

The Discourse Particle “So” at Anchor Position in the American Television Drama “Friends” —Adumbrating a Teleological Conversation—

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Abstract

This paper examines the teleological function of the discourse particle “so” at the anchor positions of conversations found in the American television series “Friends”. Anchor position is a conversation analytic term that refers to the point in the interaction at which the preliminary sequences to initiate a conversation, such as the greeting sequences and the “how are you” sequences, have been completed, and the next relevant action is the indication of the reason for the interaction’s launching. That is, anchor position is located at the border between the opening of a conversation and the first utterance in the main body of a conversation. The discourse particle “so” appears at anchor position in conversations with a teleological orientation. This study provides tentative evidence that the discourse particle “so” in anchor position adumbrates that the speaker has a purpose in starting the conversation; in other words, conversations that are initiated at anchor position with a discourse particle “so” foreshadow a conversational purpose—these conversations are not just for friendly chitchat.

Keywords: So, Discourse Particle, Anchor Position, Conversation Analysis

1. Introduction

Discourse particles are a ubiquitous feature of natural interaction. In fact, discourse particles are so frequent that some scholars have claimed that they appear with—prepare yourself for a solidly oxymoronic adverb—exceptional regularity: Jucker & Smith (1998) claim that discourse particles appear once every five seconds in natural conversations; Frank-Job (2006) goes as far as to claim that discourse particles permeate conversational structure itself. Indeed, as these scholars suggest, omnipresence is one of the central characteristics of discourse particles. Yet, the importance of discourse particles goes well beyond their high frequency in interaction. As many scholars who have adopted a relevance theoretic framework have demonstrated, discourse particles are important procedural signals concerning how to interpret and relate utterances in

conversations, and are therefore important clues as to how communication is achieved (Blakemore 2002; Schourup 2001). That is, discourse particles are signals as to which way the speaker intends the interlocutor to understand an utterance in relation to everything else that has been said in the interaction up to that point (Halliday & Hasan 1976). In a word, conversation, while not being impossible by any means, would be severely hampered without the presence of discourse particles.

Of course, different discourse particles convey different things; each discourse particle relates distinct interpretive procedures. Research has demonstrated that the discourse particle “oh” signals a change in cognitive states (Heritage 1984), or that certain questions were conversationally inapposite (Heritage 1998), that the discourse particle “okay” indicates the culmination of a sequential activity and the progression to something new (Beach 1995), or adumbrates an extended turn (O’Neal 2010), and that the discourse particle “well” adumbrates a dispreferred second pair part (Pomerantz 1984), prefaces a sequential counter (O’Neal 2011), or an indirect but preferred sequential second pair part (Schegloff & Lerner 2009).

This paper, however, focuses on only one particular discourse particle in a very specific sequential context: the discourse particle “so” in anchor position. Anchor position is a unique sequential position for two reasons: it occurs only once in an interaction; and it occurs directly after the conversational preliminaries and right before the main body of the conversation. The discourse particle “so” has a salient tendency to appear in anchor position. Yet, the discourse particle “so” does not systematically appear in anchor position; in fact, the discourse particle “so” seems to only appear at anchor position when the conversation initiator has a specific purpose to start the conversation to begin with. And that is the central claim of this study to which we now turn.

2. Previous Studies

The methodology of this study is based on three concepts—one of which, unfortunately, directly militates against the justification for one of the others, and therefore this study has a somewhat unsteady foundation. Accordingly, the three ideas upon which this study is based are in tenuous relation to each other. Specifically, this study adopts conversation analytic methodology to explicate the motivation for the usage of the discourse particle “so” found in the American television drama “Friends.” Therefore, what exactly discourse particles are—and are not—will be delineated first and then defined. Next, after a brief introduction to the central theoretical premises of conversation analysis, how conversation analytic methodology will be employed to explain the behavior of the discourse particle “so” will be stated. Last, the data set utilized in this study will be justified, especially vis-a-vis a central tenet of conversation analytic research methodology: only recorded natural interactions are valid research

data.

2.1. Discourse particles

In this section, the category to which the object of this study, the discourse particle “so”, belongs will be explicated. Furthermore, a critical distinction will be made between discourse markers and discourse particles. Last, discourse particles will be defined, and it will be argued that the “so” that appears in the data set is better categorized as a discourse particle than a discourse marker.

2.1.1. The Definition of Discourse Markers and Discourse Particles

In older and more traditional forms of linguistics, discourse markers and discourse particles were conceptualized as manifestations of linguistic performance rather than linguistic competence, and therefore described as the detritus of language processing—the linguistic version of bovine flatulence, a product of a process, and not an intrinsic part of the process—and accordingly not worthy of serious scholarship. This standpoint can still be found in fields of linguistics that accord a superlative importance to syntax, usually on the basis of the idea that syntax is linguistically prior to all other facets of language.

Yet, with the advent of sociolinguistic methodology to the study of non-syntactic elements in language praxis, pioneered by Schiffrin (1987) and Schourup (1985), the importance of components of language that are not easily limited to syntactic categorization was revealed. One of the premises upon which all sociolinguistics is based is that interaction is prior to syntax; that is, sociocultural facets affecting language use “precede” syntactic form. Schiffrin’s pioneering work on discourse markers was succeeded by scholarship heavily influenced by Relevance Theory, especially that of Blakemore (2002), which claimed that discourse markers are intertwined with the assumptions speakers and interlocutors make concerning maximum applicable relevance to utterances in conversations.

However, over two decades of research has not inevitably led to an agreed-upon definition that describes all discourse particles. Indeed, what is referred to as discourse particles in this study are referred to as “response cries” (Goffman 1981), “cue phrases” (Pierrehumbert & Hirschberg 1990), “discourse markers” (Rendle-Short 2003), “lexical fillers” (James 1983), “tokens” (Kasper 2009), “receipt tokens” (Young & Lee 2004), “sequential markers” (Sidnell 2010), “connectives” (Halliday & Hasan 1976), and “pragmatic markers” (Ajimer, Foolen, & Simon-Vandenberg 2006) by other scholars. As the plethora of terminology suggests, what discourse particles are—and are not—is a question that is still very much alive and unsettled.

Accordingly, this study needs to define what discourse particles are before proceeding any further, in order to avoid potential confusion. This study adopts the descriptive framework advocated by Fischer (2006) to categorize discourse particles.

Fischer's framework is malleable enough to describe the heterogeneous nature of discourse particles, many of which are synchronically derived from different parts of speech, but it does, however, sacrifice taxonomic exactitude for an eclectic mode of categorization. First, pointing out that not every discourse particle will qualify for every characterization in his descriptive framework, Fischer (2006) reminds us that words which qualify under more of the tenets of the framework are simply more closely approximate to the ideal discourse particle and words which qualify for a lesser number of the tenets of the framework simply less closely approximate an ideal discourse particle. Therefore, this malleable framework captures the fact that discourse particles are a category of heterogeneous, indeed borderline mysterious, lexical items and makes allowances for that fact.

According to Fischer's descriptive framework, the first characteristic of discourse particles concerns their relationship with syntax: discourse particles are not part of syntactic structures; that is, discourse particles operate on a plane separate from that of syntax (Schiffrin 1987; Fischer 2006). Furthermore, discourse particles are monosemous; in other words, discourse particles express one core meaning that can be interpreted with different shades of connotation depending on the context (Blakemore 2002; Fischer 2006). Discourse particles also signal the procedure with which the speaker intends the interlocutor to interpret the utterance in relation to everything else (Blakemore 2002; Schourup 2001; Fischer 2006). As such, discourse particles generally do not convey conceptual meanings although there is some scholarly disagreement about exactly how much discourse particles add to the conceptual meaning of utterances in certain languages (Borderia 2008; Fraser 2006). In a word, discourse particles mainly affect the procedural meaning of an utterance, but also sometimes have a minor effect on conceptual meanings.

