Arrest Matters: The Pragmatics of Vulnerability in Phone Calls to the Stasi

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Abstract

Using Conversation Analysis (CA), this article focuses on the ways in which participants invoke vulnerability in phone calls to the former East German State Security Service, better known as the *Stasi*. The calls were made in the late 1970s and the 1980s and pertained in one way or the other to political arrests. The main aim is to understand the linkage between vulnerability as an attribute of an institutional setting and vulnerability as the mutual achievement of a social interaction with an organization. The data represent different ways of addressing experiences of vulnerabilisation and different complications, each with a specific interactional character (failed request for help, self-protection or expression of indignation about one's own treatment). Starting with an ambiguous case and focusing on how participants work to describe experiences of arrest in other cases documented and available in the Stasi tape archive, the article describes the sequential unfolding of vulnerability in different formats, depending on how the recipient designs them and the communicative tasks that participants tackle in their interactions.

Keywords

vulnerability, secret service, arrest, interaction, GDR

Introduction

Vulnerability has been a popular concept for interdisciplinary research with significant heterogeneity in its investigation, ranging from approaches in natural science and risk research to developmental psychology (Bürkner, 2010; Angeli, 2024). By "vulnerability", different authors mean different things: the fragility of a person's body or psyche, the vulnerability of groups or social structures in the face of extraordinary hazards, risks, crises, stress, shocks, or damaging events that restrict important functions which occur due to the insufficient coping capacities of individuals or systems (cf. Bohle, 2005, p. 72). Although such vulnerabilities share a common normative focus—usually centred on inherent weakness and lack of power—on closer inspection, vulnerability becomes a contradictory phenomenon that encompasses both an exceptional, order-threatening situation with normal, essential characteristics (Ridder & Patzold, 2020, p. 4). This interdisciplinary non-specificity of the notion of vulnerability seems to make the concept itself vulnerable.

This article assumes a discursive re-specification of vulnerability. The aim of the analysis is to understand vulnerability as a process and the mutual achievement of a social interaction. It draws on a corpus of phone calls to the former state security service of the GDR and undertakes a description of different conversational procedures of vulnerability in a particular group of calls thematically

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pertaining to political arrests. In this data, vulnerability shows features of being both a condition in making sense of a situation and a requirement that parties are committed to producing the same sense of the situation despite their different biographical background and practical purposes.

Practiced Vulnerability in the Analysis of Conversational Data: A Literature Review and the Focus of the Paper

This paper views vulnerability as being practiced through concrete actions in interactions, coordinated and organised in the social relations participants establish with one another. This has been elaborated in detail in the analysis of conversational data in different strands of literature on CA of vulnerable settings. Literature on vulnerability is extensive; even though there are various approaches, they can be categorized into three groups. The first approach, or group of papers, focuses on interactions of different categories of vulnerable people. Douglas Maynard and Jason Turowetz (2017) investigate making diagnosis of socially stigmatized patients, who are made more vulnerable by instantiations, negative typifications, and generalisations. Similarly, vulnerabilisation, occurring through interactive asymmetries, relates to age (Jansson, 2016), race (Wroe, 2018; Whitehead & Lerner, 2009), and gender (Hollander, 1997; Hollander, 2001; Hollander, 2002). Charles Antaki et al. (2015) studied police interviews with people who, due to intellectual disabilities, struggle with language and its pragmatic implications. Although vulnerability here refers to an institutionally pre-aligned category of intellectually disabled complainants,[1] the paper elucidates how vulnerability becomes an interactional challenge both for the police and the interviewees. The police officers have to follow the guidelines; however, they do not always do this, struggling with concrete interaction tasks during the interviews. Vulnerability exploits tensions between institutional and interactional orders.

More recently, Childs and Walsh (2018) presented another study of police interviews with vulnerable interviewees. The paper examined paradoxical invitations and challenges in soliciting more information from child witnesses using the recommended practice of asking the vulnerable witness at the end of the interview whether there is anything else they would like to say. The problem is that this question is usually asked in the final phase of the conversation, which gives the impression that it is a formulaic step in the pre-closing sequence and that there is no interest in further details of the story. There are formal interviewing guidelines for this group of children who report being victims of sexual offenses. Similarly, Guusje Jol and Wyke Stommel (2021) study child witnesses during police interviews but focus on the special features of child witnesses in which the police officer's neutrality is at stake. While being neutral is prescribed and is mentioned as important by police officers and trainers, children treat neutralistic uptakes as problematic, heightening their vulnerability in the interactional status.

The second approach to vulnerability is in papers on the vulnerabilised interactions of participants independent of primary disadvantaged categories. Such studies reveal police interrogations and other blame attributing communication (Atkinson & Drew, 1979) as a vulnerabilising practice of interviewees in general (Yoong, 2010; David et al., 2018). Whalen and Zimmerman (1990) focus on descriptions of troublesome occurrences in reports to emergency services. Here, callers are potentially involved in the reported trouble and also deal with the challenge of categorising the problem in a way plausible enough to avoid any suspicion or doubt by the police. By the term vulnerabilities, the authors mean the giving of an adequate description, which always includes the interactional accomplishment of the callers' stance toward the troubles they report. This is another empirical analysis of vulnerability as an interactional occurrence and achievement, in which the authors eavesdrop on calls as the participants deal with the practical challenges of reporting various incidents. One of the curious conclusions of the analysis is the consideration that the vulnerable status of callers lies in the experience of how they came to know about the trouble and know it as trouble—in relation to the concerns of the police who must respond, confront, and deal with the reported incident.

