"I mean is that right?": Frame ambiguity and troublesome advice-seeking on a radio helpline

Ian Hutchby
University of Leicester

Abstract

This chapter analyses the operation of the "expert system" for the provision of advice in the setting of a call-in radio programme. It investigates the sequential properties of calls in which the central communicative activity of advice-seeking is merged with another activity, that of troubles-telling. In most calls, advice-seekers (members of the public) succeed in identifying a clear advice topic and advice-givers (the radio host and a social welfare expert) succeed in advising on that topic, albeit within the distinctive constraints of the broadcast setting. In a small number of cases, however, there is a difference in that the advice-seeking turns instantiate an ambiguous framing in which it is unclear whether the caller is seeking advice about, or making a complaint about, the social welfare system. This poses a problem for the expert system comprising the show's host and accredited expert, in terms of how they design the reception of advice-giving turns and the development of subsequent sequences. It is shown how the different speaker identities of caller, host and expert operate in different ways as the expert system responds to the call's frame ambiguity and seeks to re-invoke the standard features of advice-giving.

Keywords

Advice-giving, conversation analysis, expert system, frame, radio talk, troubles-telling
"I mean is that right?": Frame ambiguity and troublesome advice-seekers on a radio helpline

IAN HUTCHBY
University of Leicester

In modern society, among the many places to which an individual can turn for accredited help on social, personal, health or financial matters are what could be called the "distributed expert systems" of radio phone-ins, magazine agony aunts, television and newspaper counsellors, and the myriad sources of information (not all of it accredited, or even particularly credible) and discussion fora of the internet. Of these, the phone-in is of particular interest because of the unique dynamics of address that are involved. The person seeking help calls a broadcast outlet, presumably in full knowledge that their interchange with the expert will be overheard by an audience. The expert, meanwhile, physically distributed both from the caller and the overhearing audience, tends to produce advice that is somehow both an answer to the caller's individual request, and a piece of generalised advice that can be heard as potentially relevant by elements of the broadcast's audience.

An earlier study (Hutchby 1995) analysed some of the methods by which this is accomplished in a phone-in offering advice about entitlements to social welfare payments in the British context. Using the same data corpus, this chapter explores some departures from the general conventions of seeking and providing advice in that broadcast context. I focus on comparatively rare cases in which the caller's approach could be described as troublesome for the ways in which the broadcast is set up to provide help not just for the caller, but also the overhearing audience. In this small number of calls the principal frame for interaction – seeking and giving advice about the British social welfare system – is problematised by the incorporation of a different frame, that of introducing a personal complaint about the outcome of a social welfare claim. There thus emerges a "frame ambiguity" between advice-seeking and troubles-telling.

Advice-seeking and troubles-telling
Jefferson and Lee (1992) observed that talk about personal troubles and talk involving advice bring into play fundamentally different alignments of activity types, footings and speaker identities. They distinguished in that context between a troubles-telling and a service-encounter, with advice-giving being an example of the latter rather than the former. In troubles-telling, the activity focus is interpersonal, and interaction should therefore home in on the troubles-teller and their troubles. The troubles-recipient's task, in short, is to empathise with the troubles-teller. In a service-encounter, the activity focus is more akin to the seeking and provision of a service where interaction homes in on the problem and its properties. The advice-giver's primary task is to address possible solutions to the advice-seeker's problem.
The difference becomes clear when the interactional procedures involved in the production and receipt of troubles-talk are "contaminated" by the incorporation of advice components (or vice-versa). Jefferson and Lee (1992) discussed examples from ordinary conversation in which troubles-tellers reject or otherwise treat as inappropriate advice components offered by troubles-recipients. They also showed the converse in an example from an advice-giving phone-in where the expert advice-giver orients to a caller's advice-seeking in terms of a troubles-telling rather than a service-encounter, and engages in empathic interaction – which the caller overtly rejects. In both kinds of example, troubles-tellers and advice-seekers observably orient to the sense in which "in a troubles-telling the focal object is 'the teller and his experiences,' [while] in the service encounter the focal object is 'the problem and its properties'" (Jefferson and Lee 1992, 535).

In the present study I explore a different kind of cross-contamination between troubles-telling and service-encounter, in which it is not only the receipt of a troubles-telling or advice-seeking that is contaminated, but the activity of advice-seeking itself is problematised by elements of troubles-telling. The data, as noted, are from a call-in radio programme offering advice relating to the British social welfare system. In this programme, ordinary members of the public phone the studio and speak live on air to an expert on welfare benefits (such as unemployment benefits, state pensions, disability allowances and so on). The exchanges are moderated by a host who, while not a certified expert on the subject, has nonetheless been presenting this show regularly for many years and often contributes to advice-giving alongside the co-presenting expert. For this reason, I refer to the expert and host as together constituting the expert system of the programme.

