No as a discourse marker

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Abstract

The English discourse marker yeah is widely recognized to hold several functions, doing the work not only of agreement and acknowledgement, but also topic management and speaker shift. In contrast, little attention has been paid to no, intuitively its opposite in meaning. This study proposes three senses of no as a discourse marker, which do the work of (i) topic shift, (ii) misunderstanding management, and (iii) turn-taking conflict resolution. These senses share semantic and pragmatic aspects with other DM and non-DM senses of no, including negation and indexicality, but are distinguished from other senses on the basis of structural and turn-sequential properties. Keywords: discourse analysis, discourse markers, lexical semantics, turn-taking, no

1 Introduction

With a a few notable exceptions such as Schegloff (2001) and Jefferson (2002), research on no as a discourse marker in English has been far outpaced by work on its notional contrary, yeah (among others, Jefferson (1984); Drummond and Hopper (1993); Fuller (2003); Tao (2003). Studies that examined no as a discourse marker treated it as having a relatively narrow range of uses (Tao, 2003; Fischer, 2000), or explicitly concentrated on one or two uses (Ford et al., 2004).

The goal of this article is to exemplify and describe several senses of no as a discourse marker (DM) that have not previously been recognized. Building on the findings of Schegloff (2001) and Schegloff (1992), I illustrate that no can function as a marker of topic shift, as a general way to reject implicit assumptions or stances taken up by an interlocutor or interlocutors, and as a means to manage turn-taking conflicts. As an initial example, consider the no in the following interaction from a multi-party meeting. With only an intuitive or casual view of the meaning and use of no as simply a way to respond negatively to a question or statement, Brian’s turn in line 6 would be mysterious. There is no question being answered, nor any assertion being denied. If nothing else Brian is approving of something that Roger has said.

(1) 1 Roger To tell you the truth, I’d rath- I’d, I’d – would like
Examination of tokens of *no* in conversation reveals that the use in (1) is just one of several uses that cannot be explained simply in terms of negation. In fact, a few of its uses mirror those of *yeah*, including topic-shift and turn cohesion. This may be related to another set of mysteries in the study of *no* (and *yeah*), namely combinations of the two discourse markers, as in the following interactions.

(2) a. 1 Aaron: For instance, I mean I wouldn’t expect that it was very common
    2 Aaron: overall, that
    3 Aaron: when two people were talking at the same time,
    4 Aaron: that it would - that it really was
    5 Aaron: lower, although sometimes, as you say, it would.
    6 Megan: --> Yeah, no, that was - That was a jok-

b. 1 L: To grow money, besides like supporting an industry that’s
    2 basically a sin industry and
    3 R: Well, [alcohol ] is too.
    4 L: [you know --]
    5 L: --> No, yeah, definitely.
    6 R: Alcohol is more so than cigarettes.

A comprehensive analysis of the combination of *yeah* and *no* should be built upon an awareness of the range of the meaning and usage of the individual discourse markers, including those uses described herein. To that end, the present paper concentrates primarily on *no*, but will return briefly to the combination of *no* with *yeah* towards the end.

This article is organized as follows: first, a general background to the study of discourse markers is given, followed by an introduction to the data and analysis methods used. Then, it is demonstrated through analyses of a number of tokens of *no* in natural conversation that there exist several different senses of *no* as a discourse marker that have not previously been noticed. These senses are then compared semantically and pragmatically to other senses of *no* in some of its DM and non-DM senses. The article concludes with a discussion of implications for the representation of discourse and interaction, and for the study of complex discourse markers.
2 Background

The present study examines the properties of several varieties of no that may be described as discourse markers (DMs). DMs are taken to be parts of an utterance that are, informally, “sequentially dependent elements which bracket units of talk” (Schiffrin, 1987, 31). That is, a DM is some linguistic unit the primary function of which is not to contribute to the descriptive or propositional meaning of an utterance, but rather to indicate to the hearer how they should understand what follows or what came before with respect to each other and to the discourse as a whole. DMs cue or create relationships from one part of a text to another, or to the background assumptions and goals of the participants.

Schourup (1999) lists three main DM features: connectivity, optionality, and non-truth-conditionality. DMs should connect pieces of discourse to one another, or potentially to the non-linguistic context. They are entirely syntactically optional, and have no bearing on truth-conditional semantics. All the uses of no illustrated above and discussed herein meet these criteria.

The ways in which DMs relate stretches of discourse vary widely. But is used to cancel or contrast information present in or derivable from the previous discourse (Schourup, 1999, 259). So, therefore, and thus indicate inferential relationships between expressed or implied meanings (Schourup, 1999, 231). So is also used as a more general “text cohesion” device used to mark the beginning of a sequence of actions, often on a new topic (e.g., Bolden 2006). In addition to contrast, inference, and topic management, DMs can also project elaboration on previous talk (also, what’s more), structure sub-parts of an argument (firstly, next), and so on. As will be seen, no as a family exhibits many of these expressive possibilities.

3 Data and Methods

This study is based on in-depth analysis of several dozen natural recorded conversations, or portions thereof. The conversations are mostly from two speech corpora. The first is the ICSI Meeting Corpus (Janin et al., 2004b; Morgan et al., 2001; Janin et al., 2003, 2004a), which contains approximately 72 hours of recorded multi-party meetings that took place at the International Computer Science Institute between 2000–2002. Most of the meetings were held weekly among several groups of computer scientists and linguists to discuss their current projects, status reports, problems, and so forth. The participants know each other (to varying degrees of familiarity), and since all the meetings would have occurred independently of the recording project, the discourse can be considered natural.1 Several of the participants are non-native speakers of English (see Appendix A for details). In many cases these individuals’ uses of no seem identical to those of native speakers.

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1The one exception to this is the regularly-scheduled meetings for discussion of the technical and theoretical aspects of recording meetings. Transcripts from these meetings are indicated with the prefix Bmr.
Nevertheless, to simplify the analysis somewhat I limit discussion, where possible, to only those tokens uttered by native speakers.

The other speech corpus used is the Fisher English Training Corpus (Cieri et al., 2005, 2004). This corpus consists of several hundred telephone conversations, each approximately 10 minutes, for a total of over 11,000 recorded conversations, or nearly 2,000 hours of speech data. The conversations are between two people who in nearly every case do not know each other, and who have been assigned a random topic to discuss, such as hobbies or health care. In some cases they have very different sociolinguistic and cultural backgrounds, and in others, strong affinities. This data cannot be considered entirely natural, because (although the speech is unplanned and mostly colloquial) the conversation would not have normally occurred, nor is it the type of conversation experienced in the normal course of one’s life. However, it is plentiful and so can provide a useful auxiliary source of data which does not happen to occur in the smaller ICSI corpus. Information about the detailed linguistic background of the speakers is not available for the telephone conversations. All the Fisher extracts presented in this article feature two native English speakers, according to the corpus metadata), but more detailed information about the backgrounds and locations of the speakers is unfortunately not available. Finally, when the above sources are insufficient, they are supplemented by anecdotal evidence from remembered interactions and data analyzed in the literature.

This study relies on principles of conversation and discourse analysis to explain the significance of particular occurrences of *no* as a DM. To the extent possible, analyses of actions taken by participants (e.g., shifting the topic) are based on conversation-internal evidence. At the same time, one of the fundamental issues in the analysis of discourse markers is their multifunctionality: while the semantic or pragmatic contribution of some tokens may be more clear-cut, other instances of a given discourse marker may (appear to) carry several functions simultaneously. The paper presents first interactions in which distinguishing which sense of *no* is involved is relatively straightforward; these are followed by tokens that, at least to the analyst, play multiple roles simultaneously.

The basis of the sense division is based on detailed examination of several dozen tokens of *no* found in the corpora outlined above. These tokens were found by searching for turn- or sentence-initial *no* followed by further material from the same speaker, and extracting a random sample of the many hundreds of such tokens (see section 5.2 for discussion of “standalone” *no* as opposed to *no* followed by further talk from the same speaker).2

A grouping into senses was established based on close examination of the semantic and pragmatic properties of the token, primarily guided by the following questions:

- Does the *no* provide an answer to a prior speech act (e.g., question, request, or

2Among the senses of *no* resulting from these searches was the determiner *no*, as in *No athlete would ever say something like that*. This sense is syntactically, semantically, and pragmatically distinct from the DM senses here (though the common notion of negation is of course present) and it will not be considered further.
command)?

- Does the speaker negate any prior proposition (either given by an interlocutor or him/herself)?

- Does the speaker negate or reject some aspect of the prior interaction? If so, at what level: speech act, social relation, discourse topic, turn organization, etc (cf. the “planes” of talk in Schiffrin, 1987).

  - For instance, does the no accompany an instance of repair (in the sense of Schegloff et al., 1977)? Does it address the attitudes or assumptions of the interlocutor?

- What sorts of discourse or conversational acts appear leading up to and following the no? For instance, are the participants in agreement or disagreement? Are they being humorous or serious? Is there a shift in topic either before or after the no?

- Do any other discourse markers accompany no?

The first question picks out the sense or senses of no which are perhaps more familiar, such as a response to an information-seeking yes/no question, request, or command. These may be considered the converse of the “expectations vis-à-vis hearer” attribute of Fried and Östman 2005, 1774: while certain expressions expect a (specific type of) response, other expressions constitute such responses. These senses are abundant in the corpus, but as they are relatively well-understood, and because the focus of this study is the senses of no which operate primarily on a non-propositional level, they were excluded from analysis.

The second and third questions attempt to locate what is likely to be a common thread across many (if not all) senses of no, namely some sense of negation or rejection. Of particular interest is the level at which an instance of no operates, and whether the notion of negation or rejection applies in parallel fashion across the various levels. The fourth question is more general, and was useful as a way of characterizing the function of each instance. Topic-shift is already a well-established function of many DMs (see, e.g., the discussion of anyway, actually, and however in Lenk, 1998), and Schegloff (2001) has already identified a connection between no and the humor/serious divide. An example of the sort of observations that this question leads to is that there is a recurring pattern in the ICSI meetings in which no marks a transition between topics, in particular between detailed discussion of a smaller issue and more general evaluation of the prior discussion, usually leading to a wrapping-up of the current stage of the meeting. (9), discussed below, is an example of this pattern. The last question in the list above was added on part-way through the investigation after it became apparent that in some patterns of usage but not others, no is used in conjunction with another DM, as in but no, or so no. This issue is important because, in attempting to single out the significance of no to a particular
utterance, it is crucial to tease apart the contributions of each DM separately, to the extent possible.

Based on those properties, it is possible to establish several independent but related senses of *no* as a discourse marker. In the following sections I present a series of conversational extracts which illustrate several of the senses of *no* determined based on the questions outlined above. Some are from the original corpus search, and others were found later to illustrate specific properties of the various senses. They are intended to be representative of the range of possibilities for each sense. For instance, what I call topic shift-*no* is shown with and without accompanying DMs, as a shift from humorous to serious discourse and as a shift from one non-humorous topic to another, and with the prior utterance by the same speaker or by a different speaker.

The current analysis is thus not intended as an exhaustive examination of all the ways in which *no* is usable as a DM, even in the sample collected, nor as a quantitative study of the distribution or frequency of different senses of *no* in the corpora. Rather, it highlights the properties of previously-unnoticed DM senses of *no*, established based on naturally-occurring data.

Having set out a grouping of *no* tokens into senses, I address a question that arises from the categorization: are the senses somehow related? Some words, such as *now*, have propositional meanings in addition to one or several discourse/interactional uses. Words with multiple discourse functions may fulfill several of those functions simultaneously (Schiffrin, 1987, 1994). For instance, *so* is used in a non-interactional domain to indicate causal reasoning, but it also indicates a shift to incipient (previously projected) topics, a shift to other-attentiveness (as opposed to self-attentiveness), and floor relinquishment (Bolden, 2006; Schiffrin, 1987). How many senses of *so* are there?

