Turn-initial *Yeah* in Nonnative Speakers' Speech: A Routine Token for Not-so-routine Interactional Projects

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the use of turn-initial *yeah* in learner English, focusing on non-canonical uses of *yeah*. By showing how NSSs use *yeah* in ways different from that of native speakers (NSs), this paper aims to provide a nuanced view of the function it serves in NSSs' speech. It demonstrates that *yeah* carries particular interactional import for NSSs, in that it is adopted by NSSs to accomplish unconventional interactional projects. It considers turn-initial *yeah* in two sequential environments: (1) second position turn-initial *yeah* in responses to questions and (2) *yeah* in extended turns-at-talk.

INTRODUCTION

Discourse markers (DMs) are multifunctional and pervasive in conversation. These little words, defined as "sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk" (Schrffin, 1987, p.31), do have big uses. Subtle as they may seem, they are carriers of cohesion and coherence (Halliday and Hasan, 1976; Schriffin, 1987), frame and footing (Maschler, 2002), as well as stance, affiliation and disaffiliation (Waring, 2003, 2012), to name just a few.

DMs are difficult to be mastered by nonnative speakers (NSSs), largely due to their subtleties in usage and shades in meanings. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear NSSs utilizing DMs in their speech in ways that differ from that of native English speakers. If DMs are "the oil which helps us to perform the complex task of spontaneous speech production and interaction smoothly and efficiently" (Crystal, 1988, p.48), the usage of DMs – their overuse, misuse, or lack of use – will have important implications for a NNS's pragmatic and interactional competence.

Using conversation analytic methods, this paper examines the use of turn-initial *yeah* in learner English, focusing on non-canonical uses of *yeah*. By showing how NSSs use *yeah* in ways different from that of native speakers (NSs), this paper aims to provide a nuanced view of the function it serves in NSSs' speech. It demonstrates that *yeah* carries particular interactional import for NSSs, in that it is adopted by NSSs to accomplish unconventional interactional projects.

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BACKGROUND

Studies have found *yeah* to be the most frequently used DM, ubiquitous in conversation (Fuller, 2003; Gibson, 2010; Jucker & Smith, 1998; Tao, 2003).With such liberal uses, it is not surprising that *yeah* serves a broad range of functions. Amongst some of the labels ascribed to *yeah* are backchannel cues, acknowledgement tokens, alignment resources, markers of incipient speakership, topic shift, and the affirmative second pair part (Heritage & Raymond, 2012; Gardner, 2001; Jefferson, 1984; Lindstorm & Sorjonen, 2012; Yngve, 1970). This paper focuses on NNS use of turn-initial *yeah* in two sequential environments: (i) second position turn-initial *yeah* in responses to questions and (ii) *yeah* in extended turns-at-talk. To adequately situate my inquiry, I briefly review the existing literature concerning the use of *yeah* specifically in responses to questions, as well as in an extended turn-at-talk. I will also consider the use of *yeah* more generally in NNS speech.

'Yeah' in response to questions

One of the most common and important function performed by *yeah* is showing agreement. As a casual, informal version of *yes*, when sequentially occupying the second pair part position of an adjacency pair (Sacks & Schegloff, 1973), *yeah* is a prototypical affirmative response to polar questions, which invite recipients to either affirm or reject a candidate proposition (Heritage & Raymond, 2012). In the case of polar questions, *yeah* is preferred at two levels. First, it is cooperative, as it displays agreement and confirmation. Also, in contrast to repetitive responses, it quickly acquiesces to the propositions embedded in the question, and hence, facilitates the closing of a sequence (Heritage and Raymond, 2012; Stivers, 2010). Polar questions make affirmation or rejection of a candidate proposition a relevant response; a prototypical response would be *yes* or *no*, or their alternatives such as *yeah* or *nope* (Raymond, 2003). Response designs for *wh*-questions function differently. Depending on the *wh*-word, *wh*-questions make relevant particular pieces of information with respect to person, place, time, etc. (Lee, 2012). In other words, when a *wh*-question constitutes a sequence initiating first action, a conditionally relevant and unmarked response is the particular piece of information that the question seeks, which is not typically *yes* or *no*.