In the cases discussed below, problems arise for this expert system from the incorporation by callers of troubles-telling into advice-seeking. Two calls are analysed in detail; in each case (albeit in different ways) the request for help is done in a troublesome format deriving from the callers' departure from what I describe, below, as the Standard Advice Sequence. This renders problematic the production of advice in the specific context of the radio phone-in. My interest is first of all in the means by which the problem arises; the troublesomeness of the caller's advice request. Second, I am interested in the means by which the expert system of the show responds to that problem, in particular by seeking to re-invoke the procedures of advice-giving: to shift the focus back from "teller and his experiences" to "problem and its properties".

The Standard Advice Sequence on call-in radio
The advice-giving service encounter embodies a common configuration of footing and recipient design that can be described in terms of an epistemic asymmetry. Positioning oneself as an advice-seeker involves acknowledging a lack of personal knowledge regarding a topic and accordingly assigning possession of such knowledge to the expert. Correspondingly, advice-givers design turns on the basis that they are in possession of knowledge which the advice-recipient lacks (Heritage and Sefi 1992).

This asymmetry is reflected in the standard opening sequence in calls making up the present data corpus, which takes the following typical shape:
In both cases (and generally in the data corpus) callers do two things in their opening turn. First, they provide some details giving a broad context for the advice-seeking question that will follow (arrows a). These contextualising particulars function mainly to establish the local relevance for the call of the caller's personal circumstances ("me going back to work...my husband giving up his job" in (1); "I am...a widow, of sixty-six" in (2)). In the second part of the turn, callers ask a question which functions as a request for advice on that matter (arrows b). In both examples the question is prefaced by explicit markers of lack of knowledge on the caller's part ("what I'd like to know, is" in (1); "could you tell me" in (2)).

In the next turn, the expert takes up the role of knowledge-holder by providing an answer to the question (arrows c). He does so immediately; that is, without seeking the kind of further diagnostic information that is often present in the sequential organisation of advice, particularly in counselling, therapeutic and health settings (Heritage and Maynard 2006; Silverman 1996). In other words, the expert displays that having heard the caller's question as situated within its local contextual particulars, he understands it completely and can provide the required response.

An additional feature in the radio phone-in context, of course, is that of the relevance of talk for the overhearing audience. Participants exhibit their orientation to this contextual dimension in a particular way. Initially, advice-seeking is formulated in terms of its relevance to the caller's own circumstances, as above. But subsequently the topics on which advice is sought are treated as types or exemplars of issues that are generalisable for the listening audience. The expert goes on to provide "auxiliary advice" – more generalised comments regarding the topic brought into play by the caller that are designed to target the wider constituency of listeners to whom an advice topic might be considered potentially relevant (Hutchby 1995). Callers generally enable this dual articulation by refraining from questioning
or otherwise displaying orientation towards the possible irrelevance of auxiliary advice for their specific concerns.

This pattern I will call the Standard Advice Sequence for calls to the radio phone-in. In bare-bones terms, the sequence can be summarised as follows:

Turn 1: (Caller): [Contextualising particulars] + [Advice request]
Turn 2: (Expert): [Advice-giving answer] + [Auxiliary advice]

The delicacy of the dual articulation between the caller's evident concern with personal matters in the first instance, and the generalising orientation of the advice-giver(s), is illustrated by the following kind of case where a caller in fact foregrounds the ill-fittedness of the expert's audience-oriented auxiliary advice for her own problem:

(3) [RV:21.5.85:5:1]
1  Expert: =Well: yer okay then. .hh There's only one
2  other figu:re, an' that is when I mentioned
3  earlier on tuh somebuddy about single
4  pay:men:ts,
5  Caller: M:m::=
6  Expert: =Er you ca:n't get single payments, if
7  you've got more than five hundred pounds or
8  e- you ca:n but er, .h[h
9-  Caller: [W- I don't unders-  
10-  what did you say I'm sorry?
11  Expert: Five 'undred pou:nds is the- is the limit
12  fuh people on supplement'ry benefit fuh
13  single payments.
14  (.)
16  Expert: [.kmm] Wul- (0.8) Sorry I've-
17  I've confused you it's my fault. .hh The a- the
18  answer tih you: question is it's three thousand
19  pounds...

Line 1 marks the point at which the expert proceeds into auxiliary advice (referring to "single payments" and "supplementary benefits" which are related to, but different from the caller's original topic of the savings limits beyond which persons are not entitled to welfare benefits). The caller, still taking herself to be the intended recipient of the expert's talk – note the continuier "M:m:;" at line 5 (Schegloff 1982; Goodwin 1986) – evidently experiences difficulty in following the point of his remarks. At line 9-10 and again at line 15, she initiates repair, bringing attention to the difficulty she is having. As a result, the expert returns to the original question, stressing in the process "the answer tih you: question is...", thereby acknowledging that he had been modulating his advice for the benefit of the audience.

