

“t^saraŋ?” - Telephone Conversation Openings in the Rushani Language

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ABSTRACT

This paper uses conversation analysis (CA) to examine telephone conversation openings in an unwritten and understudied language, Rushani, spoken primarily in remote, mountainous areas of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. In a sample of three telephone conversations, examples are sought of the four opening sequences of telephone calls originally identified by Schegloff (1986): summons-answer; identification-recognition; greetings; and initial inquiries. At first glance, telephone conversation openings in Rushani appear to skip over the greeting stage and move directly into an extended exchange of initial inquiries. However, upon closer analysis, it is argued that a Rushani word that translates as “How are you” is in fact used by conversation participants as a greeting. The paper concludes with an argument that the study supports a “universalist” position of CA as applied to calls conducted in languages other than English (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002). Despite their apparent form as initial inquiries, greetings in telephone conversations in Rushani serve precisely the same function and resolve the same “interactional issues” as greetings in other languages (Schegloff, 1986).

INTRODUCTION

A great deal of literature in conversation analysis (CA) has been written about talk-in-interaction by conversation participants who are speaking over the phone. This is due in no small part to the fact that much of person-to-person interaction now takes place through the medium of phones, rather than through face-to-face conversation (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002, p. 4). This tendency has been accelerated by uptake of the now ubiquitous cellular (or mobile) phone.

Though much of this literature uses conversations on landline phones as its starting point, more recent work has begun to focus on conversations conducted via cell phones (Arminen & Leinonen, 2006; Hutchby & Barnett, 2005). This is particularly relevant for parts of the world that have skipped over landline telephony entirely, having moved directly to cell phone use from

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a prior state of having had no access to phones whatsoever. As a further point of interest, it is often the case that languages spoken in such areas have been seriously understudied by most disciplines of applied linguistics.

The purpose of this study is therefore to apply CA to the examination of telephone conversation openings in a language that is rarely encountered in academic studies of any kind: Rushani, primarily spoken in remote, mountainous areas of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. There is not, to my knowledge, any prior research on Rushani conversation practices, and this study will hopefully ground further conversation analytic studies in the Rushani language and its relatives. It is also hoped that this study may facilitate eventual cross-cultural comparisons between Rushani conversation practices and those in other languages.

BACKGROUND

Literature in CA regarding the openings of telephone conversations has focused on the following four sequences: *summons-answer*; *identification-recognition*; *greetings*; and *initial inquiries* (Schegloff, 1986). In English at least, these four elements are present in nearly every telephone conversation, in one form or another. In a summons-answer sequence, participants each confirm that they are in fact available for the conversation; in an identification-recognition sequence, they use names and/or the sounds of their voices to identify themselves to the other party; in a greeting sequence, the participants exchange greeting words (such as “hi” or “hello” in English); and, in an initial-inquiries sequence (also called a “How are you” sequence), they ask and answer questions about each other’s well-being at the time of the call (Wong & Waring, 2010, pp. 150–165).

An additional element of this framework is the study of conversations mediated by cellular phones. Several features of cell phones have affected conversation practices, most notably “mobility, caller ID, and individualization” (Hutchby & Barnett, 2005, p. 157). This means that, unlike in a more traditional landline conversation, the participants in a cell phone conversation could be physically located almost anywhere; the call recipient will often know the origin of the incoming call; and both phones used in the conversation will often be assumed by the participants to have only one possible user (Hutchby & Barnett, 2005). In some languages at least, calls on landlines and calls on cell phones differ “systematically” (Arminen & Leinonen, 2006, p. 340). The identification-recognition sequence is often skipped over, because it is unnecessary, and the ubiquitous “How are you” sequence is sometimes reoriented as a “Where are you” sequence, because the call-recipient’s location and availability for a call cannot be assumed.

Another relevant development in the analysis of telephone conversations is the study of calls in languages other than English. As Schegloff (1986) noted in an early study on conversation openings, the considerable cultural variation that one would intuitively assume to exist across languages is often not supported by the evidence, and striking similarities can reveal themselves once the data is scrutinized; this is explainable in part by the fact that the underlying “interactional issues” are the same, whatever the linguistic setting (p. 147). A related point was made by ten Have in 2002, who cautioned that it was primarily when conversations were viewed through an ethnographic lens, rather than a conversation analytic lens, that major functional differences appeared (pp. 243–244). Suffice to say that there are two schools of thought here: a “universalist” and a “particularistic” position (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002, p. 10). The universalist

position, exemplified by the work of Robert Hopper, posits a common framework for conversations across all languages (Schegloff, 2002, p. 249). “Particularistic” positions, of which there are several, acknowledge various degrees of, and differing forms of, culturally-driven variation in conversation practices (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002, p. 11).

