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Activities as Discrete Organizational Domains

Harrie Mazeland

1 Introduction

The idea that speakers convey actions in turns at talk is central to the analysis of talk in conversation analysis. It locates ‘actions’ like questioning, answering, inviting, or informing in turns as moves in sequences of action in which participants in talk-in-interaction organise local communicative projects (cf. Schegloff 2007). The notion ‘activity’ is usually reserved for more encompassing courses of action, although the scale to which the notion applies may vary. Levinson (1992 [1979]) illustrates the ‘sociological’ notion ‘activity type’ primarily with cases at the level of ‘speech events’ (cf. Hymes 1972). He takes the notion ‘activity type’ to refer to:

a fuzzy category whose focal members are goal-defined, socially constituted, bounded, events with *constraints* on participants, setting and so on,

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but above all on the kinds of allowable contributions. Paradigm examples would be teaching, a job interview, a jural interrogation, a football game, a task in a workshop, a dinner party, and so on. (Levinson 1992: 69)

Levinson's main examples are cross-examinations in the court room and teaching in the classroom (1992: 80–97). He shows for both activity types how ordered series of question-answer sequences are used to build an argument (cross-examination) or to get pupils to learn by guided discovery. The activity not only determines the setting-specific function of a question series, it also has recognizable consequences for the design of the sequence—notably whether a third-position expansion occurs (absent in cross-examination) and how it is shaped (providing an evaluation in teaching). Levinson focuses on the discussion of activity types that are 'coextensive' with episodes in clearly delineated institutional settings. This possibly explains why his notion of activity remains relatively large scale. Activities that participants organise in ordered series of sequences and/or differently organised forms of talk are not discussed in extenso.¹

The pioneering work here has been done by Jefferson.² She showed that 'troubles talk' should be considered "a discrete organizational domain, shaping the interaction in distinctive ways" (Jefferson 1988: 438).

The analytic focus is on the examination of the practices "through which speakers manage their talk as specifically *troubles* talk" (Drew et al. 2015: 19). For example, it is through such practices that participants in ordinary conversation approach a recognizable, mutually warranted entry into troubles talk as a distinct activity. They cautiously negotiate whether and how they will or will not align as troubles-teller and troubles-recipient. They are involved in doing troubles talk as a

¹Heritage and Sorjonen's characterization in a 1994 publication allowed for a more local understanding of the term 'activity':

the work that is achieved across a sequence or series of sequences as a unit or course of action—meaning by this a relatively sustained topically coherent and/or goal-coherent course of action. (Heritage and Sorjonen 1994: 4)

²See Drew et al. (2015) for an insightful appreciation of Jefferson's work on troubles talk.

distinct activity by ongoingly managing a fragile exchange of troubles delivery and affiliative recipient work. The interaction is carefully navigated around the pressure of doing ‘business as usual’, and the participants return to this ‘usual’ state by moving stepwise away from the troubles in a minimally disruptive, troubles-teller attentive manner (see the collection of papers on troubles talk in Jefferson 2015).

The overall troubles-telling sequence has a rough order of specificable, partially tightly organised segments, but the order of segments itself is weak and as flexible as is necessary to deal with the local development of the talk. Not all segments evolve according to general principles of sequence organisation (cf. Schegloff 2007) and conversational turn-taking (cf. Sacks et al. 1974). In its core segments, the sequence provides for organisations that break away from tight, locally processed forms of adjacency-pair organisation (see also Sacks 1992: 561–562). The troubles-teller delivers multi-unit tellings, whereas the relational involvement of the participants allows for the emotion-governed lifting of general turn-taking orientations (cf. Jefferson 1988).

1.1 Example 2.1: Reporting

As a less difficult, but still rather complex example of an activity that emerges in the course of conversational interaction, I will discuss several fragments from a report episode in a business-like telephone call between the coach of an amateur soccer team and a board member of the soccer club. The team plays in a high amateur league under semi-professional conditions. The reason for the call was to reschedule an appointment of the caller (the coach or ‘C’) and the called person (the board member or ‘BM’) with a player whose contract has to be renewed.

1.1.1 Launching the Activity

During the talk in which they changed their appointment, C had mentioned in a by-the-way manner that he had an evaluation session the other day with the players on his team. Later in the call, BM uses this as

a warrant for initiating a topic shift by inquiring interruptively after this meeting:

(2.1a) Initiating the delivery of the report

- 01 Coach: •hH maar binn'n 't voetbal moet je wel anderhalf uur eh[::-
but within soccer one indeed has to one and a half hour u:h
- 02 BM: → [hoe
how
- 03 was de evaluatie. was dat 'n beetje::h- redelijk?=
was the evaluation. was it a bit u:h reasonable?
- 04 Coach: =•HH NOUh. op zich ook 'n paar e:h- 'n paar-
PRT in itself also a couple u:h- a couple-
- 05 'n paar krItische opmerking'n waar je ook ie:ts mee kan doen:
a couple of critical remarks that make sense indeed
- 06 en dat is [(volge:h-) dat is vaak in organisatorisch zin[:..•hH
and this is (accordu:h-) this is often in organisational respect.
- 07 BM: [(°hm:.°) [°jah.°
yes.
- 08 Coach: bevoorbeeld eh uitwedstrijden=eh: toch de tendens van van-
for example uh away matches uh PRT the tendency of of-
- 09 iets eerder te vertrek'n. want men er[vaart-]
departing a bit earlier. because one experiences
- 10 BM: [tOch]nog eerder.
still even earlier.
- 11 (.)
- 12 BM: [°jah.]
yes.
- 13 Coach: [•h](t)JA:h m:- m- men ervaart 't toch (ook) wat krap,=
yes o- o- one experiences it PRT (also) a bit tight,

I can only discuss some of the practices through which both participants launch the new topic as a distinct type of activity. Note first that BM's inquiry (*how was the evaluation. was it a bit u:h reasonable?*, lines 2–3) not only introduces a new topic, it also sets up a framework for a specific type of response. The interruptive placement of the turn itself indicates a different set of relevancies than those of the current speaker.

And the design of the turn—a series of two questions in which the second is a specifying paraphrase of the first (cf. Bergmann 1981)—casts it as a ‘topic opener’ that invites the co-participant to respond with an answer that is “more than an answer long” (Sacks 1992: 565–566).