In the analysis that follows, I address further tensions that arise when the caller departs both from the normative epistemic asymmetry underpinning the advice-giving encounter, and from the conventional orientation to the Standard Advice Sequence of the radio phone-in setting. In two different calls, two types of troublesome caller are discussed.
In one (Flo's Case), the caller begins with an ambiguous question that is part advice-request and part complaint about a welfare payment entitlement. She subsequently shows a tendency not to defer to the expert's greater possession of knowledge on the topic in question, but instead interrupts or challenges his attempt to provide a response. In the second (Stan's Case), the caller initially appears to be orienting appropriately to the advice-seeker role until it transpires that his questions have been designed as preliminaries to a complaint, again, about an entitlement to welfare payments. In both cases, therefore, callers "contaminate" their advice request by incorporating elements that foreground specific personal problems with, or complaints about, the welfare benefit system.

Advice-seeking contaminated by troubles-telling

Flo's Case involves a female caller who ostensibly seeks advice about her entitlement to specific benefits: namely maternity allowance, given to mothers of young children on low incomes, and supplementary benefit, used as a top-up to bring individuals' incomes up to statutory levels. However, during her advice-seeking turn she begins complaining about the benefits she has in fact been awarded (arrowed lines):

(4) **Flo's Case [RV:21.5.81:1:1-2]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Transcription</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Host: Flo in Bethnal Green go ahead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(0.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Caller: Hello?:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Host: Yes:. Go ahead.=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Caller: =Oh yes.=this is Flo here. .hh What Ah'm~ Ah'm a bit out'f (~) out'v breath cuz I've just' .k been downstairs tuh speak tuh my frie:nd about this. .hhh Well yihsee I'm on::, maternity:, lea:ve sort of, yiknow from college, .hhh and Ah'm gettin' maternity allowance no:w,.hhh right, so:;, let's say that Ah'm unemployed, and erm Ah'm not workin', .hh and- I' m on'y entitled to eighty pence supplement'ry benefit a week. .hhhh Ah mean is that right.=Ah mean should I: be on'y gettin' eighty pence.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following her introduction by the host, the caller produces in lines 6-12 the kind of contextualising particulars that are found in the Standard Advice Sequence, situating a projected advice request in terms of her own personal circumstances. However, from there onwards the call begins to differ in shape from the standard format.

Rather than producing a second part of her opening turn in which she formulates an advice request, the caller produces a turn component in which it is not clear whether she is seeking advice about, seeking empathy with, or complaining about an already-established entitlement to benefits which she presents as clearly inadequate. That inadequacy is indexed in a variety of ways. First of all, the phrase "I'm on'y entitled" (line 13) displays the caller's assessment of her entitlement as less than could be expected. She goes on to name the amount to which she is "only" entitled: "eighty pence a week". The naming is significant because, in English currency, eighty pence is a negligible amount of money (less than one pound), especially as an allowance that an individual might require for weekly living expenses.
Furthermore, the entitlement amount is presented not simply as monetarily small, but as morally questionable. Note that, in line 12, the caller has been concerned to contextualise her benefit entitlement in terms of personal troubles, emphasising her current status as out of work (and hence, it might be concluded, poor) by stating the same point in two ways: "Ah'm unemployed, and 'rm Ah'm not workin'.". Then, in line 15, the caller evaluates the amount that she has been awarded through the welfare system, eighty pence a week, with a phrase that is both semantically ambiguous and carries a potential moral charge: "is that right".

In everyday English, the phrase "is that right" can mean either "is that factually correct" or "is that morally acceptable". This ambiguity renders the caller's choice of phrase particularly interesting in terms of the wider point about the frame ambiguity between advice-seeking and troubles-telling. Moreover the caller's next sentence, "should I: be on'y gettin' eighty pence", which perhaps represents an attempt to clarify the ambiguity, is also ambiguous as between factual and moral-type interpretations: i.e., "should" a person like me (or indeed any person) be expected to live on eighty pence a week, versus "should" I wonder if the system's calculation in my case is actually correct, despite my moral outrage?

In sum, in Flo's Case, there is a considerable degree of ambiguity built into her call even before the expert has begun to articulate a response.

In Stan's Case (extract 5 below), we find a different structure to the advice request, though ultimately there are striking similarities in the frame ambiguity that emerges. Stan begins by ostensibly seeking advice about his wife's entitlement to a statutory pension now that she has reached the age of sixty. Unlike in Flo's Case, the call initially takes the shape of the Standard Advice Sequence, with the expert providing answers to Stan's question about entitlements. However, from line 16 onwards, Stan initiates a series of additional questions. And whereas his first question is designedly generic ("could you tell me about (. .) a: woman's rights fer a pension, once she becomes sixty?") these supplemental questions are increasingly specific (for example, specifying the period "a woman" could have been at work as "say nineteen forty one, (. .) tuh forty eight", lines 30-32). It ultimately transpires that, as in Flo's Case, the call is designed primarily as a complaint about the state pension Stan's wife has in fact been awarded (lines 47-52):

(5) Stan's Case [RV:18.6.85:5:1-3]

1 Host:  Stan go ahead with yuh question.
2 Caller: Er good afternoon Robbie, good afternoon John,= 3 Expert: =Hello.=
4 Caller: =Er, John. I'm ringin' on beha:lf of my wife,  
5 (0.7) 6 Caller: .hh er could you tell me about (. .) a: woman's 7 rights fer a pension, once she becomes sixty?  
8 (0.5) 9 Expert: .hhhh (. .) Yes Stan.  
10 (1.0) 11 Expert: She: can clai::m, (0.5) a pension in 'er ow:n 12 right, 13 Caller: Mm :hm,  
14 Expert: if she's got any contributions of 'er own.  
15 .hh Full contributions. Yeh?= 16 Caller: =Could you tell me what yea:rs she 'as tuh be
at wo:rk?  