With this framework for the analysis of telephone call openings in mind, this paper will explore a series of three calls that are mediated by the latest in cellular technology and that occur in the rarely studied Rushani language. As the analysis of the calls used in this study will show, there is a particular word in Rushani, transcribed phonetically as /t^saraŋ/, with a literal translation that approximates “How are you?” in English (*viz.*, it looks like an initial inquiry). However, when situated in the context of actual conversations, and in particular once these conversations are divided into the traditional four sequences of telephone call openings, the word *t^saraŋ* appears to be used as something closer to the English “Hello” (*viz.*, it functions like a greeting). Though the non-correspondence between the literal translation and actual use of this word might be known intuitively to any native speaker of Rushani, its function in ordinary-course telephone practices can be neatly demonstrated using CA.

The line of inquiry explored by this paper of course begs the question of what, exactly, is the functional difference between a greeting and a “How are you” sequence. According to Schegloff, a greeting orients the parties to a conversation into “a ritual state of ratified mutual participation,” whereas initial inquiries “provide a formal early opportunity for the other party to make some current state of being a matter of joint priority concern” (1986, p. 118). Schegloff himself acknowledged the overlap between these two functions, insofar as both sequence-types serve to put the parties on the same conversational footing. For purposes of this study, we will treat a greeting as being somewhat more formalistic, in that there is little of substance being exchanged, while a question that potentially invites new information into the conversation will be treated as an initial inquiry.

It has been argued that “the fact that cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparisons are (at some point) worth making is not in doubt” (Luke & Pavlidou, 2002, p. 12), leaving aside the separate question of whether current research has brought forth enough data about a great enough number of languages to make such comparisons meaningful or interesting. With this in mind, the current study is motivated in part by the general project of facilitating intercultural communication, by first determining exactly what is going on during conversations in other languages. Work towards this end would be supported by the mere fact of this study, regardless of the specific conclusions of the analysis. But to go further, this study concludes that conversation openings in Rushani bear close functional resemblance to equivalent openings in English, despite the overwhelming geographic and presumed cultural differences between them. In so doing, this study is additionally intended to make a contribution, albeit quite minor, to the unresolved opposition between the universalist and particularistic positions of conversation analytic studies of languages other than English.

DATA AND METHOD

This study is based on three cell phone conversations recorded in November 2017 between individuals who speak Rushani as their first language. All three calls shared one common participant (the “primary study participant”), and in each case the other call participants were her family members. All calls were cell-to-cell with caller-identification enabled so that the

participants knew the presumed identity of the person on the other end of the line. The phone of the primary study participant was set on speaker-mode, and a recording device was held next to her phone during each call. The calls used in this data set were all audio-only (*i.e.*, conducted without using the video features of the phone).

Rushani does not have a universally accepted writing system, and so the calls have been transcribed phonetically (first line of transcript, in **bold**). The phonetic representations were themselves transcribed using a CA notation system described by Wong and Waring (2010) (see Appendix A). The transcriptions are then followed by a word-for-word translation (second line of transcript, regular case), as well as a gloss (third line of transcript, in *italics*). Transcriptions of approximately the first thirty seconds of each call have been included, and the analysis of each call is conducted within a conversation analytic framework. Appendix B provides an explanation of certain Rushani phonemes that do not exist in English and other information regarding the transcriptions. Appendix C contains a very brief introduction to the Rushani language.

ANALYSIS

The analysis of each extract begins by examining the data in terms of the four sequences of telephone conversation openings identified by Schegloff (1986): summons-answer; identification-recognition; greetings; and initial inquiries. As will become apparent early on, the conversations in the data set all varied from this archetypal progression of sequences. Consistent with other phone conversations using caller-ID that have been studied (Arminen & Leinonen, 2006; Hutchby & Barnett, 2005), the identification-recognition sequence was missing from two out of the three calls. However, after accounting for the absence of this sequence-type, the calls did not move from summons-answer into an unambiguous greeting stage. Rather, they appeared, at first glance, to move directly into an extended initial-inquiries stage, with multiple inquiries about the condition (or location) of one of the parties to the call. Whether the first reciprocal questions in each apparent “How are you” sequence might actually have been intended and received as greetings is the primary issue explored below.

