

Uses of *someone*: Beyond simple person reference

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This study examines how the non-recognitional reference form *someone* is used to refer to a known referent when a recognitional, such as a first name or a descriptive recognitional, is available (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979). In a conversation, when participants have shared knowledge about the identity of a referent, the occurrence of *someone* connotes more than a simple reference to the referent. While there is little previous research concerning the use of a non-recognitional to complete particular social actions, this study shows how *someone* can be employed to accomplish disaffiliative actions such as disapprovals, disassociations, intensified complaints, and accusations in media-generated conversations. Using conversation analysis as an analytical framework, I closely analyze interactional turn taking, with a specific focus on the functions and positioning of *someone*. The results of this study show how a non-recognitional person reference is delicately utilized to construct various disaffiliative actions. Theoretically, uses of the non-recognitional reference form, *someone*, contribute to the current literature examining the use of non-recognitionals to accomplish more than mere referencing. The analysis demonstrates how a speaker uses *someone* when recognitional forms for a referent are available. The notion that *someone* is referring to a known referent presents an opportunity to expand the definition of non-recognitionals established by Sacks and Schegloff (1979). The commonality found throughout the examples in this study includes the connotation of a speaker's disaffiliative actions towards either the referent or co-participants.

Keywords: Conversation Analysis; Person Reference; non-recognitional reference form

1 Introduction

This study explores how the non-recognitional reference form *someone* is used to refer to a known referent when a recognitional, such as a first name or a descriptive recognitional (such as “the woman wearing a hat), is available (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979). In a conversation, when participants have shared knowledge about who a referent is, the occurrence of *someone* connotes more than a simple reference to the referent. While there is little previous research on the use of a non-recognitional to complete particular social actions, this study examines how *someone* can be employed to accomplish disaffiliative actions such as

disapprovals, disassociations, intensified complaints, and accusations in media-generated conversations through conversation analysis (CA).

2 Background

In a conversation, when a speaker refers to a third party, there are two preferences governing person reference, *minimization* and *recipient design* (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979). Minimization means that speakers use a minimal unit (e.g. a person's name) to identify the referent. Recipient design, including the utilization of recognitionals (e.g. a name or recognitional descriptor), is used when speakers prompt their recipients to recognize the referent. While recognitionals assume some shared knowledge among interlocutors, non-recognitionals do not call for recipient recognition since the assumption is that recipients are not familiar with the referent. Hence, when recognitional forms are available, they are preferred over non-recognitionals. However, there is little research about instances where non-recognitionals are applied at times when recognitionals are accessible.

Land and Kitzinger (2007) demonstrated how a non-recognitional form, *this person*, was used by a caller, Rose, to refer to herself on the phone. Rose spoke as if she were someone unknown (*this person*) to the call recipient. This usage implicitly accounts for the fact that the call recipient will not be able to follow up on the outcome of Rose's labor since Rose's identity is unknown to the call recipient. Therefore, the use of *this person* as a non-recognitional serves to function beyond a simple reference; the speaker uses *this person* to refer to herself as a stranger from the call recipient's perspective. Nevertheless, other forms of non-recognitionals, such as *someone*, were not discussed in the study.

What previous research has shown is that pragmatic actions are completed when a marked reference form is utilized instead of an unmarked, or default, form. However, previous researchers have not delineated situations where speakers use the non-recognitional reference form, *someone*, when a recognitional is available, to accomplish specific social actions. In this study, I show how using *someone* can accomplish complex pragmatic actions.

3 Data and method

The data were collected from media-generated conversations. One was from the American TV sitcom *Friends*, and the other was from the Singaporean film *I Not Stupid*. Contexts included ordinary and institutional talk within the TV show and the movie. The data were transcribed following Jefferson's (2004) notation system.

I focus on instances when *someone* is used for a referent while participants have shared knowledge of who the referent is, excluding cases where *someone* is used for a non-specific referent. Extract 1 from *Friends* provides an example as follows:

- (1) 01 M: Chandler,
 02 (0.2)
 03 M: → ↑NObody likes breaking up with **someone**.
 04 M: except for (.) Kevin Milmo:re ma:y he >r::ot in< hell,

In line 3, “someone” is used to refer to any possible referent (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979). Therefore, such an example was not included in the discussion of *someone* employed to refer to a specific referent.

Using conversation analysis (CA) as an analytical framework, I closely analyzed interactional turn taking, with a focus on the functions and positioning of *someone*. According to Waring, Creider, and Box (2013), CA focuses on a detailed analysis of audio or video transcripts in order to disclose interaction from the participants’ perspectives in natural environments. What needs to be noted is that the data used in this study are media-generated conversations, whose nature is not the same as naturally occurring data. The difference lies in the fact that the purpose of media-generated conversation aims to entertain. Therefore, conversation is oriented to the invisible remote audience (Kääntä, Jauni, Leppänen, Peuronen, & Paakkinen, 2013), though there is no direct interaction between the audience and mass-media entertainment. In addition to grammar and prosody, gaze was analyzed in one of the examples. Three examples were analyzed to draw theoretical implications and conclusions.