Expert: Well, (. . .) it works on a proportion basis i- they look at 'ow many ye:rs she's worked.=

Caller: =Mm h[m,

Expert: [An:d, if she's worked m:- yiknow er, (. . .) if she's worked the maximum number a' years which is virtually nine tenths of 'er workin' life if she's bin covered by: s- full stamps then she'll get a full pension. En it drops down proportionately beyond that.=But I mean you can work relatively few years, .hh an' still qualify fer a pension.

 Caller: [An' if she wuz at wor:k e:r, (0.4) say nineteen forty one, ( .) tuh forty eight,

Expert: Yeh,

(0.3)

Caller: Would she qual[iy fer a pension.]  

Expert: [...] It's dodgy on that length o' time it's on'y seven years. En the length of 'er workin' life is f:- is considerably longer than that. [.hhh] There are=

Caller: =two:: (. .) leaflets Stan that I think you ought to 'ave a look at.

((Some lines omitted, re: leaflets))

Expert: I think it's a bit dodgy that one, but I wouldn't give up, .h The old golden rule Stan on this programme is if in doubt you apply:.. h=

Host: ="Hm[f"

47- Caller: [On'y, [e : ]r, she did he:ar from the=

48- Expert: [Yeh?]  

49- Caller: =pensions at Blackpool, (0.9) an' they stated, e::r, ( .) we 'ad tuh send marriage licence and the birth certificate, (0.3) an' fourteen pee a week.

Although the caller's series of questions in lines 6-7, 16-17, 30-32 and 35 already depart from the normative structure of the Standard Advice Sequence (where the caller generally produces only one advice-seeking question), line 47 represents the point at which frame ambiguity clearly emerges in this call. In the arrowed lines, as in Flo's Case, it is not clear whether Stan is seeking advice about, seeking empathy with, or complaining about an already-established pension entitlement which he presents as clearly inadequate.

Looking closely, there are marked similarities between this call and Flo's call at the precise points where the troubles-telling frame is incorporated into the advice-seeking frame:

(6) Flo's Case (Detail)

11- Caller: so:: let's say that Ah'm unemployed,  

12- and erm Ah'm not workin', .hh and- I'm on'y entitled to eighty pence supplement'ry benefit
a week. hhhh Ah mean is that right.

(7) Stan's Case (Detail)

47-   Caller:          [On'y, [e : ]r, she did he:ar from the=
48     Expert:          [Yeh?]
49   Caller:          =pensions at Blackpool, (0.9) an' they stated,
50                      e:r, (.) we 'ad tuh send marriage licence and
51   the birth certificate, (0.3) an' fourteen pee
52                      a week.

At the first arrow in each case, the caller's utterance is marked as following on from, but also somehow disjunctive from, previous contextualising details. Extract (6) commences with the upshot-marker "so", while extract (7) commences with a contrast-marker "Only" (a way in English of saying "except that"). There is thus a narrative structure being invoked: the recipient is being instructed to hear the previously described circumstances as consequential for, rather than simply a context for, what is about to come next in the turn.

What is also clear about each extract is that the caller does not ask for advice about benefits they may be entitled to but indicates that they (or in the second case, the caller's wife) have received benefits that are presented as somehow inadequate. That inadequacy is indexed in similar ways. In Flo's case, as already noted, it is by means of the phrase "on'y entitled" and also by naming the negligible amount of "eighty pence a week". In Stan's case similar work is done simply by naming the amount; in this case the even more paltry "fourteen pee [pence] a week" (extract 7, lines 51-52).

Again, as in Flo's case, Stan presents the entitlement amount not simply as monetarily small, but as morally questionable. In lines 47-49, Stan indicates that the amount he is bringing into question comes from "the pensions at Blackpool". Blackpool is the town which houses the head office of the British government's Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). By citing Blackpool therefore Stan presents the decision about his wife's pension entitlement as an official decree. The moral charge here is that fourteen pence a week is seemingly considered by the DWP to be a sufficient amount for an elderly pensioner to live on. Moreover, just as Flo constructs an account which emphasises troubles (being unemployed), Stan constructs an account in which he and his wife have had to engage in troublesome activities (sending a marriage licence and birth certificate) purely in order to be informed of this outcome.

