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# "I Have a Question for You": Practices for Achieving Institutional Interaction in Israeli Radio Phone-In Programs

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## **“I HAVE A QUESTION FOR YOU”: PRACTICES FOR ACHIEVING INSTITUTIONAL INTERACTION IN ISRAELI RADIO PHONE-IN PROGRAMS**

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### **Abstract**

Schegloff described utterances such as “lemme ask you a question” as pre-questions, pre-pre’s or pre-delicates (Schegloff 1980). This paper provides a discussion of similar utterances in a specific institutional setting - political radio phone-in programs in Israel. The participants use these utterances in ways that are similar to Schegloff’s description. Yet, the pre-construction has additional institutional functions for the differing roles of the host and the caller. Hosts use these utterances to manage the interaction during overlaps as a means to secure an exclusive turn of talk following them. Callers use them infrequently at the beginning of their talk as story-prompts. Hosts may challenge this usage and the interactional role reversal. Regular callers can use the pre-constructions similarly to hosts. In this way, the pre-constructions in the Israeli radio phone-in programs are employed as interactional practices that relate and construct the roles in this institutional setting.

**Keywords:** Pre-structures; Radio phone-in programs; Institutional setting; Roles in interaction.

### **1. Introduction**

Schegloff (1980) described the utterance, “lemme ask you a question,” and labored over the paradox of asking a permission to ask a question in a quasi-question form. He solved the paradox by explaining that these types of utterances function as pre-questions, pre-pre’s, or pre-delicates, as they may project an action while enabling their producers to insert another piece of talk before the projected action, usually a question. Thus, Schegloff stated, following “lemme ask you a question,” often a story or another type of talk, not a question, is introduced into the conversation. Only after that element of talk ends does the speaker move to the question that he or she projected in her pre’. Thus, pre’s are employed to build a longer turn of talk, and, at their conclusion, the projected action is done, serving as a resource to organize actions in the conversation. Later, Schegloff (2007) connected these pre’s to the sequence organization and discussed various types of pre-sequences, such as pre-announcements, in what we may term pre-constructions.

Just as Schegloff opened his paper with an example from a WNBC radio phone-in program (Schegloff 1980: 105), the current paper also presents a phone-in environment: Israeli political radio phone-in programs. Radio phone-in programs, also known as talk-radio, received extended discursive research (cf. Katriel 2004) that demonstrated that their talk is institutional (Hutchby 1996; Fitzgerald & Housely 2002) and has specific

sequential and prosodic features (Panese 2010<sup>1</sup>). In these programs, the paradox surrounding the employment of the pre-constructions, such as “lemme ask you a question,” may be even greater than in mundane conversations. Whereas in mundane conversations, questions are used and arguments may erupt, in current-affair radio phone-in conversations, arguments are the fundamental form of interaction both in Israel (Author 2009) and elsewhere<sup>2</sup> (Hutchby 1996; Liddicoat et al. 1995). Therefore, phone-in interactions can be based on questions and questionings, as questions are used for challenges (Weizman 2008), which are argumentative moves. There is no interactional need for permission to ask a question, yet radio phone-in participants use pre-constructions, nonetheless, as if to ask for permission before asking questions.

This paper augments the explanation of pre-construction usage in the institutional context of the interactions. Hosts and callers are the roles that construct the institutional setting of the radio phone-in (Fitzgerald & Housley 2002), and the hosts’ role is to manage the interaction as they control it (Hutchby 1996). One resource for managing phone-ins are vocative, using people’s name or terms of address (McCarthy & O’Keeffe 2003), and the current study demonstrates that pre-constructions also may be used for the same function. Hence, hosts and callers employ the pre-construction as a resource to organize their interaction.

This paper is a result of a larger research project on Israeli current-affairs phone-ins. The corpus is comprised of 80 interactions, totaling over 7.5 hours of talk between 2004 and 2006 (Author 2009). Table 1 presents the programs’ various aspects, including time of broadcast, the hosts, and the agenda setting. All pre-constructions were collected, and their position within the interaction was analyzed. A total of 59 pre-constructions were used, and, of these, the majority (48) were employed by the hosts, and only 11 were utilized by the callers. This first finding suggests that pre-constructions are related to the participants’ role in this institutional setting, as the qualitative analysis below will demonstrate.

Table 1. Programs’ names and features.

Program's Name (Acronym)	Agenda set by	Host	Time
There is someone to talk to (TST)	Caller	Changes daily	15-16 Weekdays
Conversation with listeners <sup>3</sup> (CWL)	Caller	Permanent	18-19 Bi-weekly
Friday in the morning (FIM)	Production	Permanent	8-9 Friday

The current research suggests that, in Israel, hosts deploy the pre-construction as one resource for controlling the interactions, especially when there are overlaps, as elaborated in the second section. The third section includes cases in which hosts use an

<sup>1</sup> Though prosody has an important role in phone-ins and is extensively researched (e.g., Panese 2010), for lack of space and expertise, it will not be discussed here.

<sup>2</sup> An analysis of the cultural differences between phone-ins in Israel and elsewhere awaits further research. Yet, it is the host's invariable role to control the program and to manage the interactions.

<sup>3</sup> There are two problematic terms in this program name: The interactions are not conversations, as they take place in an institutional setting; and “listeners” refers to participants, who mainly talk.

elaborated pre-construction to mark a problematic caller. Callers use the pre-construction as a story-prompt at the beginning of their interaction, as can be seen in the fourth section, which also presents the hosts' responses to these usages. One group of callers, the regulars,<sup>4</sup> as seen in the fifth section, employs the pre-construction in a manner similar to that of the hosts. In the conclusion, we note that these utterances, in addition to serving the functions described by Schegloff (1980), have specific institutional functions in Israeli political radio phone-in programs.

## 2. Hosts' use of the utterance: A managing device

Hosts use the pre-construction to manage the interaction in cases of overlaps. They use the pre-construction when they want to clarify something in the interaction or to promote a specific argument.

In the following interaction, the caller tells a story about a lawsuit that he filed against a reporter. The reporter had published a nude picture of the caller's son, who is a minor league soccer player. During the presentation of the story, the host has some clarifying questions.