One useful way to approach this question comes from the notion of multiple-inheritance hierarchies used in (Embodied) Construction Grammar and related frameworks for lexical semantics (Davis and Koenig 2000; Feldman 2006; Ruppenhofer et al. 2006; see also Kay 1992). In these frameworks, more general features or aspects of meanings are inherited, or shared, across multiple more specific lexical items. I will make use of inheritance relations in describing the relations between senses of *no*. Section 5 looks at several features that are needed to distinguish and generalize across *no*’s senses, based on the list of questions above: indexicality, negation, answerhood (the property of being “called for” by a previous conversational action), and standalone status (being able to stand on its own as full turn).

A lexical semantic approach complements the methods of conversation analysis. It is primarily linguistic, and aims to characterize the contribution made by particular words, as a prelude to, e.g., furnishing them with a lexical entry along side “contentful” words (Fischer 2000; Siegel 2002). CA is usually concerned with action and interaction, and not with the language, which is taken as (merely) the conduit for interaction. Nevertheless, a linguistic analysis of DMs must be sensitive to the features of conversation that CA can capture. A complete picture requires both points of view.
4 No as a discourse marker

No is perhaps most familiar as a response particle used to negate or reject a prior question or directive: *are you coming?—no* (Yadugiri, 1986). The speaker expresses propositional negation or rejection with respect to the prior discourse, and so this *no* is not a discourse marker in the sense that it operates primarily on the propositional level (though it is dependent on the prior discourse in a way comparable to indexicals and anaphors of various sorts). In this and the following sections I will introduce several senses that depart markedly from the familiar negating sense of *no*. I confirm and build upon the observations of Schegloff (1992) and Schegloff (2001) regarding contexts in which *no* is deployed, refining and expanding his findings, while also presenting additional senses previously unexamined.3 After description of these uses, I will return to consider how connections may be drawn between these DM senses and some other senses of *no*.

4.1 Getting serious

Schegloff (2001) noticed that turn-initial *no* is sometimes used not to negate a statement or question, but to bracket previous talk as non-serious, sometimes joking, thus marking following talk as “serious.” An example is shown in (3). In this and the following transcripts, the line containing the token of interest (here, *no*) is indicated with ->>. Other lines of interest are indicated with -->.

(3) Bed014.mrt, start at 187 seconds4

1 Tracy: Actually, maybe I could try, like, emailing the guy and
2 see if he has anything already.
3 Jason: .hhh
4 Brian: [Sure.]
5 Peter: [Hmm. ]
6 Tracy: That’d be weird, that
7 Tracy: he has both the Java Bayes and the embedded Bayes in —
8 Tracy: Yeah.
9 Jason: But that’s some sort of conversion program?
10 Tracy: Yeah.
11 Tracy: And put them into different (. ) formats.
12 Tracy: Oh — Yep, he could [do that, too.]
13 Jason: --> [I think you ] should demand things

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3Jefferson (2002) documents *no* as a DM in one particular pattern, namely as an expression of strong agreement with a negatively-framed stance. Because this sense seems rather different from those considered here—e.g., it is dependent upon a prior negatively-framed stance, which none of the uses discussed herein have—I set it aside for this study.

4See appendix A.1 for details on transcription of the ICSI meeting corpus data.
14 --> from him.
15 Sarah: ((sniff))
16 Tracy: ((laugh))
17 Brian: --> ((laugh)) He charges so much. Right.
18 Jason: ((laugh)) Ye(h)ah.
19 Brian: ->> No, I think it's a good idea that you [may as well ask.]
20 Tracy: [Yeah. ]
21 Brian Sure.

Before line 1, and continuing to line 11, Tracy and Peter are in an extended conversation about software programs they are using for a particular project. In line 13, Jason makes a suggestion, delivered in a normal intonation. It is taken as a joke, as evidenced by the laughter in the following turns, and also by a follow-up joke in line 17 (the writer of Java Bayes charges nothing for his software). Then, in line 19, Brian (the group’s leader) makes a serious contribution, agreeing with and approving of Tracy’s proposal. The turn-initial no is not a response to any prior speech act, such as a question, which might expect a no, nor does it in any obvious way negate a prior claim by the other participants. Instead, it serves to bracket his previous turn, and perhaps the prior interaction as a whole, as non-serious. The interaction then proceeds without further joking.

No also appears with more explicit markers of transitions away from jokes. In (4), line 9, Sarah mimics Roger’s legitimate (though jocular) exasperation at his microphone headset, but immediately qualifies this as “just kidding.” With respect to the “damn this project” comment, the qualification counts as “serious,” and so this is again consistent with no bracketing non-serious talk.

(4) Bed006.mrt, start 2868.661

1 Roger: Hhh. Damn this headset!
2 Roger: .hhh. When you this uh, eh -
3 Emily: ((laugh))
4 Sarah: ((laugh))
5 Sarah: Metacomment. ((laugh))
6 Roger: Ye(h)ah.
7 Emily: ((laugh))
8 Roger: That’s all recorded. ((laugh)) Um.
9 Sarah: --> Damn this project. No just kidding. ((laugh))

Let us call this use of no—bracketing prior talk as non-serious, and marking a transition to serious discussion—“serious-no.” In the above examples, it appears alone and at the beginning of a turn, but it need not. It is observed along with other DMs like but (as in Schegloff’s (4)), kidding, and so. Some examples of these are briefly illustrated below.
B has been explaining how she found out about the telephone conversation recording study. This leads to a side story about her heart attack recovery, and to her family’s history of heart attacks. B’s use of *but no* is immediately preceded by a short humorous exchange about who B would like to hold responsible for giving her a genetic predisposition for heart attacks. Her utterance is immediately followed by a return to the topic at hand, which is further indicated by *so*.

Another such instance involves a single speaker switching away from a joking stance within a short sequence of turns. In (6), A and B are talking about how they deal with very cold and dreary winters.

(6) *fsh_60685.txt*, at 389.44 seconds

B: and and you know that’s of course that’s all a mental thing
too [you know] you know but it’s it’s
A: [yeah ]
B: still very
B: um
B: very prevalent and what it does also do is
B: if if you let it take you over
B: then you can get sick too
A: uh-huh
B: i’ve heard of people who get
A: right

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5See appendix A.2 for details on transcription of the Fisher corpus data.
In this case the topic is cold weather, and in particular how people deal with cold and dreary weather. B is dominating this part of the conversation, and in line 13 mentions a coping mechanism, i.e., turning lights on. A then responds with an agreement, and then follows up on the “lights” comment in line 16. This comment is non-serious, or meant to be taken in a jocular or light-hearted way (it is not obviously false or otherwise inappropriate). This is evidenced first by the speaker’s increasingly higher pitch in lines 16–17 and the oh well, both indicative of a “you do what you have to do” attitude, and by A’s own laughter following her turns. In line 21, A returns to the topic at hand, using but no to bracket the previous talk (at least lines 16-20) as non-serious. It may be argued that the cooccurring DMs—*but, yeah, oh well*, and another *but*—also contribute, in different ways, to the indication that a new topic is upcoming.

Serious-*no* is limited in what it can bracket as non-serious. Part, or perhaps all of it must be talk from the current speaker. This constrains the turn-sequential position of serious-*no*. In this regard *no* contrasts with *anyway*, which can additionally be used by a newly-selected speaker to bracket the previous talk (of someone else) as “off-topic.” We will see that the sequential position of *no* is a crucial distinguishing feature of several varieties of *no*, and can act as a diagnostic in determining, for a particular token, which variety of *no* it is.

### 4.2 Topic shift

The joke-to-serious pattern is in fact a subset of a more general sense of *no* as a marker of topic-shift. Some of the above cases of serious-*no* are also cases of topic shift. In (3), the humorous exchange about how and why the research group should demand service from a particular software engineer constitutes what might be called mini-topic within the larger topic of the software used in the project. Serious-*no*, in addition to marking a shift
away from the joking exchange, also marks a shift back to the topic at hand. A similar characterization holds for the heart attack (5) and winter weather (6) interactions.

Consider, then, the extract in (7). The no is sequentially placed very similarly to serious-no—in the middle of a sequence of utterances by the same speaker, only briefly interrupted by the interlocutor—but there is no indication that the previous talk was in any way non-serious, nor the following talk any more serious.

(7) fsh_78297.txt, start 195

1 R: What do you do?
2 L: I'm a chemist.
3 R: A chemist?
4 L: Mhm.
5 R: Oh, okay. I'm a nurse.
6 L: Okay.
7 R: So ... I, ah, I've got one of them basic eight to five -- well, seven to three jobs so ...
8 L: Okay.
9 R: You know, my -- ah, I'm lucky. Five days a week. [LAUGH]
10 L: I start -- start early and get home late.
11 R: Yeah.
12 L: [LAUGH]
13 R: Yeah. Well, I used to. I -- I worked in surgery until I had knee surgery and, ah, that pretty much ended my call and everything else, so I sit at a desk now. It's pretty boring.
14 L: Wow. I bet, yeah. [Having knee surgery --]
15 R: [So, yeah, ] I -- I'm in the market for something else, yeah. But, ah, anyway -- no, I was just, ah, I was wondering about the, um, you know, the South
16 Eastern conference tournament that's going on this weekend.
17 L: I watched a little bit of it last night. Baseball tournament.

Earlier R had, out of the blue, asked L if he was a baseball fan. L revealed that he does not watch much baseball, though he does participate in “fantasy games” at work. Possibly seeing this as a dead end, R asked about L’s job, and began an extended discourse on the topic of his own line of work. In line 18, R closes the topic and returns to baseball. The no appears in exactly the utterance in which the topic shift is indicated, namely by a reference to his prior topic-establishment attempt (“I was just, ah, I was wondering about...”). This placement, directly after a type of digression and before a return to previously-relevant talk, parallels that of serious-no, but in this case there is no obvious non-serious talk to be bracketed off. Rather, no indicates a shift back to a previous topic.
A further illustration of this use is shown in (8), in which the assigned topic is professional athletes and their salaries. L and R had recently been discussing career options for athletes after retirement.

(8) fsh_80227.txt, start 401

1 L: -- I mean, how many of these guys really want to go into --
2 R: [NOISE]
3 L: -- coaching now? Do you know what I mean? Like --
4 R: Well, or -- or can get in, or -- or do, say broadcasting.
5 You know, like being on TV --
6 L: Right.
7 R: -- as a commentator. There’s not that many spots.
8 L: [NOISE] Except for, of course, Dick Button who’s my favorite guy on --
10 R: [LAUGH]
11 L: [LAUGH] I’m just kidding.
12 R: Oh.
13 L: You gotta love his voice.
14 R: Oh, so you do watch that, huh? [NOISE]
15 L: Yeah, yeah. [Gotta -- ]
16 R: [((unclear))]
17 L: --> -- gotta watch my figure skating but -- you know [NOISE] that’s about it but he cracks me up. But I like his voice though.
18 It’s real calming.
19 R: Right.
21 L: -- But anyway, I -- no, I hear you though. It’s like --
22 R: [SIGH] Well, see, I -- I don’t -- I don’t -- th- this whole thing about players’ salaries it’s like --

When R brings up broadcasting in line 4, L sees this as an opening to mention her “favorite” sports commentator. Though this starts off as a joking sequence, with laughter and an admission of such in lines 10 and 11, L keeps the topic going through line 19. This is evidently not seen as the main topic as hand, as she moves away from Button and back to the main topic in lines 17/18, reflected in the use of anyway and though, and a shift towards evaluating (rather than elaborating) the topic (“I hear you”). Once again, no is among the discourse markers in the crucial turn, strongly suggesting some role in effecting or marking the topic shift.

