a reference that includes a gender category with a generic reference form, thereby treating the gender category (along with the inferences it potentially made available), as a 'dispensable' element of the original answer (Schegloff, 2004) – and thereby a dispensable (possibly diverting) element of the story's telling. If one can think of Extract 1 as increasing the resolution or specificity of a formulation, then this case could be understood as decreasing its resolution or specificity (cf. Lerner et al. 2012).

In Extract 10, in a pre-enactment of a promised future encounter with his mother (cf. Goodwin, 1990), the speaker (Vic at line 24) uses a generic form that is nonetheless a recognitional reference for his immediate recipients. This follows a dispute over whether the ASPCA (American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) would charge a fee if Vic were to drop off two unwanted kittens that he has been unable to give away. In the course of this extended dispute, Rich can be heard calling the ASPCA (not shown), and then confirming that – contrary to what Carol has claimed to have been told by Vic's mother – there is a fee both for dropping off (live) animals, as well as for having them picked up (lines 1-7).

(10) [Upholstery Shop, 95-96]

01   RIC: It's a three dollar <u>c</u>harge,

02   CAR: T'bring it i:[n? too?

03   RIC: [Tuh bring 'em in.

04   (0.7)

05   VIC: A[nd it's three dollars, charge,=

06   CAR: [<u>Oo:::</u>gh.

07   VIC: =if they come t'pick 'em up

08   :

09   CAR: But yer mother jus' told me t- I, seh- she says well,

10   cuz y'know she hadda da:wg. Sa[ber,

11   VIC: [Well then I::, uh

12   n[ow you- oo- you-

13   CAR: [But the dog wuz dead.

14   VIC: You [brought me [the ta:le,

15   CAR: [She says-   [An' they told 'er if you bring

16   ['im down it costs nothin'.

17   VIC: [You brought me th'ta:le, you [brought [me,

18   CAR: [But,   [If we pick

19   [it up it costs yuh.=

20   VIC: [the ta:le, of my mother. .hh An', I'll take care of it.

21   (0.5)

22 VIC: Cuz I'll tell he:r that I know as a <u>fact</u>.

23 CAR: [Mm.

24 VIC: **[Somebod[y** called up the Humane Society,

25 CAR: [↑Alright so **he** ↑called them now so now we kno:w.

26 VIC: .hh and says that [if you bring it-

27 RIC: [What kind of kitten °is it.°

28 CAR: it's a:- [↑I don't kno:w]

29 VIC: [B e a u t i f u l] ca:t=

During the course of a further iteration of the dispute occasioned by Carol's reassertion of what she heard from Vic's mother (lines 9-20), Vic asserts that he will set his mother straight, selecting *somebody*, rather than a more revealing reference form, to refer to Rich (line 24).

This case exposes how speakers can use a generic person reference to situate a referent in the background of the action (here, being pre-enacted). Both Vic and his immediate recipients know exactly who *somebody* refers to, because they were all present when Rich made the phone call Vic describes – and Carol makes this explicit in the next turn (line 25).[14] Vic was in a position to use a more revealing reference form – at the least, a gendered reference, if not a recognitional reference form. The generic reference is nonetheless employed as part of the pre-enactment whose ostensibly addressed recipient is thereby drawn to Vic's controverting assertion, rather than to its source.

---

[14] Note Carol's use of the locally-subsequent reference form *he* that targets *somebody* as its locally-initial recognitional reference.

Generic reference forms can also be selected in accordance with precisely what the teller-as-principal-character knew about a referent at specific points in an unfolding story. That is, as a story unfolds, the formulation can evolve to re-enact – and thereby reflect – the developing awareness of the principal character. An instance of this is shown in Extract 11, in which Mom's story preface includes a recognitional reference form (line 1), before she subsequently refers to the same person using a generic form (line 3).

(11) [Farmhouse, 37]

01   MOM: Jordan just came in the house one day. I was out back um

02   hanging up clothes on the line, and I thought I heard

03   something as I'm coming in the back door I heard **somebody**

04   coming in the front door. He just walks in.