- (1) TST, 27/12/04. Host: Eitan Lifshitz, caller: Avi<sup>5</sup>
1. C: *tagid, ma yesh lakatav haze? Meshaamem lo?*  
Say, what's with this reporter? Is he bored?
  2. *ma (ben sheli) mesaxek [ota [ligat al?*  
What (my son) plays [(it) [major league?
  3. H:  
[lemi- [rega rega,  
[To who- [wait wait,
  4. (0.3) [*ah rega.*  
[Uhm wait.
  5. C: [*kula- kulo [mixsak [beliga bet.*  
[All of her- all of it [a game [in the minor league.
  6. H:  
[rega. [adon mizraxi.  
[Wait. [Mister Mizraxi.
  7. (0.7) *ten li she'ela.* (0.3) [*m::i*  
Gimme a question. [Fro::m
  8. C:  
[°ken°.  
[°Yes°.
  9. H: *mi e::h mimerc e::h alpayim ushtayim,*  
From u::h March u::h two thousand and two,
  10. *hu kol hazman katav al ha::ben shelxa?*  
he was constantly writing about your so::n?
  11. C: (0.8) *eh lo. Mimerc- ken.*

<sup>4</sup> Regular callers are a known group of callers in political phone-ins (McLeish 2005). They have various interactional features (Dori-Hacohen 2009) that I cannot reiterate here due to space limitations.

<sup>5</sup> The transcripts present the Hebrew in Latin letters using CA conventions (cf. Jefferson 2004). I use the letter c for the Hebrew Tzadik, and the letter x for the sound of either Khet or Khaf. I translated the Hebrew as close to the original as possible in form and meaning, while making the translation readable. I did not copy the pauses, as English is more verbose than Hebrew.

Hm no. From March- yes.

In this segment, the host tries to get the floor. He starts to ask a question but stops (1:3) and moves to resolve the overlaps (1:2-6). He resolves them verbally without using the mechanisms that Schegloff (2000) described for addressing overlaps. He tries, unsuccessfully, to resolve them by using four “waits” (1:3,4,6), a structural discourse marker (Maschler 1998), and a summons (1:6) (cf. Schegloff 1968). Neither of these elements receives a verbal response from the caller. Then the host uses the utterance “**gimme a question,**” in which he drops the verb (1:7). This pre-construction receives the caller’s go-ahead (1:8) (see Schegloff 2007 for go-aheads) and opens the floor to the host’s uninterrupted question. The host asks a direct clarifying question about one detail in the caller’s story. In this segment, the hosts uses the utterance “**gimme a question**” to solve an overlap as a means to manage the interaction, and then he gets to his question. Therefore, in this excerpt, the pre-construction is used as a pre-question, and it secures the host’s turn of talk, unlike the other resources that the host tried to resolve the overlap.

Whereas the interaction above centers on a narrative, most hosts’ pre-constructions are not usually used in narrative interactions. Usually, hosts use pre-constructions in argumentative interactions, to precede their argument. In the following excerpt, the caller rejects the idea of appointing a foreign governor to the Bank of Israel, while the host supports it.

(2) CWL, 11/1/05. Host: Jojo Abutbul, caller: Aharon

1. C: *hu barax micarfat, az anashim [kulam hicbi’u baado*  
He escaped from France, so people [all of them voted for him
2. H. *[aval lefi oto ikaron shelxa*  
[but according to that principle of yours
3. C: *[venihiya [xaver kneset.*  
[And became a [member of parliament.
4. H: *[rega. [rega. she’ela.*  
[Wait. [Wait. A question.
5. *(0.6) she’ela.*  
Question.
6. C: *[ken.*  
[Yes.
7. H: *[lefi oto ikaron shelxa,*  
[According to the same principle of yours,
8. *lama anaxnu meyav’im mexoniyot mixuc laarec.*  
why do we import cars from abroad.
9. *(0.6) lama anaxnu meyav’im anshey mikco’a axerim.*  
Why do we import other professionals.
10. *(0.7) bo, anaxnu po. ma anaxnu lo maspik tovim?*  
Come on, we’re here. What are we not good enough?
11. *ma anaxnu lo yexolim leyacer mexoniyot tovot?=  
What can’t we produce good cars?*
12. C: *=lo. lo maspik tovim anaxnu.*  
=No. Not good enough are we.

The caller presents an argument when he recalls a fugitive from France who became a member of the Israeli parliament (2:1,3). In an overlap, the host starts his argument (2:2), but before he completes it, he moves to resolve the overlap. He solves the overlaps by using “wait” and the word “question” twice (2:4,5). This host uses only the word question, as a shorthand for the utterance “lemme ask you a question” and its variants.<sup>6</sup> This first usage leads to a silence (2:5), in which the caller does not talk, and the repetition receives a verbal go-ahead (2:6). The host then recycles part of the talk from the overlap (2:7, see Schegloff 1987, 2000) and completes his challenges of the caller’s position, using a “why” question (2:8). Because the caller does not respond to the host’s first question, as evident in the silence (2:9), the host pursues a response (Pomerantz 1984b) with a series of questions (2:9-11), which the caller eventually rejects (2:11).<sup>7</sup> Thus, the utterance “question” is employed as a pre-argument, and the argument, in the form of challenging question, follows the pre-construction immediately. The pre-construction precedes the argument, as its main goal is to resolve the overlap cooperatively, unlike the “wait,” which demands no response.

In the following interaction, a similar utterance is used as a pre-construction that functions as a pre-pre (Schegloff 1980). This segment suggests that the role of this utterance is not to precede the question or any other specific action that follows it but, rather, to resolve overlaps and to prepare the floor for the host’s extended turn. In this interaction, the participants discuss the “demographic problem” - the Jewish-Israeli term for the future equal numbers of Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. The caller fears this numerical equality because it will lead to the demise of the Jewish state. The host refutes the existence of such a problem and declares that all citizens, regardless of their religions, should be treated equally.