Another key feature of discourse particles is that they are semantically "bleached"; that is, the original semantic meaning of the lexical item from which the discourse particle is etymologically derived has been bleached out of existence and replaced with an entirely pragmatic meaning instead. In the case of the discourse particle "so", the original coordinating conjunction meaning of "as a result" (I like curry, so I went to India), or the intensifier meaning roughly approximate to the meaning of "very" (I like curry so much), or the anaphoric (indeed, just "phoric") adverb of manner (He always cooks his curry just so), are not present in the discourse particle usage of "so". Instead, the discourse particle "so" conveys a procedural meaning to the interlocutor, a hint of what is to come.

Semantic bleaching is the central difference between discourse particles and discourse markers. In contrast to discourse particles, discourse markers retain some of the original semantic content inherent in the word from which the discourse marker is derived. For example, the discourse marker "you know" retains some of the original meaning that refers to cognitive states (Fischer 2006; Macaulay 2000). Furthermore, the

discourse marker “I mean” continues to utilize some of the original meaning of the verb in self-repair in conversation (Wong & Zhang Waring 2010). That is, discourse markers are not fully semantically bleached although they seem to currently be in such a process.

A final characteristic of discourse particles is their sensitivity to sequential position. Depending on where they are deployed in interaction, discourse particles have different connotations (O’Neal 2010, 2011). Indeed, the procedural meaning that discourse particles convey to the interlocutor can change fairly substantially depending on where a discourse particle was deployed in a sequential exchange (Sidnell 2007, O’Neal 2010).

2.1.2. The Discourse Particle “So”

We now specifically turn to the previous studies concerning the discourse particle “so” . If it can be justifiably claimed that the discourse particle “well” is the most studied discourse particle of all, then the exact opposite can be claimed of the discourse particle “so” : the discourse particle “so” is the most understudied discourse particle of all. There is a dearth of studies concerning this important linguistic phenomenon.

Bolden (2006, 2008) was the first scholar to systematically examine the discourse particle “so” in first pair part positions in interactional sequences. According to Bolden (2006, 2008), the discourse particle “so” is deployed when the speaker begins to implement “incipient actions” ; that is, the speaker prefaces their first pair part utterances with the discourse particle “so” when the action they are about to initiate represents an action that is not directly coordinated with immediately prior talk. This means that the discourse particle “so” is a type of topical disjunction signal, which explicitly marks the conversational contribution subsequent to the discourse particle “so” is not a topical outgrowth of the previous talk.

Some textbook authors have gone as far as to claim that the discourse particle “so” adumbrates a topic transition (McCarthy, McCarten, & Sandiford 2006). Other scholars have argued that the discourse particle “so” prefaces an orientation to a new topic in institutional talk or even ordinary conversations (Rendle-Short 2003; Ruhlemann 2007). What is clear, however, in many studies, is that the discourse particle “so” in first pair part initial position adumbrates a transition to something not directly related to the previous talk. Whether the discourse particle “so” indicates a topical transition or simply represents a conversational “disjunction” in the works is still something that scholars continue to debate.

However, the discourse particle “so” does not manifest only in first pair part position. Both Raymond (2004) and Schiffrin (1987) examined the discourse particle “so” in sequential post-expansion environments, that is, after the production of a sequential second pair part, but before the production of what the interlocutors treated as a new sequential first pair part. According to Raymond (2004), the discourse particle “so” found in post-expansions, after the second pair part, but before the initiation of a new

sequential action with another first pair part, indicates a prompting action on the part of the speaker; that is, if the producer of the second pair part fails to fulfill a relevant action from the perspective of the first pair part speaker, the initial speaker can deploy a discourse particle “so”, which is designed to be treated as requesting further talk from the producer of the second pair part. In particular, the discourse particle “so” deployed in post expansions informs the interlocutor that another action and/or a further action was expected at a previous point.

2.2. Conversation Analytic Methodology

The analysis within this study relies on the methodology advocated by conversation analysis (hereafter, CA). CA is an ethnographic theory of social and linguistic interaction that views interaction as sequentially unfolding, participant-driven, and practice-oriented, and thus it can be investigated for its underlying normative mechanics; that is, interaction of all sorts is permeated with organization, a maxim which underlies Harvey Sacks’s famous dictum: “order at all points” (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson 1974; Heritage 1984, Levinson 1983, Stivers 2005, Schegloff 2007, Seedhouse 2004). Putting it more simply, CA theory claims that any instance or facet of interaction is consequential for the participants of the interaction in some way: any little “uh”, any minor “um”, or in-breath of air, no matter how seemingly irrelevant or inconsequential, performs something relevant to the interaction. This is not the same as claiming that any example of interactional praxis is equally relevant for conversational participants—that is clearly not the case—but CA does insist that nothing performed by the interactants can be, *a priori*, discounted as random or meaningless. Furthermore, CA research methodology is fairly rigorous: CA demands that all research data be recorded natural interaction—and this study will attempt to justify flouting this demand in one limited sequential instance (Ten Have 2007).

2.2.1. Adjacency Pairs and Preference Structure

CA demands a sequential account of the interaction; in other words, CA analysts cannot justifiably claim what any utterance is doing in interaction until after another interactional participant has reacted to it and displayed their understanding, *in situ*, as to how they treated the previous addition to the interaction (Schegloff 2007). In other words, CA does not treat utterances in isolation; CA always attempts to analyze utterances in a pair-wise, unfolding fashion. The analyst can only claim that an utterance was a question after someone else has answered it, that is, oriented to it like a question. In CA methodology, the fact that a grammatical operator has syntactically

1 This statement ignores the prospective orientation in interaction to which interactants sometimes orient: pre-sequences (Schegloff 1980). There are a number of cases in which interactants are able to foreshadow what discourse actions are in the works, and design their conversational contributions to lead to situations in which the desired context is co-constructed.

moved to the beginning of a clause, or the fact that a noun phrase has transformed into an interrogative word and moved to the beginning of a clause, is not enough to warrant the claim that an utterance is a question. The only thing that can warrant the claim that an utterance is a question is if the interlocutor treats the utterance as a question and responds to it as such. Accordingly, CA has a retrospective analytical orientation.¹

This brings us to adjacency pairs, one of the central components in CA. Adjacency pairs are combined utterances that interactants orient to as if the utterances belonged together. For example, if one conversation participant produces a greeting, the other participant is obligated to produce another greeting: a responding greeting is conditionally relevant. If one person asks a question, then the interlocutor is obligated to provide an answer: an answer is conditionally relevant. Utterances that obligate the production of another utterance are referred to as First Pair Parts (hereafter, FPPs), and utterances that are produced in order to fulfill the obligations set by the conditional relevance of FPPs are called Second Pair Parts (hereafter, SPPs). When one greeting obligates the production of another greeting and receives one, and when a question obligates the production of an answer and receives one, then one FPP has obligated and received the production of a SPP, and this is called a sequence of pragmatically paired utterances, or just a “sequence” for short.²

Of course, the meaning of “obligate” is fairly weak in CA because nobody is really obligated to produce a responding greeting after someone else produces one. Further, nobody is really obligated to produce the answer to a question. Indeed, there are cases when greetings are ignored, and questions are responded to, as any teacher knows, with silence and a bevy of blank stares. However, not producing the obligated SPP is interactionally noticeable, and sometimes it is even socially sanctionable (Seedhouse 2004). That is, when the normative obligations produced by utterances are ignored, for whatever reason, interactants often notice it, and even react to the absence of the obligated response in such a way as to notify the offending interlocutor. Accordingly, it must be pointed out that adjacency pairs and sequences are not described as linguistic rules and invariant regularities in CA literature, as some scholars have mistakenly criticized (Eggs & Slade 2005; Cameron 2001). Instead, Adjacency Pairs are normative expectations, not linguistic rules, with which interlocutors make sense of and assess the relative level of affiliation in the talk as it sequentially unfolds (Seedhouse 2004).