4 Analysis

In the following, I analyze three instances where *someone* is deployed in ordinary and institutional talks derived from media-generated contexts, such as a TV show or a film. The first example (Extract 2) displays a complaint being strengthened by a speaker towards her own mother, a non-present referent, through the use of *someone*. The second example (Extract 3) displays how an accusation is accomplished via *someone* by a creative director targeting his colleague, a present referent. The third and final example (Extract 4) demonstrates a friend’s disapproval of her co-participants (other friends) through the non-recognitional *someone* used to refer to the speaker’s boyfriend, a non-present referent.

Extract 2 is from the classic American TV sitcom *Friends*. At Nana’s (Grandmother, Mom’s mother) memorial party, Mom (M) tells Daughter (D) that Nana would have been critical about the flower arrangement for this party. *A* in the transcript stands for the TV audience. The laughter track is marked as being produced by *A*.

- (2) 01 M: z’f I spent more she’o’d be° sa::ying (.) why’re you
 02 wasting your MONEY.=
 03 =I don’t need flowers.=
 04 =I’m de::[ad.]
 05 A: [((laughter))]

- 06 D: [That sounds like] ↑Nana,=
 07 A: [((°laughter°))]
 08 M: =°(h)uh.°
 09 (1.3)
 10 M: °.hhh°
 11 (0.2)
 12 M: Di ↑you know what it's like (.) to grow up,
 13 (1.0)
 14 M: → with **someone** who is critical of E:VERY S:IN[GLE
 THI:NG you say.]
 15 A: [((laughter))]
 16 ((laughter))
 17 (0.5)
 18 D: I can i::ma::gine?=
 19 A: =he he he [((laughter))]
 20 M: [k(h)e °he° (.hhh)e I'm telling you.]
 21 (0.5)
 22 .hhh it's a wonder your mother turned out to be the
 positive=
 23 =life-affirming person 't she i::s.

Using *someone* in this context appears to be intensifying the speaker's disapproval of the referent, connoting a distance between the speaker and the referent, and reinforcing a complaint from the speaker. Before the utilization of "someone" (line 14), M creates a frame of Nana's extremely critical way of speaking towards her. M uses a conditional *if* ("z'f," line 1) to describe Nana's potentially negative questioning of M's flower expenses for this party. "She" in line 1 anaphorically refers to Nana. After the direct reporting speech (DRS; Vásquez et al., 2009) of Nana (line 1-4) after "saying," D shows her delayed affiliative stance in line 6. She uses "that" to refer to M's DRS. By saying the DRS resembles what Nana would say, D aligns with M regarding the possible take Nana would have: Nana would disapprove of everything done by her daughter, M.

Since both interlocutors have a clear understanding of Nana's personality, M's following use of "someone" (line 14) instead of a known referent, such as *her*, *Nana*, or *your grandmother*, is noticeable in the comparison of her interrogative (line 12-14) and self-praise (line 22-23). Note that M holds her turn during the 1.0s pause at line 13 by gazing at D. Therefore, line 13 is not considered problematic. Using the third-person reference form "your mother" (line 22) to refer to herself with an emphasis on *your*, M invokes an implicit

contrast to *my mother*. Comparing “your mother” (line 22) being “positive” (line 22) and “life-affirming” (line 23) with “someone” (line 14) being “critical” (line 14), M seems to show her disapproval of Nana and to emphasize the non-critical nature of her own personality in contrast to Nana’s. M uses “your mother” to refer to herself for the purpose of achieving self-promotion. In this case, *someone* refers to Nana in order to accomplish a disapproval.

For M, *someone*—a reference typically reserved for an unknown stranger—appears to be used by her to hinder any association of her and her mother. M’s disassociation thus forms a contrast between *someone* and the close family member M grew up with. She not only excludes Nana from the community comprised of those with a family tie but also downgrades the status of Nana. To be noted is that on the other hand, M seems to invite D to imagine living with a critical person so that D can compare between her and M’s experience. In this sense, *someone* has a non-referential role based on M’s intention.

M’s deliberate use of *someone* also serves as an intensifier in her complaint in lines 12-14. The stress, high volume, and lengthened emphasis on “every single thing” (line 14) presents her dissatisfaction of Nana being critical about everything. M actually uses “someone” (line 14) to refer to the known referent to strengthen her complaint. Should she have used other recognitional person reference forms, the complaint would not have been so serious as *someone* renders an otherwise intimate relationship distant.