(3) TST, 14/11/04. Host: Gideon Reicher, caller: Or

1. H: *tagid yesh li*                    *[she'ela elexa.*  
Tell ((me)) I have a    [question for you.
2. C:    *[veze lo carix lihiyot [mashehu miyamin.*  
[And it doesn't have to be [something from the right.
3. H:    *[yesh sh-*  
    *[I've q-*
4. (0.3) *yesh li she'ela elexa.*  
I have a question for you.
5. C: (0.5) *[vaksha.*  
[Please.
6. H:                    *[nanix she'axshav anaxnu be'anglia,*  
                              *[Let's suppose we are in England now,*
7. C: (0.7) *ken.*  
Yes.

<sup>6</sup> This production of the pre-construction suggests that the variants of the utterance, such as “lemme ask you a question,” “can I ask you a question,” and “I have a question,” may be equivalent, as their focus is on their function and not on their verbal content.

<sup>7</sup> The two excerpts presented above demonstrate that callers do not act like other media participants (Greatbatch 1988, 1992; Hamo 2006). Both callers act according to the mundane preference for agreement (cf. Pomerantz 1984a). The previous caller gives the wrong answer in an agreement-disagreement structure (1:11), and this caller delays his disagreement and responds only after the host pursues a response (Pomerantz 1984b).

8. H: (1.0) *veye::sh mata'im elef yehudim shegarim bedrom*  
And there are 200000 Jews living in south
9. *angliya*, (0.7) *ole angli leshidur, vehu omer*,  
England, an Englishman goes on air, and ((he)) says,
10. *dis ju::z, dos ju::z*, (0.5) *vexuley vexuley, vehu omer*,  
these Jews, those Jews, etcetera etcetera, and he says,
11. *bo:: niten lahem pina, yoter miday yehudim yesh*  
le::t's give them a corner, ((there are)) too many Jews
12. *be'anglia. ma hem mitrabim, hem mekalkelim*,  
in England. Why are they reproducing, they are ruining,
13. (0.7) *o becarfat, efshar laasot oto davar*,  
or in France, the same thing is possible,
14. *od yoter muclax. becarfat yesh hamon e harbe*  
better still. In France there are a ton uh a lot of
15. *cfon afrika'im, ata yode'a*. (0.6) *sheba'im behamoneyhem*  
north Africans, you know. That come en masse
16. *lecarfat. efshar oto davar. ata medaber*  
to France. The same thing is possible. You talk
17. *al m- al hame'a haesrim ve'axat, sheba*,  
of c- about the twenty first century, in which,
18. (0.7) *nigmeru hayamim shebahem yaxolta, lasim*,  
They are over the days in which you could, put,
19. *im bixlal, carix haya lasim sexer, ze shelanu*,  
if at all, need to put a dam, this is ours,
20. *ze shelahem, ze taarovet*. (0.7) *ha'yita paam*  
this is theirs, this is a mixture. Have you ever been
21. *benu york? halaxta barxov benu york?*  
in New York? Have you walked in the street in New York?
22. C: *lo. [lecaari adayin lo.*  
No. [Unfortunately not yet.

The host tries to resolve the overlap and to move to his argument, repeating the pre-construction "I have a question" three times (3:1,3,4), one of which is cut off (3:3). Only after the third attempt does he receive the caller's go-ahead (3:5). The host then starts his argument (3:6), and after the first element of his argument, he stops and receives a delayed continuer (3:7; see Schegloff 1982 for continuers). The delay and the continuer suggest that the caller understood that the host was in the midst of an extended turn. The host continues his long analogy to England (3:8-12) and then starts another analogy to France (3:14-16). Following the analogies, the host states that, nowadays, such a divisive position is not acceptable (3:16-20). Following this statement, the host formulates and reformulates a question (3:20,21). Finally, after this spate of talk from the host, the caller answers.

During the host's extended talk, in which the host takes several pauses, the caller does not speak, not because there are no transition-relevant places but, rather, due to the pre-construction utterance. Because the host projected a question, and the caller accepted that projection, the caller awaits that question, and only after he identifies one does he answer. In his role of managing the interaction, the host deploys this pre-

construction, which is a pre-pre in the form of a pre-question, “**I have a question for you,**” to ensure a long, uninterrupted turn before an actual question is produced.

This segment demonstrates that a clear argumentative line within a turn following the pre-construction is not needed. One can barely connect the question at the end of this extended turn (3:20) with the talk immediately following “I have a question” (3:4). This segment illustrates, from the host’s perspective, the interactional power of the pre-construction as a way to control the interaction and to get an extended turn of talk, regardless of its content.

In the following segment, the host uses the utterance again as a pre-pre, meaning that, after the pre’, there is a question, followed by the second main question. The caller first reacts to the preliminary question, showing that she understood the host’s pre-construction to be a pre-question, and then she takes the main question to be an argument. In this call, the caller demands a referendum on Israel’s decision to withdraw from the Gaza strip.

(4) TST, 09/2/05. Host: Arye Maliniak, caller: Reut

1. H: [*yesh li elayix she’ela*.  
[I have a question for you.
2. C: [*ze paxad muvan*.  
[It is a reasonable fear.
3. H: *yesh li elayix she’ela*.  
I have a question for you.
4. C: *ken*.  
Yes.
5. H: (0.6) *zot hahaxlata, haxi xashuva, shehitkabila*  
Is this the most important decision, that was made in
6. *bimdinat yisrael meyom hivasda?*  
the state of Israel since its foundation day?
7. C: *lo. aval hi [meod xashuva*.  
No. But it is [very important.
8. H: [*ex ze yitaxen, she’ad hayom*,  
[How is it possible, that until today,
9. *afexad lo he’ela afilu al daato*,  
no one didn’t even think ((lit. raise in his mind)),
10. *be’eyze inyan xashuv, laasot mish’al am?*  
on an important issue, to have a referendum?
11. C: *ve’im ze lo kara, az ma?*  
And if it didn’t happen, so what?
12. (0.7) *l-lama ze ti’un tov ma she’ata noten li*.  
W- why is it a good argument what you give me.