This interaction does contain non-serious talk preceding the no turn. Note however the “I’m just kidding” in line 11, which seems to already close off the humorous turns prior. The comments about Button’s voice in the lines preceding no are presented and taken as serious. Like the token in (7), this no marks a transition back to the topic at hand.
4.2.1 New topic or old?

When *no* marks a topic shift (without any implication of the seriousness of prior talk), the shift is back to a prior topic, rather than a new one, as illustrated in the prior two extracts. If the joke-to-serious sense is a subtype of the general topic-shift sense, we predict that the serious talk will all be a resumption of a previous line of conversation. Schegloff's examples bear this out. For example, the *no* in his (3) is described as allowing the speaker to “transition back from the topic of studying to the topic of partying” (p. 1951). In one case (his (5)) the *no* marks not a shift back to a prior topic, but to a previously-projected action, namely part of an opening sequence (p. 1953–4). Given this, the appropriate generalization is that there is a sense of *no* which indicates a shift back to the main trajectory of the interaction. In some cases this will be a prior topic, but in other instances involves a continuation of a projected action.

If we revisit the examples above of serious-*no*, we see the same pattern. In (6), A’s contribution in lines 16–17 was taken up as humorous. But before *no* is deployed, A’s *but oh well* already projects the end of the electricity side-topic (and it does not seem as though *but oh well* should specifically pick up on joking exchanges). Line 21 is thus not simply a transition from joking to serious, but from off-topic-joking to on-topic-serious. Specifying that serious-*no* is a subtype of (inherits from) topic-shift *no* captures this fact.

4.2.2 Does *no* work alone?

In (7) and (8), *no* is accompanied by another discourse marker: *anyway*. That DM also has a topic-shift sense, and in particular a return to a previous topic after a digression (Lenk, 1998, 60). Although in these two cases it appears in a separate sentence from *no*, one might wonder, even if *no* does mark topic shifts, whether *no* is in a sense a “bound” discourse marker, obligatorily appearing with another DM that does the same or similar work.

We saw in (6) the beginning of an answer. There, *no* appears with *but*, which places *no* in a paradigmatic relation with other topic shifting DMs: *but anyway, but so, but to return*, etc. In the context of *but*, then, *no* appears to be parallel to other recognized topic-shift markers.\(^6\) The most convincing case for *no* specifically indicating a shift in topic would have *no* doing this work on its own—otherwise the function might be attributable to the accompanying DM, or perhaps to the combination. The clearest such case found so far is presented in (9).

(9)  *Bed014.mrt*, start 842.061

1 Brian: And sometimes it’s actually easier
2 Sarah: ((throat clear and sniff))

\(^6\)An additional question is whether *but* can, alone, effect or mark a topic shift. If not, then *either no* is accomplishing this work in *but no*, or *but no* is a non-decomposable multi-word DM.
3 Brian: to solve two hard problems than one
4 Roger: Yeah. ((laugh))
5 Brian: because they constrain each other. I mean if you’ve got
6 huge ra- huge range of possible choices
7 Sarah: ((laugh))
8 Peter: hhhh
9 Brian: um -
10 Brian: --> We’ll see. But anyway, so that’s, um -
11 Roger: Oh yeah, like uh, I solved the - the problem of um - we were
12 talking about how do you -
13 Roger: various issues of how come a plural noun gets to quote
14 ‘‘count as a noun phrase’’, you know, occur as an argument
15 of a [higher] construction, but a bare singular stem
doesn’t=
16 Brian: [Right.]
17 Roger =get to act that way. Um,
18 Roger: and it would take a really long time to explain it now, but
19 I’m about to write it up this evening.
20 Roger: I solved that at the same time as ‘‘how do we keep adjectives
21 from floating to the left of determiners and how do we keep all
22 of that from floating outside the noun phrase’’ to get
23 something like ‘‘I the kicked dog’’. Um.
24 Sarah: ((sniffing))
25 Roger: [Did it - ] did it at once. So maybe - [maybe] it’ll be=
26 Brian: [That’s great.] Yeah.
27 Sarah: [Cool.]
28 Roger: [=a similar thing ((laugh))]
29 Brian: ->> [No, I know, I th- I- ] I think that is gonna be
30 Brian: sort of
31 Brian: the key to this wh- to th- the big project of the summer of -
32 of getting the constructions right is that

Just prior to the beginning of this excerpt, Brian had been discussing the need to solve
a particular problem, after which he noted (ending in line 1) that sometimes it’s easier to
solve two problems at once. In line 10 he attempts to move on (“But anyway”), but is
interrupted by Roger, who tells an extended story exemplifying this method of problem-
solving (lines 11–23). In line 25 he explicitly connects his story back to the preceding
topic (solving two problems at once), a sign of making one’s narrative “reportable” in the
sense of Labov and Waletzky (1997) and Labov (1997), and also an indication of wrapping
up. In line 29, beginning with “no,” Brian brings the discussion back to the larger topic of
problem-solving and the agenda for the summer. Although this token appears very close to
the beginning of Brian’s sequence of turns—only “That’s great. Yeah” precedes it—it still fits the distributional criteria for topic-shift-no, namely marking shifts away from topics contributed to by the no-user, as well as fulfilling its discourse functions.\footnote{Alternatively, one may consider the fact that Brian is the group’s leader, and so has access to more topic-regulation resources than other members of the group. In this case, it includes bracketing others’ speech as separate from the main topic.}

The upshot of this is that it is undeniable that topic-shift contexts at least welcome no, even if no often works in conjunction with another DM. Further exploration into the exact DMs that no occurs with in topic-shift contexts will help make more precise the contribution no makes, and possibly lead to an understanding of its cooccurrence with other DMs.

### 4.2.3 Summary

There exists a DM sense of no which marks shifts from one topic to a prior topic. This is a more general sense than that identified by Schegloff (2001), who noted that no marks a shift from a “joking” to a serious topic. Unlike the response senses of no, such as answers to questions, this sense of no does not constitute an expected answer to any prior speech act, nor does it obviously count as negation of anything prior (though I will return to this in section 5). Its sequential position is quite consistent: a speaker participating the a discussion on one topic will deploy it as part of a shift to a new topic, which immediately follows the no.

### 4.3 Managing misunderstanding and disagreement with no

No also is used to manage and mitigate misunderstanding and disagreement. This sense is found in contexts where a speaker is in a position to clarify some point of the prior discourse, based on the speech of one or more of his/her interlocutors. Like topic shift-no, it is not a dedicated answer or response token, and it always appears with a following utterance or utterances which clarity the speaker’s speech or opinions. But, rather than coming after a turn or turns by the same speaker, it comes at points of speaker change. This sense (call it “misunderstanding-no”) bears some resemblance to the category of third-position repair initiators (Schegloff, 1992), but is more general, in that the problematic notion that the speaker rejects may arise in far more diverse, and even non-linguistic, contexts. I address the similarities and differences in the following section. The examples in this section illustrate the range of ways in which no is used to deal with potential misunderstandings in conversation.

Consider the following interaction between computer scientists and linguists discussing how to analyze metonymy. Sarah, Peter, and Roger are discussing cases of metonymy as part of Peter’s research proposal, itself one piece of the research program that all the
participants are part of. At this point, the participants have just located the relevant example on Peter’s handout, from which Peter is reading.

(10) Bed016.mrt, start 2079.329

1 Peter Where is the castle? How old is it? How much does it cost?
2 (a few seconds of confirmation as people locate this example)
3 Sarah --> To go in, [that’s like.
4 Roger [Two hundred million dollars.
5 (all participants laugh)
6 Brian It’s not for sale.
7 (all participants laugh)
8 Brian Uh, so.
9 Roger Yeah, I think that’s a good example, actually.
10 Sarah Yeah, that’s good u-
11 Peter --> But as Nancy just su- suggested it’s probably [ellipticus].
12 Sarah [Ellipsis.]
13 Peter Huh.
14 Sarah --> Like, ‘‘it’’ doesn’t refer to ‘‘thing,’’ it refers to acti-
15 --> you know, j- thing standing for activ- most relevant activity
16 --> for a tourist - you could think of it that way, but.
17 Brian Yeah.
18 Roger Well, shoot, isn’t that - I mean, that’s what -
19 Peter [Well, I mean, my argument here is] -
   [it’s - it’s - it’s the]=
20 Roger [figuring that out is what this is about].
21 Sarah [Yeah, yeah, no, I- I agree.]
22 Peter --> =same thing as ‘‘Plato’s on the top shelf,’’ I’m con- you know,
23 --> th- that you can refer to a book of Plato by ‘‘Plato,’’
24 --> and you can
25 Sarah Yeah.
26 Sarah --> No no, I - I’m agreeing that
   [this is a good, um ] -
27 Peter [refer back to it, and so you can] - Castles have - as tourist sites,
   have admission fees, so you can say ‘‘Where is the castle, how much
does it cost?’’

This part of the conversation features multiple competing analyses of a particular linguistic phenomenon. There are apparent (to the participants) misunderstandings regarding who favors which analysis. Peter seems to believe that Sarah holds a position opposed to his own, while Sarah in fact does not hold this position and in general agrees with Peter.
In order to ensure that her alignment is maintained, she makes use of no (repeated in this instance) to reject the notion that she is taking an oppositional stance. Let us see exactly how this misunderstanding arises and how no comes to be used in this instance.

In line 1, Peter reads out the example discourse containing metonymy (“it” referring to both “the castle” and “the castle’s price of admission”), and in line 2 Sarah provides “to go in, that’s like,” with to go in a possible completion of the last part of how much does it cost. In this context, Sarah’s completion is interpretable as an assessment of a likely interpretation of the sentence, but might it also imply a particular sort of linguistic analysis, namely syntactic ellipsis of to go in. An ellipsis analysis would make this example irrelevant to Peter’s project, which is limited to metonymy. That Peter recognizes this is inferable from his acceptance of Nancy’s ellipsis analysis in line 11; I read his use of but as contrasting with the notion that this is a “good example” of metonymy.

In response to this, Sarah presents a different, non-ellipsis analysis, which would be more in line with the type of analysis Peter hopes to do (lines 14–16). Her analysis would not count as a specific example of ellipsis, at least under a syntactic understanding of the term. It could be that she is assuming a definition of ellipsis that includes metonymy, while Peter has in mind a more syntactic definition. This may be one of the primary causes of misunderstanding in this interaction. In order to avoid confusion I will contrast “metonymy” with “deletion.”

She finishes with “you could think of it that way, but.” It is not obvious to me what “that way” is, or whether she considers her analysis to be compatible with Peter’s. Whatever her intentions, Peter evidently takes her as favoring deletion. In Schegloff’s (1992) terms, Sarah’s turns laying out her analysis are the source of Peter’s misunderstanding. He prefaces his reply (line 22) with “well,” indicating that he views his upcoming position as incompatible in some respect with Sarah’s proposal (Jucker, 1993; Fuller, 2003). The I mean marks a modification of his intentions or ideas (Schegloff, 1992; Fuller, 2003, 30). He argues that the example does not involve deletion and is similar to other, more canonical cases of metonymy, such as using an author’s name to refer to a book written by that author.

Sarah, then, is placed in a rhetorical position contrary to that of Peter. She may also have recognized that Peter no longer wishes to view the deletion analysis as preferred. She moves to (re-)establish her alignment with his opinions. First she assents to his comparison of the current case with the canonical cases (“yeah” in line 25). This is followed up by an explicit statement of agreement in line 26, which is prefaced by “No, no.” Although Peter has not suggested explicitly that Sarah’s position is incompatible with his (e.g., by saying “Well, I know you think that . . . , but I think . . .”), this underlies his conversational moves and the discourse markers he deploys.8 Sarah’s “No, no” serves to flag upcoming material as addressing an assumption that Peter has made about the conversation. In particular,
we may say that it introduces a rejection of that assumption: “No, it’s not the case that I disagree with you,” to give a rough paraphrase. The overall function of no here is to reject the assumption that there is a real disagreement.