2 There are other schools of thought that conceptualize the basic unit of interactional discourse as a three-part unit, not a two-part unit (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975; Goffman 1981). However, there is a growing body of work that demonstrates the two-part unit is the basic unit of discourse. Although three-part exchanges are frequent in interaction, it is the addition of the third component to interaction that requires the extra analysis, not the absence of a third component from exchanges composed of only two units (Schegloff 2007). For example, it is very difficult to claim that the absence of a third component in a greeting-greeting sequence is in any way “marked.” Indeed, the addition of a third component to such a sequence, while by no means unheard of or even impossible, would likely result in a very marked interaction.

However, there is another way in which interactants display affiliation to each other. Often, simply producing a SPP is not sufficient to display affiliation during interaction. Although some FPPs obligate the production of very certain SPPs—FPP greetings usually only obligate the production of SPP greetings of the same or similar type—many FPPs obligate the production of one of different types of SPPs: preferred SPPs, and dispreferred SPPs (Schegloff 2007; Sidnell 2010). For example, a request FPP could be responded to with an SPP formulated as an acceptance or compliance: this would be interactionally preferred, in the sense that it is affiliative with the previous action. However, inversely, the same request FPP could be responded to with a refusal SPP: this would be interactionally dispreferred, in the sense that it is disaffiliative with the previous action. Preferred SPPs are interactionally affiliative, furthering the action trajectory at hand, and usually lead to sequential completion. Dispreferred SPPs are interactionally disaffiliative, and typically lead to sequence expansion, and even accountings for the disaffiliation displayed in the interaction (Seedhouse 2004).

2.2.2. Conversation Structure

One of the other key findings of CA is that conversations, and all interactions in general, are systematically ordered. In fact, as Schegloff (2010) and Frank-Job (2006) have demonstrated that there is a level of organization to a conversation superordinate to the sequence. Indeed, a conversation, as a single unit, can be divided into three main sections: a conversational opening, an infinitely expandable main body of the conversation, and the conversational closing. This may seem a prosaic claim—indeed, it may seem quotidian in the extreme—but it is important to remember that it is the interactants that co-create the openings and closings of conversations: the interactants are the ones who decide how to, and when to, move from the opening of the conversation to the main body of the conversation; it is the interactants that decide how and when to stop expanding the main body of the conversation and move into the conversation closing. This is, however, admittedly a pragmatically defined distinction: conversation opening sequences are preliminary to the main body of the conversation only in the sense that they are designed to establish the availability of the interactants for conversing, and in that sense alone they are distinct from the sequences found in the main body of a conversation, which typically realize quite different sequential actions.

The opening sequences of a conversation are defined as sequences that establish the identities of the interactants, and establish their mutual availability for conversing (Schegloff 2007, 2010; Frank-Job 2006). The sequences that permeate the opening of a conversation often include summons-answer sequences, greeting sequences, and “how are you” sequences (Schegloff 2010). On the other hand, the sequences that predominate in conversation closings include pre-closing sequences, such as “Well, I gotta go” coupled with “okay, see you later”, and terminal “goodbye” sequences that actually

signal the termination of the conversational turn-taking system itself (Schegloff 2007, Beach 1995).

2.2.3. Anchor Position

Anchor Position is a special phenomenon in CA because it manifests in a conversation only once each interaction. Anchor Position refers to the point of transition between the conversation opening sequences and the first utterance in the main body of the conversation. That is, Anchor Position marks the location between the conversation preliminaries and the main body of the conversation itself.

An example of an anchor position in a telephone conversation will illustrate this position in conversational structure. In the example below, Marsha calls Sue to inform Sue that Marsha has procured the tickets for the occasion that had talked about before.

Schegloff 2010 (11) Susan & Marcia, 1 (#1) (Page 147)

00		ring	}	Conversational Opening Sequences
01	Sue:	H' llo:		
02	Mar:	Hi: 's Sue there?		
03	Sue:	Yeah, this is sheɪ		
04	Mar:	Hi this's Mar:cia.		
05	Sue:	Hi Marcia, how're you:.=	}	First sequence in the main body of the telephone conversation
06	Mar:	=Fine how're youɪ=		
07	Sue:	=Fi:neɪ		
08	➡ Mar:	Uh::m: We got the tickets, [and's ()		
09	Sue:	[Oh goo:d.]		

A sequential analysis of the above extract proceeds from the ringing of the phone, the first conversational move of this interaction, a summons. Any action that is designed to evoke a response or designed to respond to an action can be considered a conversational move (Goffman 1981; Olsher 2004). The phone ringing is definitely not a conversational contribution in the ordinary sense, but it does convey the sense that the person who telephones the receiver that they expect a reply. When Sue answers the phone in line 01, she is responding to the summons. Accordingly, the phone ring is the first pair part of the initial summons-answer sequence while Sue’s “H’ llo” is the second pair part of that sequence.

Next, Marsha dutifully begins the classic telephone conversational opening sequences: a greeting sequence, an identification sequence, and a “how are you” sequence. In line 02, Marsha simultaneously begins a greeting-greeting sequence and an identification-confirmation sequence in the same turn. Sue confirms her identity, only producing the SPP to the identification-confirmation sequence (line 03). This completes an identification-confirmation sequence. However, the SPP of the greeting-greeting sequence has yet to be produced; it is still an interactionally relevant next action.

In line 04, Marsha produces the first pair part of another greeting-greeting sequence, and the first pair part of a self-identification-recognition sequence. Sue produces the second pair part to both the greeting-greeting sequence and the self-identification-recognition sequence in line 05, and then begins to produce the first pair part of a new sequence, the “how are you” sequence, to which Marsha produces the preferred second pair part with no gap at all between their utterances, orienting to Sue’s utterance as a highly formulaic, pro-forma question. Next, Marsha produces the first pair part of another “how are you” sequence, and Sue produces the preferred second pair part, which is also produced with no gap between their utterances, demonstrating Sue’s orientation to Marsha’s utterance as another extremely formulaic, pro-forma conversation opening monotony.

It is at this point, the point after which all of the opening sequences have been completed, the summons-answer sequence, the greeting-greeting sequence, the identification-confirmation sequence, the self-identification-recognition sequence, the “how are you” - “how are you” sequence, and the availability of the participants to converse has been established as a result, that the conversation itself can begin. This point is called “the anchor point.” It is in this location that the reason for the call, if there is one, is commonly revealed. That is, the anchor point is the first point in the conversation in which sequences that are not pro-forma or required just to initiate a conversation itself can be deployed. This is not to say that the reason for the telephone call are always revealed at anchor point, but rather that this is the first location at which they can be revealed.