The host uses the pre-construction during an overlap twice (4:1,3), but only the second use leads to the caller’s go-ahead (4:4). This go-ahead ensures the host’s turn, which he uses to ask a direct question. The caller responds directly in a type-confirming answer (Raymond 2003) and elaborates on her answer (4:7); this suggests that she took this question to be the host’s main question. However, in another overlap (4:8), the host asks a follow-up question (see Schegloff 1980: 121) in which he challenges the uniqueness of the evacuation that deems it worthy of a referendum. The caller rejects the premise of



the question (4:11) and the action, which she termed an “**argument**” (4:12) that the questions tried to achieve.<sup>8</sup> The pre-construction was, thus, a pre-pre-argument of an argument that the caller rejects.

In summary, hosts use pre-constructions in overlap-saturated environments. They take advantage of their sequential implications to solve the overlap and to secure the floor. This practice is employed following other practices, such as “wait” or “hold on” to solve the overlaps; because the other practices have weaker sequential implications, their employment is not sufficient to secure a host’s exclusive turn. Some pre-constructions are used similarly to a pre-pre, and are followed by an extended turn of talk before the projected question. In other cases, after the utterances, hosts ask direct questions or questions that are the premises of their arguments. In all cases, hosts use these utterances to manage the interaction, as part of “doing being a host,” due to their sequential implication as “pre’s.” The callers accept this pre-construction and give the host the floor with a go-ahead. The callers do not and, at times, cannot project what the host’s question or argument will be, as they cannot foresee the action’s or question’s trajectory when hosts use the pre’s.

### 3. The extended utterance: Marking uncooperative behavior

As part of their role, hosts may mark an interaction as problematic by using the pre-construction. In these cases, hosts insert different elements into the pre-construction, extending the simpler versions presented above. By adding elements to the pre-construction or by using marked words in it, hosts demonstrate that they have difficulties asking questions, managing the interaction, and interacting with the caller.

In the following interaction, the host uses an extended pre-construction after the caller disparages the Israeli prime minister and the minister of defense. The caller speaks vehemently, yet the host lets her complete her argument and then tries to ask a question.

(5) CWL, 09/3/05. Host: Jojo Abutbul, caller: Iris

1. C: (0.7) *ve’ani omeret elohim yishmor*.  
And I say dear God.
2. *be’eyze teruf anaxnu xayim.* >harey ze lo ye’uman.  
In what madness do we live. >Really it is unbelievable.
3. *haanashim ha’ele, >asur lahem bixlal ledaber bashem*  
These people, >they should in no way talk in the name
4. *yisrael.* < (0.3) *asur lahem leyaceg et am Israel.*  
Israel. They shouldn’t represent the people of Israel.
5. (0.5) *en lahem shum zXu:t, ledaber beshem yisrael,*  
They have no ri:ght, to speak on behalf of Israel,
6. *ulehagid yisrael roc::a, yisrael lo [roc::a.*  
and say Israel wan::ts, Israel doesn’t [wan::t.

<sup>8</sup> It seems that rejecting the premise of a question and the action that a question tries to achieve are even more oblique responses to questions than those suggested by Stivers and Hayashi (2010). This observation suggests the need for further research on this topic.

7. H: *[hevanti.*  
[I get it.
8. (0.5) *ani yaxol lishol otax rak she'ela.*  
may I just ask you a question.
9. *kedey sheyihye li reka:: raxav yoter,*  
so that I have a wider backgrou::nd,
10. *legabey ma she'at omeret?*  
concerning what you're saying?
11. (0.8) *yesh lax ulay de'a::, (0.4) kama leylo::t?*  
Do you perhaps have an opini::on, how many night::s?
12. (0.4) *kama peulo:t? (0.4) bekama yexidot muvxaro::t,*  
How many army operation:s? In how many special unit::s,
13. *sheret sar habitaxon?*  
the minister of defense has served?
14. *o shestam at [zot omeret m::a?*  
or are you just [I mean wha::t?
15. C: *[so what. nu az m::a.*  
[So what. nu so wha::t.
16. H: *lo [yode'a,*  
(I) [dunno,,
17. C: *[az ze marshe lo et hateyruf ha↑ze axsh↑av?*  
[so does this allow him thi↑s insanity n↑ow?

In this segment, the caller speaks very quickly when she disparages the government and denies the ministers their representation rights (5:1-6). Speaking on the radio, in front of a wide audience, she uses various rhetoric devices (Atkinson 1984) such as contrastive structure (5:5-6), three-part list (5:3-6), and emotive language: “**dear God**” (5:1), “**madness**” and “**unbelievable**” (5:2). Although she speaks quickly, she does have pauses within her talk, during which the host decides not to talk. Thus, the host lets the caller complete her argument, suggesting that he would like to have an interaction in which every side completes his or her argument.

Following this rhetorical turn, which the host overlaps at its end, there is a short pause (5:8). The host uses an elaborated pre-construction that involves a less direct type of request - “**can I**” (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984; Blum-Kulka & House 1989) - to open his pre-construction. During the pre-construction, he inserts the word “**just**” to minimize the request (5:8), as it may literary mean a quick question, and, finally, he provides an explanation for his upcoming action (5:9-10). As presented above, in other interactions, hosts do not use such expanded requests; therefore, this host, in his expanded pre-construction, marks this interaction as remarkable.

After the pre-construction, the caller does not give a go-ahead but also does not continue with her argument, and there is a short pause (5:11). The host self-selects to continue talking, using a three-part list, to counter the rhetorical aspects of her turn. In his turn (5:11-12), the host establishes the minister of defense’s authority and experience, which the caller has earlier dismissed. The caller is not impressed with these credentials (5:15,17), as she aggressively (using a *nu*, 5:15) rejects the question as irrelevant (for an in-depth analysis of *nu*, see Maschler and Dori-Hacohen, in-press).

The caller continues with her arguments and the host tries to present an alternative view. In this second segment, he uses a different utterance as a pre-construction, which expresses his desire to speak at length.

(6) CWL, 09/03/05. Host: Jojo Abutbul, caller: Iris.