No is similarly used in the following exchange between the same participants on a different occasion. Here the group’s leader, Brian (a professor) is attempting to set times for various weekly meetings. A larger group is set to meet on Wednesdays, and Peter suggests that the current (smaller) group also meet on Wednesdays.

(11) Bed014.mrt, start 2145.800

1 Peter    And, um. How do we feel about doing it Wednesdays?
2           Because it seems to me that this is sort of a time where when we
3           have things to discuss with other people, there - they seem to
4           be s- tons of people around.
5 Brian --> The only disadvantage is that it may interfere with other
6 Peter    Or -
7 Peter    subgroup meetings
8 Brian --> s- you know, other - other - No, you - Uh, people in
9           --> this group connecting with - with
10 Sarah   Those people
11 Brian   those people
12 Sarah   who happen to be around.
13 Brian --> who - who might not be around so much. Uh, I don’t care. I- I- uh
14 Brian --> you know
15 Brian --> I have [no fixed - ]
16 Roger --> [To tell you] the truth, I’d rath- I’d, I’d -
17           --> would like to avoid more than one I_C_S_I meeting per day,
           if possible.
18           --> [((laugh)) But - ((laugh)))]=
19 Brian --> [O_K.
           ]
20 Roger --> =I mean. I don’t know. Whatever.
21 Brian -=> No, that’s fine.
22 Roger   [((laugh))  ]
23 Brian   [I mean that -]
24 Peter   The - I’d like to have them all in one day,
           [so package them up and then -]
25 Roger   [Yeah, I] can understand that.]
26 Brian   [Well p-]
27 Brian   people - people differ in their tastes in this matter.
           I - I’m neutral.
The group’s leader, Brian, expresses some minimal concern with having both meetings on Wednesday, but notes that he is entirely flexible, and is mostly interested in making sure as many people as possible participate (lines 5, 6, 14–16). Roger is the first to raise an objection, in lines 17–19. His turn shows several indications that he is very attentive to the fact that his preference may threaten the negative face of other participants (Brown and Levinson, 1987): (i) he prefaces his utterance with “to tell you the truth,” a hedge that indicates that what follows will be unexpected (cf. Lenk (1998, ch.8) on actually), (ii) he corrects “would rather” to “would like,” perhaps a more deferent form of preference indication, (iii) at the end he chuckles, a potential sign of embarrassment (Keltner and Buswell, 1997), and (iv), he trails off with several hedges (“if possible,” “but,” “I don’t know,” “whatever”). Important to note is that Wednesday is being treated as the default choice, as everyone will be on campus that day for other meetings. Roger’s preference would require a new round of day and time negotiations, possibly requiring people to come in on more days than they would prefer (e.g., Peter in line 25), making it potentially even more problematic. Personal conversations with the participants in question (excluding Roger himself) reveal that Roger spent a majority of his time away from ICSI, so his facework may also be motivated by an awareness of how typical it was for researchers to spend the majority of their day at ICSI.

His (apparent) addressee, Brian, responds to Roger’s statement in two stages. After Roger’s complaint in lines 17–19, Brian says “OK,” indicating receipt of the content, and presumably intent, of the utterance (Condon, 2001). This is followed by Roger’s series of hedges. In the context of the conversation—in particular the way the original question was phrased by Peter, and possibly also Roger’s junior status—Roger evidently felt as though it was somewhat inappropriate to hold or express a contrary opinion. In response to this, Brian says, “No, that’s fine.” “That’s fine” indicates his acceptance of dissent on the matter, but what about the no? As with the previous token, it appears to indicate rejection of Roger’s assumption that he should not be suggesting a new time. By assuaging this concern, Brian attempts both to manage a situation where disagreement has arisen, and to mitigate any worries or misunderstandings.

Schematically, these two tokens are quite similar. Speaker A either states or implies a certain opinion or stance (“contrary to your claim, this sentence does not involve deletion,” or “I shouldn’t express a contrary opinion about meeting times”). Speaker B believes that A’s opinion or stance is faulty in some way, and deploys a no-initial utterance which attempts to clarify the situation.

4.3.1 Sources of misunderstanding
What are the possible sources of misunderstanding that may lead ultimately to a speaker deploying no? In (10), the participant (Sarah) who deployed no was also the source of the misunderstanding, and this is reflected in the fact that the crucial turn involves Sarah explicitly revealing her own stance: “I’m agreeing that this is a good [example].” But it is
not always so easy to pin down the source of misunderstanding.

In (11) there was nothing explicit in the linguistic context that might have indicated to Roger that anyone would object to reconsidering the day and time of the meeting. Further, the participant who used \textit{no} had already expressed his lack of opinion. Nonetheless, it was clear that Roger acted as though faced with the possibility of such objections, possibly due to prior interactions, or general knowledge about the appropriateness of making objections in particular social contexts. Regardless of the ultimate source, Brian’s \textit{no}-prefaced utterance was built to address those concerns and clarify at least his own position.

Two further examples will demonstrate that misunderstanding-\textit{no} need not be used by someone who is attempting to clarify their own position. In (12), the speaker who uses \textit{no} has had very little participation in the conversation so far.

\begin{quote}
\textbf{(12) Bed006.mrt, start 2955.717}

1 Peter: So - [the - ]
2 Sarah: [:((laugh))] (Run like this uh -)
3 Peter: I think the - in some sense we - we ex-
4 Roger: ((laugh))
5 Sarah: hhh
6 Peter: --> get the task done extremely well [because this]
7 --> is exactly the discussion we need -
8 Allen: [((cough)) ]
9 Sarah: ((throat clear))
10 Sarah: Mm-hmm.
11 Peter: --> need. Period. No more qualifiers than [that. So. ]
12 Sarah: --> [No, this is] useful,
13 --> you know, don- don’t worry.
14 Peter: [and um and] - and I th- I hope um
15 Sarah: [((sniff))] 
16 Peter: uh let’s make a - a - a - a sharper claim. We will not end this
17 discussion anytime soon.
18 Sarah: Yeah, I can guarantee that. ((laugh))

The immediately preceding context involves a discussion of some very difficult problems for the computation system being built. In particular, Roger had asked “what are we doing with this?” and Peter said that certain sorts of input could not be handled “at all” by the system. In this setting, Peter’s comments in lines 3–11 may be understood as him giving encouragement (among other possible goals). He wants the group to be critical of the system (which he had a part in building), and not be discouraged because certain problems seem intractable. His forceful assertion that “this is exactly the discussion we need . . . period” makes explicit this aspect of what he is saying.
The fact that Peter is encouraging discussion implies that he feels people are discouraged, and that the discourse will cease due to apparent difficulties. Sarah's utterance in lines 12–13 directly addresses the worry underlying Peter's talk. Her reassuring remark is similar to Brian's in (11), in that she is reassuring her interlocutor that he need not worry about something. The role of no here is to indicate that she rejects the assumptions that underlie what Peter is saying, namely that people are too discouraged about the project. The difference is that in (12), the no-deployer has not been an active participant in the preceding interaction and is not per se the source of misunderstanding. In fact, since no one has explicitly revealed the sentiment that Peter is worried about, the source of Peter's misconstrual of the situation is even more nebulous.

(13) provides a case of a misunderstanding whose source is incredibly difficult to identify.

(13)  

1 R: And, uh, going running. The kids loved bicycling, so we got to do all of those kinds of things. And rollerskating was a favorite, also.
2
3 (0.7)
4 R: [And I --] everybody's grown now, that's why I referred to 'em, 'When they were kids', 'cause everybody's adult now.
5 L: That's right. [I -- ]
6 R: [And I --] everybody's grown now, that's why I referred to 'em, 'When they were kids', 'cause everybody's adult now.
7 L: No, I -- I understand that, but I -- I'm listening to you say rollerskating which I did as a kid, but now that also --
8 R: Right, rollerblading, right, right --

R and L's assigned topic is outdoor activities. In line 1, R uses an expression, “the kids.” After a short pause and an abandoned turn by L, R provides her rationale for using the phrase “the kids.” In response, L offers a no-prefaced acknowledgment of the rationale, and then proceeds onward with the topic of rollerskating. For some reason not immediately apparent (perhaps even to L), R was motivated to explain one of her expressions, presumably on the assumption that some justification was necessary. Even if L cannot identify the source of this (mis)conception, it is enough to license no as a way to assure her that such an explanation was not needed.

A final example demonstrates that the source of the misunderstanding need not have linguistic origins. This is a constructed example, but reflective of several interactions I have participated in. Imagine that a student is in a professor's office, discussing thesis research. At some point, the department chair knocks and opens the door, appearing to wish to speak with the advisor:
(14) (A student and a professor are having a discussion)
   Chair: ((walks in))
   Student: ((begins to stand, as if to leave))
   Chair: No, it’s okay, I just came by to say hello.

The student’s behavior was understandable as a response to the chair’s actions, and thus social and communicative (just as the chair’s entering the room was communicative). The chair understood the student’s actions as motivated by certain assumptions e.g., that the chair has priority to interact with the advisor, and wishes to do so. No may be used here to deny such assumptions, even if they are not verbalized.

In sum, there is a sense of no by which a speaker can address some misunderstanding or otherwise problematic issue, by clarifying a position, assuaging concerns, and in general rejecting a mistaken understanding of some aspect of the conversational context. In some cases the source of misunderstanding is something the speaker him or herself said earlier, but in other cases, the source is more distributed among various participants (12), or difficult to describe or pin down (13). This sense is general enough to apply to all of these situations: no matter how the misunderstanding came about, no can pick it out for repair.

A question that arises from this flexibility of misunderstanding-no is whether the distinction in sources of misunderstanding has tangible reflexes in the shape of the language used to correct the misunderstanding. This is more properly in the domain of the study of repairs, rather than no as a DM, but I will note one trend I have observed. Misunderstandings that arise from something the no-deployer has said involve self-oriented utterances such as “I’m agreeing with you,” “I didn’t mean that,” and so forth. Misunderstandings that become apparent due mostly to someone else’s behavior are corrected by utterances that tend to make no such self-reference: “That’s fine,” “this is good,” etc.

4.3.2 Third-position repair

The previous section introduced a sense of no which is deployed to manage or mitigate disagreement and misunderstanding. In this section I compare misunderstanding-no to the category of turns called third-position repairs by Schegloff (1992). I claim that the usage of no in third-position repairs is a subtype of the general sense of misunderstanding-no, just as serious-no is a subtype of topic shift-no.

Schegloff (1992) was among the first to note that no could be used not as a direct rejection of the propositional meaning of the prior turn, but of the context that it implied.9

9The Oxford English Dictionary recognizes what seems to be this exact use of no in its sense 1a: “introducing a correction of an erroneous opinion or assumption on the part of another person.” This characterization is general enough to cover the sense of no examined by Schegloff (1992), and also in the following sections. However, given the lack of context for many of the attestations of this sense in the OED, it is also possible that the instances of no intended to be covered by this correction sense do not look anything like those analyzed by Schegloff (1992) and in this paper. The following excerpt may be indicative of what is meant to be covered: “Now they cry out Peace, Union, Forbearance, and Charity...
In what he termed “third-position repairs,” a speaker finds that his or her previous turn (the first position) was misunderstood, based on how it was responded to (in the second position). Following that response, in the third position, the original speaker clarifies the problematic turn’s intended meaning, sometimes prefacing it with a no. An example of this is given in 15.