The third group of studies considers the harmful features of language use. There are some general routine procedures to accomplish vulnerability (Molotch & Boden, 1985), but also specific ones, such as laughing (Katz, 1996), teasing (Günthner, 1996), flirting (Goffman, 1981), or shouting (Clift & Pino, 2020), which people invoke to "interactively achieve asymmetries, which are [not] simply being imposed" (Maynard, 1991, p. 449).

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[1] The definition of vulnerability is set in this setting according to the Guidance for Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses, published by the UK Ministry of Justice in the 2011.

Despite the different approaches, the key methodological issue is in the ethnomethodological conversation analysis of trouble-telling by participants with limited resources to avoid stigmatisation or other negative consequences during the interaction (cf. Galanova, 2024). Such a framing of vulnerability is also crucial for the data analysis in this paper. However, this paper deals with different data illustrating the specific ways of thematising of vulnerabilised experiences and different complications of specific institutional and of interactional character that callers try to overcome during the interaction. Focusing namely on phone calls from the late 1970s and the 1980s pertaining to political arrests[2] by the former East German secret service, the article asks the questions on how and for what communitive pragmatics those affected by such arrests reveal their vulnerability to the Stasi.

Methodological Approach and Research Scope
This analysis relies on tapes and transcripts of citizens' phone calls to the Stasi and applies the concepts and findings of ethnomethodological CA to the circumscribed aspect of vulnerability. The advantage of this approach for the study of vulnerability is that it allows interactive phenomena to be considered as concrete and observable; phenomena whose recognisability is a condition and result of the actions of the participants themselves. In terms of the research scope, *doing vulnerability* is an observable constitutional practice and process of the different ordinary organizational achievements of participants. These achievements are measured in the ways of the production of the situational order and can be reduced neither to emotions, the motives, or intentions of interaction participants, nor to abstract theoretical categories (e.g., power, social structures, anthropological foundations, or cultures).

Concerning these methodological matters, the analytical problem of the paper is not a simple labelling of some of the types of expressions such as vulnerability. Instead, the analysis looks at the details of interactions which help participants orient themselves in ways relevant to the activities they were engaged in to shape the further development of the action. These details have been mostly investigated through descriptions of what the participants hear and how they hear (Sacks, 1992), directing attention to the turn-taking system and sequential organisation as significant phenomena of the conversational order (Schegloff, 2007) both within a big corpus and in analysis of single cases. These provide the context for the participants' understanding, appreciation, and use of what is being said, what is meant, and what is being done in and through the talk (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990). Starting with an ambiguous case of a speaker's orientation to vulnerability, I then describe how a collection of cases with similar interactional features to those that characterise the case, can be employed to strengthen the analysis (Whitehead, 2020).

The Data and their Historical-Institutional Organisation
The Stasi phone number was in every German telephone book and everyone, both from the GDR and from the FRG, could contact the authority at any time. From the 1970s, telephone contact intensified in preference to written communication. My data corpus consists of over 462 phone calls and includes diverse requests for information (86), complaints (55), provocations (50) denunciations (42), self-promotions (31) and other genres of calls. Among them, there are 18 calls pertaining to political arrests.

Calls usually follow a certain sequence: The caller dials the public number and is connected to an operator. The operator listens to the call and forwards the caller to the officer on duty. The caller's first interaction with the operator is only recorded in rare cases. The recording usually only begins when the officer, whose line is recorded automatically and without an

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[2] This is an unofficial designation, as the Ministry of Justice rejected the term "political prisoner": "Today nobody is imprisoned because of his convictions. Whoever attacks our anti-fascist order, anyone who disturbs the development of our peace and economy commits a criminal offense and will be punished for his criminal acts. Prisoners of this type are therefore not 'political prisoners', but criminals, the designation of these prisoners as political prisoners is hereby prohibited" (Werkentin, 1995, p. 381). In the context of such a wide definition of crime, imprisonment in the GDR had become a relatively well-known *body-harming* practice (Schröder & Wilke, 1998; Lukas et al., 1996), including direct physical force by a sudden brutal arrest, undressing, beatings, sleep deprivation, lack of personal hygiene, solitary confinement, malnutrition and poor medical care, assaults by prison staff and, not infrequently, torture (Oleschinski, 1994); as well as psychological oppression, "decomposition" and self-despair (Wunschik, 2003, pp. 61–62).Thus, the entire spectrum of human injury was exploited (Plogstedt, 2010; Alisch, 2016). Even if the circumstances differed greatly, depending on the place of imprisonment, the specific status of the inmate, and the sentence (Aris & Heitmann, 2013), historical and psychological research has been able to reconstruct an overall picture of the conditions that caused serious psychological damage and have had effects to the present day (Priebe et al., 1996).

