Concurrent Operations on Talk: Notes on the Interactive Organization of Assessments

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The analysis of conversation has a strong relevance to the study of pragmatics. Thus in introducing the scope of pragmatics Levinson (1983: 284) notes that

It is not hard to see why one should look to conversation for insight into pragmatic phenomena, for conversation is clearly the prototypical kind of language usage, the form in which we are all first exposed to language - the matrix for language acquisition.

The field of study that has provided the most extensive analysis of the pragmatic organization of conversation is the line of inquiry initiated by the late Harvey Sacks and his colleagues.† Indeed

* We are very deeply indebted to Alessandro Duranti, William Hanks, Gail Jefferson and Emanuel Schegloff for insightful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this analysis. This paper was initially presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, September 9, 1982.

† For a detailed study of both work in conversation analysis, and how that work is relevant to pragmatics in general, see Levinson (1983). See Heritage (1984a) for more extensive treatment of the relationship between conversation analysis and the ethnomethodological tradition it emerged from within sociology, and Heritage (1985) for a detailed summary of work within the field. For collections of specific analysis see for example Atkinson and Heritage (1984), Button and Lee (in press), Schenkein (1978), and Zimmerman and West (1980). C. Goodwin (1981) and Heath (1986) examine in detail the
Levinson (1983: 285) observes that if, as we shall argue, the proper way to study conversational organization is through empirical techniques, this suggests that the largely philosophical traditions that have given rise to pragmatics may have to yield in the future to more empirical kinds of investigation of language use.

Though starting from an ethnomethodological point of view, Conversation Analysis has developed a very productive strategy for uncovering the interactions between speakers and hearers at the level of linguistic phenomena. This is largely due to the central role that conversation plays in human interaction. The central goal of conversation analysis research is the development of a social psychology of interaction that is grounded in the empirical study of speech and body movement within the interaction.

Heritage and Atkinson (1984: 1) note that the central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explication of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which speakers produce conduct and understand and deal with the behavior of others. A basic assumption throughout is Garfinkel's (1967: 1) proposal that these activities - producing conduct and understanding and dealing with it - are accomplished as the accountable products of common sets of procedures.

Much research within conversation analysis has investigated how subsequent utterances display an analysis of prior ones, and how such sequential organization is a basic resource utilized by participants for the production and understanding of action, and the talk that embodies it. Analysis in the present paper will focus on how individual utterances and single turns at talk are themselves constituted through an ongoing process of interaction between speaker and hearer. To do this we will examine the process of assessing or evaluating entities that are being talked about. Study of this process will provide an opportunity to investigate within a coherent framework of action a range of phenomena that are typically studied in isolation from each other.

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For more detailed analyses of the data and the means used

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Methodology, and in particular its ability to reveal how participants

There are limitations to it. For example, with it it is difficult to
determine precisely how participants attend to utterances as they are being
spoken. The treatment that a bit of talk gets in a next utterance may be quite
different from the way in which it was heard and dealt with as it was spoken;
indeed, rather than presenting a naked analysis of the prior talk
next utterances characteristically transform that talk in some fashion—deal
with it not in its own terms but rather in the way in which it is relevant to
the projects of subsequent speaker. Thus while subsequent utterances can
reveal crucial features of the analysis participants are making of prior talk
they do not show how participants hear the talk as it is emerging in the first
place, what they make of it then, and what consequences this has for their
actions, not in a next turn, but within the current turn. From another
perspective it can be noted that the stream of speech is highly organized in
syntactic and other ways. What, if any, consequences does such structure
have for the organization of action within a turn of talk; for example when
the utterance manifestations of a noun phrase emerge within the stream of
speech, can the distinctive properties of such a structure (including the
syntactic framework it displays, and the ordering of elements within it) be
used by participants as a resource for the organization of their interaction
with each other?

In brief it would be valuable to begin to uncover the types of
organization that a strip of talk provides, not simply for subsequent talk,
but for the organization of action as it is being spoken.

2 Data and Transcription

We will investigate in some detail sequences of conversation recorded on
audio and videotape. The tapes are from a larger sample of data recorded in
a range of natural settings. The data to be examined here are drawn
largely from a family dinner, a backyard picnic, and a telephone call between
two college students.

Talk is transcribed through use of the Jefferson transcription system (Sacks,
Schegloff and Jefferson 1974:731-733). The following are the features
most relevant to the present analysis:

- Italics indicate some form of emphasis, which may be
  signaled by changes in pitch and/or amplitude.

- A Left Bracket connecting talk on separate lines marks the point at
  which one speaker's talk overlaps the talk of another.

