

Pragmatic Effects of “So” in Reason for the Sport Psychology Consultation¹

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Abstract

The present study examined the instructional video, *Virtual Sport Psychology: Three Approaches to Sport Psychology Consulting* (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000) in which three distinguished sport psychologists display how they work with the same athlete-client. The study focused on unexpected variability in closing the reason for the sport psychology consultation sequences. Conversation analysis of the so-prefaced talk showed the incoming speaker beginning after, during, and before the current speaker's *so*. It showed the sport psychologists monitoring the turn, sharing the turn, and interrupting and closing the turn, respectively. The results showed that *so* marks a potential turn and topic transition location within the participation framework of this talk that is open to negotiation. Hearers take up the option but display three different shifts in responsibility to complete the reason for the consultation sequence. These findings have some pedagogical implications for characterising turn exchange in sport psychology professional training. Furthermore, they focus interest on interactional variance in displays of exemplary practice.

Introduction

Discourse markers add to the coherence of conversation by providing speakers and hearers with a contextual resource. *So* is a turn transition device that marks a speaker's readiness to relinquish a turn to talk. Thus it has a pragmatic effect on conversation (Schiffirin, 1987).

This paper is concerned with how sport psychology consultations are organised as talk-in-interaction. It examined the role that so-prefaced utterances played in the reason for the consultation sequence. Speakers regularly use so-prefaced utterances in everyday talk (Raymond, 2004). Schiffirin (1987) found *so* performed important functions in organising talk in sociolinguistic research interviews.

Several sport psychology videos have recently been produced showing the different approaches that eminent sport psychologists use in working with athletes. Thus it is interesting to contemplate the role played by *so* in these works, and to contrast how *so* is used in sport psychology intake interviews compared with how it is used in research interviews.

The aim of this exploratory study was to investigate how eminent sport psychologists used so-prefaced utterances in opening a sport psychology consultation. It explored two research questions. Firstly, was *so* used

in similar ways to how Schiffirin (1987) found *so* being used in qualitative research interviews. Secondly, do eminent sport psychologists show more or less variation in using *so* in the reason for the consultation sequence?

Both research interviews and psychology intake interviews gather information about objects, persons, and events. The following analysis contributes to how we understand the pragmatics of conversation in these contexts. It is through a clearer understanding of the pragmatics of conversation that the benefits of instructional videotapes and other teaching and learning resources can be fully realised. This study contributes to this endeavour.

Methods

The present study used conversations drawn from the instructional video, *Virtual Sport Psychology: Three Approaches to Sport Psychology Consulting* (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000). This video displays three distinguished sport psychology consultants conducting an initial interview with the same athlete-client.

Participants

Four participants were involved in the present study: The athlete-client, Stephanie, who participated in each interview. She has been referred to as S in the interview transcripts and as Stephanie in the subsequent analysis. The three sport psychologists are Burt Giges, Shane Murphy, and Ken Ravizza. Their actual identities were used in the video to show the characteristic approach that each takes to sport psychology consulting. Their identities have also been retained in the interview transcripts. They have been referred to as BG, SM, and KR, respectively, in the interview transcripts, and by surname in the corresponding analysis.

Materials

Audio from the opening interaction between the athlete-client and sport psychologist was copied from the *Three Approaches to Sport Psychology Consulting* videotape. This was saved in stereo format as a wave audio file. Permission to do this was obtained from the publishers. These audio files displayed the sport psychologists' opening question and the athlete's initial response as to her reasons for the sport psychology consultation. The duration of the reason for the consultation sequences

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were 32 seconds (Burt Giges), 39 seconds, (Shane Murphy), and 182 seconds (Ken Ravizza).

This talk was transcribed by the author using the notional system developed by Gail Jefferson (cf., Jefferson, 2004). Thus, in addition to the verbatim text, the three transcripts displayed instances of overlapping talk, changes in intonation and emphasis, and timed pauses in the conversation. These features display more clearly how the original interviews were conducted. A list of common Jefferson notation symbols is displayed in the Appendix.

In addition, the talk was presented as intonation units in the transcripts. Intonation units are stretches of talk that are spoken under a single intonation contour. The four criteria used to identify and classify the intonation units included: (a) a resetting of the baseline pitch level at the beginning of the talk unit; (b) a pause at the beginning of the talk unit; (c) a sequence of accelerated syllables at the beginning of the talk unit; and (d) a prosodic lengthening of the syllable(s) at the end of the talk unit (cf., Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Paolino, & Cumming, 1991).