announcement, answers. The operator briefly describes the caller's concern to the officer and forwards the caller. According to internal regulations, the officer must record the caller's personal data: Name, date of birth, address and telephone number, if available, even if it is time-consuming. The organisation of the interaction with this data differs from corpora collected by organisations such as the police or emergency services. One of the main differences is that the Stasi's area of responsibility was very broad and the task of the reporting officer, while on duty, was mainly to forward inquiries to internal offices or simply to archive information in the journal for internal use. After 1990, these calls were preserved for political, historical, and scientific reasons at the Archive for Stasi documents in Berlin (BStU), now governed by the Federal Archive. They are accessible to researchers, can be listened to in the archive, and anonymised copies can be sent directly to research institutions.[3]

Analysis
An Initial (Ambiguous) Case
The initial call is a request about the possibility of avoiding potential arrest upon arrival in the GDR. The caller has recently tried to escape from the GDR with his pregnant girlfriend. He has managed to cross the border to West Germany, but she was shot dead at the wall by East German border guards. Now, the caller contacts Stasi to get permission to come back to GDR to visit the grave of the girlfriend and to see his family. Having been arrested in the past, he describes his experience and requests permission to protect himself from possible detention. He starts with a request to speak to a superior, but due to institutional regulations, the officer is the only person responsible for communication with callers contacting the Stasi from outside the organisation. The excerpt begins only after the caller finally addresses his question to the officer. Having illegally left the GDR in the past,[4] he asks for a guaranteed permission to enter, without being arrested at the border. He thematises his earlier arrest and the fatal shooting of his girlfriend. The key interest of the analysis is to understand how and why the caller brings arrest matters as a topic or as description of a vulnerable issue in the conversation with the Stasi officer.

1. The "Confirmation" Call
(English translation of BArsch, MfS BdL Tb 170 grün 1, 00:54:34–01:06:56)[5]

107 O:	what do you want?
108 A:	yes: (.) in fact i have a question (1.0) namely ( ) all those who ran away from you before nineteen hundred and one (0.5) are allowed to enter without punishment (0.5) is that right? (2.5) yes you ought to be familiar with it (1.5)
109 O:	and you want to enter the country, yes?
110 A:	ja, listen, listen (1.0) namely it was nineteen hundred and eighty (2.0) was at the border in berlin
111 O:	uhm
112 A:	frohnau babe was shot (.) by your people (1.0) she was bumped off (1.0) she was three months pregnant (.) maybe you can still remember (1.5) she was three months pregnant (0.5) maybe you can remember i don't know (3.0) it was in all the newspapers it's even in the newspapers today
113 O:	113 O: and what do you want now?

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[4] Unlawful border crossing was a criminal offence against state and public order in the GDR (Section 213 of the Criminal Code). The primary purpose of the penalty was to punish residents of the GDR who attempted to flee to the Federal Republic of Germany. In the view of the Federal Court of Justice, the human right to freedom to leave the country, as set out in Article 12 of the ICCPR, was violated by the border regime of the GDR, because inhabitants of the GDR were denied the right to leave the country freely. The border regime of the GDR was particularly harsh because Germans from the GDR had a special motive for wanting to cross the border to West Berlin and West Germany: they had belonged to one nation with the people on the other side of the border and had been connected to them through a variety of family and other relationships.

[5] The data presented here in this manuscript are English translations of calls originally spoken in German. A–the caller, O–Officer. See Annex A for transcription keys.

114 A:	no: i want a (2.5) so that I can enter without punishment (1.5) and have confirmation (1.5) that nothing will happen to me there (0.5) not so that i go to jail or something else (0.5) I was over there long (.) i was with you long enough (.) long enough in jail (1.5) and i'll also give you my address? (.) and phone number (2.0) so you can give me the confirmation (.) i don't have any (debts) over there (0.5) well i ran away (1.0) well i am: (0.5) without anything (0.5) I ran away (0.5) but now i want (0.5) i want to go over again (1.) and i want to go over again (2.0) and i want to go over again (1.0) and i want to go over again (1.0). 0) and i want to see (0.5) my parents (1.0) and i just want a confirmation (1.0) so that i can come back (1.5) here (.) where i am now (2.0) no i'll gladly give you my address, phone number and so on (1.5)
115 O:	well, you have to make an application (.) at the appropriate place in the fe er ge
116 A:	yes (0.5) just a moment (1.0) so it normally works i'm not stupid i lived over there for FOURTEEN YEARS (1.0) i know what you're like from the Stasi (1.0) i'm not stupid (1.5) i've been with you (1.0) a bit behind bars, right? (1.0) I was already inside (3.0) and (0.5) you are not the finest (2.0) (so that you are) a bit left everyone knows (1.5) that is clear (1.5) but (2.5) if you and your stupid friends could do me a favor (1.5) to babble [( )] (2.0)
117 O:	[stick] to facts ja?
118 A:	na how to facts? (1.5) you can't do anything to me here anyway that's clear (1.0) so i can be a bit cheeky that's clear (1.5)