(15) Bed008.mrt, start 2733.100

1 Brian: (1) Uh really important in - in the belief world- net world
2 not to have loops uh
3 Scott: Yes.
4 Peter: (2) How long does it take you to - to
5 Peter: compute [uh ]
6 Brian: --> [No it’s much worse than that.]
7 Jason: ((laugh))
8 Brian: --> It - [if i- loo- ]
9 Scott: It - [things don’t converge, yeah.]
10 Peter: uh
11 Brian: --> it - it - it - it - it’s not def- i- it’s not well defined
12 if you’re there are loops, you just

Line 1 is the first position, where Brian issues a warning about a particular computational model. The first position is the “trouble source” in that it will eventually come to be misunderstood, and subject to repair. In line 4, the second position, Peter asks a question that indicates a misunderstanding of the thrust of Brian’s warning regarding loops. Brian was attempting to say, or begin to say, that loops will cause the system to crash, while Peter’s question indicates that he believes that it will simply cause computation to slow down. When this misunderstanding becomes clear, Brian clarifies his claim, first by stating the fallacy of Peter’s supposition (line 6—the third-position repair), and then further by detailing the problem with loops (lines 8, 11).

A third-position repair has four structural components (not all of which need be present in a particular instance), outlined in (16) (from Schegloff, 1992, 1304-1313).

(16) a. An initiator of repair. This is always a turn-initial particle such as no, oh, or some combination of these.

b. An acceptance or agreement of the prior turn. This is relevant where the second position turn has treated the trouble-source turn as a complaint. Usually in the form of yeah, okay, I know, etc. The acceptance is given “even though its speaker is about to go on to deny that his or her prior turn was doing complaining in the first instance” (Schegloff, 1992, 1305)

No Gentlemen, the Time of Mercy is past” (Defoe’s Shortest Way with Dissenters (1702)).
c. The rejection component. The speaker rejects the (mis)understanding of their problematic turn. This often takes the form of I (don’t) mean..., or I’m not/I wasn’t ..., but in general the speaker is confronting some misunderstanding and rejecting its validity.

d. The repair proper. The speaker attempts to reformulate the problematic turn, explain motivation for the turn, cast it off as non-serious, or one of a few other options available for “making oneself clear.”

A third-position repair also has a sequential position, namely it should be done in “the turn after a turn containing an utterance analyzably built to be next to some prior” (Schegloff, 1992, 1318) What this does is allow for “third-position” repairs that are rather distantly removed from the original trouble-source. All that is required is that it be done following a turn that itself addresses the trouble-source. Schematically:

(17) A: T

. 

B: T_n (a “next” to T_1, e.g., a second pair part)

C: T_{n+1} (the third-position repair)

The remainder of this section examines the applicability of the notion of third-position repair to the analysis of misunderstanding-no.

In 10, as described above, Peter and Sarah end up taking contrary positions, at least from Peter’s point of view. Peter reads a particular discourse as exemplifying metonymy, but thinks that Sarah sees it as a process of “ellipsis” (line 11). In response to Sarah’s turn in lines 14–16, Peter responds by clarifying his position that the discourse exemplifies metonymy. The use of well and I mean indicate his taking a contrary position. What follows is Sarah’s no-prefaced turn, which has the hallmarks of a third-position repair. Sequentially, Sarah’s prior turn is understood as the trouble source, and Peter’s response is the second position, which indicates to Sarah some type of misunderstanding. Structurally, no is the initiator, and I’m agreeing is the rejection component. The part of the turn that she abandons (“this is a good, um”) expresses her alignment with Peter, rejecting the notion that they are in contrary positions (it also reflects an earlier turn (line 10), and so may be a bid to reframe her previous turns as an extended expression of alignment).

This interaction exemplifies a possibility that Schegloff (1992) did not consider, namely that a third-position repair might be made with respect to another third-position repair. Peter’s well turn has the structure of such a repair (see Schegloff, 1992, 1305, n. 6 on well as an initiator), and Sarah’s prior turn indicates a misconstrual of Peter’s speculation (or worry) that it might be ellipsis (line 11).

Whether the situation in example (11) can be described as third-position repair is not as clear. Peter has presented Wednesday as his preference for the meeting time. Brian (the group leader) notes a potential disadvantage to keeping the meeting on Wednesday,
but denies that he is complaining or taking a stance on it (“I don’t care.”). At this point (lines 17 and 18) Roger first gives his objections to Wednesday. Brian’s no-prefaced turn follows the above-described hedging from Roger.

If Brian’s turn is a canonical third-position repair, then the first and second positions should be identifiable. Roger’s turns indicate a misconstrual of the social situation, so it is the second position. But Roger is not in any obvious way responding specifically to Brian—in fact, the last thing Brian said (lines 5–16) can be interpreted as in line with Roger’s wishes. If a trouble-source could be identified, it is Peter’s phrasing of his question in lines 1–4. However it could just as easily be the general social situation that leads Roger to act how he does. Either scenario is a marked departure from the scheme in (17).

The internal composition of Brian’s repair is also problematic as a third position repair. No is a typical initiator, but his that’s fine is not an “acceptance” (in Schegloff’s terms), because nothing that Roger was responding to, nor anything that Brian himself said, could be construed as a “complaint.” The that’s fine is rather the very point of Brian’s actions in lines 20–30. It is assurance to Roger that his suggestions are welcome, not a throwaway comment to be made irrelevant by following talk. To call this a straightforward third-position repair would require a serious reformulation of the definition.

Nevertheless, there are considerable similarities: Brian is responding to a situation in which one person (Roger) has apparently misunderstood the intentions of another (Peter). He is not clarifying or amending any prior utterance, but is rejecting an underlying assumption that led to the misunderstanding. The situation described by Schegloff is simply a specific subcase of this situation, where the source of the misunderstanding is some prior turn, and the behavior that reveals the misunderstanding is a “next” to that turn.

It can further be noted that the constructed interaction in (14) conforms quite well to Schegloff’s general pattern. The main difference is that the trouble-source and the action that responds to it are not linguistic. The initial “turn” is the chair walking in, and the turn which evinces a misunderstanding is indeed a “next” (response) to that action. The repair proper is linguistic—an explanation of what the initial action was. It is unlikely that the chair (or other individuals in similar situations) would redo the initial action in a clearer way, even if it could be done.

If (10), (11), and (14) illustrate probable or at least possible instances of third-position repair, the interactions in (12) and (13) do not fit well into the more specific category. (12) is sequentially and interactionally quite similar to (11). Sarah’s no addresses Peter’s remarks, putting his turns in the second position. But Peter is addressing the entire group and is not responding to any particular prior conversational move. What he is saying, however, implies a certain orientation on his part, which Sarah addresses in her no turn. What follows the no is a the type of post-initiator rejection that Schegloff observed. The crucial difference is that what is rejected is not a misunderstanding of any prior turn, but of the situation in general. In (13), L’s no is not transparently an initiator of any variety of repair. Although what follows is similar in form to an acceptance, the rest of the turn is neither a rejection of a misunderstanding, nor a “repair proper.” However,
the position of the *no* and the “I understand” that follows is completely in line with the idea that *no* can be used turn-initially to clear up misunderstandings and reject the idea that there is any trouble between interlocutors. The *no* in both of these excerpts are best described as instances of the general category of misunderstanding-*no* of which the use as a (third-position) repair initiator is a subtype.

### 4.4 Negotiating turns with *no*

In the examples of misunderstanding-*no* discussed above, it was the content of what someone said that indicated to another speaker that misunderstanding had taken place. In other cases, however, it is not the content of an utterance that gives rise to problems, but rather its timing. That is, it is the logistics of turn taking that need clarification.

It has been claimed from some of the earliest literature on turn-taking that the overwhelming pattern is for one person to speak at a time, and when overlap does occur, for it to be brief (Sacks et al., 1974, 706). Schegloff (2000) notes that “most overlaps are over very quickly” (p. 10). He presents several techniques that interlocutors may use to resolve overlaps. In general, the most common outcome is that one speaker drops out, usually after a single “beat” (p. 22). Other times, there may be continuous attempts to get one’s point across, with speakers competing for the floor by raising volume, speed, initiating restarts, etc. The result in either case is that there is a “survivor” who temporarily takes the floor.

In all the excerpts Schegloff (2000) analyzed, participants simply kept talking until a resolution was reached. Unexamined were cases in which the overlap is resolved metadiscursively, i.e., by one or more participants making explicit reference to turn-taking procedures. Below I present two such instances.

(18) *fsh_116297.txt*\(^{10}\) start 000

```
1 A:    hey how’s it going
2 B:    hello mm uh this is lee in san francisco [sic]
3 A:    hey lee i’m uh alex in los angeles
4 B:    in los angeles oh okay uh hi
5 A:    .hh[hh ]
6 B -->  [th-][they asked us]
7 A: -->  [(so like it)]
8      (0.5)
9 B: -->  [no go ahead]
10 A:   [so that ]
11 A:   oh no i was just gonna say i guess the topic of the day
12 is about uh strikes for for professional [for athletes ]
13 B:   [athletes and d- do they]
```

\(^{10}\)The original transcript for this interaction was missing several of A’s turns. These are filled in by the author, in the style of the original transcription.

26
deserve the salary that they get

This is the very beginning of the telephone interaction, with the inherent problem of determining who initiates the on-topic portion of the conversation. After introductions, B starts to talk, though he hesitates during A’s pre-turn in-breath. After that hesitation, A follows through with his turn, the result being overlap (lines 6–7) due to both speakers having self-selected (Sacks et al., 1974). Following this there is a pause, with neither A nor B continuing their turn. Finally, B yields the floor with “no go ahead,” which succeeds despite being concurrent with A’s restart.

The exact same formula of “no go ahead” appears in eight other interactions in the Fisher corpus, though with a slightly different pattern: after the overlap, one participant says “go ahead” or some other floor-yielding utterance, after which the other says, “No go ahead.” The exact pattern in (18) occurred once in the ICSI meeting corpus. That instance is presented in (19).

(19) Bed013.mrt, start 2230.850

1 Peter: And then it’s up for us
2 Peter: to decide what to do with it.
3 Roger: OK=
4 Peter: t-
5 Roger: --> =[So] -
6 Peter: --> [So] i-
7 (0.9)
8 Roger: --> No, go ahead.
9 Peter: So, we may think that if you say
10 Peter: um, hhh
11 Peter: “where is the theater”

The situation here is parallel to that in 18 in that the overlap is followed by a pause, after which one speaker yields to the other. It differs in that, prior to the overlap, one speaker, Peter, had been the primary speaker. At line 2, he reaches a potential stopping point, and Roger takes it as such, beginning a turn. When it is clear that Peter has more to say, Roger yields the floor with “no, go ahead.”

5 Comparison of senses

The previous sections argued for the existence of several discourse marker senses and sub-senses of no. These are summarized below, with brief examples. The three main senses

\[\text{It is possible in this and other face-to-face interactions that the no is a response to a gesture interpretable as “(would you like to) go ahead” (there was no video recording of the meeting, so it is impossible to know). This analytic alternative is unavailable in telephone interactions.}\]
are functionally distinct: initiation of topic shift, misunderstanding management, and turn negotiation. Two other senses, discussed by Schegloff (1992) and Schegloff (2001), are special cases of these three main senses.

(20) a. **Topic-shift** (“I blame her but no um so that’s how i kind of got involved” [5])
   - **Joke → serious** (“Damn this project. No just kidding.” [4])

b. **Misunderstanding-management** (“No, this is useful, you know, don’t worry.” [12])
   - **Third-position repair initiator** (“No no, I - I’m agreeing that this is a good, um.” [10])

c. **Turn-negotiation** (“No, go ahead.” [19])

These senses, though presented separately, share aspects of meaning and distribution. In this section I examine four features that connect and distinguish these senses: indexicality, negation, inter- and intra-turn position, and answerhood. I also briefly consider them in light of Halliday’s levels of meaning and Schiffrin’s planes of discourse, and in terms of radial categories.