The problem posed for the call-in programme's expert system by these calls is not only "what kind of advice is being sought here?" but also, to some extent, "is this speaker actually seeking advice, or merely telling troubles with the welfare system?" An associated issue, in this particular broadcast context, could be stated as, "in what ways, if any, could the contents of this call feed into auxiliary advice of relevance to the overhearing audience?" I turn next to examine how the expert and the host collaborate, as an expert system, to respond to these questions.

Deferring advice

Previous research (Hutchby 1995) showed that the host of this talk radio show has two primary roles. First, he manages the boundaries of calls as single interactional episodes. It is
the host who introduces each caller, usually by naming them and instructing them to state their question to John, the expert:

(8) Flo’s Case (Detail)
1 Host: Flo in Bethnal Green go ahead.

(9) Stan’s Case (Detail)
1 Host: Stan go ahead with yuh question.

Similarly, it is the host who marks the conclusion of any call, usually by summarising the advice given and indicating a move onto the next caller or next business of the show:

(10) [RV: 21.5.85:6:3]
1→ Host: And are you: de- er are you saying that it does sound like Jane is entitled to milk tokens?
2 Expert: Yes if she’s on supplementary benefit with children under fi:ve then there should be milk tokens payable.=
3→ Host: =Okay. And get in touch with the D.H.S and ask for the twenty one weeks u-that she’s missed, in ca:sh.=It’s coming up to news weather and travel time...

As indicated by the reference in this extract to the caller in the third person (“Jane”, "she”), by the time the host produces his summary of advice the caller themselves has often been removed from the air. It is nevertheless assumed that the caller is still listening, even if no longer directly addressed.

The second primary role of the host is that of proxy advice-giving. Here the host prompts the expert to raise further issues relating to the matter at hand which he, the host, is aware of but upon which he seeks to have the certified expert provide the actual advice:

(11) [RV: 21.5.85:2:3]
1→ Host: Is there not another point John, er when it comes to qualifying for unemployment benefit isn’t there a question of, ehow you becam:e unemployed, [.hh a]nd=
2 Expert: [.hhhh]
3→ Host: =is there not a delay in getting benefit or a cut in benefit levels if you make yourself unemployed.
4 Expert: Yeah. There is a:, a benefit suspension, ((continues))

The host's question about whether there are delays or cuts in benefits "if you make yourself unemployed" – that is, if one resigns from one's job as opposed to being sacked or made redundant – acts as an invitation to the expert to confirm this ("Yeah." line 9); but the expert also treats it as an opportunity to speak further on the topic (continuation of line 9). Thus the host can be said to be introducing auxiliary advice by proxy. This represents one clear way in
which the host and expert can act in concert as an expert system in relation to the caller and
the overhearing audience; though by constructing his turn as a question, the host maintains
his interlocutor, John, as the primary expert within that system.

In terms of the two target calls in this chapter, a third role emerges for the host. That
is, in frame-ambiguous calls such as Flo's Case and Stan's Case, it is the host, rather than the
expert, who self-selects as the next speaker following the turn containing the ambiguous
advice component. Thus, in Flo's Case, we see the following:

(12) **Flo's Case (Continuation)**

11  right, so::, let's say that Ah'm unemployed,
12  and erm Ah'm not workin', .hh and- I'm on'y
13  entitled to eighty pence supplement'ry benefit
14  a week. .hhhh Ah mean is that right.=Ah mean
15  should I: be on'y gettin' eighty pence.
16-  Host: pt E:r do you mea:n as being on mater- a:s
17  you::'re, on maternity leave frum college,
18  o[r d)o you mea:n when you finish college.
19  Caller:  [Yeuh,]
20  (   ): .hhhh
21  Caller:  No (emm,:), s:ay- Ah'm, finished college.=Le's
22  say, finished college completely becuze Ah mea:n
23  I go back yiiknow next year some time.
24  Host:  Mm:::
25  (0.6)
26  Caller:  Right?

While in Stan's Case, even though the expert has previously produced many turns in answer
to the incremental unfolding of the caller's advice-seeking (extract 5 above), once the final
frame-ambiguous utterance is produced it is the host who self-selects to respond:

(13) **Stan's Case (Continuation)**

47  Caller:  On'y, [e : ]r, she did he:ar from the=
48  Expert:  [Yeh?]
49  Caller:  =pensions at Blackpool, (0.9) an' they stated,
50  e:r, (.) we 'ad tuh send marriage licence and
51  the birth certificate, (0.3) an' fourteen pee
52  a week.
53  (0.7)
54-  Host:  Ye:s that probably could be right.
55  Caller:  Yeh?
56  Host:  Mmm. .hh Er s- i- if- if seven ye:ars di:vi:ded- if
57  you look at it like this, seven years divided by
58  the number of years .hh she- she could've worked,
59  in her working life, .hh a lot a' people do end up
60  being offered pensions of less than that.=Tuppence
61  maybe.

Thus, at the precise point where the caller's talk becomes ambiguous as between advice-
seeking and troubles-telling, the Standard Advice Sequence itself is abandoned by the host
intervening in the post-request turn slot conventionally occupied by the expert. Of particular
interest, however, in terms of the relationship between the activity types of advice-giving and troubles-telling outlined by Jefferson and Lee (1992), is the type of action the host produces in these intervening turns.