1. C: *hem bexavana [rocim lexalel et [hashem yisrael.*  
They deliberately [want to desecrate the [name Israel.
2. H: *ani yax- [ani yaxol latet- [ani yaxol latet lax,*  
Can I- [can I give- [can I give you,
3. *te'oria axeret, iris?*  
another theory, Iris?
4. C: (0.6) *axshav od mashehu [shekashur.*  
Now another thing that's [related.
5. H:  
[lo lo lo.  
[No no no.
6. *[ani roce*  
[I want
7. C: *[rega. Shniya. Ani eten lexa. Hainyan shel hamaaxazim*  
[Wait. Second. I'll let you. The thing of the settlements

In this segment, the host, in a series of overlaps (6:1-2), tries to get the turn of talk. He uses another indirect request, “**can I give you another theory**” (6:2-3), as a pre-construction to obtain the floor. However, instead of the usual request to ask a question, the host tries to get a permission to present a “theory,” demonstrating his wish for a longer-than-usual turn, as “theory” indicates a set of ideas and propositions and, thus, demands a long turn of talk. Further, he ends his pre-construction turn with a vocative, “Iris” (6:3), as a summons, which is supposed to lead to his exclusive turn of talk, yet he fails. The caller lets him finish the pre-construction but does not let him present the theory; by promising to let him talk, she continues to her next topic and denies him a turn (6:7). Thus, the host uses the request for a theory as a pre-construction for an elaborated turn but does not succeed in stopping the caller’s flow of talk. This excerpt shows that a host can fail in managing the interaction, yet he has the ability to signal to the caller and to the audience that the caller is not cooperating and should cooperate more. In the case of this particular caller, she does not want to cooperate. Eventually, the host terminates the interaction by disconnecting the caller and then reprimanding her for not cooperating (Dori-Hacohen 2009). Yet, both uses of the extended pre-construction occur to mark a problematic caller, as she does not cooperate in the interaction and does not let the host speak.

In the next excerpt, taken from a program devoted to the problems in the judicial system, the host uses the extended pre-construction to mark another problematic caller, although this caller poses a different problem. The caller states that the judicial system should be more efficient and that all public services, including the educational system, have problems. The host demonstrates that he has difficulties getting the caller to express a less prosaic and clearer opinion, one that is limited to problems of the judicial system.

(7) FIM, 11/3/05. Host: Gideon Reicher, caller: Itzhak Mor

1. H: [*ma* [*hati'un ham* [*merkazi shelxa* [*neged*=  
[What is [your ma[in argument [against
2. C: [*ve::* [*axsav* [*me'ever laz::e*,  
[And [now [beyond tha::t,
3. H: =*maarexet batey hamishpat*.  
the courts system.
4. C: *e:h maarexet batey hamishpat hi lo haashema hayexida*.  
U:h the court system is not the only guilt one.
5. *yesh be'aya bemaarexet haxinux shelanu*.=  
There's a problem with our education system.=
6. H: =*rega rega*. (0.2) *ten li lesayem, beshe'ela axat sheli*.  
=Wait wait. Let me finish, with one question of mine.
7. *ma ixpat lexa. ani hayozem*.  
Why do you care. I am the initiator.
8. C: *beseder*.  
OK.
9. H: *ma hati'un hamerkazi shelxa, keneged maarexet*  
What is your main argument, against the system
10. *batey hamishpat, uvexax nextom* (0.7) [*et toxnitenu*.  
of the courts, and with that we'll close [our program.
11. C: [*hati'un hamerkazi*  
[My main
12. *sheli neged maarexet hamishpat hu*  
argument against the judicial system is ((continues))

In an overlap, the host tries to ask the caller for his main argument (7:1,3). The host uses a pre-construction for permission for a question after he uses a couple of “waits” (7:6). Instead of moving to his question, the hosts expand on the request with two additional utterances (7:7). These utterances include a demeaning question (“**why do you care?**” does not fully capture the Hebrew expression), which is a rhetorical one, and a second statement that the host is the initiator. These utterances suggest that the host is fulfilling his institutional role in asking the questions and managing the interaction, unlike the caller who does not fulfill his duty of stating an opinion clearly enough. Despite the use of an extended version of the pre-construction, the caller still gives the go-ahead (7:8), and then the host repeats the question that he asked in the overlap (compare 7:1,3 to 7:9-10).

The host asks the caller to state his main argument. This request shows that the host did not understand the caller's main argument, even at the end of their interaction. It also implies that the caller did not fulfill his role, which is to clearly state an opinion. The lack of clarity and the failure to meet this role explain why the host elaborated on the request for the question.

When hosts expand on the pre-construction, they signal that they need to do more than merely manage the interaction with the specific caller. They demonstrate that the caller does not speak in a cooperative way. This lack of cooperation can be either because the caller does not listen to the host or because he or she does not speak clearly. This function joins the first function to show how the use of the pre-construction is part

of the host's institutional role, either in managing the interaction or in demanding the caller to fulfill his or her role.

#### 4. Caller story-prompts and their responses

I have presented how hosts use the pre-construction either to solve overlaps or to mark problematic callers. These uses are part of their role as hosts. This section presents a discussion of how callers use these pre-constructions, though they do so less often (11 times out of 59 in the corpus). Moreover, when they use it, usually in the opening of their interactions (see ex. 1 in Schegloff 1980), it is for different functions than those of the hosts, as callers use it as a pre-cursor for a story. The following excerpts demonstrate a caller's use of the pre-construction and how the host responds to it. Just as hosts use various types of pre-constructions for certain reasons, so do callers.

Ex. 8. TST, 27/12/04. Host: Eitan Lifshitz, caller: Avi Mizraxi

1. C: *e:h yesh l:i she'ela. e im haya lexa ben,*  
U:h let me have a question. Uh if you had a son,
2. *vehayu mecalmim oto, shehu bo nagid,*  
and he was photographed, that he is let's say,
3. *saxkan kaduregel. o saxkan kadursal. (0.7) be'erum.*  
a soccer player. or a basketball player. In the nude.
4. *ma hayita ose.*  
What would you do.
5. H: (1.6) *ta'amin li, ani lo yode'a, afilu ex laxshov al*  
Believe me, I don't know, even how to think about
6. *hashe'ela hazot.*  
this question.
7. C: (0.8) *az haben sheli, eh bashvi'i lashli'shi*  
So my son, uh on the seventh to the third ((March))

At the beginning of this interaction, the caller uses a pre-construction as a pre-question (8:1), and as Schegloff (1980) suggested, it is not followed by a question but by a short story. Even though this form is less direct than some of the host's pre-constructions, it is also used to preface an extended turn of talk. The caller presents a synopsis of a hypothetical situation, in which someone has taken a nude picture of the host's son (8:1-3). Then he moves to his projected question and asks the host what he would do in this situation (8:4). During the pre-construction, the caller provides an abstract of his story (to use Labov's [1972] term) as a story-prompt (Sacks 1974). In a manner similar to that of the host, in this narrative-based interaction, the caller uses the pre-construction to organize his talk.