'Yeah' in extended turns-at-talk

Other than responses to questions, *yeah* also frequently appears in an extended turn-at-talk and has been found to be a key recipient action token. In the turn-initial position, *yeah* commonly appears as a freestanding object. It is often referred to as a backchannel cue, or sounds that signal listenership, such as *mm*, *mhm*, *uh- huh*, and *oh* (Yngve, 1970). *Yeah* also demonstrates orientation to the ongoing course of interaction, signaling that the recipient has processed the prior and is ready for the next. As such, it is termed an *acknowledgement token*. In multi-unit and extended turns in particular, tokens such as *yeah*, *mhm* and *uh-huh* are deployed as continuers, sandwiched between turn-constructional units (Schegloff, 1982). The use of *yeah* in this position projects the trajectory of continued telling. It shows that the recipient is cooperating with the speaker, giving the teller interactional space so that the action of telling can be accomplished.

Thus far, we have discussed how *yeah* contributes to the construction of continuous listenership. Corollary to such turn-taking dynamics is the notion of *alignment*. In the context of extended turns, particularly in storytelling, *alignment* refers to the recipient's support of the structural asymmetry resulting from the endorsement of the teller's priority to the floor (Stivers, 2008b). Acknowledgement tokens such as continuers are regularly deployed to achieve alignment (Lindstorm and Sorjonen, 2012). Furthermore, Jucker and Smith (1998) observed that depending on the information that precedes the token, *yeah* reveals how interlocutors monitor each other's continuous activation and integration of information. Compared to *oh* and *really*, *yeah* marks information that affirms pre-existing assumptions.

Yeah is distinguished from other continuers and acknowledgement tokens because of its power to shift talk trajectory. When a second position, turn-initial *yeah* is followed by further talk, it can index a potential change in speakership. Jefferson (1993) noted that not only does *yeah* acknowledge or sanction the previous turn, but also initiates an incipient change of speakership and marks a shift in topic. This is supported by Drummond and Hopper (1993), as well as Gardner (1998), who pointed out that *yeah* is more multifunctional than other "vocalization of understandings" (p. 205) such as *mhm* and *mm*, in that *yeah* displays stronger alignment, claims greater speaker incipiency and is semantically less empty. Prosody also plays a role in signaling the meaning of yeah. When used as an archetypical receipt token, *yeah* has a falling intonation contour. However, other marked contour shapes such as fall-rising *yeah*, suggest incipient trouble and imply that more interactional work should be done by the speaker (Gardner, 1998).

'Yeah' in NSSs' Speech

While the notion of NSSs' mastery of DMs has gained currency in recent years, studies on nonnative speaker's use of DMs were largely based on quantitative methods, particularly a corpus-based approach (Carter & Fung, 2007; Fuller, 2003; Heinz, 2003; Clancy, Thompson, Suzuki, & Tao, 1996; Muller, 2005; Polat, 2011) with a strong emphasis on comparing the frequency of DMs in nonnative speakers' speech to that of native speakers. However, relatively little research has been done to examine the precise distribution of discourse markers, the sequential environment in which a DM appears, and the composition of the turn it inhabits in the context of NS/NSS interaction. Precisely because the functions of DMs are context specific, a conversation analytic approach would help pinpoint the intricacies of DM usages.

Based on transcriptions in 20 articles and book chapters, Gardner (1998) compared the use of receipt tokens such as *mm*, *m-hm*, and *yeah* in NS/NSS face-to-face dyads. He reported NSSs' strong reliance on *yeah*, and noted that this was the only token used more frequently by NNSs than NSs. Although he underscored a pressing issue that has important pedagogical implications, Gardner did not show exactly how *yeah* was used by NSSs, leaving the question of why and how *yeah*-italicizeis used by NSSs unanswered.

Using primarily a CA framework, Wong's (2000) study provides an excellent exemplar as to how NSSs draw on DMs as linguistic resources. While *yeah* conventionally appears in turn-initial position and is produced by a recipient, Wong's (2000) study shows that the distribution of *yeah* in learner English has a markedly different pattern. Specifically, Wong discovered that *yeah* produced by Mandarin

speakers inhabits a turn-medial position in the environment of same turn self-initiated self-repair to mark the success of a search. Her work sheds light on how NSSs use DMs to project interactional competence despite disfluency.