In addition to being a complaint intensifier, *someone* can also be utilized to form an accusation towards a present referent with the aid of gaze. Extract 3 shows how an accusation is constructed by using *someone* in a media-based institutional setting. This extract is from the Singaporean film *I Not Stupid*. In a meeting room, the story begins with the client, K, unsatisfied with the current team’s proposal to promote his business and wanting to talk to the creative director, J. The problem is, the team leader, Designer A (DA), secretly changed the appointment time without telling J, as the team does not want K to accept J’s proposal. J finds out about the situation and enters the room with his team designers.

- (3) 11 J: =.hhh
 12 so::rry, so::rry, Mr. °k-° Ku::.
 13 I’m Jo::hn,=
 14 =the creative director.=
 15 K: =°h:m.°
 16 J: I’m very sorry to be LA:T(h)E.
 17 {kuh - ((J pulls a chair and sits down))}
 18 → {**someone** - ((gazes at K))}
 19 {did not - ((slowly shifts his gaze from K to DA))}
 20 [{tell me - ((lowers his head while gazing at DA))}]

- 21 DA: [((gazes at J))]
- 22 J: [{that (.) - ((shifts his gaze from DA back to K))}]
- 23 DA: [((gazes away from J))]
- 24 J: {the ti:me °ha°ve been - ((gazes at K))}
- 25 [{changed. ((widely opens his eyes and raises his
eyebrows while gazing at K)) }]
- 26 DA: [((slightly moves his head to the right and lowers it))]
- 27 J: where's my proposal?

J's use of "someone" (line 18) has three functions. It displays J's disapproval of the present referent, DA, forms his accusation, and disassociates himself from DA. After apologizing for being late in line 16, J's account of "someone did not tell me that the time have been changed" (line 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, and 25) is also a complaint about his colleague, DA. J's complaint is based on not knowing the changed time of the meeting; it is *someone's* fault that J is late. He suggests his victim role like K; hence, he is able to associate himself with K and potentially eliminate K's bad impression of him due to his lateness. Even when J does not specify who *someone* is, his gaze at DA while saying "tell me" in line 20 seems to mark DA as the person who changed the meeting schedule. DA's reaction after his gaze meets J's (line 20-21) suggests that he is the blamable person. His gaze away from J (line 23) and lowered head (line 26) to avoid eye contact reveal his guilt. Referring to DA as *someone* thus shows J's disapproval of DA not telling him about the time change.

As J's gaze reveals his knowledge of who the blamable person is, his word choice of *someone* is vital for forming his accusation against DA in front of the other participants. From this instance of gaze, everyone in this room knows that DA is responsible for hiding the time change. While a speaker-associated person reference, such as *my colleague*, seems to be an available candidate, J uses *someone* to target DA in an explicit way. J appears to downgrade the status of DA to a person deprived of recognition. This conflict between the non-recognitional *someone* and the knowledge of who this person is thus makes J's accusation stand out.

Simultaneously, J apparently does not regard DA equally as a colleague but excludes him by using the non-recognitional *someone*. J's disassociation from DA is observable from J's preference of *someone* over *my colleague*. If J used *my colleague* to associate himself with DA, then the degree of his accusation would not be as severe. Instead of including DA in his professional field, J deliberately excluded DA from his group by using *someone*, which seems to suggest that DA is responsible for this unsolvable issue. DA is not given an opportunity to

negotiate based on the other-exclusion of his collegial identity. It should be noted that since J does not explicitly point out who *someone* is, it is still possible for J to deny his accusation of DA.

A slightly different third type of use of *someone* is found in Extract 4. In this context, Monica (M) brings her new boyfriend, Alan, back to her apartment to meet her friends. After sending Alan back home, M goes back to her apartment and invites comments from her friends on the topic: “Let’s let the Alan-bashing begin.” However, the positive assessments from Ross (RS), Joey (J), Phoebe (P) and others, together with affiliation with Alan from Chandler (C), Racheal (RC) and others formulate a contrast to M’s disaffiliation.

- (4) 01 RS: we loved °him.°
 02 All: we LOVED him.=
 03 ? =[hold on.]
 04 J: [°isn't]that great?°=
 05 M: =ALL::↑RI::GH"°=
 06 =[\$(h)w(h)ait] (h)a\$ minute.=
 07 P: [°great.°]
 08 M: → =we're talking about **someone** that I::'m going out
 °with°?=
 09 C: =[YE(h)::S.]
 10 P: =[YE:::S.] [yeah.]
 11 J: [↑yeah.]
 12 RC: that pimento trick?