Note further that the coach begins the response turn with an ordered series of preliminaries. First a generalizing formulation of what is mentionable about the evaluation session (*in itself also ... a couple of critical remarks*, lines 4–5), followed by a comment that indicates how he is going to deal with the critique of the players on his team (*...that make sense indeed*, line 5). The coach then nominates the thematic domain of the critique (*often in organisational respect*, line 6), before finally announcing the first report item with *for example* in line 8. In the preliminaries, the speaker not only projects the delivery of a longer report, but also sets up the framework for the professional, neutral style in which he is going to tell about an evaluation session in which he himself was a party. Note finally BM’s continuer *jah* (*yes*, line 7) by which he aligns himself as the recipient of the longer project that C is recognizably working up to.

In a series of three turns, the participants have not only changed the topic, they have also installed a different turn-taking framework in which they temporarily move away from coordinating the progression of the talk as a succession of adjacency-pair sequences to an organisation that is guided by the progression of the report that the primary speaker is going to deliver (cf. Houtkoop and Mazeland 1985).

1.1.2 Delivering the Report

The report itself is structured as a list of topics. Each topic is first announced in a preliminary topic-nomination component with a phrasal construction such as *uitwedstrijden* (*away matches*, line 8 of (2.1a) above), or *over de omgang met (...) met name de jongeren* (*about my dealings with particularly the younger players*, lines 37–38 of (2.1b)):

(2.1b) Continuation of the report (15 lines left out)

- 27 Coach: ze gev'n toch aan van liefst op tijd aanwezig
they point out PRT like better to be there on time
- 28 en: [dan:- >dan vind'n ze 't< wat rustiger,=
and then- then they feel this more relaxed,
- 29 BM: [°jah.°
yes.
- 30 Coach: [•hHhhh]
- 31 BM: [=got! ik von'd]at als trainer altijd naa:r..
jesus! I never liked that when I was a trainer.
- 32 as ik e[h: [anderhalf uur va[n te voren< 'r was.]
when I uh was already there one and a half hours beforehand.
- 33 Coach: [(°o-) [(°i-) [jaA precies:!]
yes exactly!
- 34 BM: poe:::h.=
whew!
- 35 Coach: =ja.
yes.
- 36 0.3
- 37 Coach: →e::h (0.6) noue:::h (0.4) over de omgang met m- >met name<
u::h (0.6) PRT (0.4) about my dealings with part- particularly
- 38 de jongeren vond'n ze mij: e::h in de communicatie niet altijd
the younger players they thought I u::h our communication not always
- 39 ev'n e:h •hH wel dat ik e:::h wel: (.) eerlijk was
equally u:h indeed that I u:::h was indeed honest with them
- 40 met m'n mededeling', •hH maar dat ik niet- n:iet genoeg
in my notices, but that I didn'- didn't show enough
- 41 interesse toonde in de jongere jongens,
interest in the younger players,

The transition to a next topic in C's report is 3 out of 6 times prefaced with the particle *nou* (in this environment similar to English *now*), as in line 37 of (2.1b). This way of introducing a next report item portrays it as if it is taken from an informal agenda (cf. Button and Casey 1988). It is not just any new topic, but 'the next' topic in a more or less ordered list of issues. The particle works as a "marker of position" (cf. Sacks

1992: 557): it is a sequential technique that is used for linking the new topic to the list of items in the speaker's report (Mazeland 2016).

The discussion of a report item itself displays a loose structure. The soccer coach first describes the general tenor of an issue raised by his players in the evaluation session, and after providing more details, he reports his reaction in the session itself or he tells how he thinks about this now. This evaluative stage is not only closure-implicative for the current report-item, it is also a place where the report recipient may join the discussion. See lines 31–34, where BM tells about his own experiences with arriving at a match too early.

The activity role as *report recipient* / *report assessor* is carefully managed. Apart from aligning to the primary speaker's project as a recipient with a continuer (line 29, for example), BM also manifests himself as an expert on the issues C is reporting about. See, for example, his quasi-surprised repeat of *eerder* (*earlier*) in line 10 of extract (2.1a): *toch nog eerder* (*still even earlier*). But note that he also goes on with a continuer, *jah* (*yes*, line 12). This blocks the sequential implicativity of the comment in the first part of his turn, and it neatly shows how BM gives priority to the progression of the report by almost immediately returning to the recipient role.

BM does not always stick to his role as report recipient. The report sequence is vulnerable to merging with an alternative activity in which the same topic is developed within a different activity framework. BM's perspective display in lines 31–32 has the potential to evolve into a more elaborate telling about his own experiences as the coach of a soccer team. He then would become the primary speaker and C would be caught in the role of (second) story recipient. C's attempts to take the floor back again in line 33, and the affiliative way of doing agreement with which he subsequently closes the matter, *jaA precies: (yes exactly)*, successfully block this kind of 'activity contamination' (cf. Jefferson and Lee 1981). The activity framework thus requires permanent monitoring to keep the activity on track. Possible derailments are met by renegotiating the framework, as can be seen in the hesitant manner in which C subsequently makes the transition to the next report item (lines 36–37 in (2.1b)).

1.1.3 Closing the Report

The participants may also ‘boundary off’ the closing of a report from the activity that follows it (cf. Jefferson 1984: 198). Compare the fragment below. It is from the discussion phase of a report item about the different coaching style of the assistant coach. The activity framework has already been loosened. The participants shifted the activity framework once when they began discussing a remaining issue as a problem-solving matter. The current report item itself deals with a sensitive subject. It is raised late in the series of report items, possibly showing the reporter’s scruples about criticizing his closest colleague:

(2.1c) Closing the report (*about 5 minutes after the initiation of the report*)

BM comments on C’s report about the different coaching style of the assistant trainer.