Of central importance to this investigation will be a particular Rushani word, *tʰaraŋ*, which is used by the conversation participants in interesting ways. This word often appears, in the form of a question, in the first conversation turn that is available for greetings. The primary study participant, who translated the calls for this study, indicated that this word translates literally as “condition,” and is used to mean something approximating “How are you?” in conversation.² This is the case whether the word is used alone or in a slightly longer combination

² In one of the only existent dictionaries of the Rushani language and its relatives (a Shughni-Russian dictionary), the word *tʰaraŋ* is given a full page of translations (Karamshoev, 1988, pp. 294–295), none of which correspond to the way the native speakers in our data set actually used the word. Among the many translations of the word *tʰaraŋ* (rendered “царанг” in Cyrillic script) are the following: “как так?” meaning “How so?”; “почему?” meaning “Why?”; “что делать?” and “как поступить?” both of which (roughly) mean, “What are you doing?” (Karamshoev, 1988, pp. 294). Once again, the primary study participant gave “How are you?” as the best pragmatic-use translation of this word, with “condition” as the closest word-to-word translation. There is a similar framework for the Tajik word *awo:l* (“аҳвол”) used in line 04 of Extract 1, which also translates word-for-word as “condition” but is used to ask “How are you?”

Coming at the meaning of *tʰaraŋ* from a different direction, the second syllable may be etymologically related to the Persian word رنگ, pronounced /raŋ/. This word is most commonly used to mean “color” (indeed, the same word is used in Rushani with this meaning), but in some antiquated contexts, it can also refer to a person’s health or

with a word that means “you” (*tut tʰaraŋ*). In attempting to determine whether the first “How are you” questions in each extract might be better characterized as greetings, there will also be an attempt to reconcile the apparent meaning of the word *tʰaraŋ* with its actual use.

The extracts are presented in chronological order of their date of recording and are examined for the possible use of *tʰaraŋ* as a greeting word. The analysis argues that the use of *tʰaraŋ* as a greeting would solve several apparent problems in the organization of the calls and would also allow us to fit conversation openings in Rushani comfortably into the framework already established for other languages.

Extract 1

In our first extract, GS, at home in New York, NY, receives a call from GM, who is at home in Moscow, Russia (GS = Gulchehra; GM = Gulpari). GS and GM are cousins, and they catch up with each other after having not spoken for several weeks.

- 01 **((Summons (silent ringing): call from GM to GS))**
 02 GS: **alo::?**
 hello
 Hello?
 03 **(1.3)**
 04 GM: **jax awo:l.**
 sister condition
 How are you sister?
 05 GS: **so:z, tut tʰaraŋ.**
 good you condition
 Good, how are you?
 06 **(0.7)**
 07 GM: **so:z, ba[fa:nd]. () tar korato=**
 good very good () at work-you-QM
 I'm very well. () Are you at work?
 08 GS: **[tʃi-]**
 what-
 What-
 09 GS: **=na, naw om jat az kor.**
 no now I come from work
 No, I just got home from work.
 10 **(2.1)**

circumstances (Steingass, 2008, p. 588). Hypothesizing that the first syllable *tʰa* could be some form of *ta* (meaning “you” in Rushani, in the genitive case), the question of *tʰaraŋ?* may have originally been understood to mean something like “What is your condition?” Under this interpretation, the later addition of the word *tut* (meaning “you” in Rushani, in the nominative case) in the phrase *tut tʰaraŋ?* (as used in Extract 1, lines 05 and 17; Extract 2, line 13; and Extract 3, line 07), is a re-addition of a word whose meaning had been lost through an ordinary and well-understood process of language fusion and erosion (Deutscher, 2005, pp. 167–170).

- 11 GM: **ɖʒən tar ko:ro.**
John at work-he-QM
Is John at work?
- 12 GS: **na ja': tɔnde.**
no he here
No, he's right here.
- 13 **(0.8)**
- 14 GM: **a:n, da' ʃurt so:zo.**
ok his condition well-QM
Ok, is he well?
- 15 GS: **so:z.**
good
He's good.
- 16 **(1.5)**
- 17 GM: **tut t'araŋ, diɠar.**
you condition also
You are also well?
- 18 **(0.3)**
- 19 GS: **so:z, [b-]**
good
I'm good.
- 20 GM: **[ta] korɔ bor ta darsɛ'n.**
you work and all your classes
How is work and school?
- 21 GS: **fukɪθ so:z ɛkɔndɛj ɔm naʃʃ naw ɔm dusɪk (0.5)**
everything good here I sitting now I
Everything is ok, I'm sitting here now
- 22 **b- (0.3) b- (.) bu:rgɛj ɔm xu xo:.**
little burger I ate
I ate a little hamburger.