Procedure

The transcripts were examined for instances of *so* in the reason for the consultation sequence. The procedure was to then to work with the audio files and the transcripts to identify whether these instances provided for a turn transition and a topic transition between the two participants in the interview. Five instances of so-prefaced turn transitions talk were identified in the data.

The next turn proof procedure was used to validate analytic claims about a so-prefaced turn exchange and a topic exchange in the data. This approach employed Schiffrin's (1987) criteria that if the current speaker returned to the floor to talk about an immediately prior topic then it displayed that he or she had not readily relinquished his or her turn to talk. Furthermore, if the current speaker returned to the floor to talk about a topic other than that introduced by the previous speaker then it displayed that he or she was not ready to relinquish his or her choice of the topic of conversation. The next turn proof procedure is a speakers' conversational resource that becomes a useful analytic resource for locating participants' own categories and interpretations (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). It permitted evidence of the situated use of so-prefaced utterances by sport psychologists and their clients to be uncovered.

Analysis

The analysis outlined three methods used by eminent sport psychologists to accomplish the reason for the consultation sequence. These included:

1. So + explicit turnover phrase
2. So – explicit turnover phrase
3. So + formulation + explicit turnover phrase

These so-prefaced utterances marked a turn exchange and provided for a topic shift to initiate and to close the sequence. They display a sport psychologist's actions to monitor the turn, share the turn, and interrupt and so complete the turn exchange, respectively.

Analysis 1: Monitoring the Turn

Extract 1: Where would you like to begin

Participants: Sport Psychologist (BG), Athlete-Client (S)

1→ BG: So
 2 Stephanie
 3 uhm
 4 (1.0)
 5 where would you like to begin.
 6 (0.6)
 7 S: t.hhh
 8 Well uhm
 9 (0.4)
 10 I think
 11 tha:t
 12 (0.7)
 13 I wannad t
 14 talk to you today because
 15 .hh
 16 some things have become not so clear for me
 17 .h
 18 uhm with:
 19 volleyball
 20 with my sport an
 21 with my team and
 22 .hh
 23 I'm feeling
 24 frustrated
 25 (1.0)
 26 and overwhelmed
 27 and
 28 .hh
 29 not so happy
 30 right now.
 31 BG: Mhm=
 32→ S: =So uhm
 33 (0.5)
 34 I was hoping I could just
 35 tell you a little about that:
 36 BG: Sure go ahead=
 37 S: =°that's ok°
 38 Well uhm
 39 >I'm a junior<

Giges displays his knowledge of the canonical form of *so + explicit turnover phrase* as a turn exchange device in his opening utterance (lines 1-5). Giges asks Stephanie to begin by explaining why she has come to the sport psychology consultation using an open-ended invitation. Similarly, Stephanie displays her knowledge of the canonical form of a so-prefaced turn exchange device by (a) allowing the turn to be completed, (b) taking the offered turn at the potential location (line 7), and (c) providing a conditionally relevant reason for the

consultation as the second part pair to Giges' invitation (lines 7-30). Thus Stephanie monitors the so-prefaced turn transition before producing a response.

Stephanie closes the account (line 30) and marks her willingness to transfer the floor back to Giges with a *so* + *explicit turnover phrase* (line 32-35). Giges, again, displays his knowledge of the canonical form of this turn exchange device by (a) allowing the turn to be completed without interruption or interjection, (b) taking the offered turn at a potential location (line 36), and (c) producing a conditionally relevant utterance that provides for the topic shift that was proposed by Stephanie. That is, Giges monitors the so-prefaced turn transition and topic transition device before producing a response.

Note that Stephanie's *so* in line 32 marks the close of her reason for the consultation account at the end of the adjacency pair, and signals a shift in the participant responsibilities for moving to a new topic of conversation. *So uhm* opens a potential turn space that Giges allows to pass-by. Thus *so* has been used as a discourse marker in a similar way to that found by Schiffrin (1987) in her qualitative research interviews.

Note, also, that it is possible to treat Stephanie's *so uhm* (pause) as an elided preface to the conclusion of her account that Giges is to recover from this earlier talk. This being done then an explicit turnover phrase is the conditionally relevant utterance needed to close the turn, and so advance the conversation. Giges displays his knowledge of this in his response (line 36).

Thus Extract 1 shows the canonical form of a so-prefaced turn transition and topic transition device being used to accomplish the reason for the consultation sequence. *So* functions by shifting the responsibilities for accomplishing this action between the speaker and hearer. *So* + *explicit turnover phrase* is a simple elegant device for achieving this turn and topic transition.