- A colon indicates that the sound just before the colon has
  been noticeably lengthened.

- A dash marks a sudden cut-off of the current sound.

- Intonation: Punctuation symbols are used to mark
  intonation changes rather than as grammatical symbols:
  - A period marks a falling contour.
  - A question mark indicates a raising
  contour.
  - A comma indicates a falling-raising
  contour.

- A series of T's preceding a colon marks silence in seconds
  and tenths of seconds.

- A series of T's preceding a dash marks silence in seconds
  and tenths of seconds.

- A Right Bracket closing the line after the current line.

- A Left Bracket opening the line before the current line

- A colon indicates that the talk following it is
  spoken with noticeably lowered volume.

- A series of `h's preceded by a dot marks an Inbreath.

- Double parentheses enclose material that is not part of the
  talk being transcribed, for example a comment by the transcriber if
  the talk was spoken in some special way.

- A degree sign indicates that the talk following it is
  spoken with noticeably lowered volume.

2. For more detailed analysis of the data and the means used
to obtain it see C. Goodwin (1981).
Assessments

One activity that both speakers and recipients perform within the turn at talk is evaluating in some fashion persons and events being described within their talk. The following provide examples of such assessments:

(1) G. I 26:22:40

(2) 6.84:10:30

Eileen: Curt: -> Th

This guy had, a beautiful, thirty two O:lds.

In both cases speakers preface descriptive nouns with the word “beautiful” and thus evaluate the phenomena referenced by these nouns (i.e., in #1 Eileen assesses the “Irish Setter” she is talking about by describing it as “beautiful”).

The word “assessment” can in fact be used to refer to a range of events that exist on analytically distinct levels of organization. In view of this some definitional issues arise:

1. The term can be used to describe a structural unit that occurs at a specific place in the stream of speech, for example the adjective “beautiful.” For clarity this sense of the term, which is used to designate a specific, segmental unit in the stream of speech can be called an assessment segment.

2. In addition to using phenomena that can be neatly segmented in the stream of speech, such as assessment adjectives, participants can also display their involvement in an assessment through nonsegmental phenomena such as intonation, and also through recognizable displays of orientation toward the phenomenon. Though the term “assessment” is sometimes confused with “evaluation,” the term which is used to designate a specific, segmental event in the stream of speech can be called an assessment unit which is used to designate a specific, segmental event in the stream of speech.

3. For other relevant analysis of how assessments are organized within conversation see C. Goodwin (1986), M.H. Goodwin (1980), and Pomerantz (1978, 1984a).

4. Frequently the left boundary of an assessment is especially difficult to precisely locate in the stream of speech. Signals are limited to specific segmental phenomena in this way (and moreover that signals that precede the explicit assessment term, for example intensity markers, might also be part of the activity of assessment), being able to talk about an assessment occurring at a particular place in the stream of speech, for example a specific place in the stream of speech, offers great advantages for starting analysis of the larger activity of performing assessments - e.g., once an assessment segment is located an analyst can look in detail at the different types of action that not only co-occur with this event but also precede and follow it. Moreover participants themselves attend to the distinctiveness and salience of such segmental phenomena; for example they distinguish an assessment segment from events that precede it and treat it as a place different from other phenomena in the turn at talk. The activity of assessment also has its limits to work of pragmatic uses of phenomena, for example a participant’s preface the word “beautiful” with his turn at talk, but also this turn at talk is also relevant to the activity of assessment. In this sense the evaluation of the turn at talk is relevant to the activity of assessment, for example a participant’s preface the word “beautiful” with his turn at talk, but also this turn at talk is also relevant to the activity of assessment.
indeed one principal resource for displaying evaluation.

5. With respect to the close ties between evaluation and intonation note that Pike, in his seminal study of English intonation (Pike 1945), argued that the principal function of intonation was to show the attitude of the speaker toward what he was saying. While such a view of the function of intonation is clearly inadequate as a general analysis of the work that intonation does, it does capture and highlight the way in which intonation can tie together phenomena being talked about, with the speaker’s alignment to, and experience of, those phenomena. Such analysis of the way in which intonation can display speaker’s evaluation of the talk being produced is most relevant to the structure and organization of assessment actions.

6. In his analysis of narrative Labov (1972) classifies evaluation as one distinct element of narrative structure, but also notes that unlike other features of narrative which occur at specific places within the overall structure of a narrative (for example the coda occurs at the end) evaluation can pervade the narrative. Such analysis supports the argument about the distribution of assessment signals that is being made here.