2.3. Justifying the American Television Drama “Friends” as Conversation Analytic Data for the analysis of face-to-face conversation beginnings

As mentioned in the previous section, CA demands that all research data be recorded natural conversation data; any research data that is based on the intuitive thought-processes of the scholar, or is the creation of a screenwriter and enacted by paid thespians is automatically suspect, and any claims based on such data would instantly have to be qualified as the invention of a highly overpaid Hollywood executive. There is an extremely good basis for this: only research based on natural, unscripted interactions can provide the basis for a claim about naturally occurring interactional practices.

In spite of the demands of CA, and even the reasonable stipulations CA places on research data, this study advocates the usage of the American television drama “Friends” as CA data. How can this departure from conversation analytic standards be justified? CA studies have provided a wealth of publically available naturally recorded data to be researched. The justification for utilizing “Friends” as CA data cannot be based on the claim that there is not enough data to be studied—there clearly is. However, there is one specific type of interaction that the banks of publically available

CA data entirely lack: conversation beginnings not on the telephone. CA began with the analysis of telephone conversation beginnings (Schegloff 1968), but, as yet, there is no publically available set of face-to-face conversation beginnings (Wong & Zhang Waring 2010). There is an extremely good reason for this state of affairs. There is a specific name in legal jurisprudence for natural conversations recorded from the very beginning of the interaction: illegal wire-tapping. Recording conversation requires the consent of the interactants, which at the very least requires the analyst to inform the conversation participants that they are on camera, which obviates the possibility of a face-to-face conversation to begin naturally. That is to say, in order to get consent, the participants must have already progressed beyond the anchor point of the interaction simply to express their consent to be recorded. This goes beyond an “observer’s paradox” because attaining the consent of the conversation participants automatically takes the interaction past the point of interest for this study: anchor point. Accordingly, for legal, ethical, and pragmatic reasons, recordings of natural face-to-face conversation beginnings are unavailable.

Yet, the claim that there is no conversation analytic data recorded from the very beginnings of the interaction is only half-true: there is a plethora of recorded telephone interactions, most of which include the conversation beginnings. There is, however, no reason to believe that the beginnings of conversations on the telephone are the same as face-to-face conversation beginnings. At the very least, in most of the publically available telephone recording data, one of the participants of the conversation was unaware of the identification of the other participant before the conversation began. The mutual establishment of identities inevitably extends the length of the conversation opening. Furthermore, telephone conversations can always be assumed to be somewhat teleological: nobody accidentally picks up a phone and calls someone. Face-to-face conversations, however, can be simply relational, which indicates that the conversation is aimed towards maintaining social relationships, or purposeful, which means that the conversation is initiated for some transactional purpose. Accordingly, there are good reasons to assume that telephone conversations are not the same as face-to-face conversations and, therefore, cannot serve as proxy data for face-to-face conversation openings.

Accordingly, because of the inherent difficulties and moral restrictions in collecting data on naturally occurring conversational beginnings, this study advocates the study of conversational openings in the American television series “Friends” as the best set of publically available proxy data; that is, the conversations found in “Friends” is “as close as it gets to the real thing without committing a crime” . This is not to claim that conversational openings in this television series are the same as natural face-to-face conversation openings, but until the moral dilemmas inherent in collecting data on face-to-face conversational openings are resolved, some proxy set of data has to be used to explicate the manifestations of face-to-face conversational openings.

This study claims that the data in the American television drama “Friends” is an adequate set of proxy data. This claim is based on the understanding that the English found in “Friends” is roughly approximate to the English found in natural conversations. In fact, according to Quaglio (2009), who compared the English found in “Friends” with Biber’s (1988) corpus of naturally recorded English, the English found in “Friends” “shares the core linguistic features that characterize natural conversation” (139). However, as Quaglio himself is quick to point out, sharing core linguistic features is not the same thing as complete equivalency. In fact, although the English found in “Friends” and Biber’s (1988) corpus contained roughly an equivalent amount of various markers of informality and emotional language, the English of “Friends” lacks an equivalent amount of markers of vague language and has a lower degree of narrativeness (Quaglio 2009). Furthermore, it must be stated that the English found in “Friends” also has a near complete absence of overlaps and interruptions, which has been indentified as a constituent feature of natural interaction (Schegloff 2000) ³. The comparative disparity of overlap and interruptions was not one of the features Quaglio investigated in his otherwise very thorough monograph.

This study is cognizant that the English found in “Friends” is not a one-to-one clone of naturally occurring English, even if many of the features of the English found in “Friends” and the English found in Biber’s (1988) corpus of natural English are roughly equivalent. Furthermore, this study is also aware of the reasons, and even agrees with the rationale, as to why conversation analysis demands that only naturally recorded data be subject to analysis. However, as of yet, there is no set of data of naturally recorded face-to-face conversation beginnings. Therefore, this study claims that a set of proxy data can be justifiably employed in this one instance, and even then only until a set of naturally occurring data has been procured; that is, this study insists that a non-natural set of data can be utilized only when a similar set of naturally occurring is not available. Any findings are, accordingly, tentative, as well as predicated on the hope that a better study, based on real data, will later appear.

3. Methodology

First, two seasons of “Friends” was selected as a data set. This study utilizes season nine and season ten of “Friends” as the research data set. Season nine contains twenty-four episodes, for a total of about twelve hours of data, and season ten contains

3 This does not mean that there are no overlaps and silences in the English in the television show “Friends.” Indeed, there are examples of this. However, it seems to be something that is less prevalent in “Friends” than it is in naturalistic conversation corpuses. One of the major elements Quaglio (2009) did not investigate during his comparsion and analysis of “Friends” and natural English is overlaps. Accordingly, it’s hard to say at how much a variance “Friends” overlaps are with natural conversations.

eighteen episodes, for a total of about nine hours of data. Therefore, this study’s data set includes over twenty-one hours of data. Next, all examples of conversations in the data set prefaced with the discourse particle “so” at anchor positions were identified. Then, representative examples of conversations with the discourse particle “so” in anchor position were transcribed according to Jeffersonian transcription conventions (see appendix 1 for transcription conventions). Lastly, the transcripts were subject to an analysis informed by CA methodology, and the practices underlying the deployment of the discourse particle “so” at anchor position in face-to-face conversations were deduced.

4. Results

In this section, a number of conversation beginnings found in the data set will be analyzed according to CA methodology. The analysis will begin with fairly canonical cases of the deployment of the discourse particle “so” , and then move on to less canonical cases of discourse particle “so” placement. Last, a deviant case analysis will also be provided, but as the details of the deviant case reveal, even the deviant case demonstrates an underlying orientation to the normative practices involved in the deployment of the discourse particle “so” at anchor position in interaction.

4.1. Conversations with a discourse particle “so” at anchor position

In the following example, Joey returns to his apartment and begins a conversation with Rachael. Joey and Rachael had previously decided to begin an intimate relationship, but both had decided to relate that information to Ross, who is Rachael’s ex-boyfriend, and Joey’s best friend, before they began. However, they had previously agreed that Rachael should be the first one to tell Ross about their impending relationship. They agree to meet again later the same day after Rachael has informed Ross of their decision. The example below begins just before Joey returns to ask Rachael if she has informed Ross of their potential relationship. After Joey enters the apartment, he launches a greetings sequence, to which Rachael provides the preferred second pair part, and completes the sequence (lines 01-02). After the greeting sequence is completed, the conversation moves from the conversational opening to the main body of the conversation (lines 03-07). This example demonstrates a canonical case.