This call begins with a summons-answer sequence in lines 01 and 02, in the form of the ring (from the caller) and the answer *alo* (from the recipient). In an ordinary landline telephone call, the parties negotiate some kind of identification and recognition of each other immediately after the summons-answer. However, as observed in calls in English, the use of caller-ID allows the participants to skip over the identification-recognition sequence that would otherwise be found here (Hutchby & Barnett, 2005, pp. 159–161). Instead of identifying herself in her first spoken turn of the call, the caller moves directly into an inquiry about the call-recipient. She simply asks “How are you sister?” (line 04), without needing to identify herself first. The second sequence-type is therefore skipped.

By the time the call arrives at its third turn, it is therefore already at a point where we might look for the third sequence-type, a greeting. However, it is unclear whether or not there is an exchange of greetings in this call. Relying upon the word-for-word translation of what comes next, the caller appears to ask the recipient how she is doing (line 04), and in the next turn, the recipient answers and reciprocates with a question about how the caller is doing (line 05). We

will return to the way these “How are you” questions are answered in a moment, but first, the forms of the questions themselves bear examination.

The two speakers each use a slightly different form for the apparent “How are you” questions in lines 04 and 05. The caller uses the word *awo:l*, and the recipient uses the word *tʰaraŋ*; the latter is a Rushani word, whereas the former is a Tajik word with an equivalent meaning (borrowings from Tajik and also from Russian are frequent in modern Rushani). As noted above, both words literally translate as “condition,” and both mean something like “How are you?” when used by themselves as a conversation turn. But in considering their function in the conversation opening, we should ask whether they are affording “a formal early opportunity for the other party to make some current state of being a matter of joint priority concern” (in which case they are functioning as initial inquiries) or whether they are merely putting the parties in “a ritual state of ratified mutual participation” (in which case they are functioning more like greetings) (Schegloff, 1986, p. 118).

In line 07, in response to the *tʰaraŋ* question from the recipient (GS), the caller (GM) gives her own response. Interestingly, just as the forms of these two “How are you” questions are parallel, the answer that each speaker gives is the same: Both use *so:z*, meaning “good” or “fine.” GS uses this word in line 05, and GM uses it in line 07. In English, this kind of response to a “How are you” question is generally interpreted as a neutral answer. And a neutral answer, at least in a normal “How are you” sequence, will usually operate to close down the sequence; by contrast, a non-neutral response (such as “I’m having a bad day”), will usually keep the sequence open, so the parties can exchange additional information (Wong & Waring, 2010, p. 166–167). Viewed in isolation, lines 04–07 look like they could be an initial-inquiries sequence: There is a reciprocal exchange of questions about condition that are answered neutrally by the participants. However, this would have to be the case despite the position of these questions in the first slot available for a greeting sequence. And analysis of the turns that come next also shows that, if this really was part of an initial-inquiries sequence, it would have to be one that was not closed down by the mutual exchange of neutral responses.

In line 07, after responding to the purported “How are you” question with a purportedly neutral answer, GM immediately asks a new question, this time about GS’s location (“Are you at work?”). This may be where the initial inquiries really begin. As noted earlier, when callers are speaking on cell phones (as opposed to on landline phones), a “Where are you” sequence often takes the place of what used to be a “How are you” sequence (Hutchby & Barnett, 2005, pp. 162–167). Taking the view that line 07 is an initial inquiry in the form of a “Where are you” question, it appears to be an initial inquiry that is embedded within a larger series of similar questions, such as how GS’s husband is doing (line 14), how GS is doing (line 17), and how GS’s classes are going (line 20). Bolstering the argument that these questions are the real initial inquiries of the conversation opening, none of them are reciprocated by GS, the call recipient. One of them, in line 20 (“How is work and school?”), is given an informational, or at least non-formulaic, response in lines 21–22 (“Everything is ok. I’m sitting here now. I ate a little hamburger.”). These are both departures from the first question and answer in lines 04–05. Finally, if the question in line 04 were an initial inquiry, the identically-phrased question in line 17 would seem to be a repetition.