5.1 **Indexicality and negation**

The notions of indexicality and negation are bound together in the case of discourse markers: negation must be negation of something, and because DMs do not take syntactic arguments that could be linked to the proposition denied, that which is negated must be found in the linguistic or extralinguistic context. That is, DMs relate the current utterance to the prior or following discourse, and to the interlocutors and their actions. This relationship has been described as indexical (Schiffrin, 1987, 322–326).

Negation and indexicality are implicated in many of the contexts in which *no* is used. As a response to a question, *no* perhaps most clearly exhibits properties of indexicality and negation.12

(21) A: Is she a student?
   B: No. (She’s not.)

As a response to a question, *no* is interpreted as negation of the proposition underlying that question (cf. the lexical entry for *yes* in Ginzburg and Sag, 2000). The marker also indexes the prior turn as containing the proposition negated. The same may be said for *no* used to reject a command or request, though a simple “no” in these cases may be more likely to be interpreted as aggressive or rude.

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12It is not immediately clear whether these various uses of *no* (as a response to a question, or to a command, or to a declaration as in (24) are best understood as separate senses, or as the same sense which is flexible enough to function in these various contexts. Because the main point here is to establish the relevance of negation and indexicality to *no* in general, I do not take a stance on this issue.
(22) A: Please leave now.
    B: No.

(23) A: Could you make the arrangements?
    B: No.

No may also be used following a declarative utterance as part of a turn that rejects the prior turn’s propositional content. Here too the notions of negation and indexicality are evident: the no, here with an accompanying utterance, forms an indexical connection with the prior turn, with the specific semantic relation of negation.

(24) A: She’s a lawyer.
    B: No, she’s not.
    B’: No, she’s a real estate agent.

These may be contrasted with the following:

(25) Jimmy: [about to draw in crayon over the wall]
    Father: Jimmy, no!

(26) [Favorite baseball team loses a game]
    No(oooooo)!

The “imperative” sense in (25) retains a clear negative meaning (exactly what sort of meaning it is depends on one’s analysis of imperatives), and indexes not some part of the linguistic context, but the situational context. The soliloquial sense in (26) is similarly tied to the non-linguistic context, in that it indexes both some situation the speaker apprehends, and also his or her stance towards that situation. It intuitively retains a notion of negation—the speaker has, informally, a “negative” stance, as revealed in rough paraphrases of the utterance: I don’t believe it, this can’t be happening.

The properties of indexicality and negation also apply to the senses established in the prior section. The indexical properties of the topic shift sense are both textual and situational. A topic-shift brackets what came before as “the old topic” and prepares the interactants for the new topic (which in this case is the original topic). What constitutes “the old topic” may be defined both linguistically and non-linguistically, i.e., both in terms of common semantic relations between utterances, as well as in terms of coherent actions by the interlocutors. As such, topic shift-no operates on both a linguistic, or textual, level, as well as on a metadiscursive, situational, level.

The negation properties of topic shift-no are not as apparent as in the response tokens mentioned above. Certainly there is no propositional negation, nor even negation of implicit assumptions or presuppositions. Instead, negation is present in topic shift-no on the textual level, specifically of how parts of the discourse cohere (or do not cohere) with one another. Marking a shift back to a main topic denies that what is about to be said will form a cohesive unit with what preceded it (or, at least, that the level of cohesion will be lower).
The presence of indexicality and negation in third-position repair was noted quite explicitly by Schegloff (1992, 1306): “With [the rejection component], the speaker overtly rejects the understanding that prior turn reveals its speaker to have accorded the trouble-source turn” (emphasis in original). Though here he is addressing expressions such as “I wasn’t criticizing,” it seems plausible to attribute such a meaning to no, if it is present in this context. Once again, this sense treads the line between indexing the linguistic context and the actions accomplished with language. In some cases, as when the speaker says “No, I didn’t mean X when I said Y,” misunderstanding-no plausibly picks out a particular bit of what was spoken. On the other hand, when Brian said “No, that’s fine” (11), what was rejected was not any act of Roger, linguistic or otherwise, but rather some belief of Roger’s that was evidently motivating his conversational moves (e.g., “People here just want to keep the meeting on the same day”). Similarly, when Sarah said “No, I’m agreeing with you” (12), what was rejected was some belief on Peter’s part that seemed to be behind what he was saying. This sense of no allows participants to get at these presuppositions, attitudes, etc., and problematize, reject, or, in an extended sense, negate them.

5.2 Formal and sequential comparison

Topic shift-no, misunderstanding-no, and turn negotiation-no are connected to each other and to other senses of no by, among other features, indexicality and negation. These three senses are also distinguished from each other by these two semantic/pragmatic features by the different ways in which they embody indexicality and negation. Yet there are other features of these DMs which distinguish them, as a whole, from other senses of DMs. These are: whether the no constitutes an “answer,” i.e., an expected response to a speech act; whether the no can constitute, on its own, a full turn.

No used to respond to a yes/no question can, in general, stand alone as a full turn: its meaning will be understood if a speaker says only “no” and nothing else. Other such words, in the proper sequential context, are yes, probably, and perhaps. Depending on the context, it may be that a simple “no” will be understood, yet infelicitous. Yadugiri (1986) points out some circumstances in which a simple no response to a yes/no question is infelicitous. In particular, when a yes/no question is interpreted as an indirect wh-question, a no is a dispreferred second, which calls for further clarification, while a yes may be fully sufficient as a response (Levinson, 1983, 333–336).

In (27), NS is attempting to get some background information on S, and it has been determined that S is a stockbroker. When NS tries to determine exactly when S began doing stockbroking by asking a yes/no question, S replies with a no and a clarification.

(27) from Yadugiri (1986, p. 250, ex 8)

13Schegloff (2001) has said that a third-position repair “is not a rejection of the other’s prior turn. Indeed, the third-position repair may [in some cases] be designed to underscore that no such rejection of other’s prior turn is being done” (p. 1947). What it means to “reject a prior turn” should be distinguished from rejection of (or disalignment with) some understanding resulting from a prior turn.
NS: and you’re a stockbroker
S: I’m a stockbroker yes stockbroker
NS: when did you leave school and which school did you go to
S: - I was at charter house and I left in nineteen fifty one
((some lines omitted in original))
NS: m m m - did you enter stockbroking straight from there
S: ->> no I’ve only been there three years

In this context, the proposition “S entered stockbroking at some particular time” has been established, and is now presupposed in the discussion. A question such as “did you enter stockbroking straight from there” is, according to Yadugiri (1986), an indirect \textit{wh}-question, approximately “when did you enter stockbroking,” along with a proposed response: “straight from there.” In this context, a \textit{no} response would be insufficient, as it would not resolve the larger question of when S began his profession. This is in contrast to \textit{yes}, which would resolve the larger question by also resolving the smaller question. Ford (2001) and Ford et al. (2004) have shown that there are instances of “inappropriate” \textit{no}-only turns, which are treated as problematic by other interactants.\footnote{Yadugiri (1986) also notes that there is a situation where a simple \textit{no} is appropriate, and a \textit{yes} response is what requires further clarification. These are so-called pre-sequences, where the speaker checks that some condition holds before continuing. In cases where (it is clear to the addressee that) the questioner is about to ask a more detailed question based on the initial yes/no question, then a plain \textit{yes} is not cooperative, whereas a \textit{no} is appropriate.}

The upshot of this is that, as a response to a yes/no question, standalone \textit{no} is always “grammatical,” but may be sequentially inappropriate. As a command or as a response to one, \textit{no} can constitute a full turn, as can the soliloquial use (25, 26). In contrast, a simple \textit{no} (with no accompanying explanation) in response to A in (24), however, would be highly marked. Another sense of \textit{no} that cannot stand alone is the one that prefaces self-initiated self-repair. It is illustrated in the conversation in (28).

\begin{flushleft}
(28) Bed012.mrt, start 2558.990
\end{flushleft}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Jason: So the best-case scenario would be the number of constructions -
  \item or, the worst-case scenario is the number of constructions equals
  \item the number of neurons.
  \item Scott: Well, two to the power of the number of neurons.
  \item Jason: Right.
  \item Jason: --> But still
  \item Jason: --> finite.
  \item Tracy: ((laugh))
  \item Peter: O.K.
  \item Jason: ->> No, wait. Not necessarily, is it?
  \item Jason: We can end the (.) meeting. I just -
  \item Jason: hhh Can’t you use different var- different levels of activation?
\end{enumerate}
Here Jason makes a claim about the finiteness of the number of constructions that would be theoretically possible in the framework he is working in. In line 10, he corrects himself, starting the correction with no. This is parallel to (24), except that the repair and the repair target are produced by the same person. It happens that the rejection of the prior statement also has negative polarity (“not necessarily”), but this sort of self-correction need not accompany explicit negation. In another meeting (Bed010), Peter is talking about intrinsic directions (front, back, behind, etc.), and gives an example, “your shoe is behind the chair.” However, a few seconds later he corrects himself: “No, from - from my point of view your shoe is left of the chair.” Self-initiated repair of this kind must, intuitively, be accompanied by further talk, either indicating what is wrong about what was said, or offering a replacement, or both. If Jason, above, or Peter, had simply said “no”, and treated that as the entirety of their turn, their interlocutors would in all likelihood have been very confused.

None of the senses of no posited in this paper can constitute full turns on their own. They are turn-initiators (Tao, 2003), framing the following utterance in specific ways (e.g., as a return to a previous topic). Replacing any of the attested no-initial turns with simply “No” would result either in misunderstanding or confusion. If Brian had simply said “no” in (3), it might have been construed as disapproval rather than approval. A standalone “no” in (13) would probably have been met with confusion (or, perhaps, simply ignored). Similarly, a no after overlap could not be understood (at least over the telephone where no visual gestures are possible) as an indication that the other should take the floor.

Related to the possibility of being standalone is whether a particular token of no is an answer. Following a yes/no question or request, the range of expected next moves is rather limited. One either responds in the positive or negative (possibly with additional explanation), or takes a different tack entirely, by ignoring the speech act, or addressing it metadiscursively (“I’ll find out,” or “Why ask that now?”). As an answer to such speech acts, no can generally occur as an full turn. Because the range of possible moves is somewhat limited, it makes sense that a minimal response is sufficient.

On the other hand, attempting to address a misconstrual, or shifting the topic, simply by uttering “No” is, in all likelihood, impossible. These actions are not “answers” (let alone expected answers) to a prior speech act or acts. They become relevant through a combination of discourse and situational effects, some of which may not be apparent to all the interactants. In the end it is the no-deployer who initiates the topic shift or repair utterance, and it is that person’s job to make clear the purpose of his or her utterance. At the same time, it should be noted that there are several non-answer senses of no which may stand alone as a full utterance. The agreement token described by Jefferson (2002) is one such, as is the imperative “No!” and the cry of disbelief (26). Thus it is not the case that all non-answer nos must be accompanied by an explanation of their import. Perhaps more crucial is the fact that the acts which are accomplished by the senses in (20) are not sufficiently predictable in the flow of interaction that they can be done without extended explanation.
In sum, while indexicality and negation tie together many (perhaps all) senses of *no*, the property of being an answer, and of standing alone as a full turn, serve to distinguish large groups of senses from one another. Surely other features of these and other DMs can be found which will create a finer division into categories, but these four are useful for situation the topic shift, misunderstanding, and turn negotiation senses among the many others.