Jefferson and Lee (1992) argued that whereas the advice-giver's role is to orient towards the problem and its properties, the troubles-recipient's role is to orient towards the troubles-teller and his/her experiences. Once the caller in these cases moves from what seems to be advice-seeking to what seems to be troubles-telling, therefore, the expectation might be that the host, in his intervening turn, might seek to empathise with the caller's negative experiences in receiving these patently inadequate welfare payments.

In both cases, however, that does not occur. Rather than orienting to the caller's utterance empathically, the host orients to what might be called its problematic nature. For example, in Stan's Case, the host's response in lines 54 and 56ff presents an interpretation in which Stan's telling of a trouble may not in fact be legitimately complainable. Not only is the decision of the DWP "probably...right", but there are other pensioners who may be far more hard done by than Stan: "a lot a' people do end up being offered pensions of less than that...Tuppence maybe."

In Flo's Case, rather than producing a turn which sympathises with what she has presented as the inadequacy of her benefit entitlement, the host initiates a turn to seek clarification over the way the caller has described her circumstances:

(14) **Flo's Case (Detail)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>should I: be on'y gettin' eighty pence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Host: .pt E:r do you ma:n as being on mater- a:s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>you::'re, on maternity leave frum college,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>o[r ] do you ma:n when you finish college.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Caller: [Yeuh,]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>( ) : .hhh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Caller: No (emm:,) say- Ah'm, finished college.=Le's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>say, finished college completely becuz Ah ma:n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>I go back yihknow next year some ti:me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Host: Mm::</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>(0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Caller: Right?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is some ambiguity in the caller's response (lines 22-24): she simultaneously claims to have "finished college completely" but also that she "go[es] back yihknow next year some ti:me". The following sequence shows the host orienting to this continuing ambiguity by issuing an upward-intoned continuer (line 24) which indicates something like a "more to be expected" orientation to the caller's response. However, the caller furnishes no further clarification; rather, following a 0.6-second gap, she issues a pursuit of understanding with an upward-intoned "Right?" in line 26.

In both calls, therefore, the Standard Advice Sequence is deviated from in two ways. First, the caller has produced a turn which is ambiguous as between advice request and morally indignant troubles-telling; second, the host has interjected in the sequential slot normally occupied by the expert, to seek or offer clarification. Moreover, while the host self-selects in the slot following a frame-ambiguous turn component, in neither case does his turn
do the kind of work that might be expected if the frame of the call had in fact shifted from approach-giving to troubles-telling. The host's post-complaint turns are better described as seeking to maintain the advice-giving frame by deflecting the talk away from the just-indexed trouble in favour of maintaining a focus on the problem and its properties.

Reinvoking advice
Having moved out of the Standard Advice Sequence, therefore, a key problem for the expert system comprising the host and the welfare advisor is how to re-establish an advice-giving modality; and more than that, one in which auxiliary advice of some potential relevance for the overhearing audience could also be made relevant. This is accomplished in both calls, albeit in slightly different ways that reflect the structural differences in the context for the frame ambiguous or troublesome turn, outlined previously.

In Flo's Case, the next phase of the call shows a collaborative move by the expert system to reinstate the Standard Advice Sequence. The host turns to the expert with a request as to whether he "understands" the caller's turn (line 27). The expert displays that he has no problem in understanding the caller's point (line 28), and subsequently launches into advice-giving (line 33 onwards):

(15) Flo's Case (Continuation)
26   Caller:    Right?
27→  Host:     D'you understand that John?
28→  Expert:   Ye.
29   Host:     Go (.). Fine. Go [ahead.]  
30→  Expert:   [R:ight.]=go- A'yuh ready
31   Flo?:  
32   Caller:   Ye[s, 
33→  Expert:    [.hhh (.). Basic'lly, (.). unemployment
34   benefits::, maternity benefits en things like
35   that're thin:gs you've paid _contributions_
36   for.

Indeed, the sense of "launching" into advice-giving is neatly demonstrated by the turn in lines 30-31, in which the expert seems to prime the caller for receipt of upcoming advice. The expert begins in line 33 by seeking to explain the general rules that define unemployment benefit and supplementary benefit as related but differing types of entitlement. In doing so, he begins to adopt the typical dual articulation of advice-giving in the phone-in context, as this explanation can be treated as relevant to the caller but may also be of general use to the overhearing audience.

In Stan's Case we see something slightly different, though it is still a re-invocation of an advice frame with attendant potential generalisation. We join the extract at the conclusion of extract (14) above:

(16) Stan's Case (Continuation)
59   Host:     .hh a lot a' people do end up being
60   offered pensions of less than that.=Tuppence
61   maybe.=

12
In line 65 the expert self-selects to direct a new information-seeking question to the caller. The caller’s response, in which he reveals that his wife had worked during more recent years but without "payin' a full stamp" (that is, not earning enough to make the full statutory contributions towards her state pension), enables the expert to produce a new piece of advice: that the fourteen pence "may well be:...a thing called graduated pension". As the caller begins to display his recognition of this term (line 73; then subsequently in lines 77 and 80), the expert constructs a turn in which he displays that his intention had in fact been to offer this piece of advice ("Cuz I wuz gunna go on tuh say...") line 75-79).