Joey & Rachael (“Friends” , 2005, Season 10, Episode 1)

- | | | |
|----|----------|---|
| 01 | Joey: | Hey |
| 02 | Rachael: | Hi |
| 03 | ➔ Joey: | So, did ju, uh, did ju tell Ross? |
| 04 | Rachael | Well, I tried. (.) But then he had uh shampoo related |
| | : | emergency. (1.0) ((Rachael’s |

- 05 eyes are pointed to the ceiling and meet Joey's gaze again
 during the in-breath))
- 06 Hhh. So I guess now it's your turn again.
- 07 Joey: No no no, no no no.

The only sequence in the conversational opening in the example above is in line 01 and 02, a canonical greeting sequence?canonical in the sense that the sequence is not expanded and thoroughly expected. However, a minimal number of sequences in the conversational opening is common in the English found in "Friends" , so this is hardly unusual, and indeed may be one of the key differences between telephone conversation openings and face-to-face conversation openings, if indeed the English found in "Friends" is representative of real English at all. In line 01, Joey says, "Hey" , and Rachael replies with "hi" , indicating that Rachael orients to Joey's "Hey" as a greeting and responds accordingly. The culmination of this sequence establishes that both participants are available for conversing.

In line 03, Joey produces a syntactic yes/no question, to which Rachael orients to as an information request, and produces a non-conforming answer (Raymond 2003) to Joey's question along with an account for failure to notify Ross of their potential relationship after a micro-pause in line 04. During the account for her failure to inform Ross of their potential relationship, Rachael has broken conversational gaze (Goodwin 1980), and this could account for the lack of uptake on the part of Joey after Rachael's account has reached a point of possible completion. After one second of silence, Rachael produces the first pair part of a request-acceptance sequence after a strong in-breath, which strongly augurs the production of an utterance, in line 06, to which Joey demonstrates his understanding of as a request by flatly refusing the request in line 07 in a very dispreferred manner without any of the hesitations or other hallmarks of dispreferred actions; that is, to utilize the parlance of politeness theory, Joey's refusal is very bald and on record. Accordingly, the preferred second pair part of the request-acceptance sequence Rachael attempted to interactionally achieve was never realized.

What needs to be pointed out at this point is that a discourse particle "so" appeared at the anchor point in this conversation. Again, the anchor point is the first available slot in the conversation in which the purpose of the conversation can be revealed. The fact that Joey initially asks about Ross indexes a very important facet of this conversation: Joey orients to Rachael's telling Ross as the most important business at hand, revealed by the fact that this was the first topic of the conversation. This, in turn, demonstrates that Joey had a teleological purpose when initiating the conversation. At the first available slot in the conversation to initiate a topic, Joey proceeds to launch a sequence designed to ascertain the success or failure of Rachael's task. Moreover, the fact that the discourse particle "so" is located at exactly anchor position is relevant to

the participants. Neither participant orients to the discourse particle “so” as a grammatical unit. In the above example, the discourse particle “so”, located at anchor position in the conversation, adumbrates a thoroughly teleological conversation, one which is oriented to by both participants as such.

An additional example of the deployment of the discourse particle “so” will illustrate how it is used in face-to-face conversation beginnings to adumbrate a teleological purpose. In the following example, Monica, who is a professional chef at an up-scale Manhattan restaurant, enters the coffee shop where her brother, Ross, and best friend, Phoebe, are sitting and chatting. The conversation begins with conversation opening sequences (lines 01-04), and then moves into the main body of the conversation (lines 05-09).

Monica, Phoebe, and Ross: (“Friends” , 2002, Season 9, Episode 19)

- 01 Monica: Hey ((to Phoebe))
02 Phoebe: Hey
03 Monica: Hey ((to Ross))
04 Ross: Hey
05 ➡ Monica: So, do you guys want to come and eat dinner at the
 restaurant sometime in the
06 next few weeks?
07 Ross: [I'd love to]=
08 Phoebe: [Sure:.....]=
09 Monica: =well you can't. (2.5) We're booked solid for the next month.

The conversation above begins with the conversational openings, which consists of two separate greeting sequences, one directed to Phoebe, and another one directed to Ross. First, Monica produces a single “hey” (line 01), to which Phoebe produces a counter “hey” (line 02), demonstrating that Phoebe orients to Monica’s initial “hey” as the first pair part of a greeting-greeting sequence. Next, Monica produces another “hey” directed toward Ross (line 03), who responds with another “hey”, which shows that Ross also orients to Monica’s “hey” in line 03 as another greeting. At this point, the conversational openings have been completed and the availability of the interactants for conversation has been established.

Having completed the conversational opening sequences, Monica moves the conversation into the main body of the conversation, and produces an opening gambit that syntactically seems to be an offer (line 05-06). Indeed, in lines 07-08, Ross and Phoebe respond with alacrity to Monica’s utterance with an orientation to it as if it were an understood as a syntactic offer. Both Ross and Phoebe self-select as the next speaker simultaneously and produce their respective second pair parts of the assumed offer-acceptance sequence simultaneously (indicated by the brackets around both utterances), and both orient to Monica’s utterance in line 05-06 as if it were an offer. If

Monica's utterance in lines 05-06 really were an offer, however, then an offer-acceptance sequence has just been completed and the conversation could move onto other matters. Yet, that is not what happens. In fact, Monica expands the sequence beyond the second pair part, into a post-expansion (line 09). Monica states "well, you can't", and provides an account for the reasons as to why Ross and Phoebe actually can't come to the restaurant after a 2.5 second pause, during which both Ross and Phoebe stare at Monica in a flabbergasted manner. Therefore, in retrospect, Monica's initial sequential move in the main body of the conversation was not actually the first pair part of an offer-acceptance sequence. Rather, it was a pre-telling, a pre-sequential utterance that sets up the sequential conditions felicitous to conveying news (Terasaki 2004, Schegloff 1992). Monica purposely manipulated the innate understanding her interlocutors have for conditional relevance to establish an environment favorable to conveying the information she intended to relate to Ross and Phoebe: that the restaurant at which she is employed is doing very well recently.

Accordingly, by line 09, it has become clear that Monica purposely initiated the conversation with the teleological goal of conveying a very specific bit of information about her place of employment's economic condition to her interlocutors, and that Monica decided to set the stage for the telling through a manipulation of conditional relevance. However, what needs to be pointed out here is that the discourse particle "so" again appears at the anchor point of the conversation. Although the understanding of Monica's utterance in line 05-06 is retrospective for Ross and Phoebe, for Monica, the entire conversation is being teleologically designed from line 05-06 to eventually lead to the information telling in line 09. Therefore, from Monica's perspective, there is a congruence between utilizing a pre-telling masked as an offer to set up conditions relevant for a telling and the prefacing of the whole utterance with the discourse particle "so". Here, as in the other examples above, the discourse particle "so" seems to adumbrate a teleological purpose as the reason for initiating the conversation.

Another example will illustrate the deployment of the discourse particle "so" at anchor position. In the following example, Rachael is about to have an interview at a restaurant with the president of a clothing manufacturer, James Campbell, but she has not yet noticed that James has walked up behind her. The transcript begins just as both Rachael and the president of the company are about to start conversing.

Rachael & the President ("Friends", Season 10, Episode 14)

- | | | |
|----|----------|---|
| 01 | James: | Rachael? |
| 02 | Rachael: | Yes! Hi! ((turns to look at James)) |
| 03 | James: | James Campbell ((extends his hand for a handshake)) |
| 04 | Rachael: | Hi= ((extends her hand and shakes James' hand)) |
| 05 | James: | =Hi. Please. ((motions toward Rachael and the table for her to sit down)) |

06 ((Rachael and James sit down at the table))
07 (4.0)
08 ➡ James: So, your resume is quite impressive.