Several issues relevant to the analysis of assessments on this level of organization can be briefly noted. First, while most analysis of speech acts has focused on actions embodied by complete sentences or turns, assessments constitute a type of speech act that can occur in the midst of an utterance. Subsequent analysis in this paper will investigate some of the consequences of this. Assessment actions are not only peripheral to the production of the phenomena they address, but also central to their organization. Moreover, assessments provide resources for the interactional deployment of the experience of the agent assessing an event in his or her phenomenal world, including their evaluation of what they have witnessed. By virtue of the public character of this display, others can judge the competence of the assessor to properly evaluate the events they encounter (such a process is central to the organization of assessments into a speech act). Assessment actions can also be used to display the experience of others in their interaction with the event being assessed. For example, if someone comments on a recent movie that they enjoyed, the listener can respond with an assessment action that expresses their agreement or disagreement. This can provide resources for the interactional deployment of the experience of others in the interaction. In this paper, we will examine some of the consequences of this. Assessment actions can also be used to display evaluations of other types of phenomena, such as the events being assessed. For example, if someone comments on a recent political event, they may use an assessment action to express their opinion on the matter. This can provide resources for the interactional deployment of the experience of others in their interaction with the political event.
5. what they see others are doing, and the recognizable structure of the emerging assessment activity itself (a topic to be explored in detail later in this paper).

Finally the word assessable will be used to refer to the entity being evaluated by an assessment.

In subsequent analysis the context in which the word "assessment" is being used will usually indicate which of the several senses of the term noted above is relevant at that point. Therefore these distinctions will not be marked in the text unless necessary.

When assessing does the fact that a speaker doesn't just describe something that can be responded to, and participated in, in a special way place an assessment in her talk, does an immediate subsequent assessment from a recipient signal that the talk marked by placing an assessment in her talk speaker secures an immediate reciprocal affect display? The talk marked by placing an assessment in a recipient's response is thus not treated simply as a description, but rather as something that can be responded to, and participated in, in a special way.

4. Assessments that Precede Assessables

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4.2 Differential Treatment of Talk as it Emerges and When it Reaches Completion

The issue arises as to what relevance such sequential placement has for the organization of action within the turn. For example, does access to multiple places to operate on the same strip of talk provide participants with resources for the organization of their action that they would not otherwise have, and if so, how do they make use of these resources? One way to investigate this issue is to look at how this talk is treated when it eventually reaches completion. Looking again at the data, it can be seen that the treatment of this talk was projected for it before it began (arrows mark points of laughter in the preface, climax, and response sequences):

For more detailed analysis of how assessments contrast with continuers, see C. Goodwin (1986).
different interactive activities, and deal with the talk that it contains in

4.3 Pre-Positioned Assessment Adjectives as Guides for Hearers

Let us now examine in more detail the interactive organization of the noun phrase. The way in which its components might be attended to as it emerges through time. It can be observed that within it speaker's assessment term occurs in a particular position relative to the object being assessed, i.e., it occurs before that object. Thus by the time the object itself emerges recipients have been alerted to hear it in a particular way. The issue arises as to whether recipients do in fact track the emerging structure of a noun phrase on this level of detail. Is it the case that at the completion of the word "beautiful" a recipient will deal with the next words to be spoken in a different way than he would have before hearing this term?

Features of these data not yet examined provide some evidence that indeed recipients do deal with the interactive import of emerging talk on this level of detail. Just after saying "beautiful" speaker hesitates. Paul, the party who experienced with teller the events being described, appears to interpret this hesitation as the beginning of a word search; just after it he provides the projected next item in speaker's talk, the words "Irish setter," beginning an instant before speaker herself says this. However, Paul does not simply speak these words; rather through his actions while speaking he makes visible an alignment toward them that is congruent with the assessment just made by the speaker. This action is recognized by the recipient and reciprocated, with the recipient recognizing this action as a kind of non-verbal assessment marker, and performing a prototypical vocalized reaction.

Hence, just after saying "beautiful," Paul hesitates. However, Paul does not simply speak these words; rather through his actions while speaking he makes visible an alignment toward them that is congruent with the assessment just made by the speaker. This action is recognized by the recipient and reciprocated, with the recipient recognizing this action as a kind of non-verbal assessment marker, and performing a prototypical vocalized reaction.

This in the very next moment after Eileen says "beautiful," PaulCarl says "Irish setter." But what happens here is also relevant to the analysis of affect and an interaction phenomenon. When in assessing a partner, one can even bridge actions performed by that person that are not directly related to the assessment. This is especially true for non-verbal actions, such as headshakes, which can play a significant role in affecting the recipient's interpretation of the assessment.