The usual way the caller opens the conversation with the organisation is primarily intended to give the impression that his concern is serious and fits the competence of the call-taker, as other studies to institutional talks have shown (cf. Bergmann, 1993; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990). While the opening sequence of the officer employs a contingent self-identification on the part of the call-taker with quite general duties [107], the main work of the caller is to deliver a relevant request for assistance (Raymond & Zimmerman, 2016) [108]. However, the call-taker does not answer his specific question. Instead, he responds with a query, reformulating the caller's request as if it were just about the intention to enter [109]. To specify the request on his particular case, namely, how to avoid a possible arrest by entering the GDR [114], the caller gives more details of his biography. Finely, he reformulates his request from a question-format to help-inquiry ["i can enter without punishment, could do me a favour" 116].

While asking for help from the officer, the caller is becoming "cheeky" [118] at the same time and even offends the call-taker ("you and your stupid friends", "you are not the finest"116]). Such different conversational dynamics within a single call make the case analysis particularly interesting and need more detailed work, involving other cases from the corpus.

Help-Request and Initiating a Solution
A similar problem of a vulnerable partner and his request for help is also characteristic of the following phone conversation with the Stasi. A caller misses his arrested wife and calls to get information about her.

2. The "Wife" Call
(Englisch translation of BArsch, MfS BdL Tb 443 grün 1, 01:04:41–01:08:06)

006 O:	hello duty officer
007 A:	good afternoon x my wife was taken away yesterday at five o'clock by three h officials from your ministry to clarify a brief matter (.) and eh still hasn't returned home and i'd like to know (.) first of all: h (.) is that factually correct? that she is also there with you and second how=long=that=will still take (1.5) that I can count on her. (.) my name x
008 O:	uhm (3.0) uh (1.0) I can't answer that right away
009 A:	you can't say whether my wife is with you
010 O:	yes, as an officer on duty I don't know (1.0) uh, tell me, Mr. x, a question about your wife with=m first name, what is her name?
011 A:	x with x
012 O:	and when was your wife born?
013 A:	x on x oh wait x yes x x

014 O:	uhm
016 A:	x
017 O:	yesterday yes?
018 A:	yesterday at five o'clock yes (.) so you know how =man=calls it (.) provisional arrest probably (.) took place here in berlin pankow (.) that is till? e:h today at noon:ch e:h ((coughs)) i assume i've been to the police (.) inspection berlin pankow. (1.5) that's where they brought her first, anyway, they said that that she should come with.
019 O:	uhm (4.0) and uh have you approached the public prosecutor's office with your request?
019 A:	NO: but maybe the idea isn't that bad uh
023 A:	yes, and if i don't get any information uh uh if they don't know (.) what's going on [uh]
024 O:	[uhm]
025 A:	what do i do then?
026 O:	uh just one thing you say can you be reached by phone yourself?
027 A:	yes
028 O:	can you tell me the phone number?
029 A:	yes x
030 O:	um
031 A:	x x
032 O:	do you have the possibility to call again in about uh so let's say around half? fifteen thirty something?
033 A:	two thirty yes uhm I will
034 O:	yes?
035 A:	yes
036 O:	um
037 A:	i would join
038 O:	um
039 A:	I'll call you then
040 O:	all right, good, thanks
041 A:	bye

The caller also establishes the relevance of his request by explicitly stating "from your ministry" and coherently concludes his description with two short questions that demand clear information [007]. The next component following an accepted caller's request is a question concerning the nature of the problem, its location, or time. In other corpora such an "insertion sequence" has been usually seen as form of acknowledgement and a testing ground for accepting the caller's description as a request for help which are preliminary to an emergency response (Zimmermann, 1984). The question of the officer "yesterday?" can be understood as "a response to the reported *trouble*, rather than to the *report* of trouble" (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990, p. 472), because the caller has already given the time of the arrest at the very beginning.

In response to the officer's question, the caller continues the sequential machinery of help-request with the opening of another trouble, pointing to the problem of his institutional unfamiliarity. Due to this targeting, the officer is taken out of the participant design of a representative of a sanctioning institution and, instead, is addressed as a helper. This addressee design seems to be a central vulnerability-constituting feature. The vulnerable character of the caller is confirmed here by such prosodic delaying features as clearing his throat, pauses, voice fluctuations from high and loud to soft and deep and is further intensified by addressing a possible difficulty in the further course of the conversation. Here, the caller seems to deny his self-determination and to limit his agency, which is accepted by the call-taker through the next *insertion sequence* which is a request to provide the caller's phone number and to call back with

the information. This demonstration of his willingness to search for and to communicate the result over the phone is quite atypical in the corpus of calls, used by the Stasi mostly for data collection.