The interaction in the above example begins with a summons from James Campbell, who calls out to Rachael with her name in line 01. In line 02, Rachael demonstrates her orientation to James’s summons as a summons by spinning around to face James while also saying “yes, hi” . This completes a summons-answer sequence, but the conversation initiation sequences are not yet complete. In line 03, James Campbell deploys the FPP of a self-identification-receipt sequence, and extends his hand for a handshake at the same time, deploying the FPP of two sequences at the same time. Rachael says “hi” again in line 04, indicating receipt of the self-identification, and extends her hand to complete the hand-shake-hand-shake sequence. In turn, James Campbell orients to Rachel’s “hi” in line 04 as the FPP of a greeting-greeting sequence instead of the SPP of a self-identification-receipt sequence, producing yet another “hi” in line 05. Yet, the interactants do not treat this mismatch as problematic in any way and nobody initiates repair or anything that might indicate that a problem had arisen. Rather, James simply says “please” and makes a kinesthetic motion toward the lunch table in line 05. Rachael orients to James’s kinesthetic movement and “please” as a request to sit down, and Rachael sits down in the chair on one side of the lunch table, which completes a request-compliance sequence. Note here that the SPP of the request-compliance sequence was entirely a kinesthetic movement and not a verbal utterance, demonstrating that sequences include elements usually far removed from linguistics proper.

Now that the identities of the interactants have been established and the availability for conversation has been ascertained, the conversation initiation sequences can be considered completed. Indeed, James orients to the interaction thus far as a conversation initiation, and after a four second silence, during which both James and Rachael nestle into their chairs, James moves into the main body of the conversation at anchor point. James states, “So, your resume is quite impressive” in line 08. What needs to be pointed out here, however, is James has elected to choose to start the conversation in accord with the purpose of the interaction? a job interview? and that at anchor position for this purpose-driven conversation, James deploys the discourse particle “so” . That is, at the exact point in which the first topic of conversation can be introduced, the anchor point, James elects to choose a topic directly related to the teleological purpose of the conversation, and he deploys the discourse particle “so” before he does so, adumbrating that he intends to move the conversation into matters related to the reasons as to why both interactants are meeting in the first place.

Another fairly straight-forward example of the discourse particle “so” deployed at anchor point in a very different context will illustrate how the discourse particle “so” is

deployed in various situations, all of which have a teleological purpose. In the following extract, Joey, Mike, Phoebe, and Mary-Ellen are about to go on a double blind date. Although Joey and Phoebe know each other, Mike will meet Phoebe for the first time, and Joey will meet Mary-Ellen for the first time (thus the appellation “blind-date”). The interactants have agreed to meet at a local restaurant, and the transcript begins at the moment in which Phoebe and Mary-Ellen enter the restaurant and saunter over to the table at which Mike and Joey are already seated.

Joey, Mike, Phoebe, & Mary-Ellen (“Friends” , Season 9, Episode 3)

- 00 ((Phoebe and Mary-Ellen enter the restaurant))
 01 Joey: They’re here.
 02 Mike: ((turns his head to look at the door of the restaurant))
 03 (3.0)
 04 Phoebe: Hi. I’m Phoebe. ((to Mike))
 05 Mike: Hi Phoebe. I’m Mike. Nice to [meet you. ((to Phoebe))
 06 Phoebe: [nice to meet you. ((to Mike))
 07 Phoebe: Joey, this is Mary-Ellen Jenkins. ((to Joey))
 08 ((Joey and Mary-Ellen shake hands))
 09 ((Everyone sits down at the table))
 10 ➡ Phoebe: So, Mike, how do you and Joey know each other anyway?

The interaction between all four participants begins in line 04, when Phoebe simultaneously conducts a greeting and an introduction. Mike orients to both of the actions in line 05: the first one is treated as a greeting and Mike produces the requisite SPP; the second is oriented as an introduction and Mike produces the relevant self-introduction. This completes the greeting-greeting and self-introduction sequences. Next, Mike produces a formulaic “nice to meet you” in line 05, and Phoebe produces a matching response with considerable overlap in line 06, indexing exactly how formulaic and normative the expression is in this kind of situation (Wong & Zhang Waring 2010). After that, Phoebe introduces Mary-Ellen to Joey, producing an FPP that obligates a mutual action on the part of both Joey and Mary-Ellen. Both Joey and Mary-Ellen shake hands, producing the expected SPP to Phoebe’s FPP. After the culmination of the conversational preliminaries, the conversation opening sequences, everyone sits down at the table in near-unison, kinesthetically demarcating the boundary between the conversational preliminaries and the main body of the conversation.

Directly after all of the interactants sit down at the table, Phoebe moves the conversation into the main body of the conversation: she asks Mike, “so, Mike, how do you and Joey know each other anyway?” It is important to note that the discourse particle “so” again appears at exactly the anchor position of the interaction. However, it may be claimed that there is no indication of a teleological purpose here. In fact, some may claim that the above example demonstrates that the participants are just chatting

—the above example is just a relational exchange of information. Yet, that interpretation ignores the fact that this interaction is a blind date. The purpose of a blind date is to get to know someone else. Accordingly, the whole interaction has a teleological purpose from the beginning—a very interpersonal purpose, but a purpose nonetheless. Therefore, it is justified to say that the deployment of the discourse particle “so” at anchor position in the above extract is related to the teleological purpose of the interaction.

A further example will again illustrate the application of the discourse particle “so” at anchor position in face-to-face conversations, but this next example is considerably more complex, consisting of many more sequences. In the following example, Ross and Charlie have decided to start dating. However, Charlie is Joey’s ex-girlfriend, and Ross’s best friend is Joey, so both Ross and Charlie have decided that it would be opprobrious, showing a proper amount of amicable decor, if Joey was informed of their decision before they actually began to date. Ross walks over to where Joey and Rachael are sitting and talking, and asks Rachael to leave before he begins talking to Joey privately.

Ross & Joey (“Friends” , 2005, Season 10, Episode 1)

- | | | |
|----|----------|---|
| 01 | Ross: | Hey, Rac[h, |
| 02 | Rachael: | [yeah |
| 03 | Ross: | Do yuh, do you mind if I sit here for a sec? |
| 04 | Rachael: | Yeah. Yeah. Sure. Yeah. |
| 05 | | (5.0) ((Rachael gets up and leaves. Ross sits down in Rachael’s seat)) |
| 06 | Ross: | Hhn. Hey |
| 07 | Joey: | Hey |
| 08 | | (2.0) ((Ross and Joey don’t make eye-contact for 2.0 seconds)) |
| 09 | ➡ Ross: | So, I, um, (1.5) I kinda need to talk to you about Charlie. |
| 10 | | (1.0) |
| 11 | Joey: | Yeah? |
| 12 | Ross: | Kay, last night, after you guys broke up (.) so sorry tuh hear that by the way. |
| 13 | Joey: | ((Joey nods his head affirmatively)) |
| 14 | Ross: | Well, (1.0) hhn. Charlie and I were talking, (.) and (2.0) well |
| 15 | | (2.0) |
| 16 | Joey: | Yuh kissed. |

In the above example, the interactional exchange begins between Ross and Rachael. First, Ross says, “Hey Rach” , and Rachael turns around and responds with “yeah,” which indicates that Rachael orients to Ross’s utterance as a the first pair part of a summons-answer sequence. Rachael’s response is an answer to that summons and completes the summons-answer sequence. If Ross had intended to open a conversation

with both Joey and Rachael as participants, the space after the culmination of the summons-answer sequences would have been the place to deploy a greeting-greeting sequence. However, Ross actually requests to change seats with Rachael in line 03. Because there are only two seats, Rachael can infer that Ross wishes to speak to Joey alone. Rachael orients to Ross's utterance as a request-compliance sequence FPP and vacates her seat and leaves. Ross then sits down in the seat vacated by Rachael.