05   DON: Really?

Having used a name to refer to the referent, the unmarked form for a locally subsequent reference would be a pronoun (e.g., *him*). Mom's use of the generic form *somebody* thus displays that, at the moment about which she is telling, and having only heard a person coming through the door rather than seeing them, she did not know who it was. Her use of the locally subsequent form *he* in referring to the same person for a third time (line 4) is then fitted to the shift from not knowing the identity of the referent to knowing, such that she could later use his name in launching this story. So, here, the locally-subsequent position of the reference occasion is superseded by the temporal ordering of the story's source events.

In Extract 12, a pair of references to the same person similarly reflect the development of the principal character's knowledge of the referent. In this case, Cindy is telling a story about a disturbance that took place in her neighborhood. Having heard one person *yelling*, Cindy can warrantably infer gender based on voice quality, and hence can refer to this person as *this man* (line 4); however, having neither heard nor seen the target of the yelling (because she did not want to look out the window – lines 5-6 and 8-9), she only knows enough – at this point in the story – to refer to them as *somebody* (line 5).

(12) [Munoz 1.1, 2-3]

```
01   CIN:    I got home around three:, ↓an:d um: .hhhh you

02           know, I was >gonna take a nap before my< four

03           o'clock class? .hh <a::n::d I hea:::rd=h> (.)

04           like this ↑ma:n like yelling, like >top of his<

05           lungs: a:t ↑some↓body, >you know, and I didn't

06           wanna look< out the window?

07   HOL:    uhh hh huh

08   CIN:    $Didn't wan' (him/'em) tuh$ s(h)e(h)e m(h)y

09           f(h)a(h)c(h)e. .hhhh Bu::t I was thinking,

10           ↑go:sh, you ↓know what if something really bad

11           happens, so I l::ooked out the window, and

12           he was: yelling at somebody <in a ca::r,>

13           (.)

14   HOL:    [O:h: ]
```

28

15   CIN: [.hh <u>B</u>]ut he was like <u>two</u> <u>feet</u> a<u>way</u> from the c-

16   you know, from the c<u>a</u>r

As Cindy continues the story, she refers to the same person again (line 12). However, this occurs at a point in the telling after she has now looked out the window. And in this second reference, she adds the descriptive component *in a car* to the generic form *somebody* she had employed in the initial reference. Cindy thereby shows that she subsequently came to know that the person being yelled at was *somebody in a car*, and thus that she could have referred to them as such the first time around. Nonetheless, she selected the generic form *somebody* without the additional descriptive component she then used on second mention. Here, we can observe that the initial reference form is precisely fitted to its particular place in the unfolding story – that is, it is fitted to what Cindy knew (or didn't know) at the precise moment she is now telling about, even though she subsequently learned more as the events unfolded. Moreover, that she learned by looking is precisely what provides the basis for the telling: It provides for her having a puzzle to solve by going from not knowing to knowing, as a result of investigating.

<u>When a Generic Reference Is Employed as a Telltale Suppression Device</u>

In Extract 13, a speaker repeatedly employs various generic reference forms that betray the suppression of a recognitional reference, as well as gendered locally subsequent reference forms that could be a telling hint to the identity of the referent. In this case, Sandy, a graduate student, has solicited advice from Arthur, a professor, about serving as a teaching assistant for an undergraduate class that she reports is convergent with her interests by virtue of intersecting with

one of her undergraduate majors (lines 1 and 3). In his response, Arthur advises Sandy to find

out who will be teaching the class, before issuing a warning about *one person* (line 9) in the

department that she would be *better off steering clear of* (line 10).