- 241 BM: en jij bent eh gewoon jha::h >wat wat< anders gewoon.
and you are uh just well: somewhat somewhat different just.
- 242 dat is- dat moet'n we respectere gewoon.
that is- that's something we simply have to respect.
- 243 (.)
- 244 Coach: nee maar daarom mog'n ze- voor mij: best
no but therefore they still can- I don't mind they
- 245 → kritische::h opmerking plaats'n,
make critical remarks
- 246 BM: jah.=
yes.
- 247 Coach: =dan: kun je in ieder geval toelicht'n e:h
then you are at least in a position to explain u:h
- 248 hoe as je dat zelf e:h siet en ervaart.
how you see this your u:h self and experience this.
- 249 1.2
- 250 BM: → hEe maar- en >nog één dingetje< (hèrre:h) Hans, (.)
hey but- and one more thing (you know) Hans,
- 251 e::h met de klE:r'n allemaal. law'n we dat nou:*°e::h°*
u:hh about the clothing and all. let's do this now u::h
- 252 dat ze de kleren inleveren en zo:_
that they return the clothing and the like

The report deliverer uses practices that seem to be specifically designed for indicating and negotiating closure of the report. For example, the repetition of a phrase that was also used in the preliminaries of the report by the report deliverer. At the start of his project, the coach used the phrase *'n paar kritische opmerkingen* (*a couple of critical remarks* (lines 4–5 in (2.1a)) in order to characterise the criteria for sampling reportable issues. He re-uses this phrase in the evaluation section of the current report item, *kritische opmerking* (*critical remarks*, line 245 in (2.1c)). This kind of repeat of a phrase that was used in the set-up stage may work as a device for marking the possible completion of the whole project. It signals the closure of the full circle (cf. Schegloff 2011; Mazeland 1992: 355).

The final clue is the 1.2-second silence in line 249. This is the first time during the whole report episode that the coach does not hurry to self-select as next speaker in an environment of imminent closure of the current report item in order to make a transition to the next report item. His co-participant treats this gap as a suitable position for raising another issue in a different activity framework (lines 250–252). BM shifts the activity to getting a commitment that something will be taken care of (the players that leave C's team have to return their club outfits). This definitively seals the closure of the report episode and clearly delimits the current activity from the preceding one.

(2.1d) Repeat detail Extract (2.1c)

250 BM: → hEe maar- en >nog één dingetje< (hèrre:h) Hans, (.)
hey but- and one more thing (you know) Hans,

251 e::h met de klE:r'n allemaal. law'n we dat nou:*°e::h°*
u:hh about the clothing and all. let's do this now u::h

252 dat ze de kleren inleveren en zo:_
that they return the clothing and the like

Note finally that the next activity is also distinguished from the activity that precedes it. BM uses an ordered array of practices at the beginning of his turn in lines 250–252 in order to mark the activity-framework-shifting status of his turn. The turn-initial particle *hee* (*hey*, line 250) works as an alert to a departure from the current line of talk. The self-repair from *maar*

(*but*) to *en* (*and*) indicates that the speaker is working on how to tie the action in his turn to the preceding interaction. The following component with the phrase *nog één dingetje* (*one more thing*) ties the new topic to the list of issues to be handled in the call. The inserted address term *Hans*, immediately after this component, articulates the seriousness of the project that is to be launched in this turn (cf. Clayman 2010: 173–179). It is only after this series of prefatory practices that BM nominates the topic of his project in a separate preliminary turn-construction component (*about the clothing and all*, line 251), before, eventually, delivering the exhortation that it was all about, *let's do this now u:h that they return the clothing and the like* (lines 251–252). By heavily ‘front-loading’ the beginning of his turn with various types of organisational information (Levinson 2013), the speaker helps his interlocutor align with the new organisational configuration.

In summary, participants in ordinary conversation bring about an activity such as reporting in a larger stretch of talk that is organised as a ‘discrete organizational domain’ (Jefferson 1988). The activity is set off against the preceding talk and the talk that follows it. The participants orient to turn-taking restrictions that provide systematic opportunities for the production of multi-unit turns by the report deliverer. The reporter acts as primary speaker whereas the interlocutor aligns as report recipient / report assessor. The progression of the talk is partially organised in terms of an ordered succession of report-items that the reporter delivers in multi-unit turns. The report items are also structured. The primary speaker first elaborates on the reported issue and after this, the report may be ‘interactionalised’ in an evaluative section that is potentially closure implicative. The participants have to do coordinated work to keep the activity on track, but derailments may develop because of overlap with alternative activities and the organizational and interactional roles that are associated with them. At all levels of the organisation of their project, the participants use an activity-fitting array of practices through which they shape their interaction as a report.

2 Activities and Adjacency Pair Organisation

The report sequence discussed in the previous section is primarily organised as a form of topical organisation combined with turn-taking restrictions that enable the primary speaker to deliver tellings in long

multi-unit turns. Only specific segments are organised in terms of adjacency-pair sequences, most notably the launching of the activity, its closure, and the segments in which the participants jointly evaluate a reported issue. Adjacency-pair organisation is relied on particularly in environments in which the interactional configuration is reconfigured or when the interaction within the activity framework requires a more co-agentive type of involvement. Conversationalists also accomplish activities that are primarily organised as a succession of adjacency pairs. Adjacency pair organisation is a major research area in conversation analysis (cf. Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Schegloff 2007). The focus is on how participants organise communicative projects in sequences that are formatted as an adjacency pair of complementary actions, such as question/answer, request/decision, compliment/appreciation, informing/receipt, or greeting/counter-greeting. How participants arrange such sequences into a larger series in which they bring about activities has been investigated less. This is surprising because even a simple mundane activity may require a series of multiple, often expanded adjacency-pair sequences.

2.1 Example 2.2: Making an Appointment

Consider, for example, the course of action in which two friends make an appointment in a phone call. The caller launches the activity with a proposal to go to the movies in the reason-for-the-call slot after the opening section of the call:

(2.2a) Going to the movies

010 Fred: → **e:h zullen we morgenavond naar de film gaan?**
 u:h shall we tomorrow-evening to the film go?
 u:h shall we go to the movies tomorrow evening?

011 0.2

012 Peter: **jAh. is goed.**
 yes. is alright.

013 0.9

014 Fred: → **welleke?**
 which-one?

Although Peter's acceptance of the proposal to go to the movies completes the sequence, it does not complete the activity. On the contrary, the proposal sequence sets up an activity framework for a larger course of action in which the participants will work out the details of their plan. Fred's follow-up question, *welleke?* (*which-one?*, line 14), launches an expanded sequence in which he and his friend choose the film they want to go to. This sequence is only the first in a series of sequences, in each of which the participants decide on a relevant detail of the project.