At this point, in line 06, Ross says, "hey" one time after an in-breath, which usually interactionally adumbrates the intention to speak, and Joey responds to Ross's "hey" as if it were a greeting, producing another interactionally relevant "hey" . This culminates a greeting-greeting sequence. After two seconds of silence, Ross proceeds to produce the opening conversational gambit, designed as a pre-telling that foreshadows the intent to further convey information about Charlie to Joey in line 09. Pre-tellings can foretell that a dispreferred, potentially face threatening, FPP is in the works (Schegloff 2007). In line 11, Joey produces a "go-ahead" response that indicates he is ready for Ross to begin the telling, and that demonstrates Joey's orientation to Ross's utterance in line 09 as adumbrating further talk, that is, as a preliminary to further talk (Schegloff 1980). In line 12, Ross begins to produce the first pair part of an telling-receipt sequence, punctuated throughout with hesitation markers like micro-silences and the discourse particle "well" . After a two second silence indicating the highly-sensitive nature of the telling, Joey proceeds to complete the information telling FPP for Ross in line 16, which indicates that Joey was monitoring Ross's utterance in the making and accurately predicted the probable outcome of the telling.

As interesting as the level of discourse act embedding is in the above example, the important facet of the interaction under consideration is that the discourse particle "so" again manifests at the anchor point of the conversation between Ross and Joey. Of course, Joey was within earshot of the interaction between Ross and Rachael that preceded Ross and Joey's conversation, but once Rachael leaves the scene, Ross initiates a new conversation with Joey, complete with a conversation opening greeting-greeting sequence. The interaction between Ross and Joey is, essentially, an entirely new conversation. Indeed, the fact that the opening gambit in the conversation between Ross and Joey is a pre-telling adumbrates the teleological nature of the conversation: at the first available open slot in the conversation, Ross produces, and Joey orients to, an utterance that is designed to set the stage for further information telling. Accordingly, the purposeful motivation for initiating the conversation is well apparent, and it is no accident that the discourse particle "so" appeared exactly at the anchor point of the conversation.

So far, all of the examples examined thus far demonstrate that the discourse particle "so" has been deployed directly after conversation opening sequences, and before the main body of the conversation, in which the teleological purpose of the conversation was revealed. Yet, this does not mean that teleological conversation

openings are always constructed in this manner. There are some deviant cases, examples of when the discourse particle “so” does not appear after conversation opening sequences. It is to these deviant cases to which we now turn our attention.

4.2. Deviant Case Analysis: discourse particle “so” at relative anchor position

The following example illustrates a deviant case of the discourse particle “so”. In the example below, Rachael and Phoebe are going out on a “girls’night out”. Ross has invited Mike, who is Phoebe’s boyfriend, over to his house while Rachael and Phoebe are out in order to get to know Mike. That is to say, Ross invited Mike over to his apartment for the explicit purpose of socializing with him for the first time. The following extract begins with the knock on the door of Ross’s apartment. Ross and Rachael are inside the apartment already, and Mike and Phoebe are outside the door.

Ross and Mike (“Friends” , 2002, Season 9, Episode 9)

00 ((Door knock twice))
01 Rachael: Yeah?
02 Phoebe: Hi ((Phoebe and Mike walk into the apartment))
03 Rachael: Hi
04 Phoebe: Hey ((to Ross))
05 Rachael: Hey ((to Mike))
06 Phoebe: ((Phoebe looks at Rachael’s salacious dress)) Woo. Girls’night out indeed.
07 Rachael: ((laughs))
08 (2.0)
09 Rachael: Okay, so, now I think Emma’s probably down for the night but if you need
10 [anything:::]
11 Ross: [Rach, Rach] We’ ll be fine. Alright. You go have fun.
12 Rachael: Okay. You too (.) And I hope you score.
13 Ross: ((laughs))
14 Rachael: Okay, bye ((Rachael and Phoebe leave the room))
15 Mike: Bye ((Mike closes the door behind the two departing women))
16 ➡ Ross: So, welcome
17 Mike: I got beer
18 Ross: I got bottled breast-milk
19 Mike: Eh, why don’t we start with the beer.
20 Ross: Okay

An initial inspection of the above transcript reveals that the discourse marker “so” has not been placed at the anchor point of this conversation—or at least it may look that way. Indeed, after the exchange of conversation opening greetings in lines 02 to 05,

Phoebe does not place the discourse particle “so” at the anchor position of the conversation. Rather, Phoebe makes a joking comment concerning the revealing nature of Rachael’s salacious and revealing attire (line 06), to which Rachael laughs, displaying an orientation to Phoebe’s utterance in line 06 as a joke. After a two second silence, Rachael begins to make an offer to help with the babysitting, but Ross interrupts Rachael, who stops after a brief two-beat overlap (Schegloff 2000), and tells Rachael to go ahead and go, revealing Ross’s orientation to Rachael’s utterance as a potential offer in the making, which Ross pre-empts and blocks. Ross’s pre-emptive action stops the first pair part of an offer before it can be fully formed (line 11). Afterwards, Rachael makes another joke, to which Ross laughs (line 12-13), and Phoebe and Rachael then vacate the room. Mike closes the door behind both of the women, leaving only Ross and Mike in the room for the first time.

At this point, directly after Rachael and Phoebe have left the room and right after Mike has closed the door on the two departing women, Ross produces the first pair part of a welcome-receipt sequence (line 16). Furthermore, Ross deploys a discourse particle “so” at the head of his utterance. Again, this example seems to militate against the contention that the discourse particle “so” is deployed after the conversational opening sequences and right before the main body of the conversation to adumbrate a teleological purpose for the conversation. However, line 16 represents the first interaction between Ross and Mike in this encounter. It is true that Ross and Rachael have interacted over the course of two sequences (line 09-13), and that Rachael and Phoebe have interacted over the course of three sequences (lines 00-03; lines 06-07), but line 16 represents the first attempt at interaction between Ross and Mike; that is, from the standpoint of interaction between Ross and Mike, line 16 represents their potential conversational anchor position. Accordingly, the anchor position for Ross and Mike is line 16, and Ross orients to line 16 as if it were indeed the anchor point in their interaction by deploying a discourse particle “so” at exactly this position, the first point of common possible interaction between them. It is this kind of anchor point, which is relative to the interactants involved, that is called the “relative anchor point.” That is, although the conversational opening sequences, such as the greeting sequences in this case, have already been completed many sequences previously, the first point of potential interactional contact between the interactants after the opening sequences, in which greetings are relevant next actions, is treated and oriented to by the interactants as the anchor point for them: the relative anchor point.