(13) [MWA-NOD-1, 00:49:30]

```
01   SAN:     One of my undergraduate [majors that I like totally

02   ART:                             [Right.

03   SAN:     left in the dust.

04   ART:     >Okay< (0.3) if (0.2) o[o-

05   SAN:                           [huh huh=

06   ART:     =find out who it is

07   SAN:     HHH huh huh [hn huh

08   ART:                 [and then come talk to me cause if they-

09            there's one person who you know I'd say you know

10            you're better off steering clear of >°even if it does sound

11            interesting but°<

12            (1.5)

13   SAN:     Is it somebody other than Roberta ha [huh

14   ART:                                          [nah he[h yes

15   SAN:                                                 [cause ah-

16            she's on my list to never TA [for

17   ART:                                  [ha ha yes

18            (0.2)
```

19   ART: Yeah [it's **somebody**

20   SAN: [So you're not gonna tell me who it is unless I a:sk

21   ART: Right

22   SAN: specifically about **this person**=

23   ART: =°yeah°

24   (0.3)

25   SAN: I see hh ha huh huh huh huh huh huh .hhh

26   ART: Like la- n- no I can't remember **the person's** name right

27   now or I would (0.8) uh I'll fi[nd out

28   SAN: [That's not a good sign .hhh

29   if it's **somebody** whose name you don't even know.

Following this locally initial reference, Arthur continues to use generic reference forms –
somebody in line 19 and *the person* in line 26 – making it clear that there is an ongoing effort on
his part to circumvent the (usually gendered) pronouns that are systematically employed as
locally subsequent reference forms.[15] Arthur thus uses generic forms in managing the dual, yet
divergent, projects of warning Sandy about the possibility of entering into a problematic

---

[15] As Schegloff (1996, p. 439) notes, speakers can produce references 'so as to accomplish, on the one hand, that
nothing but referring is being done, and/or on the other hand that something else in addition to referring is being
done by the talk practice which has been employed', with the latter set of practices being recognizable (for
participants and thus analysts) as alternatives to the former. Arthur's use of generic forms here rather than the locally
subsequent forms that would be ordinarily be employed in such positions render observable the work he is doing to
suppress the deployment of pronouns (also see Klein, 2011; Land & Kitzinger, 2007; Stivers, 2007).

professional relationship, while at the same time avoiding the appearance of deprecating a colleague by revealing the identity – or even hinting at it via gendered reference – of the specific person who has effectively been negatively assessed through this warning. Although their name is reportedly not available (lines 26-27), there is no attempt to pursue recognition by other means, and the recipient detects the circumlocutions (lines 20 and 22) after having tried to launch a recognition search (line 13). So, in this circumstance, a generic reference form is employed where a recognitional form (whether a name or a recognitional description) could have been used. Note also how this contrasts with Extract 1, in which the repair to *one a' the neighbors* introduced a category in a context where *somebody* is treated as inadequate. That is, in Extract 1 the generic form is treated as not sufficiently revealing, whereas, in Extract 14 it is selected so as to sidestep revealing anything about the referent's identity, beyond their membership in the category 'professor in this department' that is made evident from the context of the exchange.

Concluding Remarks

This investigation has focused on a set of reference forms to which only passing attention had been paid in previous studies, exposing a range of circumstances in which speakers may select these generic forms of person reference, even when other forms are available. We have shown how these forms may be specially selected to contribute to their occasion. This includes the use of generic references to contribute to the formation of an action, as constitutive features of a story's telling, and to overtly mask indications of a referent's identity.

These findings demonstrate how deployment of generic person references may be called for by an assortment of situated considerations – exogenous to the system-based organization of

person reference. The systematics of references to persons provides a routine basis for the selection of a reference form that displays participants' orientations to knowledge of the referent, and this in turn enables the use of particular forms to claim non-known-ness in the service of particular interactional outcomes, independently of what is evidently known about the referent. It is in this way that even generic references to persons can be understood as context-sensitive. And as such, reference forms that ostensibly do 'nothing but referring' can also be called on to perform delicate interactional work – not by doing more than referring, but by doing referring in a particular way at a particular moment in an emerging conversation.

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