This study is inspired by Wong (2000) and reports instances of non-canonical use of *yeah* detected in NS/NSS conversation. It contributes to the research of NS/NSS interaction by providing further evidence that NSSs deploy DMs in ways markedly different from NSs. In addition, by providing a nuanced view of the function of *yeah* in learner English, this paper illuminates how NSSs draw on *yeah* as an interactional resource to manage interaction with NSs.

DATA AND METHOD

The data for this study are drawn from eight video recordings of a conversation group involving an instructor at a community English program (T), who is a native speaker of American English, and her students (S1-S8), who are Korean and Japanese adult learners of English. The students' proficiency levels range between low-intermediate to high-intermediate. All participants were residing in the northeastern region of the United States at the time of data collection. The conversation group was organized by the instructor. It met twice weekly outside of the classroom, to provide students a platform to practice their speaking skills in an informal and friendly environment. Each discussion began with greetings and reporting current happenings. Depending on participants' input, the group exchanged ideas on a wide array of topics such as education, food, holidays, and politics. To encourage her students to participate, T often asked open-ended questions, attempting to elicit rich contributions. Since participation was on a voluntary basis, each section lasted between 45 to 90 minutes, depending on the number of participants. The researcher (R) also joined the discussion when recording the sessions.

In order to gauge how NSSs use *yeah* in distinctively different ways, the video clips were first transcribed (see Appendix for transcription conventions). Instances *of yeah* outside its use as an affirmative response to *yes-no* questions were then identified. Next, to enhance the validity and reliability of the candidate phenomenon, NSs' judgment was also consulted. Sections of transcripts containing the instances were shown to ten NSs of English, who were asked to determine the instances' acceptability and whether they have heard other NSs use *yeah* in such ways. Instances that were deemed not acceptable by all NSs were selected for further analysis. The extracts featuring the candidate phenomenon are presented in the following section.

ANALYSIS

In this section, I use two groups of extracts to demonstrate non-canonical uses of *yeah*. The first group focuses on the turn-initial *yeah* in the second pair part of question and answer sequences. More specifically, these interactions show how non-native

speakers draw on *yeah* to manage the task of responding to *wh*-questions.

Yeah-prefaced answers to wh-questions

The first set of extracts demonstrates an unfitting question-response design. In extract 1, T and eight NSSs are discussing Disney World, but only T and two students in the group, S5 and S8, have been there. Before the extract begins, the T has already nominated S8 to share her experience of Disneyworld. In line 1, S2 begins a question and answer sequence, asking which park in Disney World is S8's favorite:

```
Extract 1
01    S2:         which one is your favorite?
02    S8:         uh: I like (.) animal kingdom.
03    SS:         [Oh::::
04    S8:         [there are many: animals so like ku savanna.
((22 lines omitted))
27    S2:         ((gaze to S5)) Hanako did you go to the animal:
28                animal: like=
29    SS:         =animal kingdom.=
30    S2:         =yeah.
31                (0.5)
32    S5:         Some parts of (0.7)-((mouthing words)) iz:
33                it iz- the area iz: (0.2) very (good).
34    SS:         Oh.:::
35    S2:         ((gaze to T)) (…) The animals is (.) caged?
36    T:          OH: >yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah.<
37    S6:         I see:.
38    SS:         HEH HEH HEH heh
39    T:          You can't get that close to them. That's sort of
40                (.) far away. Like see them with binoculars or
41                something.
42                ((gaze to S5)) What was your favorite uh: part of
43                Disney world?
44    S5:         Um::: ((nods))-y↑eah: I like (.) animal kingdom.
45    S2:         WHY?
46    S5          [((point at S8))-as well as her.]
47    T:          [       I'm so surprised.     ]
48    S2:         Y↑eah.
```

S8's answer in line 2 begins with vocalized hesitation "uh:," followed by "I like (.) Animal Kingdom." She then continues to explain why she liked features of the park. In line 27, S2 nominates S5 to speak through gaze and asks whether she has been to Animal Kingdom. The polar question, however, is not responded to with a 'yes' or 'no.' Instead, in lines 31-32, she offers an assessment that is fraught with cutoffs and silences, indicating difficulty continuing her speech. S2 and T then briefly take the floor from lines 35-41. T's gaze nominates S5 to be the recipient of her *wh*-question, inquiring as to her favorite part of Disney World in lines 42-43.