The transcription of the stretch of talk in which the friends accomplish the activity is too long to discuss in detail. The whole episode lasts about 3 minutes and 20 seconds (185 lines in the transcription). The activity develops along a trajectory with successive steps such as selecting a movie and finding out which cinema is showing it and at what time. The final issue concerns how and where they will meet:

(2.2b) Going to the movies

- 142 Peter: **zuwwe dan daarvoor afspreken.**
 shall-we then there-in-front-of meet.
shall we meet then in front of it.
- 143 1.4
- 144 Fred: **(°mm-°) bij de Heuvelpoort:t.**
(mm-) at the Heuvelpoort. ((name of the theater))
- 145 Peter: **ja of je kunt ook even naar hier naartoe komen.**
 yes or you can also PRT to here here-to come.
yes or you can also come to my place first.
- 146 0.6
- 147 Fred: **ehm: (1.9) >•h ja dat kunnen we ook doen.<**
 uhm: yes that can we also do.
uhm: (1.9) yes we can also do that.
- 148 1.0
- 149 Peter: **°hm,m.°**

The participants develop the activity in a series of successive steps that are functionally ordered toward the achievement of its goal (cf. Levinson 1992: 71; Rehbein 1977: 108). Each step is organised as an adjacency pair sequence. If necessary, the participants expand the

sequence in ways that overcome problems with the successful completion of the sequence. Each next sequence builds on the outcome of the prior one (cf. Schegloff 2007: 213–215).

The dependency on the previous sequence is usually highly visible in the design of the turn with which a speaker initiates the next sequence. The domain of the follow-up question *welleke?* (*which one?*, line 14 in (2.2a)), for example, is to be retrieved from the topic of the preceding sequence. And the proposal at the beginning of (2.2b) above, *zuuwe dan daarvoor afspreken* (*shall we meet then there-in front of (it)*, line 142), is not only presented as a consequence of the preceding interaction with the adverbial *dan* (*then*), it is also marked for referential and topical continuity across sequences with the pronominal compound *daarvoor* (*there-in-front-of*). A final example is the design of the question that Peter asks about the theater that is showing the movie they have chosen:

(2.2c) Going to the movies [detail]

034 Peter: → **en die draait in: Cinecitta hè?**
 and that-one plays in Cinecitta isn't it?
and it is shown in Cinecitta isn't it?

Peter's question is *and*-prefaced. The preface functions as a sequential conjunction that coordinates the upcoming sequence with the activity it is contributing to (cf. Heritage and Sorjonen 1994).

The structure of the sequences in which the activity evolves may reflect their function in the series. The opening sequence—the proposal/decision sequence in (2.2a)—does not get post-expansion (cf. Schegloff 2007: 115–168). Instead of sealing it as a unit in its own right with a sequence-closing third like *okay* or *great!*, the participants treat it as just the beginning of a larger project by immediately continuing with the selection of the film they want to go to: *welleke* (*which-one*, line 14).

Only after having decided on a list of details do the participants close the series of sequences with a couple of activity-closing sequences that turn the now-specified proposal into a definitive arrangement (cf. Houtkoop-Steenstra 1987: 101–140). See Extract (2.2d). Peter

first does a request for confirmation of a necessary consequence of the arrangement (line 180) and then finally concludes with a summary assessment of the outcome of the work they did in the preceding sequences (line 191):

(2.2d) Activity-closing sequences

- 180 Peter:→ •hh **nou dan zie ik je: beslist morgen,**
 PRT then see I you definitively tomorrow
 well then I'll see you tomorrow definitively,
- 181 0.5
- 182 Fred: **ja.**
 yes.
- (...) ((8 lines left out))
- 191 Peter:→ **nou: da['s dan goed afgesproken.**
 PRT that is then well agreed-upon.
 well that's agreed upon well then.
- 192 Fred: [(°misschien.°)
 (perhaps.)
- 193 1.3
- 194 Fred: **jah.**
 yes.
- 195 0.8
- 196 Peter:→ •h (.) **verder nog iets te vertellen?**
 further PRT something to tell?
 any news further?

The concluding sequences deal with the overall structural organisation of the activity (cf. Robinson 2013). Their design, placement, and function are different from those of the sequences in which the details are settled. Note, for example, that their structurally marked position— at a point at which the activity is possibly complete—is signalled by the turn-initial particle *nou* (literally: *now*, lines 180 and 191). Dutch speakers use this particle to mark transitions between activities or between subsequent phases of activities (Mazeland 2016). The participants thus attend to the formal structure of the activity in the design and placement of turns with sequence-initiating actions.

3 Activities with a Baseline of Mutually Coordinated Practical Actions

Activities differ with respect to the degree in which they are constituted by talk. For a major class of activities, the baseline of the activity is a course of action that consists of a series of progressively ordered interactional moves and related practical actions (e.g. moving heavy furniture, filling a tank with gasoline, getting a haircut, going for a walk, or checking a train ticket). Talk is primarily used to coordinate the progress of the course of action and also for relational functions. At the other end of the continuum, we see activities of which the baseline is entirely or almost entirely constituted by talk (e.g. reporting, making an appointment, making an emergency call, or deciding on a pupil's promotion to a next grade level in a report card meeting). The participants measure the progress of this latter type of activity in terms of the outcome of the successive sequences in which the activity unfolds. In activities that have a series of practical actions or tasks as their baseline, the participants measure the progress of the activity in terms of the completion of successive tasks. They use talk for coordinating the progress of practical actions, but the activity context is provided by the structure of the task(s) to be completed and the way in which multiple tasks are serialised.

3.1 Example 2.3: Putting on Compression Stockings

Consider, for example, the following extract. It documents the last 30 seconds of the performance of a simple, mundane task in a caretaking interaction in a nursing home for the elderly (Wanders 2004). Mr. H. dresses himself in the morning, but a caretaker comes by to put on his support stockings. The extract begins at a point at which the caretaker (CT) is almost ready to put on the second support sock (Still 2.1). Mr. H. sits in an armchair with his right leg stretched out within the operation scope of CT's hands and arms. CT's 'project position' (Lerner and Raymond forthcoming) is on the side of Mr. H's legs, with the upper half of her body bent over the legs. When both support socks are on, the normal socks have to be put on again. CT has put one normal sock on the coffee

table on the other side of her work space, whereas Mr. H. has kept the other one in his hand after having taken it off himself:

(2.3) Putting on support stockings in a caretaking interaction.