Stepping back for a moment, the questions in lines 04–07 appear in the first slot available for greetings, directly after the identity-recognition sequence. Each call participant asks the other how she is doing; these questions are both answered neutrally with the same word *so:z*. These turns therefore seem to have the same placement and function of greetings. Interpreting them as

greetings also avoids two problems that would otherwise exist: an absence of greetings in the conversation opening and an expanded “How are you” sequence that continues even after neutral answers to the first pair of “How are you” questions. This interpretation would also allow us to distinguish the first pair of questions in lines 04 and 05 (actually just reciprocated greetings with formulaic responses) from the sequence of one-sided questions in lines 07, 14, 17, and 20 (all true inquiries that potentially elicit informational responses). Analysis of the next two calls will show whether or not such an interpretation makes sense.

Extract 2

In our second extract, GS is eating at home in New York, NY and receives a call from SM, who is at an outdoor market in Khujand, Tajikistan; SM is accompanied by AS, a five-year-old boy (GS = Gulchehra; SM = Shukrona; AS = Alihazrat (Alishka)). GS and SM are cousins, and SM has called GS to see how she has been:

- 01 **((Summons (silent ringing): call from SM to GS))**
 02 GS: **((chewing)) a:, al[o:]?**
 uh hello
 Uh, hello?
- 03 SM: **[a:], gəl?**
 uh Gul
 Uh, Gul?
- 04 **(0.8)**
 05 GS: **((chewing)) t^saraŋ.**
 condition
 How are you?
- 06 SM: **so:z. [()]**
 good [()]
 I'm good. [()]
- 07 GS: **[ʃizita.]**
 things-you
 How is everything?
- 08 AS: **() v: kamaz [()]**
 () it dump-truck-is [()]
 () *There's a dump truck!* [()]
- 09 SM: **((to Alihazrat)) [JA MAN], (.) >azom mot mof qata'z**
 10 **sodʒ< ʃizgɛ arad.**
 come here I tired stuff with become thing there
 Come on! I'm getting tired with all this stuff.
- 11 **(0.7)**
 12 SM: **((to Alihazrat)) qin mak.**
 bother do-not
 Stop bothering me!

- 13 SM: () **so:z. [o::, tut tʰaraŋ?]**
() good yes you condition]
() *I'm good. Yes, how are you?*
- 14 GS: [ɛd tʰaraŋ.]
he condition
How is he?
- 15 (4.0)
- 16 SM: **mɑːjə ɔo:wuna qataj ʊm garaŋ suɟ.**
him crazy with I bother becomes
I'm going crazy with him.
- 17 GS: **alɪfkajo.**
Alishka-QM
With Alishka?
- 18 (1.8)
- 19 SM: **ʔo::.**
yes
Yes.

This call also begins with a summons-answer sequence in lines 01 and 02, in the form of the ring and the answer *alo*. Though the call-recipient had the benefit of caller-ID, she nevertheless prefaced her answer in line 02 with *a::* (roughly meaning “uh”), and used a rising intonation for word *alo*? Such an answer to a telephone ring would be typical in a traditional landline call, at least in English, where the speaker does not know the identity of the caller (Schegloff, 1986, p. 121). If it can be assumed that the recipient knew the identity of the person on the other line, its use here is somewhat odd.³ Perhaps as a result of this, the caller appears to have interpreted the recipient’s answer as an initiation of an identification-recognition sequence. She responds in line 03 with a parallel structure in the form of *a::* and a rising intonation, and, rather than use a form of “hello,” she asks the call-recipient’s name.

In the next turn, in line 05, GS simply says the word *tʰaraŋ*. Rather than confirming her recognition of SM with some sort of acknowledgement, GS appears to have moved directly into a new sequence. The identification-recognition sequence initiated by SM has therefore been left unfinished, and it is not clear at this point in the call how *tʰaraŋ* functions. In the next turn however, SM responds with *so:z* (“I’m good”) in line 06. This is identical to the answers given to the *tʰaraŋ* question in lines 05 and 07 of Extract 1, which could suggest that the word is being used similarly here. Also like in Extract 1, this word is used by one of the speakers in the first slot that would otherwise be available for a greeting, *i.e.*, after the summons-answer and, if applicable, after an (admittedly unfinished) identification-recognition sequence.