Strikingly similar to S8's turn in line 2, S5's reply in line 44 also begins with vocalized hesitation, stating that she liked Animal Kingdom. Note that in this turn, the discourse marker *yeah* is sandwiched between the vocalized hesitation and the actual answer. In addition, the *yeah* in line 44 appears in concert with nodding, a substantial nonverbal response that strengthens the affirmative tone of the *yeah* token (Stivers,

2008a). In fact, S5's increment "as well as her" in line 46, along with a pointing gesture, reinforces her alignment with S8's answer and explicitly articulates that she and S8 happen to share the same favorite park in Disney World.

Yeah in line 44 is unconventional for two reasons. First, the first pair part is a *wh*-question, not a polar question. The affirmative *yeah*, which appears in the turn-initial position, is therefore not a fitted second pair part. While S5 does provide a relevant response after *yeah* by supplying the information that the question seeks, prefacing the answer with *yeah* remains at odds with the principle of response designs. Secondly, while both S5 and S8 like Animal Kingdom the most, the adverb *too* or *also* are normatively deployed to mean that the opinion is shared, showing similarities and displaying alignment (i.e. "I like Animal Kingdom *also/too*"). Interestingly, S5, a nonnative speaker, uses *yeah* instead to perform the interactional job of alignment and affiliation; she displays support of both S8's proposition (liking Animal Kingdom) as well as the affective stance S8 expressed.

In extract 2, *yeah* occurs in a similar sequential environment. In this conversation, S4 has been describing his ex-wife and launched an extended telling regarding the selfishness and inconsiderateness of his ex-wife; whenever S4 was sick, his spouse would move out of their house to avoid getting infected. The extract below begins as the telling reaches a completion, as signaled by the punch line in line 1:

```
Extract 2
01    S4:         So when I was uh ill, I was- (0.2) I was alone.
02                heh[ heh ]
03    S2:            [ HEH ]heh heh heh.
04    T:          What about when she was ill.
05                (.)
06    S4:         Uh yeah but-, so she won't- y↓eah she
07                didn't want to get ill. From me. So she kept away
08                from my house.
09    T:          But if she: got sick,
10    S4:         ((nods))
11    S2:         and you're not sick at that time.
12    T:          Would you stay? Did you stay? Or did you $go
13                to your parents' house$?
```

After the punch line in line 1, which triggers some laughter, T pursues the topic, wondering how S4 treated his ex-wife when she was ill. After a very short silence, S4 produces "uh", an equivalent to the change of state token *oh* (Heritage, 1984) in line 6, which appears to claim understanding of what is being asked. Following is the DMs *yeah* and *but*. Similar to extract 1, the first pair part initiated by T in line 4 is a *wh*-question requesting an informative answer. Yet, S4 produces "yeah" to supply an affirmation even when no candidate proposition is presented.

Two cutoffs and two self-initiated self-repairs ensue. The second *yeah* in line 6 matches Wong's (2000) findings, in that it appears after a repair initiation and before the turn resumes. At a closer look at S4's turn in lines 6-8, he does not address T's question regarding what he did when his ex-wife was ill. Instead, he offers a summary of his telling that his ex-wife left him alone when he was sick. The inadequacy of his answer is underscored by a post-expansion sequence co-constructed by T and S2 in lines 9 and 11-13. T and S2 jointly reformulate T's question in line 4 into a series of polar questions.

The above post expansion sequence from lines 9 and 11-13 clearly indexes that S4 has in fact misinterpreted T's question in line 4. Against this background, S4's first *yeah* in line 6 seems to be semantically empty and pragmatically significant: it performs the interactional duty of acknowledging the receipt of a question despite a lack of understanding.

So far, the excerpts have shown that turn-initial *yeah* prefaces answers to *wh*-questions and can be used to display alignment and signal the receipt of a question. The following extract will showcase that *yeah* can also be used as a placeholder.