Clearly, while this advice is relevant to the caller’s concerns, the information it contains – that there are at least two types of pension, "graduated" and "national insurance contributory", that people can be entitled to – is also potentially relevant to members of the overhearing audience. Thus, again, the expert’s talk exhibits the dual articulation of advice and auxiliary advice that is characteristic of the broadcast context.

It seems, therefore, that when faced with frame ambiguity in the shape of callers incorporating potential troubles-talk into what should be an advice-seeking call, the show’s expert system seeks first to deflect that trouble, then second, to locate ways of re-invoking the advice frame.

**Footing ambiguity: Declining the role of advice recipient**

Within the advice-giving phase of the Standard Advice Sequence, the caller’s normative role
is to refrain from further speech, beyond possibly issuing continuers or acknowledgement tokens, granting the expert the floor to construct his advice-giving turn. In fact, as displayed in extract (3) earlier, the expectation here is often that the caller should refrain from speaking even (perhaps especially) when the expert advances into auxiliary advice-giving. In extract (3), the caller's orientation to the auxiliary advice as addressed specifically to her led to problems in understanding, resolved by the expert clarifying that his most recent spate of talk had not actually been addressing the caller's question at all ("Sorry I've- I've confused you it's my fault. .hh The a- the answer tih you'ra question is it's three thousand pounds...").

Similarly, as illustrated by the previously cited extract (10), showing the closing of a call, host and expert often summarise the advice provided to the caller referring to them in the third person, thereby demonstrating that at some point during auxiliary advice-giving, the caller's line is sometimes closed:

(10) [RV:21.5.85:6:3]
1 Host: And are you de- er are you saying
2 that it does sound like Jane is entitled
3 to milk tokens?
4 Expert: Yes if she's on supplementary benefit with
5 children under fi:ve then there should be
6 milk tokens payable.=
7 Host: =Okary. And get in touch with the D.H.S
8 and ask for the twenty one weeks u-that
9 she’s missed, in ca:sh.=It’s coming up to
10 news weather and travel time...

In Flo's Case, this is an area where we see another departure from the Standard Advice Sequence. The following extract continues from the point of re-invocation of advice in extract (15) above. As the expert's advice unfolds, the caller's first response is not simply to issue a continuer ("Mm hm", "Uh huh", etcetera), but to seek to display common knowledge with the expert. (lines 38-39 below):

(17) Flo's Case (Continuation)
34 Expert: .hhh (.) Basic'lly, (. ) unemployment
35 benefits::, maternity benefits en things like
36 that're thin:gs you've paid contributions
37 fo[r.
38 Caller: [Ye:ah I: mean becuze I've worked
39 pr[e v i]ou:sly,yeu(p)-
40 Expert: ["uhh"]
41 (0.6)
42 Expert: .h Yeh? ph[hh
43 Caller: [Yeuh(h),
44 Expert: A:nd, (. ) thu(p)- position as fa:r as (0.7)
45 supplement'ry benefit's concern:ed, .hh is (. )
46 if (. ) yuh haven't got enough tuh manange
47 on:, [s:upp]lement'ry benefit brings y'up to=
48 Caller: [Yeh, ]
49 Expert: =a certain level.
As already noted, the expert begins by explaining the relevant rules of the system. However in lines 38-39 the caller produces a turn that acts as a display of her existing understanding of the rules of the benefit system.

On one level, the caller here fails to orient to the epistemic asymmetry that normatively underpins the advice-giving frame. In that frame the advice-seeker positions themselves as lacking knowledge on the topic at hand and grants epistemic authority to the advice-giver. But more significantly, in this context, the caller's turn implies that the expert's explanation is not in fact necessary in her case. In so doing she also instantiates an expectation that the expert's talk at this point is, or should be, addressed specifically to her personal circumstances, thus challenging the dual articulation of the Standard Advice Sequence. We see further traces of frame ambiguity, therefore, in that the caller's relationship to the advice-giving exchange in this case may be "over-personalised" for the radio phone-in context.

The perturbations in the interactional frame that the caller's action causes are reflected in the sequential perturbation that follows her turn in lines 38-39. The expert's "uhh" (line 40), 0.6-second pause, and ".h Yeh?" (line 42) show him orienting to the caller's turn both as interrupting the construction of his explanation of the benefit system, and as failing to display the appropriate footing of advice-recipient. The intonation of "Yeh?" in line 42 is significant here. A downward-intoned "Yeh." would indicate that the expert accepts the caller's turn as a clarification or expansion of his prior point (as in "Yes, that's right."). In using an upward intonation, "Yeh?", he contrastingly seeks to re-position the caller as recipient of, rather than collaborator in, the production of advice (as in "Are you listening so that I can go on?"). The caller's next turn (line 43) seems to accept this re-positioning, and the expert proceeds to expand on his explanation (line 44ff).