Positing for the moment that line 05 was in fact a greeting, the next question is whether this greeting was reciprocated and, if it wasn’t, why not; it almost goes without saying that greetings tend to be mutual (Wong & Waring, 2010, pp. 163–164). After SM’s response in line

³ English of course uses a rising intonation as one way to signal uncertainty (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Goodwin, 2010, pp. 236–239). Though no studies about the phonology of Rushani appear to exist, the use of a rising intonation similarly coincides with question formation in a number of places in the data: Extract 1, line 02; Extract 2, lines 02 and 13; and Extract 3, lines 02 and 04. It may therefore be appropriate to assume that SM is using a rising intonation to signal uncertainty here in Extract 2, line 03.

06 to the potential greeting, she does not in fact immediately reciprocate. Instead, SM appears to be interrupted, and GS simultaneously begins a new turn in line 07. GS uses her turn to ask a new question (using *fizita*, meaning “How are things?”) that could either be a true “How are you” type of question, or alternatively her turn to give a greeting.

After GS asks the question in line 07, there is a long interjection during which SM appears to be dealing with AS, a young boy. She can be heard speaking directly to him for two, and possibly three turns (the beginning of one of the turns is unintelligible). Even after this redirection of her attention however, SM returns to the sequence in line 13 to respond to the question from line 07 and reciprocate with a question about GS’s condition. The word she uses to respond, *so:z*, is the same neutral response that she had used in line 06 to respond to the *t^saraj* question (and, as we will see in Extract 3, is not the response that *fizita* always elicits). She then follows this response with her own posing of the question *t^saraj*.

These features of her response suggest that SM may actually have treated the question in line 07 as a further greeting: She uses what may be the neutral response word for greetings and then gives a greeting herself, using what may be the usual formulation for doing so. To answer the question from line 07 at all, even after this interlude, suggests no small degree of perceived conditional relevance on the part of SM. Admittedly, an argument from conditional relevance could also support an assertion that line 07 was treated as a “How are you” question, since both greetings and initial inquiries are generally reciprocated. However, the gap between line 07 and line 13 is long indeed, and the conditional relevance of a reciprocated greeting is arguably stronger than that of an initial inquiry due to the ritual, and entirely non-informational, nature of the exchange.

If lines 05 and 07 are reciprocated greetings, this call would have a progression from summons-answer, to identification-recognition, to reciprocal (and fairly parallel) greetings. If, however, lines 05 and 07 are the beginning of an initial inquiries stage, we once again would have a missing greeting sequence and a rather long and wandering initial inquiries sequence. We will look at one more conversation to see whether and to what extent its examination may support either of these hypotheses.

Extract 3

In our third extract, GS, once again at home in New York, NY, receives a call from NB, who is at home in Qumsangir, Tajikistan (GS = Gulchehra; NB = Navruz). As in the first two extracts, the speakers here are cousins who are catching-up after having not spoken in some time, with NB placing a call to GS:

- 01 **((Summons (silent ringing): call from NB to GS))**
02 GS: **alo:?**
 hello
 Hello?
03 **(2.8)**
04 NB: **ar daro:n?**
 at inside
 Are you inside?

- 05 GS: **t^saraŋ.**
condition
How are you?
- 06 (2.0)
- 07 NB: **so:z, tut t^saraŋ.**
good you condition
Good, how are you?
- 08 GS: **me:ʃad. ʃizita.**
it becomes things-you
It's going ok. How is everything?
- 09 (0.7)
- 10 NB: **ɛda ɛkondɛj, tɛlvizor tɛʃas ɔm.**
I am here television watch I
I'm at home watching television.
- 11 GS: **ʃiz tɛkɪnɛ.**
what you-do
What are you doing?
- 12 NB: **tɛ- tɛlvi:zor tɛʃas ɔm.**
television watch I
I'm watching television.
- 13 GS: **m:: ʃto:tarado. ar ʃiztaɪjat xo (0.5) vɔstʃɛt xo.**
mmm cold there-QM at something you wrapped you
Mmm, it is cold there? Did you wrap yourself with something?
- 14 NB: **na::, ar ʃɔd, ɔdona xor^o.**
no at home piece sun
No, at home there is some sun.

Like the other two extracts, this call begins with a summons-answer sequence in lines 01 and 02, in the form of the ring and the answer *alo*. However, the first turn after this sequence (line 04) is neither an identification-recognition, nor a greeting, nor a clear “How are you.” Instead, it is a question about the call recipient’s availability for a call (“Are you inside?”). This is arguably a type of “Where are you” sequence, evidencing that SM has found it necessary to topicalize the call recipient’s location right at the outset (Hutchby & Barnett, 2005, pp. 162–163).