In extract 3, T, S1, and S2 are engaged in a lively discussion about early childhood education and parenting styles. It begins with T's comment on early childhood education in line 1:

```
Extract 3
01    T:          I think it's hard. It's really hard.
02    S1:         Yeah because children always have a $question$
03                so maybe parents are really really annoyed when
04                they're really really: .h yeah tired ? But I think
05                that's really important because .hh ah yeah with
06                my experience .h °yeah°.
07    T:          So how did your parents raise you when you're
08                a child? Did you ask a lot of questions and
09    S1:         =yeah
10    T:          what $did they do$?
11    S1:         Yeah cuz actually uh: I can't remember but I think
12                my parents were really really good for me, yeah
13                (0.2) but I think there's lot of:: any kinds of: tsk
14                Parents?  I think my parents is uh:::: good but I
15                think may be a little over?((hands up))
16    S2:         $Why do you think so?$
17    S1:         Yeah because um: my parents have always:: uh:
18                think about me and always (.) give attention for
19                me. >Yeah< because [it's v-]
20    S2:                           [are you] the only child?
```

In line 2, the turn-initial *yeah* displays both agreement and incipient speakership. S1 elaborates her view from lines 2-6, briefly projecting that she has personal experience to share in line 6. Upon hearing that, T launches a question and answer sequence, first with the "how" question and then a polar question in lines 7-8. S1, in response, quickly offers an affirmative answer in line 9. T further pursues the topic and begins another question and answer sequence in line 10, but the *wh*-question is met with an answer prefaced with "yeah" and "cuz" in line 11. With respect to conditional relevancy, both tokens are sequentially incompatible, even ill-fitted, to the format of the question. As in previous extracts, line 10 is a *wh*-question inquiring information rather than affirmation or rejection. Also, since the question does not elicit a reason, *cuz* is thus equally inapposite in that environment. While the rest of S1's turn in lines 11-15 does address T's question in line 10, the first two tokens found in the same turn – "yeah because" – result in discourse incoherence. The same response design is observed when S1 responds to S2's question in line 17. While in this case, *because* logically corresponds to the why-question in line 16, the *yeah* token causes the same discourse disjuncture found in line 11.

It is notable that in both line 11 and turn 17, "yeah cuz actually" and "yeah

because" are followed by vocalized hesitation markers, "uh:" or "um:." In this case, these vocalized hesitations project that an answer is forthcoming, and that the speaker is working to provide an answer that is due. While silence might well be an alternative to vocalized hesitation, fillers like "uh" or "um" orient to the preference for progressitivity in interaction (Fox, 2010). In the same vein, the DMs *yeah + because/cuz* in this extract carry no lexical meaning. They are used as placeholders, securing an interaction space while a search is taking place and an actual answer is underway.

In this section, I have demonstrated instances where NSSs preface answers to wh-question with *yeah*. These turn-initial *yeah*s are incompatible with the sequential environment, and yet are used to (1) show alignment and affiliation with a previous speaker, (2) signal the receipt of a question when such acknowledgement is unnecessary, and (3) hold an interactional place to maintain progressivity in interaction.

Yeah-prefaced subunits of an extended talk

Besides prefacing answers to *wh*-question, turn-initial *yeah* is also found to preface turns belonging to extended turns-at-talk. Before introducing the second set of extracts, a look at an example of an extended talk produced by a native speaker provides a comparative perspective.

Participants in the conversation groups are eager to express their views or respond to previous opinions. Not surprisingly, then, the data feature a significant number of extended turns-at-talk, including storytelling, arguments, opinions, etc. These spates of talk, according to Schegloff (2007), can be understood as a single sequence involving many parts. The subparts are often separated by continuers or assessments produced by recipients as the extended talk unfolds. These tokens are alignment displays, showing recipients' understanding and endorsement of the primary speaker's right to the floor and the structural asymmetry resulting thereof (Gardner, 1998; Stivers, 2008b). Since an extended turns-at-talk may consist of many subparts, each sub-part can be prefaced by discourse markers to achieve cohesion and signpost its relation to the previous subpart when necessary.