As the sequence unfolds, however, the caller's inappropriate footing emerges once more, as she re-invokes her knowledge claim on the matter at hand to take issue with the expert's advice (lines 54-63):

(18) Flo's Case (Continuation)

As this extract begins, the expert is completing his explanation that the caller's supplementary benefit entitlement may be reduced because her other entitlements (maternity allowance) are included in the means test of her income. He indicates, by embarking on the word "So" ("S:uh-") in line 55, that his turn is about to move into a next advice phase, possibly outlining the consequences of the ways the benefit rules can affect entitlements.

This turn is abandoned however as the caller starts up, following a possible completion of the expert's turn at the end of "income" (line 53), to take issue with this explanation. In her turn (marked with arrows a), the caller invokes her belief that maternity allowance is "an extra" based on the fact that one has "worked an' paid your stamp" (that is, made your National Insurance contribution, through taxation, upon which entitlements to benefits in the British system are based). In doing so she once again partially moves out of the advice-recipient role. Even though the epistemic position she adopts is mitigated by the phrase "Yeah but I thought-", the overall effect of this turn is to challenge the epistemic asymmetry upon which the provision of expert advice is premised.

While the expert, in overlap with the caller, seeks to disagree with the opinion she is expressing (lines 60, 62, 67), what is most notable about the second half of the extract is the way that the host once again intervenes to resolve the frame ambiguity and stabilise the Standard Advice Sequence (arrows b). His turn begins in overlap with the completion of the caller's argument (line 64), but is then overlapped by the expert's own start up on a disagreement with the caller (line 65-67). The competition between these two turns reflects the roles host and expert play in the collaborative expert system of the broadcast. While the expert's utterance focuses on correcting the caller's interpretation of facts ("No that's the problem. What id is Flo..."), the host's turn, which wins the competition for the floor, focuses on instructing the caller as to the role she is expected to play as an advice recipient at this stage in the call. Having heard the expert's two disagreements earlier in the sequence (lines 60, 62) he utilises this "proxy" expertise to sanction the caller: "I think you're wrong Flo,", before adopting his own key role as moderator to re-establish the epistemic asymmetry of expert advice-giving: "so listen to John's explanation okay.". Following this, the expert embarks on continuing his advice-giving turn.

In summary, Flo's Case exhibits both frame ambiguity between advice-seeking and troubles-telling, and footing ambiguity in terms of the appropriate adoption of the role of advice-recipient. It is not just in the way that she designs her reason for calling the phone-in, but also in the way that she orients towards the attempt to provide advice in response, that this particular caller presents problems for the expert system comprising the show's host and the advice-giver.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has analysed the operation of the expert system for advice-giving in the setting of a call-in radio helpline, focusing on rare troublesome calls in which the caller's central
activity of advice-seeking is merged with another activity, that of troubles-telling. In most calls in the data corpus, advice-seekers (members of the public) succeed in identifying a clear advice topic and advice-givers (the radio host and a social welfare expert) succeed in advising on that topic, albeit within the distinctive constraints of the broadcast setting. In the two deviant cases discussed here, however, there is a difference in that the design of advice-seeking turns instantiates an ambiguous framing in which it is unclear whether the caller is seeking advice about, or making a complaint about, the social welfare system.

Analysis identified a Standard Advice Sequence in calls to the radio helpline, and showed how the problematic features of the calls in question derived initially from the caller's deviation from the normative constraints of that sequence. The problem this poses for the expert system comprising the show's host and accredited expert was viewed in terms of how they design the reception of advice-giving turns and the development of subsequent sequences. Although the two calls differed somewhat in terms of their overall organisation (with the frame ambiguous moment occurring early in one call and later in the other), there were marked structural similarities both in the design of the frame ambiguous utterance, and in the design of the expert system's response.

Frame ambiguous calls were characterised by the incorporation of some form of moral indignation on the caller's part regarding an established entitlement to, rather than a question about possible entitlements to, welfare benefits. This was most clearly illustrated by the phrase "I mean, is that right?" which in English usage can mean either "is that factually correct?" or "is that morally acceptable?". In response to such utterances it was found that the host self-selects in the sequential slot conventionally occupied by the expert, to produce a turn which in various ways disattends the troubles-relevant implicature of the caller's turn. Following this there are overt attempts by both host and expert to re-invoke the conventions of the advice-giving frame; moreover, on the expert's part, advice-giving which is sensitive to the broadcast context which can be said to have been downgraded in the caller's "over-personalised" frame ambiguous turn.

It was thus shown how the different speaker identities of caller, host and expert operate in distinctive ways as the expert system responds to the call's ambiguous framing and seeks to re-invoke the standard features of advice-giving in the radio helpline setting.
References