The host shows that he cannot answer the question both by delaying and stating his response (8:5-6). Indeed, the host accepts the caller's abstract and story-prompt, and he is willing to hear the story, as he cannot even imagine such a state of affairs. Following the host's response, the caller starts telling his story. Although the host did not know the exact answer, he gave the expected response, aligning with the caller and his story-prompt.

When a caller uses the pre-construction, he or she uses it to project a story in the interaction. The use of the pre-construction by callers is rare, partially because narratives are not preferred in this environment (Hacohen 2007). Most callers do not present a story and do not use any pre-construction but, rather, simply start their interactions directly with an on-topic discussion. Callers who use stories tend to preface them with pre-constructions as pre-cursors for their stories. When using the pre-cursors as pre-questions, the caller knows the story and, thus, they also know the answer to his or her question. Moreover, as the following excerpt suggests, callers expect the host to either guess an answer or at least affiliate with them about the question and its answer. The previous excerpt was an example in which a story-prompt succeeded. This is not the case in the next example, in which another caller begins his call with a pre-construction that is a story-prompt.

(9) TST, 02/2/05. Host: Arye Maliniak, caller: No identification

1. C: (0.6) *shalom arye*.  
Hello Arye.
2. H: *ken*.  
Yes.
3. C: (0.7) *raciti ledaber itxa al mishteret hatnua*.  
I wanted to talk to you about the traffic police.
4. H: *mishteret hatnua?*  
The traffic police?
5. C: *ken*.  
Yes.
6. H: *ken*.  
Yes.
7. C: *yesh li she'ela elexa*.  
I have a question for you.
8. *a-kama ola be'emve shvameot shloshim?*  
yo- how much does a BMW 730 cost?
9. H: *betor ma ata shoel oti?*  
In what capacity am I being asked?<sup>9</sup>
10. C: *lo. An::i exad she:: (0.7) ani roce lish'ol otxa?*  
No. I:: one tha::t I want to ask you?
11. *ata yaxol lehagid li, kama ola bemve shve meot*  
Can you tell me, how much does a BMW 730
12. *shloshim. ve'ani agid lexa gam lama*.  
cost. And I will tell you also why.
13. H: *ata yaxol lehagid li, kama ole zug mixnasayim leyatom*.  
Can you tell me, how much does a pair of trousers cost for an orphan.
14. C: (0.3) *lo*. (0.3) *lo. tir'e. bo ani agid lexa*.  
No. No. Look. Come I'll tell you.
15. *anaxnu yod'im kama ola beemve shva me'ot shloshim*.  
We know how much a BMW 730 costs.

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<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew phrase, and especially its weary tone, cannot be exactly translated into English.

This interaction begins slowly and with many pauses (9:1-3). The caller presents the topic of his call, the traffic police (9:3). The host initiates a clarification sequence regarding the topic (9:4) and completes it (9:6). Then the caller uses the utterance, “**I have a question for you**” (9:7) and follows it with a question about the cost of an expensive car, specifically a BMW 730 (9:8). In this case, the pre-construction is followed by a direct question. Because it is a luxury car, the caller expects the host to know that it is expensive.

The host, however, does not answer the question, as he does not understand under which guise he is supposed to answer it (9:9). From his response, it is clear that the host does not see the relevance of the question or its trajectory. The caller, after some hesitation and a pause (9:10), insists on his question and closes his turn by stating that he has a reason for asking (9:12). The host refuses to answer and counters with a meaningless ironic question (9:13), ironic because orphans do not get discounts when buying trousers. The caller suggests again that the host knows the answer, by trying to use an inclusive “we” (9:15), which the host challenges (not shown here, see Author 2009).

This caller uses the pre-construction for a question as a pre-telling device. By using it, he tries to build the following trajectory: He thought that the answer to his question was known to the host (9:15) and tried to align the host with the point of his story, as an evaluative mechanism (Labov 1972). However, the host did not follow the caller’s trajectory and did not align with him but, rather, rejected the relevance of the question.

Both excerpts include callers that use the pre-construction at the beginning of an interaction. They use it as cursors and as story-prompts to get the host’s attention to their story before telling the abstract. Following this opening, both callers use a narrative and use the pre-construction as part of creating a known trajectory to their stories. One of the callers succeeds in prompting the story, while the other fails.

The two excerpts suggest that hosts accept the callers’ use of the pre-construction. Hosts may accept or reject the story that these utterances are used to prompt. However, they do not reject the use of the questions themselves, unlike what happens in the following excerpt.

(10) CWL, 29/12/04. Host: Jojo Abutbul, caller: Benny

1. H: *im mi ani medaber.*  
Who am I talking to.
2. C: *beni.*  
*Benny.*
3. H: *vaksha.*  
Please.
4. C: *tir’e, ani- yesh li she’ela axat.*  
Look, I- I have one question.
5. (1.3) *tagid li vaksha.*  
Tell me please.
6. *haim haislam haarav:i, (0.5) kovesh umitnaxel, ze mutar.*  
If the Arabic Islam, conquer and settle, that's allowed.
7. *layehudim sheas- shemeshaxrerim et haarec shelahem,*  
((why)) To the Jews that I- that liberate their land,
8. (0.7) *ze asur. (0.3) ze ha’she’ela sheli.*  
that's not allowed. That’s my question.