The way the participants continue with the conversation shows an interesting evolution of relationships and themes. The framing of the vulnerable participant, initially linked to arrest, detaches from this theme and expands to additional themes (concern for the partner, institutional incompetence or the inability to begin the search), framing the officer in charge as a benefactor, promising to help the person. In this relationship, vulnerability is revealed as a request for protection and care, despite the sanctioned and threatening nature of the institution addressed.

The participants' helpless-benefactor relationship, coordinated through the machinery of the request, seems to fail in the initial confirmation case in that the caller acts as quite experienced in dealing with Stasi and starts to disparage Stasi staff. Another failed help-request is presented below, in which the helping alignment also becomes problematic.

Repair of a Failed Help-Request
Citizens from both parts of Germany have contacted Stasi. Here, a West Berliner calls immediately after his arrest by the West Berlin security and addresses the officer not as the person responsible but as a like-minded outsider. Just as in the *wife* call, his arrest is reported here as an unusual negative event. While, in the previous call, the officer shows a willingness to help, the officer in this case reacts quite differently.

3. The "Westberliner" Call
(English translation of BArsch, MfS BdL Tb 21 grün 1, 00:59:18–01:04:16)

011 A:	i was ARRESTED here on saturday ten past ten because i supposedly (.) should ACCOMMODATE someone here (.) er:h or would have given information (1.0) i work in a ( ) barracks yes? (1.0) and i would have given information. HOW is that possible? that they come to me and arrest me? (0.2) i don't UNDERSTAND that.
012 O:	i don't know anything about that?
013 A:	no no uh you can't know ( ) i mean i also have your political opinion (.) i have mine you have yours and i think we have the same ( ) but I DON'T UNDERSTAND how they ARREST me here they have me here led out like a ROBBER murderer. (2.0) i don't UNDERSTAND that.
014 O:	are you a west berlin citizen?

Being responsible for different incoming topics and dealing with a flow of calls that do not have any routine openings, the officer of duty must determine whether the issue reported by the caller is relevant and whether is a *Stasi-able* matter. In comparison to the previous examples, there is no explicitly indicated relevance to the Stasi in this call. Furthermore, the caller relates his concern to clarifying the situation and proceeds with a form of (moral) indignation about his treatment that is usually the hallmark of accusatory sequences (Drew, 1998). According to Susanne Günthner, the combination of increasing intonation and volume with grammatical how-constructions, in German, forms the so-called "reproachful voice" (Günthner, 2000, p. 88). The repetition of words in the call of West Berliner ["i don't UNDERSTAND", 011] and the defensive reaction of the officer ["but I don't know anything about that", 012] can be either heard and understood in sense of Susanne Günthner's definition of an expression format reproach. Consequently, the irrelevance of the request and of the expression format is noticeable in the officer's disengagement and his explicit statement that the request is not the Stasi's responsibility.

The officer's denial triggers a repair of arrest description by the caller from "I was arrested" to "they arrest me here… they have led me here out like a robber murderer" [013]. Here, he changes his description of the arrest from the point of vulnerable self-categorisation (Stokoe, 2009). Other properties in the caller's description also refer to an attempt to repair the failed request. The defensive mechanism "I mean" is usually used to defend a complaint and to encourage (missing) acknowledgment, confirmation, or other aligning types of responses to complaints, preserving the speaker's right to finish off a complaining action (Maynard, 2013).

Especially remarkable is the utterance which follows directly: "i also have your political opinion (.) i have mine you have yours and i think we have the same" [013]. Such explicit references to a common political position are quite typical for calls from West Germany in my corpus and usually appear in conflicts as strategic attempts to harmonise problematic relationships

which, sometimes, become a source for suspicion for the officer. Such awakened suspicion shows up in the officer's question "are you a west berlin citizen?" and can be understood as an "uncovering move" (Goffman, 1971, p. 18) of strategic interaction.[6]

This call is interesting due to the interactional dynamics of a failed help-request which exemplifies the so-called "vulnerability of description" (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1990). The missed maximal property of the help-request seems to make the description fragile (Drew, 1992). Different levels of repairs in cases of irritation and embarrassment can be quite vulnerabilising in very different interactional settings independent of the concrete subject of conversation (Goffman, 1981).

The moral indignation in the opening sequence here is palpably very identical to the opening sequence in the confirmation case. The Stasi-able matter is also explicated in that case through the blaming/accusing format ("was shot by you people"), turning the recipient from helper to a perpetrator of violence. Afterward, the caller also repairs himself and turns his trouble-description back into help-request, referring to his arrest experience. In summary, the personified vulnerability in both cases seems to be a property helping the callers to repair a failed help-request.

Self-Protection Against a Future Arrest

Phone calls to Stasi can be risky undertakings, not only because of institutional uncertainty, possible doubt and fragility of description, technical disruptions, and irritations. As soon as someone contacts the Stasi (especially on such politically sensitive subjects as an application to leave the country or to invite relatives from the outside), they become threatened due to the possibility of being arrested in the future. For this reason, quite a number of callers desire to protect themselves by remaining anonymous and withholding their personal data, even if they demonstrate a willingness to be open with the Stasi officer in general, which can shape statements of guilt or innocence. In the following sequence, the caller explicitly states that he wishes to remain anonymous to protect himself from arrest.