To draw a comparative perspective between how NSs and NSSs produce extended turns, we now turn to extract 4, which shows how T, a native English speaker, accomplishes an argument. The group has been discussing the importance of praise in child rearing. All NSSs believe that praise is crucial, but T is more critical about the role of praise in one's upbringing. When the extract begins, the previous opinion is coming to a close as T performs a wrap-up by offering a short assessment in line 2. In the same turn, she launches a multi-turn unit in first position, discussing her opinion about praise:

```
Extract 4
01                  [I think.]
02    T:            [°mhm    ]it's interesting.° Cuz I feel like my
03                  parents gave me too much praise.
04    S1:           [praise?]
05    S2:           [Really?]
06    T:            Yah.
07    S1:           I think that's really good for you.
08    T:            Well what I've heard is that- I mean I always
09                  felt loved right?
10    S1:           mhm.
```

```
11    T:          But I've heard that there are different kinds
12                of praise and (0.5) some forms of praise are more
13                effective, or more beneficial than others. An: duhm
14                if your parents say like oh you're so smart,
15    S2:         mhm.
16    T:          That's actually not helpful.
17    S1/2:       °Oh::: °
```

As engaged participants, S1 and S2 show interest and surprise in lines 4 and 5, respectively. S1 subsequently offers an assessment of T's statement regarding "too much praise" in line 7, claiming that too much praise is good for T. In lines 8-9 and 11-14, T continues to build her argument of why too much praise is not helpful. These turns are prefaced by *well*, which flags her disagreement with S2's assessment, and *but*, which indicates a contrast with previous discourse content. The last subpart of T's telling in line 16 is not preceded by any discourse marker. This can be accounted for by the syntactic structure of the turn; it consists of a main clause that completes the conditional clause in line 14. The occurrence of turn-initial DMs *well* and *but* in this multiturn-in-progress is prompted by S1's disaffiliating assessment in line 7. One way to describe the occurrence of DMs is that there is an open slot before each subunit of an extended turn, and as the need to organize and structure the emerging discourse arises (such as responding to a disagreement or a comment), the open slot could be occupied by a DM.

Let us now turn to the second set of extracts where NSSs use *yeah* in multiunit-in-progress. Before extract 5 begins, S1 has been talking about a book of early childhood education and has been explaining how her husband's upbringing has shaped him. Intrigued by S1's comments, T initiates a follow up question and answer sequence:

```
Extract 5
01    T:          like do you notice the difference (.)
02    S1:         yeah.=
03                =betwee::n >you know< him and you? How is it
04                affecting him? >I'm just curious.<
05    S1:         Yeah.
06    T:          You don't have to talk [about it if it's too
07                                       [ mhm yeah yeah
08                person]al.
09    S1:         yeah. ]
10                ((unfixed gaze, touching head and neck))-(2.0)
11                It's really::°yeah° .h cos uh recently I::: (.)
12                read about as I said the John Gardener's books,
13   T:           mhm.
14   S1:          That's really amazing because it's really really
15                fit for my husband,
16    T:          [yeah.]((S1 gaze to T))
17    S2:         [ mm  ]:: ((S1 gaze to S2))
18    S1:         Y↓eah because my husband: really easy to catch
19                a cold.
20    S2:         [Hehhehhehheh]
21    T:          [   really?  ]
```

In lines 1 and 3-4, T pursues more responses from S1 by asking her to explain the differences between her and her husband, but it is not until line 10 that S1 begins a multi-turn answer. S1's turn in lines 9-12 ends with a mid-rising prosody shape, indicating that

more talk is to come. Also, a continuation is in order pragmatically, since a comparison between S1 and her husband remains pending. Another subunit of the extended turn occurs in lines 14-15, which again awaits full pragmatic completion. However, as S1 continues her extended talk, the third subunit in lines 18-19 is prefaced by *yeah* followed by *because*.

Immediately preceding the third subunit is two acknowledgement turns produced by S1 and S2 in lines 16 and 17. Since these acknowledging turns have no propositional content, no reciprocating acknowledgement or agreement is required. Also, *because* itself occupies the open slot for DMs in the turn initial position, indexing that the forthcoming discourse explains a reason. Interestingly, S1 first gaze to T and then S2 as they produce acknowledgement tokens. Again, given that neither T nor S2 inserts any comment of any sort in the vicinity of the third subunit, *yeah* in line 18 appears to be acknowledging the acknowledgement tokens produced by T and S2. Such use of *yeah* is unnecessary and rare in NSs' speech.