9. (0.8) *yesh li od eyze he'ara, axrey ze.*  
I have another remark, following this.
10. H: *az ma ata roze, axshav ata lahafox lihiyot jojo.*  
So what do you want, now you turn into be Jojo.
11. *ata shoel tashe'elot. vean::i [yaanu ani beni?*  
You ask the questions. And I:: [you know I am Benny?
12. C:  
*[ani shoel she'ela.*  
[I ask a question.
13. *[nekuda.*  
[Period.
14. H: *[aha. ok. [she'yaalu maazinim haba'im-*  
[Aha. Ok. [The next listeners that go on the air-

After the caller presents himself (10:2), the caller says he has **“one question”** (10:4). This pre-construction functions as a pre-question, and it is followed by a long silence in which the caller might have expected a go-ahead; however, because he does not get one, he continues to follow the silence with another utterance, changing his action to a request (10:5). He then uses a split conditional sentence<sup>10</sup> (10:6-8) that creates a perceived asymmetry: The Arabs are allowed to conquer lands (10:6), but the Jews are not allowed to liberate their lands (10:7). This structure does not create a clear question in Hebrew, which might explain the host's lack of response. Following a short pause, the caller chooses to continue talking (10:8) and restates that this is his question, implying that the split conditional sentence is an interrogative, as many yes/no questions use conditional sentences in Hebrew. The host does not respond (10:9); therefore, the caller reiterates that he has another comment, thus pursuing a response (Pomerantz 1984b).

Unlike the two previous callers, who projected a narrative, this caller creates a political trajectory to the interaction. He tries to make the host commit to expressing his political opinion through answering the question. Moreover, the language in his utterance makes the asymmetry look unfair, and, thus, the caller expects the host, and everyone else, to reject it. This unfairness projects a negative answer to the question, and a hypothetical answer could look like: “No, it is allowed for Jews to liberate their lands.”

The caller's use of the pre-construction does not go unchallenged. Instead of answering the question, the host refutes the caller's right to ask questions (**“what do you want”**, 10:10) and then accuses the caller of switching roles with him (10:10-11). The host challenges the attempt that the caller makes to reverse their roles, in what Weizman terms an interactional challenge (Weizman 2008). Using this challenge of the caller's right to ask questions, the host succeeds in not responding to the caller's trajectory and avoids answering the question. Because the host denied the caller's ability to ask questions, the caller adjusts the meaning of his action and claims that it was a general question (10:12-13). The host accepts this adjustment (10:14) and redirects the question to subsequent callers, showing that he understands the caller's attempt to deflect the attack.

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<sup>10</sup> The caller's Hebrew is problematic here, as he uses the question adverb “ha'im” (which has no parallel in English) instead of the conjunction “im” (=if).



Later in the same interaction, the caller moves to his second topic. The next segment suggests that the caller understands that he is not allowed to ask questions.

(11) CWL, 29/12/2004. Host: Jojo Abutbul, caller: Benny

1. C: *hashe'ela hashniya sheli*,  
My second question,
2. *zot omeret hahe'ara hashniya sheli, hi al arye.*  
that is my second comment, is about Arye.
3. *Ata yode'a, arye mixulon o bat yam.*  
You know, Arye from Xolon or Bat-Yam.

The caller presents his second action as a “**question**” (11:1). He then initiates a self-repair at the first possible position (11:2). The caller changes the presentation of his talk from a “**question**” to a “**remark**” (11:2). The self-repair is evident from the use of a “**that is**” as a repair initiator.

The repair may have two explanations, and both relate to the previous excerpt. One possible explanation is that, because he presented his second topic as a remark at the beginning of the interaction (10:9), the caller self-repairs his presentation to follow his first statement. The second explanation is that, because the host challenged his right to ask questions (10:10-11), the caller moves from asking a question to making a remark, an unchallengeable action in this setting.<sup>11</sup> Regardless of the explanation, the caller's self-repair shows his reluctance to use a pre-question again.

The excerpts from the last interaction relates to knowledge and projectability in the interaction. The callers use the pre-construction before what they assumed is known information that the hosts should share, or alignments, termed O-events by Labov and Fanshell (1977). These include a response to a son's nude photo (ex. 8), the price of a luxury car (ex. 9), and the unequal treatment of Arabs and Jews (ex. 10). The callers expect the host to answer their questions in the expected way, with indignation or shock (ex. 8), a high numeric value (ex. 9), and rejection of the injustice (ex. 10). The host in ex. 8 acted as projected and accepted the caller's O-event. However, the other hosts acted as though they do not share the assumed knowledge and turned the interaction into D-events (Labov & Fanshell 1977), in which the participants dispute each other's reality. One host rejected the projected social knowledge (ex. 9), whereas the other rejected the social roles that the caller designated (ex. 10). These responses demonstrate that callers might be challenged when they use a pre-question as a pre-construction. These challenges go hand in hand with the limited use of the pre-construction by callers, which suggest that these utterances are not a resource for the standard caller.

## 5. The regular caller: Using the pre-construction as hosts and not as callers

The remark that the caller made in the last example was about a regular caller (11:3). In Israel, the political radio phone-in programs have a small community of regular callers (Dori-Hacohen 2009). This section concerns the regular caller's use of the pre-

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<sup>11</sup> There is some further evidence that callers are not supposed to ask questions. In another interaction (TST, 11/3/05), the caller asks a question, and the host, as an addressee, rejects answering it. Similarly, a caller apologizes after asking a direct question (TST, 09/2/05).

construction in a manner similar to that of hosts. Regular callers talk often on the phone-ins, which leads to their having interactions with hosts that are almost symmetrical. This symmetry is created, among other things, by the regulars' use of practices in a manner similar to that of the host, as illustrated below in regard to the pre-construction. Thus, they do not use it as a story-prompt, at the beginning of an interaction, as illustrated in the previous section but, rather, during an interaction as a means to manage it.

The following excerpt is taken from an interaction with a regular caller,<sup>12</sup> regarding smoking. Whereas the caller is a heavy smoker, the host ceased smoking and is now anti-smoking. The tone of the interaction is half joking, overlaps occur often, and the host used pre-constructions four times before the caller uses one.