But rather than answer this question directly, GS moves into a new sequence by asking the somewhat ubiquitous *t^saraŋ* in line 05. Just like the placement of this word in line 05 of Extract 2, there is no greeting up to this point in the conversation opening, and it does not answer the question posed in the prior turn (after a question, an answer is conditionally relevant (Wong & Waring, 2010, p. 57)). If line 05 supplies any kind of answer to the question from line 04, it does so only very indirectly, in which case it means something like “Yes, I am inside and available to speak, let’s now proceed with the call.”

Regardless of how the question *t^saraŋ* in line 05 was intended, it seems to have been received as a greeting. NB’s answer in line 06 takes the form of *so:z* (“good”), which is the answer given to the *t^saraŋ* question in almost all instances in this study’s conversation samples. Moreover, after answering, NB immediately reciprocates with his own *t^saraŋ* question. This is

then answered by GS in a similarly neutral way in line 08, in the form of *me:fad*, short for the Tajik word *me:favad* (мешавад), meaning “It’s going okay” in this context.

That *tʰaraŋ* functions as a greeting is further supported by what comes next in the conversation opening. In line 08, GS asks a “How are you” question using a different formulation. Unlike the question in line 05, the question in line 08 gets a substantive answer in the form of actual details about what NB is doing. Line 08, therefore, appears to be the real “How are you” question. It is worth noting however that the form of the question in line 08 (*fizita*) is the same form used in line 07 of Extract 2. In Extract 3, this form of the question produced a substantive answer, but in Extract 2, it produced the potentially formulaic and neutral response of *so:z* (“good”). Given the interruption that took place in the middle of the sequence in Extract 2, there may be reason to believe that the longer response in Extract 3 is the more typical form. In any event, the use of *tʰaraŋ* as a greeting appears to be well-supported here.

NB’s substantive answer in line 10 to the real “How are you” question is followed by additional questions on the subject matter of what NB is doing at the time of call in line 11 and line 13. This is typical of the kind of “locational inquiry sequence” made relevant by the fact that the parties are using cell phones, and it also happens to be embedded within a larger, general exchange about NB’s condition (Hutchby & Barnett, 2005, p. 163). As another interesting departure from the usual framework however, and unlike the similar exchange in Extract 1, the questions here are asked by the call-recipient, rather than by the caller. This would seem to conflict with the usual posture of a “Where are you” line of inquiry, which usually requires that the *caller* establish that the *call-recipient* is in fact available to speak (rather than the other way around). In the context of this paper, we can only speculate as to the reasons for this reversal. In any event, the sequence that begins in line 08 appears to be a line of genuine inquiry, to be distinguished from the earlier exchange of *tʰaraŋ* questions that bear more functional resemblance to greetings.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

At first glance, call openings in Rushani seem to skip over the greeting sequence, moving directly into a “How are you” sequence very early in the conversation. Using CA, this paper has demonstrated that the question *tʰaraŋ*, though translating literally as “How are you,” is in fact better characterized as a greeting. The posing of the initial *tʰaraŋ* question does not result in an informational response, but it is generally followed by other questions that do. Functionally, it therefore appears to serve a formal or ritualistic purpose, which is a core attribute of greetings as characterized by Schegloff.

Speaking more broadly, this study has shown that the sampled telephone call openings in the Rushani language, while at first appearing to differ from the general framework established for calls in English (and other languages), in fact bear a much closer functional resemblance when examined in detail. Such a result is an additional data point in support of the universalist position of the conversational analysis of calls conducted in languages other than English. Despite its unusual form, the greeting that is typically used in telephone openings in Rushani serves precisely the same functions and resolves the same “interactional issues” that other greeting words do in English (Schegloff, 1986, p. 147). It is hoped that further studies with a larger data set could broaden the applicability of this line of inquiry and further ground the analysis described herein.

As a final and now pedagogical application, this study hopefully underlines the necessity of teaching conversation openings as a discrete topic to language learners, no matter what the target language or the native language. For both teachers and students, “understanding the complexities and nuances of openings” (Wong & Waring, 2010, p. 176) can provide a useful framework for the mastery of a language task that is both intimidating for the learner and a vital component of basic communicative competence. In the case at hand, a hypothetical learner of the Rushani language would have relatively firm ground on which to stand in hypothesizing that he or she should use the word *t^saran* as a greeting, notwithstanding its apparent form as a question.