Analysis 2: Sharing the Turn

Extract 2: So what brings you in here today Stephanie
Participants: Sport Psychologist (SM), Athlete-Client (S)

1→ SM: So what brings you in
2 here today Stephanie.
3 S: t.hh uhm
4 (0.8)
5 tch well I've I'm:
6 currently playing volleyball
7 for my college an
8 I'm a junior
9 (0.6)
10 this year
11 and uhm
12 .hh
13 things have been kind of:
14 .h
15 .hhh
16 (0.5)
17 a little bit frustrating

18 hh
19 and stressful for me lately
20 uhm
21 an:
22 ((three coughs))
23 I I've
24 just
25 >not really sure what's going on=
26 =I feel like I'm in a big slump.<
27 SM: Hmh
28 S: Uhm
29 with my sport
30 and I just
31 .hhh
32 I'm not really sure how it all h happened
33 °there°
34 (0.6)
35 where to go or
36 how to fix it.
37→ So uhm
38 .hh
39 SM: What sort of slump are you in?
40 Tell me about that.=
41 S: =I I'm
42 well I'm j-
43 (0.6)
44 tch
45 hhh
46 It's n
47 >I'm not having fun.<
48 I'm not having fun an:

Murphy displays his knowledge of the canonical form of *so* + *explicit turnover phrase* as a turn-exchange device in his opening utterance (lines 1-2). Murphy invites Stephanie to begin by providing an account for why she has come to the sport psychology consultation. Similarly, Stephanie displays her knowledge of the canonical form of a so-prefaced turn exchange device by (a) allowing the turn to be completed, (b) taking the offered turn at the potential location (line 3), and (c) providing a conditionally relevant second part pair to Murphy's invitation by providing a reason for the consultation (lines 3-36). Thus Stephanie monitors the so-prefaced turn transition device before providing a response.

Stephanie closes her account (line 36) and marks a willingness to transfer the floor back to Murphy with a *so* utterance (line 37). It is possible to treat Stephanie's *so uhm* as an elided preface to the conclusion of her account. That is, as an utterance that conveys the elliptical meaning of her explanation that Murphy is to recover from her earlier talk. This being done then the next conditionally relevant utterance is an explicit turnover phrase to close the turn. Stephanie's inbreath (line 38) signals her intention to hold the floor and thus complete the turn. However Murphy produces a wh-interrogative question (line 39) and request (line 40) at the location where Stephanie would have been expected to produce a turnover phrase, and so this utterance was

not produced. Murphy's question *what sort of slump are you in?* And request, *tell me about that*, recovers the conclusion of Stephanie's account and becomes a proposed topic for the incoming talk.

Murphy displays his knowledge of *so* as a potential turn transition device by positioning his talk after *so*, and at the location of a projected turnover phrase. That is, he recognises Stephanie's marked willingness to transfer the floor, and takes the floor at an appropriate transition relevant space. This interrupts the production of an explicit turnover phrase. Stephanie cedes the floor to Murphy, which is consistent with her *so* offer. Secondly, Murphy displays his knowledge of *so* as a potential topic transition device by producing a question and request response (line 39-40) that provides for the incoming talk to pursue a new topic. Note that Stephanie's incoming talk (lines 41-48) provides a conditionally relevant utterance that accomplishes this proposed topic shift. Thus Murphy displays his knowledge of *so* - *explicit turnover phrase* as a potential turn and topic transition device by sharing the so-prefaced turn with Stephanie. This shared action is similar to interactions found by Schiffrin (1987) in her qualitative research interviews.

Extract 2 shows an alternative form of a so-prefaced turn transition and topic transition device being used to accomplish the reason for the consultation sequence. *So* functions by shifting the responsibilities for accomplishing this action between the speaker and hearer. *So* - *explicit turnover phrase* is a perfunctory device for achieving a turn and topic transition.

Analysis 3: Completing the Turn

Extract 2: What's going on + so

Participants: Sport Psychologist (KR), Athlete-Client (S)

1 KR: Hallo Stephanie
 2 howya doing.
 3 S: Hi Ken
 4 I'm [good
 5 KR: [all ri:ght
 6 S: °I'm good°=
 7 KR: =Hey uh:m
 8 .hh tch
 9 what can I do for you today=
 10 =what's going on that we can
 11 talk about in terms of
 12 (0.7)
 13 your sport performance
 14 an what's happening.