▼ Indicates the point at which a still is taken from the video recording of the interaction.



[5.3 seconds

CT: [*CT pulls the second support stocking over Mr. H's right leg up to his knee ▼¹ and straightens the sock hem. She then makes one step to the left toward the slider opening at the toes, grasping the top of the stocking slider with her left hand and holding the instep of Mr. H's foot with her right hand.*

still 2.1



CT: zo: da(n) . [▼²
so then.

[▼² pulls stocking slider up with a firm push of the left arm, meanwhile holding down Mr. H's foot with her right hand.

[0.7

still 2.2



CT: [puts slider on the coffee table and ▼³ picks a normal sock from it.
Mr.H: [lowers right leg but keeps it stretched out above the floor, meanwhile turning his gaze toward the sock on the coffee table and moving his upper body slightly towards it ▼³, but moves back again then while looking at the other sock in his left hand.

[1.6

still 2.3



CT: [gets up into standing position, brings sock opening into pull-on position
[1.1

Mr.H: [starts to lift his right leg again ▼⁴
[0.5

CT: ▼⁴ kousen d'r weer bij aa:n!
socks on again.

0.5

still 2.4

Mr.H: °j:ah.°
yes.



still 2.5

[5.5

CT: [*bends down to right foot and pulls sock on, and ends with a finishing touch movement ▼⁵, smoothing away any wrinkles by moving both hands simultaneously in an upward stroke*



still 2.6

[7.6

Mr. H: [*bends right knee and puts his foot on the floor, offering the other sock by stretching out his left hand, and then lifts up his left leg meanwhile also pulling up the left trouser leg ▼⁶*

CT: [*takes sock from Mr. H, positions the sock opening ▼⁸, and then pulls the sock on his left foot, ends with a finishing touch stroke*



still 2.7

CT: [▼⁷ nou:h!
PRT

[((gets upright))
(.)

CT: [ga ik] ('t) bed nog even opma:ke[h,
go I (the) bed PRT PRT make up,
just going the make up the bed quickly,

Mr. H: [ja be-]
yes tha-

[bedankt. ▼⁸
thanks.



still 2.8

CT: [*turns right, skimming Mr. H's face in passing, steps towards the head end of mr H's bed ▼⁸*

Mr. H: [*brings foot to the floor, first straightens his left trouser leg with his left hand, and then shifts gaze toward right foot, ▼⁸ and straightens his right trouser leg with both hands.*

CT: [*picks up pyjama and starts folding it up*

Mr. H: [*then starts to put on his slippers*

[3.7

CT: [dan is't weer klaar.
then is it again ready
then it is ready again.

[gaze directed at folding task,

[puts pyjamas under pillow

[2.0

The caretaker and care recipient collaborate in accomplishing a routine course of action with a projectable sequential structure. Each discrete sub-task has a recognizable formal structure, with projectable task completion zones. The subtasks are ordered in a way that allows for anticipation of

the kind of task that will follow next. This enables the participants to pre-emptively attune their respective task-oriented positions and postures so as to facilitate the smooth performance of subsequent tasks. Compare, for example, the “task-transition space” (Lerner et al. 2011: 44) that develops when CT lays the stocking slider on the coffee table (Stills 2.3 and 2.4). Putting away the slider marks the completion of the stage in which the second support stocking is pulled on, whereas CT’s next action—picking up the sock right next to the place where the slider is set—marks the beginning of the next stage in which the normal socks will be pulled over the support stockings. When CT lays down the slider, Mr. H. slightly lowers his right leg. However, he does not lower it to the floor and he keeps his leg stretched out (Still 2.3). As soon as CT bends back and gets upright, CR lifts his leg again toward a height that facilitates the performance of CT’s projectable next action. He does so even before CT announces the next task round by describing its target state, *kousen d’r weer bij aa:n!* (*socks on again*, Still 2.4).

The participants are thus demonstrably oriented to the formal structure of the practical task they are involved in (Lerner et al. 2011: 44.), and they use it as a resource for coordinating both the performance of subtasks and the transition from one subtask to the next. A similar coordinated use of the task-transition space can be observed when CT signals she is ready with putting on the first sock with a kind of ‘finishing touch’ of smoothing the sock (Stills 2.5 and 2.6).

Talk does not determine the formal structure of the development of the activity. However, talk does occur—for example when CT says *zo: da(n)* (*so then*) just before she pulls the sock slider from Mr. H’s left leg (Still 2.2). Her remark articulates the arrival at a structurally projectable ‘pre-completion point’ (Schegloff 1996) in the subtask’s trajectory, not only projecting the action that will finish the subtask, but also enabling Mr. H. to anticipate the brusque dynamics of her pulling away the sock slider. Note that CT’s remark does not get a verbal response from Mr. H. and its absence is not treated neither as noticeable or repairable (cf. Schegloff 1987). “What is being sustained is not a state of talk” but the activity (Goffman 1981: 143). CT’s utterance refers to a specifiable point in the progression of the subtask; it gets its significance from its placement at that position.

Stretches of talk in the course of the unfolding activity may be organised as an adjacency pair of actions. CT’s announcement *kousen d’r weer bij aa:n!* (*socks on again*, Still 2.4), for example, gets an

decades. In this view, “each clearly demarcated activity” is associated with “a corresponding set of inferential schemata” (Levinson 1992: 72ff.). The inferences bridge the difference between the ‘literal meaning’ of an utterance and its actual force in the context of a specific activity. As an example, Levinson discusses utterances that have the force to announce the beginning of an activity, like:

(L) *It's five past twelve.* (1992: 72)

Under the right conditions—like the scheduling of a meeting at the time referred to in the announcement, the presence of all necessary personnel, and (L) being uttered by the person whose designated task it is to begin the meeting—(L) might be heard as starting a meeting. Levinson discusses several, not necessarily mutually exclusive models of the inferential schemata that participants use to move from literal to action meaning.³ In its most persistent form, this approach boils down to constructing some kind of context-independent meaning of an utterance in an unmarked communication context, and then applying one or several inference-making ‘transformations’ in order to arrive at the action meaning that participants observably orient to in the actual, ‘specific’ activity.