Another example is shown in Extract 6. Prior to Extract 6, S4 has already introduced his ex-wife and narrated her allegedly selfish behavior. S4 has mentioned that there is a personality clash between him and his ex-wife. When the extract begins, S4 is skillfully shifting the topic by launching a multiunit turn about the ways in which family and upbringing shapes personality:

```
Extract 6
01    S4:         I mean- yeah especially- yeah this is my opinion
02                but people's character's influenced by °uh° (0.5)
03                their homes their families.
04    R:          mhm.
05S4:             I have five siblings. There younger sisters one
06                younger brother. She (0.2) has no siblings.
07S2:             [    mm:      ]
08R:              [only child.  ]
09S4:             ((gaze to R))-yah. [so  ] especially only ch-
10S2:                                [yeah]
11S4:             only child and the person who has siblings are (.)
12                totally different.((T frowns and makes a thinking
13                face.))
14    S2:         yeah.
15    S4:         >Y↓eah I think< because-
16    S2:         ((to T)) don't you think so? You feel um? Hehheh
```

S4's argument begins in line 1. After two cutoffs and tries, he frames his turn as an extended talk by announcing "this is my opinion." At this point, given the prior talk about his ex-wife's personality, it is recognizable that S4 will elaborate his view. An acknowledgement token appears in line 4. S4 then points out that while he has 5 siblings, his wife is an only child. With the vocabulary input from R, he further elaborates the correlations between the number of siblings and personality in lines 9 and 11-12. Immediately following S2's acknowledgement slot in line 14, S4 continues his argument by explaining how personality is shaped by the number of siblings, but this subunit of his argument is prefaced by *yeah*, even though the phrase "I think because "sufficiently signposts the turn's relation to previous subunits. Similar to extract 5, at issue is the fact that *yeah* is produced even though no acknowledgement or agreement is required in the

sequential environment. Such practice differs from the way native speakers continue their extended talk.

The final extract features a sequential environment that can be contrasted with extracts 5 and 6. Earlier in the interaction, S4 was discussing the correlation between siblings and personality, but as the discussion evolved, the focus shifted from S4 to T, who talked about her relationship with her brother. In line 1, T has just realized that she has talked for a considerable amount of time and is steering the direction of the talk back to S4:

```
Extract 7
01    T:          Sorry I don't mean to (.) [sidetrack. L↑et's just
02    SS:                                  [heh heh heh
03                talk about me now. [(…)
04    R:                               [Let's just talk about (0.2) Amy
05                Tater.
06    SS:         hehhehhehheh.
07    T:          °Y↓eah°. Speaking of selfish. ((gaze to S4 and palms
08                up pointing at ))->Anyways< you were saying so:
09    S4:         Ah >yeah yeah yeah<. >Yeah yeah.<Y↓eah I think in
10                general a child has siblings some siblings, they
11                always (.) kind of pulling? Politics. Politics among
12                family?
13    T:          yeah.
```

In line 7, T nominates S4 to be the next speaker by gaze and a pointing gesture. The disjunctive marker *anyways* brackets the previous talk as being "off-track," and along with "you were saying," T is launching a move back to the important item in the conversation agenda. T explicitly hands over the floor to S4, asking him to continue the topic that was abandoned. Furthermore, the slightly stretched discourse marker *so* underscores that his elaboration of views is also on the discussion agenda, but somehow delayed (Bolden, 2009).

S4 begins his turn with "ah," an interjection token indicating a change of state, perhaps taken aback by an unanticipated invitation to talk again. Immediately following is a series of successive *yeah*s. While Stivers (2004) found that multiple sayings highlight a problematic course of action, given that the previous action is a simple invitation to resume sharing of opinions, it is unlikely that S4 is treating T's question as problematic. The multiple sayings of *yeah*s serve as fillers providing S4 more time to formulate his talk. In the turn where S4 actually begins to discuss his views on how siblings affect personality, the turn is prefaced by *yeah*. Different from extracts 5 and 6, the *yeah* in this extract appears in the very first unit of an extended turn-at-talk. However, same as the *yeah* token in extract 6, the *yeah* in this extract is also followed by "I think."Despite the initial stuttering of *yeahs*, after "yeah I think,"S4 is able to continue his turn without signs of great difficulty.

As such, from the second set of extracts, we can conclude that a turn-initial *yeah* is deployed by NSSs to manage an extended turn-in-progress. *Yeah* is incompatible with these sequential environments as the token is not preceded by comments or turns that carry propositional content, and subsequently no enactment of agreement or acknowledgement is due. However, we have shown that the turn-initial *yeah* occurs in

combination with *I think* or *because* to help manage a multiunit-in-progress, whether it is an argument or an opinion. Indeed, when the discursive thickness of the conversation increases due to the demand to produce longer turns, the not-so-competent NSSs might draw on resources such as *yeah* to manage the interaction.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

I have presented two sets of extracts where turn initial *yeah* is deployed to perform interactional duties that are not usually done by the token. The *yeahs* in these environments are found to be sequentially inapposite, rendering the candidate phenomenon distinctively "nonnative."