 ((talk from 13-93 seconds omitted)

 15 S: I don't fill
 16 (0.4)
 17 goo:d about the way I'm playing
 18 an I don't
 19 .hhh
 20 feel excited about
 21 (0.5)

22 going to practices
 23 and I just
 24 (0.5)
 25 >I don't know<
 26 I I'm very [frustrated
 27 KR: [Ok
 28 Alright
 29 .hh
 30 So one of the things
 31 you wanna get into
 32 is this rut that you're in now
 33 and what you're going through
 34 and coming out of that rut.
 35 .hh
 36 S: I think [so
 37 KR: [Is there anything else
 38 for you
 39 going on
 40 that we should address today
 41 and talk about.
 42 S: .hhh
 43 Uhm
 44 (0.5)
 45 Not really
 46 I I jus
 47 yknow

Ravizza opens the consultation and introduces a reasons sequence in a different manner from Giges and Murphy. The opening has a more mundane conversational shape (lines 1-6). Ravizza continues and uses two latched wh-interrogative questions (lines 9-14) to produce the reason for the consultation first part pair. These produce an extended account from Stephanie lasting about 90 seconds. Stephanie closes this with the announcement, *I I'm very frustrated* (line 26). Stephanie produces two so-prefaced utterances in her account that are omitted from Extract 3 but that do not produce a turn exchange. Rather it is the talk in lines 27-41 that is of particular interest because it displays different turn transition and topic transition properties from those found in Extract 1 and Extract 2.

Ravizza acknowledges Stephanie's emotional state in line 27 and line 28. He then signals his willingness to hold the floor with an inbreath (line 29). Ravizza marks this turn transition with a so-prefaced utterance (line 30) and continues to formulate a conclusion to Stephanie's account (lines 30-34).

An interesting feature of this turn exchange involves Stephanie's response (line 36). Ravizza's *so* marks the actual turn exchange between the participants but also marks a potential turn exchange location that can be projected at the end of his current turn. Secondly, Ravizza's formulation fixes the meaning of the talk-so-far (cf., Clifton, 2006) but also provides the first part of a formulation adjacency pair sequence for which an agreement is the preferred second part pair (Heritage & Watson, 1979). Thus an agreement or disagreement is a conditionally relevant response to the formulation that should normally be positioned after the formulation

utterance. Ravizza closes the formulation first part pair with, *rut*, which is produced with a downward closing intonation (line 34). However Ravizza's inbreath (line 35) signals his intention to hold the floor following the so-prefaced formulation. Thus Stephanie's, *I think so*, response is conditionally relevant, and occasioned by *so* and the corresponding intonation contour. However, it must be interjected into a brief transition relevant space that Ravizza claims back as speaker (lines 36-37). Ravizza then continues talking to produce an explicit turnover phrase (lines 37-41).

Thus Stephanie displays her knowledge of a *so + formulation* turn-exchange by (a) allowing the turn to be completed, (b) taking the offered turn at the earliest potential location, and (c) providing a conditionally relevant preferred response as the second part pair to Ravizza's formulation (lines 36). Thus Stephanie monitors this so-prefaced turn transition before producing a response. However Ravizza's turn is incomplete and has been designed as a *so + formulation + explicit turnover phrase* device. Ravizza produces a yes-no interrogative question as an explicit turnover device that proposes a topic shift. Stephanie's incoming turn accomplishes the turn and topic transition (line 42-47). Stephanie's type-conforming and polarity-conforming responses to the formulation (lines 36) and the utterance closing question (lines 42-47) display that she is untroubled by this device.

Thus the talk in lines 27-41 displays different properties from those uncovered in Extracts 1 and 2. Ravizza's acknowledgements interrupt a potential turn exchange that can be projected to be initiated by Stephanie, and so he must complete the turn exchange himself. A *so + formulation + explicit turnover phrase* device accomplishes a turn and topic transition in a largely problem-free manner by shifting responsibilities for this action between the two participants.

However a distinguishing feature of this device is that it makes the conclusion of Stephanie's account explicit. This action contrasts with the monitored turn and shared turn where the conclusion was conveyed elliptically by Stephanie via a *so uhm* utterance. This being done then an explicit turnover phrase would not be required to achieve a turn exchange. However it would be required to achieve a topic shift and so potentially complete the reason for the consultation sequence. Ravizza continues beyond the acknowledgement tokens, and temporarily holds the floor to produce a so-prefaced device that accomplishes a turn and topic transition so that it may complete the reasons sequence. Thus *so* has been used as a discourse marker in similar ways to Debby Schiffrin's own talk where as a research interviewer she produces some so-prefaced conclusion and question sequences (Schiffrin, 1987). Similar so-prefaced formulations feature in Heritage and Watson (1979) and Clifton (2006).