An approach that is more in line with Jefferson’s focus on the examination of the practices through which participants manage their talk as moves within an activity framework is to analyse an utterance in its environment of use ‘as a unit’. The unit works as a practice for doing an action in the course of the interactional realisation of a specific activity. In the case of (L), for example, stating the current time in an environment of use in which the meeting that people are gathering for is scheduled to begin at that time works as a practice for starting that meeting.⁴

³The 3 most important types of inferential reasoning that Levinson (1992) considers are (i) Grice’s model of conversational maxims; (ii) inference-making based on detailed situational knowledge and its structuring in frames and scripts; and (iii) inference-making relying on expectations about the structural organization of conversation.

⁴A serious examination of example (L) should also include information about the exact placement of the utterance, a comparative consideration of its design (e.g. why is ‘five minutes past X’ relevant), a detailed description of its productional features such as the occurrence of a turn-initial operator such as *u:h(m)* (cf. Atkinson et al. 1978) or of the prosody of the utterance (relative loudness, for example), the type of participation framework that is signalled by the embodied behaviour of the speaker and the audience (gaze, seating positions; see Goodwin 2000), and situational information about the setting for the gathering.

Members understand the utterance cast in its environment of use as a practice for doing a situated action.

The ‘activity-context’ (cf. Lerner et al. 2011: 44) offers the framework for the formation and interpretation of actions. Consider once more, for example, the question *welleke?* (*which-one*, line 14) which occurs immediately after Peter has accepted his friend’s proposal to go to the movies together (Sect. 1):

(2.2e) Going to the movies; repeat and continuation of the interaction in Extract (2.2a)

010 Fred: **e:h zullen we morgenavond naar de film gaan?**
 u:h shall we tomorrow-evening to the film go?
u:h shall we go to the movies tomorrow evening?

011 0.2

012 Peter: **jAh. is goed.**
yes. is alright.

013 0.9

014 Fred: → **welleke?**
which one?

015 0.2

016 Peter: **e::h ja:h zeg 't maar..**
 yes say it PRT
u::h well you tell me.

017 **'k heb ze: (0.6) °ammal nie gezien. dus eh°°**
 I have them all not seen. so uh
I haven't seen (0.6) any of them. so uh

018 0.9

019 Fred: **ehm: (0.7) AmadEus draait ↑nou,**
 uhm Amadeus plays now,
uhm (0.7) Amadeus is showing now,

Fred’s question is not asking for information about something that he does not know but assumes Peter does (cf. Heritage 2012). Instead, the use of the question-word question initiates a phase of selecting the movie they will go to. Peter’s counter in line 16 shows this clearly: He is not answering a question but is giving back the responsibility for selecting a movie. The question

is the next move in the ‘language game’ the participants have set up in the previous sequence when they agreed to go to the movies together (Levinson 1992: 81; Wittgenstein 1958: 11). The conditions for responding are not established by the question itself. Its design features—most notably, its elliptic format—index its environment of use as the basis for making sense of its purpose (cf. Pomerantz 1988, 2017; Lee 2011; Walker et al. 2011).

4.1 Example 2.4: Assessing a Product in a Telemarketing Call

The activity-context also explains how participants understand an action simultaneously in its local sequential context and within the larger trajectory of the activity. They do not just take an action at face-value but also take into consideration its impact on the larger course of action. See the following extract from a telemarketing call in which a telemarketer tries to sell a financial product (Mazeland 2004). After having described the product’s main advantages—it multiplies a savings deposit within a period of three years—the telemarketer (Tm) invites the prospect (Pr4) to evaluate the product by asking how this sounds (line 33). The prospect responds in a way that displays her understanding of the question’s purpose within the larger activity framework (lines 35–36):

(2.4) Telemarketing call

33. Tm: hoe vindt u dat klinken?
how does this sound to you?
34. 1.7
35. Pr4: → ja:h 't- (0.5) 't klinkt allemaal wel: maar ik heb t'r
well: it- (0.5) it all sounds alright indeed but I am
36. → eigenlijk- eigenlijk niet zo veel interesse voor.
actually- actually not very much interested in it.
35. 0.3
36. Tm: nee:h. (°no-) (.) ik kan't u nog wel eve kort uitlegge?
no:h. (well-) (.) I can explain this to you PRT PRT just briefly?
36. 0.9
37. Pr4: °hm↑hm°
38. Tm: ·h nou de inleg bij dat ((naam spaarplan)), (...)
well the deposit for this ((name savings plan)), (...)

The response turn in lines 35–36 is formatted as a compound turn-constructional unit in which a contrast is set up (cf. Lerner and

Takagi 1999). In the first part of the contrast pair, the prospect answers Tm's question with a rather positive assessment of the product, *ja:h t- ... t klinkt allemaal wel: (well it- ... it sounds alright indeed*, line 35). In the second part, however, she then says she is not interested in the product (*but I am ... actually not very much interested in it*, lines 35–36).

Note that the response turn is produced from its outset as a dis-preferred second (cf. Pomerantz 1984): It is delayed, its beginning is hesitant and disruptive, and the more clearly disaffiliating part only comes in the second half of the turn (lines 34–35). This might seem strange because a positive evaluation of the product would be in agreement with the type of answer favoured by Tm's question (cf. Clayman and Heritage 2002). But the prospect shows that she is also faced with the problem that a positive assessment in itself may be legitimately treated as a 'go-ahead' for an unobstructed continuation of the sales trajectory (cf. Schegloff 2007: 30ff.). By continuing with a statement that she is not interested, she blocks an understanding of the first part of her answer as a go-ahead. So the action in the second part of the response turn, that is, the part of the turn in which the speaker deals with the impact of her answer at the level of the activity, dominates the formatting of the turn as a whole (cf. Schegloff 2007: 76–78). The prospect understands the telemarketer's question not just as the first pair-part of an isolated sequence in which she is invited to give her opinion, she also treats it as a move within the larger trajectory of the activity.