However, it might be asked, even if one accepts that line 16 is the relative anchor point for the relevant people involved, how does the deployment of the discourse particle “so” at this location adumbrate a teleological orientation to the prospective conversation? The sequences after the anchor point seem to be relationally, not teleologically, oriented. Yet, it must be remembered that Ross invited Mike over to get to know him for the first time. Indeed, the entire interaction was teleologically oriented

from the beginning: Ross invited Mike over to his apartment for the explicit purpose of getting to know him. The deployment of the discourse particle “so” at the relative anchor point just demonstrates this all the more.

However, this is not to say that the interactants treat the deployment of the discourse particle “so” at line 16 as if it were an example of normative placement. In fact, Mike never produces the second pair part of the welcome-receipt sequence initiated by Ross. However, Mike produces the first pair part of an informing-receipt sequence, rather than accepting the conditional relevance established by Ross’s FPP to produce some kind of receipt or acknowledgement of the welcome. Therefore, the incongruence between the conditional relevance set and the way the interactants deal with it foreshadows future interactional trouble, which actually does happen in the further details of the interaction, although that is beyond the scope of this paper.

5. Discussion

As the above examples demonstrate, the discourse particle “so” is deployed in the data set at the anchor point relevant for the interactants involved when the conversation has a teleological, goal oriented, purpose⁴. Again, the conditions under which the discourse particle “so” is deployed are fairly regular: the conversation which one of the interactants initiates has a teleological purpose; further, the discourse particle “so” is deployed once at anchor point: a point in the conversation that is canonically located after the conversation opening sequences and right before the main body of the conversation. However, the anchor point, while commonly located at the pivot point between the conversation opening sequences and the main body of the conversation, is not deterministically found there. Anchor point is not always right after the conversation opening sequences. The interactants also strategically place the discourse particle “so” to distinctly mark a location in the interaction as the anchor position.

Indeed, the deployment of the discourse particle “so” is one way in which interactants display interactive competence, and more specifically interactive intention,

4 There is, however, one example that could indicate that the writers of “Friends” over-generalized the usage of the discourse particle “so”. The following extract is from a teleological telephone conversation in “Friends.” It follows in exactly the same format as teleological face-to-face conversations in “Friends,” but Schegloff (2010) has indicated that anchor position in teleological telephone conversations is usually filled with “uh(m)” instead of the discourse particle “so”. In the following extract, Estel, Joey’s agent, calls Joey to ask him about how an audition for a part in a play went, revealing the teleological orientation of the interaction in line 04. Although it is a telephone conversation, there is a discourse particle “so”. Joey & Estel (“Friends” , Season 10, Episode 4)

00 Ring
01 Joey: Hello?
02 Estel: Joey, it’s Estel.
03 Joey: Hey.
04 Estel: So, how’d your audition go today?

in interaction. As mainstream SLA migrates away from communicative competence as the central core goal of language teaching, and immigrates toward interactive competence (Celce-Murcia 2008), small signals of interactive intent become all the more important, necessary, and helpful. The study of interactional practices, which could be equated to the central purpose of CA, will become one of the central ways that interactional competence can be measured.

Yet, one of the glaring deficiencies of CA for those who wish to apply its findings to teaching conversational skills is that CA has absolutely no insight into face-to-face conversational beginnings. Teachers are forced to rely on intuition to teach the vicissitudes of conversational openings, which could have potentially deleterious effects on interactional competence. The reasons for this situation are more of a moral and legal nature than a lack of methodological ability to deal with the issue at hand; indeed, this study is an attempt to substantiate that CA methodology can be utilized to understand the normative mechanics of face-to-face conversational gambits. Further, CA has great insights regarding how interactants incorporate repair practices, topic shifts, and overlap into conversational praxis (Wong & Zhang Waring 2010). However, as of yet, there is no research as to how interactants, and especially second language learners, actually initiate face-to-face conversations in English. This study is the first attempt to tackle this problem.

However, it is important to be fair to the results of this study based on this data set: this study only demonstrates that the screenwriters of the television series “Friends” think that teleological face-to-face conversations start with the discourse particle “so” at anchor position. It does not need to be said that this may not be how actual teleological conversations are begun. Accordingly, this finding is extremely tentative as regards genuine practices utilized during real face-to-face conversation openings. At best, the conversation openings found in the television series “Friends” can only be considered a reflection of actual conversational praxis, refracted through the prism of the creative process of writing television dialogues. Yet, this does not mean that the reflection of actual praxis is worthless—quite the contrary. Even a reflection demonstrates at least a grain of truth, a fragment of what actually happens. But, be that as it may, it must be stated that the conclusion of this study is tentative: this study does not claim that actual face-to-face teleological conversation beginnings are initiated with the discourse particle “so” at anchor position; however, they may very well be so, if this study is an accurate or even a somewhat accurate portrayal of conversational practices.

6. Conclusion

The discourse particle “so” is deployed at relevant anchor position in conversations with a teleological purpose in the American television series “Friends”. Conversations which have a discourse particle “so” located at anchor position adumbrate the

teleological purpose of the conversation, even if they do not specifically foreshadow exactly what the teleological purpose of the conversation will be; that is, the discourse particle “so” at relative anchor position indicates to the interlocutor that the conversation soon to be at hand has some goal orientation that the conversation initiator intends to complete, and that conversation has exited the conversational opening sequences and entered the main body of the conversation. In a word, conversations marked with the discourse particle “so” at relative anchor position are not intended to be friendly chitchat: these conversations so marked are oriented to a teleological end.

*** Appendix 1: Conversation Analytic Transcription Symbols**

The following list of CA transcription symbols is based on the transcription symbols from Atkinson & Heritage (1984 ix-xvi).

- **Simultaneous Utterances & Overlapping Utterances:** simultaneous and overlapping utterances are marked with left brackets from the first point of overlap or the point of simultaneous beginning.

Simultaneous Utterances

A: How are you guys?

B: [Great

C: [Good

Overlapping Utterances

A: Happy birth[day!

B: [Thank you!

- **Contiguous Utterances:** When no interval is found between utterances, an equals sign is placed at the end of the first utterance and the beginning of the second utterance. This indicates that the transition between speakers was very short.

Contiguous Utterances

A: I started smoking again=

B: =You promised you wouldn't!

- **Intervals within and between utterances:** salient silences between utterances are noted inside parenthesis in numbers of seconds of silence.

Intervals within an utterance:

A: When I was (3.0) eighteen years old, I went to Las Vegas for the first time.

Intervals between utterances:

A: So, what did you do last weekend?

(2.0)

B: Uh, what was that again? I couldn't hear you.

- Sound Stretches: When interactants elongate a phoneme of any sort, colons are added after the phoneme to indicate a sound stretch. Furthermore, more colons indicate a longer sound stretch.

Sound stretch:

A: I don't know:::::::

- Kinesthetic Details of the interaction: relevant kinesthetic details (body movements, gestures, laughter, etc.) that interactants orient to are written inside double parenthesis.

Kinesthetic Details:

A: Yeah, it's a great salad ((turns eyes counter-clockwise and removes gaze from the interlocutor))

- Intonation: intonation is only marked in a few ways in conversation analysis. High rising intonation is marked with a question mark, regardless of whether the utterance is oriented to as a question or not. Low rising intonation is marked with an upside down question mark. Slight rising intonation is marked with a comma, regardless of the grammatical unit bounded by the comma. Periods indicate full intonation stops and a falling intonation. Word stresses are underlined. Sentence stresses are marked with upward arrows for rising sentence stress and downward arrows mark descending sentence stress. It must be remembered though that CA doesn't use sentences as units of analysis, so the term "sentence stress" is somewhat out of place, although the phenomenon is certainly present in much of the interaction CA deals with.

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