M’s use of a non-recognitional reference form “someone” (line 8) shows her disapproval of both the referent and her co-participants; interestingly, she also uses *someone* to disassociate her co-participants and herself from the referent. Different from what M was expecting, everyone has a good impression of Alan (line 1, 2, 4, and 7). “Him” in line 1 refers anaphorically to Alan. In contrast, M’s attempt to get the floor to show her disalignment and forecast her disapproval is perceivable in line 6. When M says “wait a minute,” she does not align with her friends but interrupts the flow of compliments. Additionally, the smiley sounds and outbreaths are embedded in “wait a.” These discourse markers constitute laughter. This suggests that M treats the unexpected positive assessments as laughable, thus displaying her disalignment and projecting her disapproval in line 8. Using “someone” in line 8 suggests M’s disapproval of her co-participants (friends) due to their positive comments towards Alan. The entire NP “someone I’m going out with” (line 8) appears to be a category or at least category-resonant, which appeals historically to M’s dates which her friends typically did not like. M appears to regard the person who has been assessed positively by her friends as unrecognizable. This discrepancy is thus relevant between the highly-rated Alan

and the category containing men she dated who her friends disliked. M apparently shows her disapproval of her friends' compliments for Alan. M's disapproval is salient by categorizing Alan with the word choice *someone*. In addition to that, by emphasizing the first-person singular "I" (line 8) with stress and vowel-lengthening, M seems to cast doubt on the positive comments her friends attribute to her new date. She uses the emphatic *I* to reinforce her disapproval of her friends since they are supposed to criticize the person *she* is going out with, but the compliments contradict her expectation. M also appears to question her friends by saying "I" with emphasis; no one follows *her* lead.

The non-recognitional *someone* may indicate M's disapproval of not only her friends but also Alan. The disapproval M shows of Alan is evident in M's initiation of the "Alan-bashing." With the negative connotation of "bashing," M already presupposes her disapproval of him. However, since the positive assessments from others seem to contradict M's initiation of the bashing, M's use of *someone* in the category of *someone I go out with* echoes her impression of Alan. Comparing "he" in line 1 and "someone" in line 8, M appears to push for the known referent to be excluded from recognition.

In addition, M's preference of *someone* over *Alan* or a recognitional descriptor, *my date*, seems to mark a distance between M's community and Alan. While M begins her turn in line 8 with "we," she affiliates herself with the community comprised of the other five friends. Thus, the occurrence of *someone* seems to implicitly exclude Alan from M's community of friends. As mentioned earlier, the NP *someone I'm going out with* treats Alan as a member of the category encompassing her dates that were disliked by M's friends. M seems to objectivize Alan in the sense that he too will fit into this category in order to echo the original Alan-bashing topic. While the other friends shorten the distance between Alan and them, M appears to purposely distance her date from the community.

Disassociation seems to occur between M and her referent as well. M appears to disassociate herself from Alan despite the positive impressions provided by her friends. If using *Alan* instead of *someone*, the degree of closeness between M and Alan would come across stronger. This implies that M does not view her romantic relationship with Alan as stable; after all, M and Alan have only met each other recently. Therefore, using *someone* seems to downgrade the position Alan occupies in their romantic relationship, which marks the distance of M's emotional proximity to Alan.

5 Discussion and conclusion

This study shows how non-recognitional person reference is delicately utilized to construct various disaffiliative actions. Theoretically, uses of the non-recognitional reference form, *someone*, contribute to the current literature of utilizing non-recognitionals to accomplish more than simple referencing. The data present how a speaker uses *someone* when recognitional forms such as a name or a recognitional descriptor are available. The notion that *someone* is

referring to a known referent presents an opportunity to expand the definition of non-recognitionals provided by Sacks and Schegloff (1979). The commonality found throughout these three examples includes the connotation of a speaker's disaffiliative actions including disapprovals, disassociations, intensified complaints, and accusations. In Extract 2, *someone* highlights Mother's (M) complaint of Nana. In Extract 3, *someone* constructs John's (J) accusation towards Designer A (DA) with the aid of J's gaze, which reveals the fact that *someone* is present. In Extract 4, in addition to constructing a disaffiliative action directed towards the referent, Monica (M) uses *someone* to express her disapproval of her co-participants and the referent. These three examples demonstrate how *someone* is used delicately to accomplish disaffiliative actions and thus social interaction.

In addition, the salience of *someone* is made relevant by the use of different categories such as *your mother* and *someone I'm going out with*. These categories are vital in constructing the pragmatic functions of *someone*.

Gaze appears to be significant in facilitating the use of non-recognitional person reference to refer to a known referent. This indicates the import of a detailed transcription and a close analysis through the lens of CA.

Future research will focus on expanding the data collection of *someone* beyond media generated data to include naturally occurring conversations. Instances of referring to present and non-present referents by using *someone* may be further delineated and compared when more data are accessible.

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