### 5.3 Levels of meaning

These various senses of *no* may be considered in light of various taxonomies or categorizations of meaning types. Here I consider Halliday’s (1970) division of ideational, interpersonal, and expressive meanings, and Schiffrin’s (1987) five planes of discourse. Though these categories are rather coarse-grained, and alone will not do justice to the precise pragmatic function of each DM, it is nonetheless useful because it provides a way to pinpoint the major differences across the senses, while providing the potential for comparison to other DMs.

Turn-negotiation-*no*, though in function is distinct from both topic-shift- and misunderstanding-*no*, is affinal with the latter. Their relationship becomes clear when examined with respect to Halliday’s (1970) ideational, interpersonal, and expressive meanings. Misunderstanding-*no* is intimately concerned with the interactional situation, in particular as it relates to the content of what is being said and the motivations behind it. In using misunderstanding-*no*, a speaker can mitigate troubles that may arise due to what people have said. In contrast, the *nos* illustrated in (18) and (19) are concerned with troubles that may arise due to the logistics of the interaction itself: that is, not why but when people talk. In this sense it is operating on a textual level, while misunderstanding-*no* is operating on an interpersonal (or intersubjective: Schegloff, 1992) level. The specific subcase of third-position repair also potentially brings in the ideational level, if the misunderstanding is specifically about the propositional content of prior utterances; but the interpersonal aspect is always present.

Schiffrin (1987) proposed five planes of discourse: exchange structure, action structure, ideational structure, participation framework, and information state. Schiffrin claims that each DM has a primary function on a single plane and possibly secondary functions on other planes. If so, then the turn negotiation sense’s primary plane of operation is exchange structure, “the outcome of the decision procedures by which speakers alternate sequential roles and define those alternations in relation to each other” (Schiffrin, 1987, 24). Yet because it is exclusively a means to yield the floor, it is also influenced by participation structure, e.g., the social relationship between the speakers, which no doubt influences who decides to yield the floor when. Topic shift-*no* operates on the ideational level, where relations between semantic content of propositions is reckoned. Yet it also has consequences for action structure, which includes consideration of what sort of actions are expected to follow—especially the joke-to-serious subsense. Misunderstanding-*no* will always make reference to the information state, which includes what the interlocutors know
as it changes throughout an interaction. Yet, depending on the source of the misunderstand-
ing, it will operate on other levels as well. In (10) the ideational structure is at issue
(is the propositional content of our claims in conflict?), as is the action structure (were you
agreeing or disagreeing with me?). In (11), it is the participation framework which comes
into play, as one member of a group apprehends that it may be inappropriate to have a
contrary opinion and “rock the boat”.

5.4 Radial categories

Although an inheritance hierarchy of senses can do a reasonable job of capturing the
similarities and differences of a group of DM senses, it is possible that it may be too
limiting a tool. It has been shown, particularly by Lakoff (1987), that the notion of radial
category is in some cases a more appropriate way to understand the connections between
related senses of a word. The advantage of radial categories is that several lines of similarity
and connection may be observed between the senses of a single marker, without necessarily
declaring that each sense be related to the others by means by inherited properties.

For instance, serious-no is describable, as above, as a distinct subsense of topic shift-
no. At the same time, it may be more insightful to view the topic shift sense as a radial
category: a marker of a variety of discourse moves, done for various reasons, with a pre-
topics and post-topics of various types. Schegloff (2001, 1953) has already noted that no
should be understood as “marking a transition to a next production which is ‘serious’ from
a preceding one which was ‘nonserious’, in a range of senses, including ones embodied in
rhetorical tropes of various sorts.” The incorporation of serious-no with the more general
one in this article may best be understood as involving a radial category (a “range of
senses”) of topic shift, ranging from a bracketing-off outright jokes to a return to a main
topic from a (possibly quite serious) side topic.

Though tentative at this point, I suggest that the misunderstanding and turn nego-
tiation senses, initially quite different functionally from the other senses, might too be
understood as part of a radial category of negation—in particular, negation or rejection of
some implicit aspect of the conversational context. As noted above, misunderstanding-no
rejects an implicit assumption, stance, or understanding held by one or more other inter-
locutors. In the phrase “No, go ahead,” no may reject one’s own right or justification
to self-select as the next speaker. This is not to say that these three senses are simply
one large vaguely-defined category: they are functionally distinct, and are generally dis-
tinguishable in specific instances. Instead, they are related to each other by notions like
negation and indexicality, subtly different across all the senses but unified at a more general
level. To be sure, more work in this area is needed; the claim here is that a combination
of the strict sub-sense/super-sense relation is usefully supplemented by radial categories.

15In my searches nothing like “No, I’ll speak first” was found, though barring politeness strategies, nothing
in principle rules out such a use.
The previous sections examined *no* in terms of several semantic, pragmatic, and formal features, and with respect to different frameworks of meaning categorization. Some of these, such as indexicality and negation, are not exclusively properties of DMs, yet as general semantic and pragmatic notions they provide a way to situate these DMs with respect to other words in the same functional domain. Others, such as Schiffrin’s categorization, are (or were originally designed) more attuned to the diverse functions of DMs, and allow a coarse-grained look at how the various senses can be distinguished from one another. Alone they do not provide the whole story of each sense, but together they begin to paint a fuller picture which is finally filled out by the detailed descriptions in section 4.

5.5 Functional overlap

In this section I briefly examine one case of functional overlap, where *no* is analyzable as carrying more than one of the functions outlined in the above sections. Here, the *no*-containing turn in line 23 does the work of both shifting the topic and mitigating potential misunderstanding.

(29) Bmr006.mrt, start 3070.222

1 Larry: Yeah, I (.) maybe this is a dumb question, but
2 Larry: [w- I]=
3 Aaron: [Nah.]
4 Larry: =thought it would be - hhh I thought it would be easier if you used a PDA because can’t you, couldn’t you like use
5 David: ((laugh))
6 Larry: beam-forming or something to- detect speaker overlaps?
7 Larry: I mean -
   ((15 lines omitted))
8 Aaron: I - I think - I think it’s - it’s - it’s a - it’s an additional interesting question.
9 David: No.
10 David: Yeah.
11 Aaron: I mean, I think you wanna know whether you can do it with one, because
12 Aaron: (you know) it’s not necessarily true that every device that you’re trying to do this with will have two.
13 Larry: Mm-hmm
14 David: Yeah.
15 Aaron: Uh, if, on the other hand, we show that there’s a huge advantage with two, well then that could be a real point.
16 David: Yeah.
17 Aaron: But, we don’t even know yet what the effect of detecting — having the ability to detect overlaps is. You know, maybe it doesn’t [matter too much.]

18 Larry: [Right. Right. ]

19 Aaron: .hhh

20 David: Yeah.

21 Aaron: [So,]

22 Larry: [OK.]

23 Aaron: this is all pretty early stages. But no, [you’re absolutely] =

24 Larry: [I see. ]

25 Aaron: =right. That’s [(.) ] a good thing to consider.

25 Larry: [O.K.]

In lines 1–6, Larry presents a solution, framed as a question, to the problem of detecting speaker overlaps. This is followed by several rounds of clarifications as to the technical aspects of the solution (lines omitted). Then, in line 8, Aaron (the group’s leader) provides an evaluation of the solution as “an interesting question.” Perhaps because this is not clearly a positive or negative response (it praises the idea but potentially relegates it to “future work”), he rearticulates (“I mean” in line 11) his opinion, expressing his thoughts on why the solution might be worthwhile, and why it might not be. Coming into lines 17–22, both the content of turns and their intonation indicate that this portion of the interaction is coming to a close. Larry, who had originally made the suggestion, but who has not been speaking much in the interim, begins making several acknowledging turns. This is potentially in reaction to Aaron’s saying that their group “[doesn’t] even know yet what the effect of detecting” speaker overlap is, which echoes his original evaluation of beam-forming being an “additional interesting question.” Aaron is also beginning to speak more softly (starting with “you know”) which may also indicate a winding-down of a particular sequence of talk. Finally, we see Aaron explicitly attempting to wrap up the topic. In line 21 he begins a turn with so, one of the functions of which is to begin a wrapping-up (Müller, 2005, 76–78). The turn continues in line 23 with an evaluation of the suggestion (“a good thing to consider”), indicating that enough discussion has happened to warrant such a move. In doing so, Aaron says “But no, you’re absolutely right.” What exactly is no’s function here?

In terms of position within the discussion, this looks much like the topic-shift uses of no, and especially of but no. It occurs within a turn or series of turns by a single speaker, and marks a return to a previous topic or line of discussion. Specifically, it is the “final response” to Larry’s suggestion of using beam-forming to detect overlap. That initial suggestion and Aaron’s eventual response are separated by an inserted sequence where various consequences of the suggestions are played out, presumably in service of coming to a final evaluation. The no is one of the signals that a final evaluation has been reached.
Following Aaron’s “but no,” Larry acknowledges the evaluation (“I see,” “OK”)

On the other hand, this no also has properties of the misunderstanding-no. Prior to giving praise, Aaron had said “maybe it doesn’t matter too much,” a much more pessimistic view of Larry’s proposal. It is possible that the no is not just marking a return to evaluation-mode, but indicating that Aaron doesn’t want to be taken as being too critical.

From the perspective of the analyst, both of these are possible. What of the interactants themselves? Larry’s minimal responses to Brian’s turns do not in and of themselves tell us if he views the no as an attempt to assuage worries that his suggestion was being ignored. However, he does not make any further contributions on the topic, which is consistent with him viewing it as finished. But, after Larry’s “OK,” another participant, Kelly, who has not been participating in this particular interaction, says, “There - there is a complication though, and that is if a person turns their back to the - to the PDA, then some of the positional information goes away?” The initial restart, and the contrary marker “though” indicate that at the least Kelly is taking partial issue with the conclusion just reached. However, at the same time both of these features of her turn indicate, at least to me, that not only is she qualifying the evaluation, but she is in doing so re-opening discussion on the details of the merit of the technique. That is, her turn is oriented to the fact that, at least between Aaron and Larry, the topic has been wrapped up. The interactant’s reactions in general support a topic-shift understanding, but this does not exclude the possibility that the no was intended (or understood) to address a miscommunication. The senses of no examined in this article are not mutually exclusive, and in some contexts their sequential position will not disambiguate between them. When this happens, we should expect instances that display properties of multiple senses simultaneously.

5.6 Yeah and no: functional combination

Combining yeah with no might initially seem contradictory, but as has been noted by Burridge and Florey (2002), it is not uncommon. In this section I will demonstrate that analysis of no-yeah and yeah-no is greatly aided by the present study of no.

Recall the no-yeah in (2b), expanded below. It illustrates the misunderstanding mitigation use of no, combined with yeah as an agreement token.

(30) 1 L: -- I don’t know, we’re advanced enough to like find other
     2 ways to, like --

Preliminary searches, which may include false positives, found 35 instances of turn-initial yeah no in the ICSI meeting corpus, and six of no yeah (including variants where the transcriber used a comma or period to separate the two words). The Fisher corpus has 170 instances of yeah no, and 28 of no yeah. This may be compared with combinations of no or yeah with anyway: ICSI has one such example (“Anyway. Yeah.” in Bmr023), and Fisher has 11. Though these are all dwarfed by the overall frequency of yeah and no individually (which number in the tens of thousands even in the ICSI corpus), the combinations no yeah and yeah no seem worthy of further attention, as does the as-yet unexplained relative frequency of yeah no over no yeah.

37
R: [COUGH]
L: -- grow money.
R: To do what?
L: To grow money, besides like supporting an industry that’s
    basically a sin industry and
R: Well, [alcohol ] is too.
L: [you know -- ]
L: ->> No, yeah, definitely.
R: Alcohol is more so than cigarettes.
L: But do you think that, like, us saying that, you know,
    ‘‘Oh, where is the American economy gonna be, where are all
    these people going to go without their tobacco supported jobs
    and stuff’’ don’t you think that’s like, sort of, a cop out?