4. The "Anonymous" Call
(English translation of BArsch, MfS BdL Tb 72, 00:39:09–00:41:14)

017 O:	yes then (0.5) well I can't (well) start with that if you don't tell me who you are, no
018 A:	I won't
019 O:	umm
020 A:	(but ha) (2.0) for=not for the reason alone: (1.0) because (.) I used to be a gdr-citizen and then.
021 O:	umm
022 A:	if in doubt you would look for me if you didn't attack and arrest me again, right?
023 O:	yes good (.) can we end the conversation yes?
024 A:	okay

In comparison to the previous excerpts, this section (part of the longer conversation) demonstrates a different sequential position, namely a pre-closing move and a closing conversational sequence, moves which are usually significant for understanding whether a help-request has been accepted and whether the caller received some support. The pre-closing move starts here, when the caller refuses to identify himself. Due to institutional instructions of the office on duty to collect personal information, the recording of personal data is a necessary condition for the officer to start the conversation. However, it is not only a matter of institutional case registration in his duty journal, but also grounds for trust. The rule *in order to count on the officer's service, one has to sacrifice one's anonymity* seems to be a source of vulnerability in the corpus and is clearly noticeable in the confirmation case ["and i'll also give you my address? (.) and phone number (2.0) so you can give me the confirmation"]. Through the willingness to provide personal information, he accentuates his cooperation in supporting the conjoined help-seeker/help-provider participation design.

On the contrary, in the *anonymous* case, the protection of personal data for the purpose of self-protection is crucial in order to avoid possible arrest. The officer gives a choice: either the

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[6] Goffman gives the following definition to this notion: "The observer, suspecting that what he might have treated as an unwitting move is actually or possibly an obfuscation or misrepresentation, suspecting that what appears to be ingenuous fact could be shot through and through with a gamesman's manipulation" (1981, p. 17).

caller tells him his name and the officer can help him or not. This explicit demonstration of the officer's dominant position in the decision to provide help or to reject the caller's request is audible as a warning to close the talk, but also as an implicit questioning of the caller as a genuine help seeker. Indeed, the caller, who initially contacts the Stasi to request help, changes the relationship format, casting the officer as potential arrester and moving the caller himself preventively out of the design format of the person seeking support.[7] This call is significant for how vulnerability becomes a ground for resistance (Hollander, 2002) if the request-for-help format of the interaction becomes less relevant.

The next call provides another example of resistance. The caller's request to be arrested in solidarity with the pastor of Berlin's Zion Church can be seen as a critical statement and an act of political resistance against the pastor's imprisonment.[8] However, in contrast to the previous sequence, an arrest is expressed here as an explicit wish and occasion to contact the Stasi. He opens his call with the following request: "uh i would like to be arrested by you (0.5) uh in solidarity with the pastor x (0.5) how do i do that?". At the officer's request for self-identification, the caller provides information on his name and birthdate. The following sequence develops after the caller is asked to give his address as well but denies the completion of the identification similar to the previous case.

5. The "Home Address" Call
(English translation in of BArsch, MfS BdL Tb 443 grün 1, 01:18:02–01:21:41)

016 O:	yes and where do you live?
017 A:	what does all this have to do with it? i give you some some what [the hey]
018 O:	[well, i have to] know whom i'm talking to. x tell me please?
019 A:	i would like to ask you to tell me something. to TELL me how to [get there]
020 O:	[tell me] first where you live please? yes. then we come to your concern yes?
021 A:	you can't talk to me in a barracks tone. you [must]
022 O:	[i'm not speaking to you in a barracks tone i asked you politely]
023 A:	( )YOU have to answer me [not me]
024 O:	[to tell me your] home address. yes:?
025 A:	that's very un (.) are you listening? answer me how i get to jail
026 O:	tell me again (.) what is it about [about what kind of issue]
027 A:	[it's] about me with x from the zion church ( )
028 O:	hello participant
029 A:	i'm all ears yes.
030 O:	are you still there?
031 A:	yes (3.0) uh i want to go to prison for him and i want to (be locked up with him) i want (.) to be arrested (1.0) as long as the pastor is in there i want to be arrested too
032 O:	and with whom do you want to declare your solidarity? Tell me again with the
033 A:	x yes
034 O:	aha (.) in which church is the pastor? in the church of zion. yes?
035 A:	don't you know them at all.
036 O:	where is it?
037 A:	(you are opening your mouth but you are not a berliner ne)
038 O:	tell me that please. yes?
039 A:	tell me can you i've already asked you three times can you just tell me where to go ( )
040 O:	i can't help you with this issue (1.0) i'm sorry. (1.0) hello?

The way the official formulates his question does not allow for a variety of answers and only reflects the direct wording of the address; the misalignment between the participants is

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[7] Callers in other similar cases hung up instead of providing personal data.