5 Situated Activity System

Goffman developed the notion 'situated activity system' to describe repetitive encounters in social establishments in which an individual is brought

into face-to-face interaction with others for the performance of a single joint activity, a somewhat closed, self-compensating, self-terminating circuit of interdependent actions. (Goffman 1961 [1972]: 84–85)

Although the concept ‘situated activity system’ is not an analytic notion,⁵ I find it useful because it helps to understand the multi-layered, ‘laminated’ character of human activity in task-specific settings (Goodwin 2013). ‘Communities of practice’ (Wenger 1998) that perform a recurrent task—like helping every morning with putting on compression stockings (Sect. 3)—develop a repertoire of ways of organizing and facilitating them. The repertoire provides guidelines for how to perform activities in more or less standardised settings, it distributes tasks and associated roles over participants and it provides tools and routines for performing tasks. The members of a community of practice adapt, innovate, and archive their repertoire depending on the requirements of the circumstances. Novices learn the repertoire at least partially by taking part in the realisation of the activity itself (Lave and Wenger 1991; Goodwin 1994, 1997; Hanks 1996). The notion ‘situated activity system’ provides a framework to analyse the interplay of the semiotic resources participants rely on relative to the activity in which they are used.

5.1 Example 2.5: Deciding About a Pupil’s Promotion in a Report-Card Meeting

The linguistic practices in the repertoire of a community of practice are saturated with knowledge, insights, and skills for doing actions in a situated activity system (cf. e.g. Goodwin 1996, 1997; Goodwin and Goodwin 1996; Good and Beach 2005; Nevile 2007; Pekarek-Doehler 2002). I want to illustrate this with a fragment which is taken from a report-card meeting in which a team of teachers decides on the future school careers of the pupils in a so-called *brugklas* (*bridging class*; see Berenst and Mazeland 2008; Mazeland and Berenst 2008). The *bridging class* is the first general year of a specific type of secondary school in the Netherlands. After this year, the pupils can continue school in the

⁵Goffman’s notion ‘situated activity system’ is just one of the many concepts and theories that have been proposed in the literature. Lahlou (2017: 221)—who uses the term ‘installation’ for a theory that focuses on how artifacts “guide users in their activity” through culturally constructed situations—rightly points out that the plethora of concepts is typical of most important phenomena.

Table 2.1 The teaching team's standardised measurement system for allocating pupils

Pupil summary score	Allocation
96 or more	Promotion to HAVO-2
89–95	Discussion zone HAVO-2
77–88	Promotion to MAVO-2
71–76	Discussion zone MAVO-2

second grade of either MAVO (a mid-level type of secondary school), or in HAVO (a higher-level type of secondary school).⁶

In the report-card meeting from which Extract (2.5) is taken, the math teacher acts as the main curator of the repertoire of this community of practice. He has already prepared a spreadsheet with an overview of the pupils' end results for each separate subject and a summary score that is calculated by adding the results up in a weighted manner. This score is used as part of a measurement system for determining whether the promotion of a pupil is a routine decision or needs further discussion. At the beginning of the meeting, the math teacher lists the rules of the system (see Table 2.1). His summary also serves as an instruction for a novice member in the team.

Only pupils whose results assign them to a discussion zone are discussed more elaborately before the team makes a decision by voting about the alternatives at hand. The team prefers decisions by ample majority.

The 'actual' work of discussing pupils in the report-card meeting is organised by looking at each pupil in the order in which s/he is listed on the spreadsheet. The math teacher who is also the informal chair indicates how the pupil in question should be handled according to the sorting rules. If the rules put a pupil into a discussion zone, he launches a discussion round. See lines 1–9 in Extract (2.5). Fabienne has a summary score that puts her into the discussion zone HAVO-2. The team has to decide whether she will be promoted to the next grade in HAVO (the higher type of high school) or whether she will continue at the MAVO level. The teacher for Dutch is the first to give his opinion (line 11). He thinks Fabienne should not go into the higher level school and he accounts for

⁶“MAVO” is an acronym for ‘mid-level general secondary education’, “HAVO” for ‘higher general secondary education’.

his position with an ample report of his experiences (lines 13–25). The teacher for French then joins his position and accounts for it by repeating the Dutch teacher's concluding assessment (lines 29–31):

(2.5) Report-card meeting. MA: math teacher; DU: Dutch; FR: French

- 01 MA → FAbiEnne.
 02 0.9
 03 bevoorderingspre- bespreking HA:vo twee.
promotion cus- discussion HAVO two.
 04 0.8
 05 °dus:° (.) eh g- gaan we weer:.
so: uh th- there we go again.
 06 0.9
 07 HAVo twee.
HAVO two.
 08 2.2
 09 → u::h, (3.4) >kan dit meisje naar havo twee.<
u::h can this girl go to HAVO two
 10 5.6
 11 DU → ik (0.7) denk 't niet.
I don't think so.
 12 1.4
 13 → ze::: e:h (0.4) doet 't heel redelijk, (2.1)
she:: uh is doing very reasonably,
 14 maar dan moet ze 'n aantal e:h (0.9)
but then she has to do a number u:h
 15 dan haalt ze eh hoog cijfer voor 'n proefwerk,
one time she gets a high grade for a test,
 16 vervolgens moet ze iets met 'n eh boekverslag
and the other time she has to do something with a book review
 17 'n spreekbeurt, (1.2) en da:n zou je juist bij hAA:r
a presentation, and then you would expect certainly in her case
 18 verwachte dat 't 'r goed uit zou ko:me, (1.1)
that she would make a good job of it,
 19 en dat valt dan tege
and the result is disappointing then.
 20 2.3
 21 DU dus van eh nou ga je le:hre, (0.2) en dan weet je wat 'r
so like uh now you start to work, and then you know exactly
 22 precies wat op je AFkomt, (0.3) >dan haalt ze het wel,<
what you will be faced with, then she is making it indeed
 23 en (dan:) wijk je daarvan af, dan wordt het moeilijk voor d'r.
and then you depart from this, then it becomes difficult for her.