Extract 3 displays another alternative so-prefaced turn transition and topic transition device being used to

accomplish the reason for the consultation sequence. *So* functions in this device by shifting responsibilities for accomplishing this action between the speaker and hearer. *So + formulation + explicit turnover phrase* is a functional adaptation of the canonical form of *so + explicit turnover phrase* for achieving a turn and topic transition that is initiated by the hearer.

Discussion

The three sport psychologists use *so* to mark potential turn and topic transitions in the reasons for the consultation sequence in similar ways to those found in qualitative research interviews by Schiffrin (1987). However they deploy so-prefaced utterances differently. Of course, this finding is provisional given the caveats of a small corpus of three consultations and the contrived nature of these interactions in an instructional sport psychology video. The natural-contrived nature of data and context is a matter of some concern in the discourse analysis community (cf., Lynch, 2002; Potter, 2002; Speer, 2002a, 2002b; Ten Have, 2002). The limited attention devoted to the matter in this paper should not be read as the author's indifference to the issue. Rather, it is taken to direct attention to the issue of whether to expect more or less variation in the performance of eminent sport psychologists.

The variation in so-prefaced turn and topic transitions by eminent sport psychologists would surprise many in the sport psychology community where the expert-novice paradigm holds a commanding theoretical position. Thus experts are conceptualised as displaying more consistent, higher-level performance. Therefore many in the sport psychology community would approach Virtual Sport Psychology: Three Approaches to Sport Psychology Consulting (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000) anticipating seeing less variability in practitioner's micro-skills and some differences on the larger canvas of therapeutic orientation. Instead, the three sport psychologists display three different methods for closing the reason for the sport psychology consultation sequence. A fine-grained analysis of this sport psychologist-client talk show them exploiting the local organisation of talk to advance the conversation by adjusting the allocated responsibilities for achieving a particular interactional task. Different so-prefaced methods were useful for maintaining orderly talk and achieving the reasons for the consultation sequence.

These provisional but unexpected findings may question how we conceptualise the expert performance of eminent sport psychologists? Succinctly put, what distinguishes the skillfulness of the expert sport psychologist from competence of the skilled everyday conversationalist?

Let me briefly elaborate on this to focus attention back to the original research question. Does recovering the elliptical meaning of the conclusion when a client utters *so uhm* in a monitored or shared turn, or

extracting and stating the conclusion via a *so* + *formulation* in a completed turn demonstrate ordinary conversational competence?

Heritage and Watson (1979) provide an example of a so-prefaced formulation that displays such ordinary conversational competence.

Extract 4: Example 1 (Heritage & Watson, 1979, p. 125)

((Lines 1-11 omitted))

- 12 C: She decided to go away this weekend. =
 13 E: = Yeah
 14→ C: .hhh (.) So that (.) y'know I really don't have
 a place ti'stay
 15 E: .hO::h.
 (0.4)
 16→ E: .hh So you're not gonna go up this weekend?

Alternatively, is recovering the elliptical meaning of the conclusion when a client utters *so uhm* in a monitored or shared turn, or extracting and stating the conclusion via a *so* + *formulation* in a completed turn, a display of extraordinary conversational competence?

Clifton (2006) provides an example of a so-prefaced formulation that displays extraordinary conversational competence in his work on leadership.

Extract 5: DUF 15: 030 (Clifton, 2005, p. 211)

- 1 Ray: we've probably got half a day's work to stitch it
 2 Yann: () cut them cross cut all the pieces match them
 [so you'd] so you'd have=
 3 Ray: [right]
 4 Yann: =you'd have a good day if not two
 5 Ray: yeah but I could go that route because our biggest
 problem is sheeting it
 6 Yann: even if you stitch up all those leaves and then ()
 7→Nick: okay alright so Smiths we're happy with apart
 from the stick marks
 8 Y:R:B: yeah

Notwithstanding the various contributions that Three Approaches to Sport Psychology Consulting (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Petitpas, 2000) can make as a teaching and learning tool, a fine-grained examination of this work can occasion new discussions about the nature of expertise in psychological practice. These discussions have a reflexive element as they shape methods for training novice practitioners. It is hoped that this exploratory work advances talk in the sport psychology and pragmatics communities about what characterises discursive expertise in psychology and other health professions.

Appendix A

Some Transcription Conventions (Jefferson, 2004).

- : An utterance is prolonged or elongated.
 = Signals talk that is latched to a previous turn.
 (.) A brief untimed pause less than 0.2 seconds.

- (0.4) A 0.4 second pause in conversation.
 .hhh An audible in-breath.
 t.hhh A tch sound followed by an audible in-breath.
 hhh An audible out-breath.
 °text° Whispered or reduced volume speech.
 ((text)) Annotated text provided by the transcriber.

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Additional Information

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