[8] Judith Butler et al. claim that resistance can also appear as a sign of the limits in cases of a very deep and sensitive vulnerability, which emphasizes that vulnerability and resistance are not quite opposites but show deferent sides of the same coin (2014, p. 64, 67).

reinforced by these non-compliant answers. (Raymond, 2003). In contrast to the previous call, this call is done by questioning the interactional order and the rules imposed by the officer "what does all this have to do with it?" as irrelevant to his initial request, reinforcing with a *reproachful voice* "what [the hey]". Prosodic features such as overlaps, imperatives (tell me, answer) and repeated words "that YOU tell me.., that you TELL me how", as well as passages with increased volume and rising intonation leave the impression of a tense relationship between the participants in this call.

Even though the caller is not yet in custody, he is gradually drawn into an interrogation, as if it were the situation before a real arrest, by being forced to answer the officer's questions, who continues his questioning regardless of the caller's recalcitrant attitude. Further in the conversation, the caller becomes involved in the interactional order determined by the officer:

The caller's assimilation becomes suddenly observable when he starts to speak only after the officer's demand. His voice becomes quieter, there are no longer any overlaps, there are more pauses, the pace of speech slows down and there is less intonation.[9] Finally, the caller addresses the officer with a begging voice providing him with recipient status of a helper [039], the officer rejects help-providing and the caller hangs up.

The closing of the conversation through hanging up in two last calls has something in common with the symbolic self-protective slamming of the door. While resistance suggests vulnerability as a deficient state and the caller strives to regain some self-determination, paralyzed resistance can be experienced as a limitation in options for action, where autonomy becomes problematic again. In this sense, callers to the Stasi can still provide themselves with an *emergency exit* to interrupt the talk and protect themselves from any possible arrest.

Teasing: Between Play and Disobey

In the following conversation, the caller makes his past arrest the subject of the call with the Stasi officer. The relevant question is which communicative tasks make the description of one's past experience of being arrested relevant. The answer lies in the conversation designed as provocation and teasing which does not seek any personal solution to the trouble but rather, criticises the general circumstances.

6. The "Former Prisoner" Call
(English translation of BArsch, MfS BdL Tb 53, 00:26:04–00:32:33)[10]

015 O:	yes please
016 A:	imagine the ministry of state security is here, yes?
017 O:	you wish something from me, don't you?
018 A:	well. (1.0) do you have pen and paper? (2.5) if not i'll send you a WHOLE bale full. (1.5) a man sentenced to six and a half years. (.) former prisoner. (1.5) brandenburg. (1.5) eh by the official court (speech) in (west stettart (.) west stettart). convicted in erfurt. (2.5) eh, call you here.(1.0) because. (1.0) my LATE fiancée? (1.0) that=say=i=quite=honestly. (.)
019 A2:	that i believe it is [(…)]
020 A:	[nanana because she doesn't believe that. (0.5) me] she asks me what kind of tea i would like to drink. (.) and then i asked=said ES E DE (1.0) and then: she asked me what kind of tea is that and i said a puke remedy (.) with which i throw up.
	(…)
041 A:	sentenced to six and a half years in prison? cause of (1.0) anti-state propaganda. (.) (diverse) rush. (.) illegal messaging. (.) FIRST (.) SECOND (.) the trial is ILLEGALLY secret and covert. carried out with the exclusion of =the=public. (.)
042 O:	why have you contacted the ministry for state security?
043 A:	well, because? I want to know now. because my fiancee. who I've been with for six and a half years. (.) I was (.) I WAS now at all with x. (.)x. (.)x. (.) maybe x (.) this man is now ALSO in the federal republic. (.) eh why CAN YOU (0.5) why CAN and MUST one. be SO: guilty as we are (.) because of often trifles.

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[9] The claims about a reproachful voice, prosodic features, and conflicting recipient orientation certainly need much more careful analysis in the corpus. Here they only serve a descriptive purpose in this conversation.

[10] (A – the caller, O – Officer, A2 – the fiancée of A)

044 O:	you are certainly in the wrong place.
045 A:	i'm here in the wrong place?
046 O:	you are in the [wrong place]
047 A:	[I am wrong] EVERYWHERE because THESE people? (0.5) eh as i experienced them in Brandenburg. they are all wrong. the prisons are all WRONG (0.5) anyway NOBODY feels responsible for it

The special feature of this call is that the opening of the conversation is conspicuously provocative in terms of content and prosody. While the usual caller's first turns are either immediate request assistance or reports of trouble, this caller does not make his request but wonders whether he has reached the representative of Ministry of State Security. Like an atypical design, it can open a collaborative elaboration of doubt (Garcia & Parmer, 1999). Then, he describes the trouble only after the officer's explicit appeal and after an ironical comment on call documentation [018]. These special features are grounds for an apparent downgrading of the request urgency.