In the first set of extracts, *yeah* resides in the second pair part of a question and answer sequence. The turn-initial *yeah* prefaces an answer to a wh-question and is used as an alignment token in place of adverbs such as *also* and *too*. It is also found to be used as a receipt token to claim understanding of the wh-question, despite the fact that none is necessary. Lastly, turn-initial *yeah* may occur in combination with *because/cuz* before vocalized hesitation markers. In that case, *yeah because/cuz* does not carry any lexical content; rather, it functions as a placeholder replacing the next lexical item that is due, projecting that an answer is in-the-making.

In the second set of extracts, *yeah* appears in the environment of extended turns-at-talk in progress as a coherence option. While literature has documented that *yeah* is used by the hearer to signal recipiency, the *yeahs* in the second set of extracts are used by speakers to preface subunits and in turn structure the forthcoming discourse. The extracts show that *yeah* occurs in combination with *I think* or *because* to help NSSs project and manage upcoming increase in the discursive thickness of their talk. These findings complement Gardner's (1998) and Wong's (2000) studies on how *yeah* is used in NNS and highlights the specificities of their functions.

Across all extracts, one might be tempted to draw the conclusion that the turn-initial *yeah* is simply redundant. Yet, the analysis has specified the interactional import *yeah* carries in each extract. Although I have yet to provide a unified, singular function that these turn-initial *yeahs* serve, taken together, these *yeahs* report a distinctive communicative phenomenon in NSSs' speech.

One possible account for the candidate phenomenon is NSSs' inability to cope with the interactional pressure for progressivity, and consequently begins the turn with placeholders such as *yeah*, *yeah cos*, or *yeah I think*. Instead of initiating repair, or explicitly requesting more time to construct their response (e.g."let me think"), NSSs deploy *yeah* to prevent the conversation from stalling. To this end, the unorthodox usages of *yeah* presented in this paper coincides with Wong's (2000) suggestion that turn-medial *yeah* in same turn repair environment is used to create an image that the speaker is managing the interaction. The last possible reason is the NSSs' obsession with hearer endorsement: they acknowledge the receipt of a turn, even when the acknowledgement is unnecessary. This could possibly be attributed to the interferences of the pragmatics of the participants' first language.

The findings of this paper have important pedagogical value. As pointed out by Gardner (1998), simple as it may seem, the teaching of vocalizations of understanding

yeah and *mhm* does have an important role to play in improving learners' interactional competence. The nuanced view of turn-initial *yeah* has uncovered the need to incorporate DMs in the classroom. To truly improve learners' interactional competence, a context-sensitive approach highlighting the subtleties in the usage of each DM would be beneficial.

Given the unique and dynamic nature of learner English, this study runs the risk of reporting idiosyncratic speech phenomenon. Indeed, since this is a small scale study, the findings may have low generalizability. As "the real power of CA argument is based on the regularity of behavior as documented in the collection of cases" (Gardner and Wagner, 2004, p.7), building a larger collection is an indispensable step to take in order to validate the candidate phenomenon's regularity.Factors such as learners' proficiency level, interlanguage transfer, and the question-response design of the participants' first language etc. are beyond the scope of this paper, but they will certainly shed light on the possible reasons for the candidate phenomenon. Finally, I would like to call for using CA as a means to explore NSSs' mastery of DMs. Only by such thorough sequential analysis can we illuminate how exactly NSSs, as creative users of English, use DMs and the very interactional functions they serve.

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APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION SYMBOLS

.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
,	continuing intonation
-	cut-off
::	elongation of sound
<u>word</u>	emphasis (more underlining for greater stress)
↑word	raised pitch on the following syllable
°word°	quiet speech
[word1]	overlapping speech.
[word2]	
=	continued utterances of the same speaker
(2.4)	length of a silence in seconds
(.)	micro-pause
( )	non-transcribable talk.
((*action*))	nonverbal activity.