(12) FIM, 28/1/06. Host: Gideon Reicher, caller: no identification

1. H: *zot omeret, ze tov, layeladim, haashan,*  
That is, it's good, for the children, the smoke,
2. *baoto, (0.6) kshehaxalon [patuax,*  
in the car, when the window is [open,
3. C: *[gidon. ata yode'a ma, bo,*  
[Gideon. You know what, come,
4. *yesh li [she'ela el[exa.*  
I have a [question for [you.
5. H: *[bexaya'ix. [ani ro'e (.) horim doxafim et*  
[Come on. [I see parents are pushing
6. *aglat tinokam, (.) [sheze ata nolad,*  
their baby's stroller, [that was just born,
7. C: *[rega rega rega.*  
[Wait wait wait.
8. *[yesh li she'ela elexa.*  
[I have a question for you.
9. H: *[ume'ashnim.*  
[And smoking.
10. C: *mishehu xakar, veulay higi'a hazman laasot mexka::r,*  
Has any researched, and maybe it's time to do research,
11. *(0.7) l- bedorot kodmim lo ishnu:,*  
t- in previous generations ((people)) didn't smoke,
12. H: *[ken,*  
[Yes,
13. C: *[anashim metu begil shloshim arbaim. velo yad'u mima.*  
[People died at the age thirty forty. And didn't know what from.
14. *hayom xayim ad gil me'a. ulay ze ha[sigaryot?*  
Today live to a hundred. Maybe it is the [cigarettes?

The host argues against a position that justifies parents' smoking with their children in the car (12:1-2). To get his attention, the caller overlaps him with a summons and two other utterances (12:3). Then she uses **"I have a question for you"** (12:4). She

<sup>12</sup> For lack of space, I will present only one example for this phenomenon.

produces it in an overlap, and the host continues with his argument against parents who smoke while their newborn babies are in their strollers (12:5-6). The caller continues with her bid for the floor, using three instances of “**wait**” (12:7) and then repeats her pre-construction (12:8). These actions resemble the hosts’ actions in overlaps (compare lines 12:7-8 to 1:6-7, 2:5).

Even though the host does not provide a go-ahead to the pre-construction, following its use, this caller succeeds in getting an exclusive turn of talk. She does not present a question; rather, she first presents the need for research without presenting the type (12:10). At the first transition-relevant place, the host does not respond, which suggests that he accepted the caller’s bid for an extended turn of talk, and after a short pause, the caller continues (12:11) with the premise of the suggested research. After the host’s continuer (12:12), the caller provides the logic of the research, concluding her turn with what she believes might be the results of the research (12:14), which would show that cigarettes are the reason for the longevity that she presented. Similar to hosts’, the caller’s pre-construction did not project what the question or the argument would be about but, rather, came to cooperatively secure her exclusive turn of talk, as is evident from the host’s acceptance of her extended turn of talk.

The regular caller in this excerpt uses the pre-construction as a managing practice, solving overlaps, and, thus, succeeds in getting the floor. She acts as hosts usually act, and uses the pre-construction in similar ways to those of hosts. Whereas standard callers employ pre-constructions as a story-prompt, and might be challenged for it, regular callers act similarly to hosts, and use the pre-construction as a practice for managing the interaction without creating any trajectory other than getting the exclusive turn of talk following it.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper provides a description of the use of utterances such as “lemme ask you a question” in Israeli political radio phone-in programs. These interactions are used variously by callers and hosts for different reasons. In the programs, callers and hosts converse in an argumentative manner about public affairs. During these interactions, as may be the case in similar argumentative interactions, overlaps occur. The hosts, as part of managing the interaction (Hutchby 1996), employ several practices to control the interaction and to get an exclusive turn of talk. This paper demonstrated that pre-constructions act as one such practice. Hosts use the pre-constructions alongside and after summons or “wait”s in a series of managing practices. The pre-construction has one advantage over other practices - a sequential implication, whereby callers produce a go-ahead, which ensures a host’s exclusive turn of talk. Hosts use this utterance as a manifestation of their interactional role. Moreover, they can use it in an elaborate way, to mark an uncooperative caller. Their use of the pre-construction does not create a topical trajectory for their talk, and the caller has no presumed knowledge of the host’s projected question.

Unlike hosts, whenever standard callers use the pre-construction, a clear trajectory is created. In the Israeli corpus discussed here, callers use this practice at the beginning of their talk, to organize and frame it, usually as narrative interaction, as the pre-constructions function as story-prompts. Thus, when they ask a question following the pre-construction, the callers project that the host shares their knowledge or epistemic

stance. This observation suggests that pre-constructions are a resource for creating an epistemic stance in the vicinity of stories. Similar to other actions as assessments (Heritage & Raymond 2005), in story-prompts, there are resources, such as the pre-construction, to make epistemic claims and to create shared epistemic stances.

Hosts can respond to the caller's pre-construction in different ways, as they are in charge of managing the interaction. Hosts may accept a trajectory and align with the caller by giving the expected answer and then listen to the caller's story. Conversely, hosts may reject such a trajectory, answer in an unexpected way, and reject the story or the argumentative path that the caller created, following his or pre-construction. The host's ability to go against the caller's trajectory shows once again that hosts are managing the interaction, and that this is their institutional role - to lead the discussion.

This employment of the pre-construction, however, is true only for standard callers. Regular callers are familiar with the programs and share a status similar to that of the hosts, as part of the egalitarian ethos of the Israeli communication pattern (Katriel 2004). Therefore, regular callers use the pre-construction as a managing practice, similarly to the usage of hosts.

The explanation presented above connects the use of the pre-construction in Israeli current-affairs phone-ins with the settings and roles in the interaction as well as exemplifies the use of interactional power in the phone-in setting (Hutchby 1999): Hosts use the pre-construction in an undisturbed way, whereas standard callers may fail when they use the same construct. When callers fail in their usage, it is due to hosts' control over the interaction. Because regular callers share interactional power similar to that of hosts, they can use the pre-construction to manage the interaction.

The pre-construction is a differential technique available to various parties in relation to their institutional (phone-in) omnirelevant category membership (Fitzgerald & Housley 2002). This explanation joins practices in institutional settings (cf. Heritage & Sorjonen 1994) with those of media programs (Greatbatch 1988). It shows how one type of utterance is used for several different functions by the participants in the interaction. Both participants adjust the mundane practice to create their institutional role within the institutional setting. Future research should explore the use of the pre-construction in other institutional settings, such as the teacher-student interaction, doctor-patient interaction, and other media interactions, and compare the various usages across settings.

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