- 24 1.4
- 25 → dus ik denk dat ze 'n goeie MA:vo leerling is.
so I think she is a good *Mavo pupil*.
- 26 3.1
- 27 MA Marianne? ((Marianne is the French teacher))
- 28 0.4
- 29 FR daar sluit ik me helemaal bij a(f).
I totally agree with this.
- 30 1.0
- 31 → goeie mavo leerling, (0.3) havo vin ↑ik (2.9) neeh!
good mavo pupil, Havo I think no!

At all levels of interactional organisation, the interaction in this fragment is shaped with the help of tools and routines that are part of the team's repertoire for deciding about pupil careers. Turn-taking in discussion episodes, for example, is organised in a way that gives each teacher ample opportunity to develop their position and to account for it in multi-unit turns such as DU's report in lines 11–25 (cf. Houtkoop and Mazeland 1985; Boden 1994).

The format and the content of the evidence on which the Dutch teacher bases his judgement are also constrained by community-specific ideas about what counts as a viable account. He does not tell a story about a single event but reports about patterns in Fabienne's conduct (lines 13–23; cf. Rehbein 1984). The opposition that DU builds between being good at reproducing knowledge (lines 14–15 and 21–22) but not being able to develop understanding and insight (lines 16–19 and 23) is also in line with shared norms about what makes a pupil suited for a HAVO career (cf. Berenst and Mazeland 2008).

The orientation to the activity system also explains how a seemingly neutral, descriptive term like *MAVO pupil* can be used for taking a position in the decision-making discussion (cf. Bergmann 1991; Jayyusi 1984). In his concluding summary assessment, the Dutch teacher characterises Fabienne as *a good MAVO pupil* (line 25), and the French teacher repeats this evaluative categorisation as a formulation of her agreeing position in line 31. In the context of the deliberation about Fabienne, this assessment works as a positive way of stating that

Fabienne cannot be promoted to HAVO-2. The measurement system and the sorting rules shape the discussion of a disputable case as a decision about mutually exclusive alternatives. If a pupil is classified as a good exemplar of the lower ranked option, the binary design of the sorting system provides the basis for understanding this as saying that she is not eligible for promotion to the (higher ranked) alternative option.

Sorting pupils in the report-card meeting thus is a task for which the community of practice has developed a partially routinised, task-specific activity system with its own modes of interactional organisation, tools, procedures, and norms, including specialised devices for categorizing and evaluating pupils. It makes the work of deciding about pupil careers in the school both interactionally feasible and institutionally accountable.

6 Conclusions

Human actors organise joint activities as discrete organizational domains. Participants actively delimit the activity from preceding, following, and/or parallel activities. The activity itself is accomplished through the use of ensembles of practices that make actions and organizations recognizable as actions and organizations in, for, and of a specific type of activity.

The focus of the paper was on small-scale activities in which participants cooperate to reach an outcome of a goal-directed course of action in a situated, locally controlled series of interactionally organized steps. Each step is characterised by its position in the series and all steps are organised as little projects that contribute to the progression of the activity. The order of steps may be cumulative (examples 2.2 and 2.4), cyclical (example 2.1), or a mixture of these forms (example 2.5). If talk constitutes the baseline of the activity, its overall progression may be organized in terms of its topical development in and around a series of multi-unit turns, or it may develop primarily as a succession of adjacency-pair type sequences with each next sequence building on the outcome of the preceding one. Talk has a different role in activities with a baseline consisting of practical actions (example 2.3). In such cases, it helps to coordinate actions and to mark interactionally relevant points

in the development of the interaction, or it is used to mark boundaries and to coordinate transitions. Steps have a recognizable formal structure with respect to preliminaries, beginning types, the direction of development, realization stages, and the completion state. Participants orient to this structure in order to anticipate interactionally relevant developments within and between steps.

The setting of routine activities may be usefully conceptualised as a situated activity system. Such ensembles are a part of a community's repertoire that provides ways of organizing and understanding activities.

Participants make sense of an utterance by analysing its features together with its environment of use as a unit. Both the local sequential context and the wider activity context contribute to the course-of-action meaning of a turn at talk and human actors orient to its multi-layered character by taking both levels into account. They integrate different semiotic fields, each of which contributes "in a simultaneous as well as a sequential fashion ... to the differential meaning-making practices that work together" (Goodwin 2013: 12) to construct particular actions as moves in, for, and of an ongoing activity.

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Social Encounters in Time and Space
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Mediated Settings**

Edited by Elisabeth Reber and
Cornelia Gerhardt



Elisabeth Reber · Cornelia Gerhardt
Editors

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Preface

The contributions to this volume (but that by Darren Reed) have grown out of projects conducted within the scientific network “Multimodality and embodied interaction” (Conveners: Cornelia Gerhardt, Saarland University, and Elisabeth Reber, University of Würzburg, <http://memi.uni-saarland.de/>). This research network, funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG; reference number GE 1137/4-1), is a tool especially designed for researchers in the early stages of their career (but also addressing senior colleagues) to meet at workshop meetings on a regular basis and discuss their work with senior experts in the field. The network was concerned with the forms and functions of communicative practices in recordings of naturally occurring face-to-face encounters from an interactional, multimodal perspective: Analytic interests included the use of bodily (i.e., gaze, facial expression, gesture, bodily posture, and proxemics), phonetic-prosodic and linguistic resources as well as the manipulation of objects for action formation in different linguistic and cultural communities (including English, German, Dutch, French, and Mandarin Chinese). Settings under study ranged from informal contexts to institutional interaction. Aiming at developing methodologies of analysing embodied social interaction, the network

combined interdisciplinary, cross-linguistic and -cultural, and interactional aspects in its research. Members have a methodological background in Conversation Analysis, Interactional Sociolinguistics and Interactional Linguistics.

We would like to thank all members as well as the invited guests to the network meetings, Ruth Ayaß (then University of Klagenfurth), Jörg Bergmann (University of Bielefeld), Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen (University of Helsinki), Harrie Mazeland (who subsequently became a network member; University of Groningen), Geoffrey Raymond (UCSB), Margret Selting (University of Potsdam), and Jürgen Streeck (The University of Texas at Austin) for making this exciting network possible.

Würzburg, Germany
Saarbrücken, Germany

Elisabeth Reber
Cornelia Gerhardt

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