R and L have been discussing smoking addiction and anti-smoking campaigns and
laws. R has previously compared cigarettes to alcohol, in particular adducing the failure
of prohibition in arguing for the impossibility of regulating away drug addictions. R also
noted that if everyone in the US stopped smoking, the loss in jobs and tax revenue would
endanger the economy. L counters (in lines 1–2 and 6–7) that we should be able to find
other ways to “grow money” than levying a sin tax. R interjects (line 8) that alcohol
is a sin industry just as tobacco is. His motivation for this “reminder” may be that he
perceived L’s remarks about cigarette taxes as an argument for treating tobacco differently
from alcohol, or as an indication that L was ignoring his observation that the two products
are economically and morally similar. The well highlights his perception of disagreement
on the topic.

In line 10, L says “No, yeah, definitely,” indicating her agreement with the basic idea
that alcohol, like tobacco, is a sin industry. The yeah acts primarily (or exclusively) as a
marker of agreement, as does her “definitely” (Tao, 2003, 198–9). The no indicates her
rejection of whatever she thought motivated R to reiterate his alcohol/tax argument, and
additionally of the (mis)perceived non-alignment on that issue. The sequence here closely
matches that in (10), including the perception of disagreement, the reiteration of position
with well in both cases, and the no along with explicit assertion of agreement.

Example (2a) is also an instance of misunderstanding-no with yeah acting as an ac-
knowledgement (Drummond and Hopper, 1993). In that meeting, Megan had earlier made
a proposal, jokingly, that when speakers speak simultaneously, they might lower their over-
all volume: “Cuz what if it’s the case and I don’t think this is true - What if it’s the case
that when two people overlap they equate their - you know, there’s a conservation of en-
ergy and everybody - both people talk more softly? I don’t think this happens at all.”
She suggested this as a sort of extreme example where certain types of statistical analysis
would have to be carried out. Nevertheless, Aaron takes this speculation as a serious sug-
gestion and considers it critically. Megan then disclaims her suggestion: “Yeah, no, that

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was – that was a joke.” The yeah acknowledges Aaron’s multi-line response, while the no rejects the understanding that underlay it, namely that the “conservation of energy” was a serious suggestion rather than simply an extreme illustration of a phenomenon.

Burridge and Florey (2002) examined several tokens of yeah no and no yeah, grouping them into three uses: propositional, textual, and personal. However insightful this grouping is, several of the examples they provide can be understood as a combination of an independently-established use of each of the words.17 [citation omitted; in progress] provides detailed reanalysis of their tokens in terms of the senses summarized in (20); here I provide a single example illustrating how to understand a yeah no in terms of the individual DMs.

Many of their textual uses seem to involve what I have identified as the topic-shift sense, though some (e.g., their (9)) may involve misunderstanding management as well. Their propositional and personal categories contain aspects of misunderstanding-no as well. I briefly illustrate this with their example (4), below:

(31) Clive [He had] a good time up there [didn’t he?]
    Bruce ->> [Yeah-nah]
    Clive cause he was saying he loved it.
    Bruce ->> Yeah-nah he had an absolute ball.

Burridge and Florey (2002) claim that the no “functions to strongly reinforce the agreement of yeah by removing any possibility of contradiction” (157). How is this accomplished in (31)? Throughout this interaction (see Burridge and Florey 2002 for the full transcript), Bruce is telling Clive about his attempts to get his father to be less reclusive. Several times his speech indicates a lack of confidence in the appropriateness of his actions (e.g., “It’s very hard,” “it’s a very strange position,” “No you know in a nice way”). Clive orients to this stance. His utterances include several “yeah” back-channels and agreements, and a reiteration of Bruce’s goal (“just concerned because of his welfare”), which to me is indicative of a “reassuring” stance. In this light, Clive’s first and third turns in (31) can be viewed as an attempt to get Bruce to admit to the success of his plan. If so, then Bruce’s nah functions to reject some misconstrual on Clive’s part. Bruce may be rejecting the idea that he is not confident in the efficacy of his project, and also addressing any doubts that Clive picked up during the interaction. Given a larger context we may be able to determine if there was a particular source of the misconstrual.

Much can be learned about yeah no and no yeah by examining them as single units. At the same time, it is possible to miss a great many generalizations by not recognizing the functions of the individual discourse markers and how they contribute to the meaning of DM combinations. Decomposing complex DMs also has the potential to reveal uses of DM combinations that would be unexpected given the independently attested functions of the parts.

17Burridge and Florey (2002) found no instances of no yeah that were not propositional, i.e., with no denying a statement or question. This may be a difference between Australian and American English.
6 Consequences for discourse representation

Indexicality is a key feature of discourse markers, and of no especially. A proper representation of the indexicality of each use of no requires a rich representation of the speech context, as it must take into account the prior and projected linguistic context, and the social and physical contexts of the interaction.

The standalone response particle senses may be straightforwardly represented by the small model of discourse in Ginzburg and Sag (2000), which involves keeping track of the set of “questions under discussion” in a discourse. No as a third-position repair marker, on the other hand, poses a problem because, as Schegloff (1992) noted, the repair rejects not the content of the prior turn, but the understanding implied by it. This does not fit into the normal conception of question under discussion. Even more problematic are the turn-negotiating sense of no and the more general cases of misunderstanding-no that do not involve repair in the usual sense (e.g., 12), because what is rejected is not even an understanding based on prior language, but rather an understanding of the speech situation (e.g., “we are arguing”) that is evidenced by the sort of actions that a speaker is taking. The more abstract and action-oriented the object of rejection becomes, and the less anchored to particular linguistic forms it is, the further away from language-oriented models of discourse we get. Nonetheless, if we take the indexical aspect of no’s meaning seriously, then we must have recourse to a model that represents or at least notes the existence of these parts of an interaction.

This question of representations can be recast as a part of the problem of indexicality, anaphora, and context-dependent meaning in general. Computational discourse analysts have long realized the difficulty in resolving the referents of personal pronouns, and even of fully lexical noun phrases (“Yesterday Microsoft announced...the Washington-based software company will...”), to say nothing of resolving verbal anaphora and omitted arguments. Crucially for this paper, and for the study of DMs in general, the issue of context-dependent interpretation reaches far beyond anaphora and ellipsis. Consider discourse connectives like instead and otherwise (Lai, 2004), which relate two propositions. In the trivial cases, one of the propositional arguments indexed by the marker (for instead, the state of affairs that does not hold; for otherwise, the state of affairs that would normally cause something to happen) happens to be in the same clause that the connective is in. Many other times the argument is deeply embedded in other clauses, or extends over several clauses (Miltsakaki et al., 2003). Suffice it to say that a full account of the meaning and use of discourse connectives requires an expansion of the task of reference resolution.

The same set of issues applies to no. Indeed, already for the sense of no illustrated in (25), we reach a point where we would like to propose a meaning that makes reference to the non-linguistic context. Extending this to misunderstanding-no, the number of possible antecedents at any given point in a discourse becomes enormous—and only a small number of those potential antecedents will be people and things. Many will be propositions, questions, possibilities, attitudes, and so forth. This is not a problem, conceptually. In-
Indeed, practitioners of interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis, while careful to only posit structures that participants clearly attend to based on their actions, do not a priori rule out any particular aspect of the conversation as irrelevant, (e.g., Gumperz (1982) on contextualization cues, but see Schegloff (1997) on exercising caution in incorporating “context” into the analysis of discourse). Although in this article I do not propose a concrete model of discourse that will accommodate the antecedents of no, the hope is that the findings presented contribute positively to the development of grammars of discourse and interaction.

7 Conclusions

The main goal of this article has been to expand the catalogue of discourse-marker senses of no. The result is that three new senses have been identified: topic-shift, misunderstanding mitigation, and turn-taking management. Each of these functions are distinct but semantically and pragmatically related to each other and other senses of no by the properties of indexicality, negation, answerhood, and turn independence. Just as the response-particle sense is indexical, so it was found that three DM senses explored make reference to the prior interaction: both linguistic and not. At the same time, they differ from response particles in not being usable as a full turn, a fact which is at least partly due to the fact that they do not function as answers to prior speech acts.

This study has ramifications for the study of discourse, including computational approaches to reference resolution. Without a rather rich model of contextual features, including inferences that participants constantly make, it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the significance of many instances of no, or indeed any discourse marker like it.

Exploration of no is far from complete. As studies such as Ford (2001) demonstrate, even the more familiar uses of no exhibit a complexity of meaning and distribution. This will no doubt be compounded by complex discourse markers such as no-yeah and yeah-no, which were touched upon briefly. A more detailed examination of the categories outlined herein will no doubt reveal added details and nuances of its semantic and pragmatic significance, both alone and along with other DMs. The study of no and its indexical properties leads one further down the path of an ever richer representation of the discourse, necessary not just for the data presented in this article but for a full account of discourse markers in general.

A Transcripts

A.1 ICSI meeting corpus

ICSI meeting corpus transcripts are indicated by the formula Bxx###.mrt. ‘B’ indicates the location of the meeting (Berkeley, California). The following two letters indicate which
group was meeting, according to the following table (not all meetings are represented in
the extracts presented):

db Database issues meeting
ed Even Deeper Understanding weekly meeting
mr Meeting Recorder weekly meeting
ns Network Services and Applications group meeting
ro Robustness weekly meeting
sr SRI collaboration meeting
tr Meeting Recorder transcriber’s meeting
uw UW collaboration meeting

The transcripts themselves have been heavily edited. XML markup has been removed,
including indications of stressed words and commentary on pronunciation irregularities
and foreign-sounding words. In addition, due to the sometimes large number of meeting
participants, utterances of speakers who are talking but who are not, in my judgment,
contributing crucially to the interaction in question have been omitted. In most cases
this is either short backchannels, chuckles, or non-vocal sounds (coughing, etc.) of people
who do not otherwise speak and are not directly addressed in the time frame in focus.
Side conversations that are picked up but which seem to be entirely separate are also
omitted. Speech segments (which are more “practical units rather than theory-relevant
units” (Edwards, n.d.)) have been preserved where possible, except for limitations of
space and to more clearly show speaker overlap. More information on the methods and
participants of the corpus can be found in Janin et al., 2004b.

For ease of reading, aliases in the original transcripts have been replaced with pseudonyms.
The table below gives the original aliases. An ‘m’ indicates male, ‘f’ female, ‘e’ a native En-
lish speaker, and ‘n’ a non-native speaker. The three digit number is the unique identifier
of each speaker.

| fe004  Sarah | me003  Jason | me013  Aaron | me028  Lucas |
| fe008  Kelly | mn005  David | mn015  Peter | mn036  Allen |
| fe016  Megan | me010  Brian | me018  Larry | me045  Roger |
| fe046  Emily | me011  Kevin | me025  Craig | |
| fn050  Tracy | me012  Scott | me022  Brent |

Table 1: Original participant aliases and corresponding names used in this article.
A.2 Fisher corpus

Fisher transcripts (fsh_#####.txt) have been formatted to show speaker overlap, but are otherwise displayed as provided by the Linguistic Data Consortium. Two transcription techniques were used. In one method, each conversation was automatically segmented into utterances, followed by human transcription done by making a single pass over the audio, without attempts at punctuation, capitalization, etc. Speakers in this system are named “A” and “B”. In the other method (which does contain capitalization and punctuation), no automatic segmentation was done prior to transcription. Speakers in this system are named “L” and “R”. Detailed information can be found in Cieri et al. (2004). Line breaks are mostly preserved from the original transcripts, but should not be taken as reflecting theoretical units of conversation or syntax. In most cases line breaks are indicative of tangible pauses.

References