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APPENDIX A

Transcription Key

.	(period) falling intonation
?	(question mark) rising intonation
,	(comma) continuing intonation
-	(hyphen) abrupt cut-off
::	(colon(s)) prolonging of sound
<u>word</u>	(underlining) stress
<u>word</u>	The more underlining, the greater the stress
WORD	(all caps) loud speech
◦word◦	(degree symbols) quiet speech
↑word	(upward arrow) raised pitch
↓word	(downward arrow) lowered pitch
>word<	(more-than and less-than symbols) quicker speech
<word>	(less-than and more-than symbols) slowed speech
<	(less-than symbol) jump start or rushed start
[word]	(vertically aligned brackets) beginning and ending of simultaneous or
[word]	overlapping speech
=	(equal sign) latch or continuing speech of the same speaker, with no break in between
(0.4)	(number in parentheses) length of a silence in tenths of a second
(.)	(period in parentheses) micro-pause of 0.2 second or less
()	(empty parentheses) indecipherable segment of talk
((gazes))	(double parentheses) non-speech activity or transcriptionist comment

Appendix B

Phonemic Inventory of Rushani

The phonemic inventory of Rushani contains the following sounds which are not found in North American English (NAE); this is only a partial list, and there are other such sounds that do not happen to appear in the conversations used in this study:

Phone	Classification	Notes
/ɒ/	low-back rounded vowel	This vowel is slightly further back in the mouth than the /ɑ/ phone of NAE (which itself is a sound that Rushani also uses).
/ç/	voiceless palatal fricative	This phone sounds nothing like the sounds represented in French and Portuguese with the letter <ç>.
/x/	voiceless velar fricative	This phone is not at all related to the sounds represented in NAE with the letter <x>.
/ɣ/	voiced velar fricative	This phone is the voiced counterpart to /x/.
/q/	voiceless uvular stop	This phone is not at all related to the sounds represented in NAE with the letter <q>.
/tʰ/	voiceless alveolar affricate	This consonant is sometimes transcribed as /ts/, but /tʰ/ has been used in the transcription to avoid confusion with /t/-followed-by-/s/.

The phonetic symbol /j/ is used in the transcription to represent the voiced palatal glide that also exists in NAE (this is sometimes transcribed as /y/ in American phonetic notation). The symbol /aⁱ/ represents the same diphthong found in NAE that moves from the /a/ sound to the /i/ sound during its production (this is sometimes transcribed as /ay/ or /ai/).

In addition, the term “QM” has been used in the word-for-word translation to signify a grammatical element in Rushani that can be best described as a “question marker.” It is an inflection (usually an /o/ sound) added to the final syllable of certain words to signify that the entire utterance is in the interrogative mood.

Modern Rushani is replete with borrowings from both Tajik (a variety of Persian written in the Cyrillic alphabet) and Russian; indeed, all participants in the data set are also fluent in both of these other languages. Speakers of Persian or Russian may therefore recognize familiar words in the transcriptions.

Appendix C

The Rushani Language

Rushani is the mother tongue of approximately 18,000 speakers in the Kohistan-i Badakhshan Autonomous Region (Вилояти Мухтори Кӯҳистони Бадахшон) of eastern Tajikistan and the neighboring Badakhshan Province (ولایت بدخشان) of northeastern Afghanistan (Lewis, 2009, pp. 325 and 528).

Rushani is a language in the South-Eastern branch of the Iranian (or “Iranic”) language family, and more specifically, within the Pamiri language family that is spoken high in the Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan and adjacent areas of Afghanistan, Pakistan and westernmost Xinjiang, China (Lewis, 2009, p. 528; Payne, 1987, p. 514). Many of the Pamiri languages are considered to be endangered (Dodykhudoeva, 2007, pp. 69–71), some critically so. None of the languages in the Pamiri family have universally-accepted writing systems.

Rushani exists in a dialect continuum with some of the other Pamiri languages spoken in the same region, most notably its larger cousin Shughni (Lewis, 2009, p. 528). Rushani’s closest major relative is Pashto, and it is more distantly related to other Iranian languages such as Persian and Kurdish (Payne, 1987, p. 514). As a member of the Indo-European language family, it is of course also a very distant cousin of English and many other European languages.