The self-introduction of the caller is also very atypical. Instead of a short name, the self-introduction is a challenging summary of his arrest history. Similar to the *wife* call, the description of the arrest is characterised by a structured manner, which, due to its demonstrative emphasis and pauses, is less similar to a memorised mode of speech than to an "aloud reading" (Goffman, 1981, p. 171). Single keywords are filtered out of the adjustment and dictated in bureaucratic language so that the officer is invited to record it directly word for word to make use of what has been said (Scheffer, 2006). However, without the possibility of using this information directly against the caller. In this matter, the call approaches a teasing interaction, which is characterised by a double structure of verbal critics and play modality (Günthner, 1996). "It is … the playful aspect of teasing which allows the potentially serious irritation to be treated lightly" (Pawluk, 1989, p. 151). Such a tension between criticism and playfulness becomes a resource for resilience and resistance against vulnerability. If the activity tended too much towards direct aggression and provocation, the forms of hostility, insult, critique, and offense win; if the fun-playful modality is prevalent, teasing tends to lead to irony and sarcasm (Günthner, 1996). The participation configuration is characteristic of the usual teasing format. The caller's fiancée also participates in the conversation as a typical spectator-recipient of teasing. So, the sequence does not fit the help-request format which problematises the officer in his reply [042] that, in contrast to the initial case, does not elicit more detail of his arrest description. Rather, the caller depersonalises his arrest experience, turning the interaction into a complaint, expressing indignation at his and others' problematic treatment.[11]

There are some common interactive features between this call and the *confirmation* case. Both callers had been arrested in the past and were in safety at the time of the call in West Germany ["you can't do anything to me here"]. They both described their arrest experience not chronologically but through conclusive enumeration of the most dramatic points relevant to critical public discussions in West Germany against the political order in East Germany. The caller from the initial call also starts a teasing activity in which he defines himself as being cheeky after the officer suggests a standard solution, which is treated by the caller as help-rejection.

This diminutive meta-communicative definition of the first caller reveals the significant distinction between these calls. The caller (ex-prisoner) turns his performative teasing into criticism. Being in a more dependent position, the other caller, who asks for confirmation of his entry into the GDR, closes his teasing activity. Such diminutive meta-communication is very common in morally vulnerable situations and is usually used to attenuate a potential conflict (Katz, 1996).

Concluding Remarks

The analysis draws on research on the organisation of conversational interactions and on previous studies of calls to police and helping institutions to develop a sequential framework within which to represent vulnerability. The organisation of phone conversations related to arrest varies not only in terms of the case, personal biography, and location of the caller, but also in terms of the temporality of the arrest and communicative purposes (see Galanova, 2024). The analysis recognises multiple interactional genres and pragmatics of vulnerability, designed as request for

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[11] In this setting, a specific form of the political ability to act—in the sense of Judith Butler—can be thought of in terms of vulnerability. It is the joint mobilisation of vulnerability that makes it possible to criticise, to question the circumstances, and to regain lost claims to validity. For this, the time of the conversation (1989) is very significant.

urgent help prompted by personal involvement, as initiation of a solution, as repair, as self-protection, but which can also turn into joking and criticism in calls regarding the potential or past arrest of callers who are at a distant location. These communicative tasks and the formats of treating arrest experience are not individual features characteristic only for one speaker. Rather, all of them can be treated within one interaction in a process of permanent change and the mutual development of different interactional formats due to specific aims of the participants. Concerning these matters, vulnerability becomes an achievement of both participants during the interaction: there is a continuous mutual production of vulnerability through turn design and mainly through the loosing of such interactional tasks as overtaking and loosing of control in interactional elaboration. Due to such a detailed empirical description of vulnerability, based on the interactional behaviour of participants, both the caller and the officer on duty can be designed as vulnerable. Despite the institutional punishing purpose of the Stasi, and the officer's directive way of interaction, the threatening setting is not a pre-aligned source of a lack of power. Rather, the callers could also take back control through enforcing of support (call 2), resilience (calls 4 and 5), provocation and teasing (call 6). As a result, alternative relationships occur here through mutually coordinated forms of recipient design and interactive organisation. Such a scope can overcome the analysis of vulnerability only as the extorting effect of a specific threatening setting and can reveal alternative locally activated pragmatics.

Factually, in order to get the help of the Stasi, callers are expected to open themselves up to the mercy of the officer and to be ready to become vulnerable to potentially threatening consequences, but even in these calls, the officer—mimicked as helper—cannot always guarantee any help.

In such situations of limited omnipotence and even of certain helplessness in solving problems or in preventing unforeseen situations, the duty officer also accomplishes a vulnerable participant framework. Considering this, from the point of interaction organisation, understanding the Stasi in the various calls regarding arrests exclusively as the subject of unlimited power and the callers as subordinate participants would be misleading. Rather, there is a range of different observable dimensions in relational participations, which do not appear mechanically as opposites or the result of power application as some classical power concepts would claim. Instead, vulnerability is accomplished in situational practices in its own right, unfolding as a solution to a situational problem.

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Annex A. Transcription Key (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017)

(0.8)   Silence measured in seconds
(.)   Micropause
[overlap onset
]   overlap offset
=   latching
( )   unrecoverable speech or speaker identifier
.   falling or final intonation contour: pyjamas.
?   strongly rising intonation
,.   slightly rising intonation

Capitals or upper case – elevated volume
Degree signs – reduced volume
x – redacted personal information of callers
(( )) – transcriber comments