Debbie

Shakes

Head

Assessment

---

Thiss Senter ("ReVeRteRdy")

An this beautiful, ("I like Senter"

Debbie

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4.3 Pre-Positioned Assessment Adjectives as Guides for Hearers

For more detailed analysis of the way in which such a headshake is performed, see M.H. Goodwin (1980).
With recipient initially taking the way in which speaker has laid out the details of the ice cream as given and not questioning it, the recipient of the original description appears to have aligned with the description provided by speaker. The second version of the description, however, includes the term "homemade," which is marked as essential for proper understanding of the description. When speaker returns to the ice cream and mentions "homemade" before describing the type of ice cream, recipient begins to treat the talk in progress as an assessable. This change in alignment appears to be responsive to the detail in which speaker organizes her emerging description. Speaker interrupts the noun phrase in progress before it has reached a recognizable completion and redoes it, only this time placing the word "homemade" before the type of ice cream. Just after this word, over the second production of "peach," recipient begins to treat the talk in progress as an assessable: 9

POST-POSITIONED ASSESSMENTS

In the data so far examined the assessment term and the phenomenon being assessed have been packaged together within a single unit, for example within a single noun phrase. It is, however, possible to perform these activities separately. For example, in the following "asparagus pie" is introduced in a first sentence and then assessed in a second:

10. Constructions such as this, in which an entity is introduced in a first structure and then assessed in a second, have been the subject of extensive analysis from a number of different perspectives. Thus linguists have studied such structures both in terms of syntactic processes such as left dislocation (Gundel 1975; Ross 1967), and in terms of how topics, and comments on those topics, are organized with respect to the contrast between "given" and "new" information (Chafe 1976; Li and Thompson 1976). It should however be noted that while organizing information is a very important aspect of the discourse process itself as a left-dislocated structure, and new information which is referred to the "development and "given" information is a very important aspect of the discourse organization of such constructions, information management is nonetheless only one of a range of functions that such structures can perform (Silverstein 1976). Thus, as will be seen later in this paper, in many cases reception of information involves a shift of perspective, such as from "given" in the description to "new" in the assessment. This shift can be understood to involve a change in the focus of attention between "given" and "new" information.

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5.2 Post-Positioned Assessments as Techniques for Displaying Closure

Thus the assessment occurs after the assessable has been made available and is the only activity done in the speaker’s second sentence. The ability to perform assessments in this fashion is useful to participants in a number of different ways. For example, with such a structure participants are able to assess phenomena that would not fit neatly within a single unit. In the following speaker has provided an extended description of a movie she has seen.

5.1 Post-Positioned Assessments as Techniques for Displaying Closure

The issue arises as to how actions such as these are perceived. The issue arises as to how actions such as these are perceived. The issue arises as to how actions such as these are perceived. The issue arises as to how actions such as these are perceived. The issue arises as to how actions such as these are perceived. The issue arises as to how actions such as these are perceived.
Looking at these data from a slightly different perspective, it can also be noted that speakers' heightened participation in the activity of assessing begins before the assessment term itself. Earlier it was seen that immediately upon the occurrence of an assessment adjective recipients could begin to treat the talk to follow as an assessment. This raises the possibility that by attending to the pre-positioned intensifier recipients of sentences of the type now being examined might be able to align themselves to the emerging talk as an assessment before the assessment term itself is actually produced. Indeed when the actions of hearers to these utterances are examined it can be seen that post-positioned assessments are found in both the structuring and the assessment of an assessment activity. Rather than one that would follow immediately from the assessment term, it was seen that immediately upon the occurrence of an assessment adjective recipients could begin to treat the talk to follow as an assessment.
in both cases recipients start to produce an assessment of their own just as the intensifier comes to completion:

Thus at the point where speaker actually produces her assessment term recipient is simultaneously providing her own assessment of the same material. Such activity has a number of consequences for the present analysis. First, it provides a clear demonstration of how the production of an assessment can constitute a social activity involving the collaborative action of multiple participants. Second, the placement of recipient's action supports the possibility that she is tracking ... It would thus appear that subcomponents of speaker's utterance, such as the intensifier, as well as the details of its sound production contribute to the interactive organization of the actions of speaker and hearer in the activity they jointly engage in. In this sense the emerging structure of speaker's utterance, and the details of the way in which it is spoken, constitute one aspect of the context that recipients are actively attending to within the turn as consequential for the organization of their own actions. Moreover that context, and the utterance itself, are intrinsically dynamic, and are attended to as such by recipients and speakers alike. Hence the possibility that she is tracking ... It would thus appear that subcomponents of speaker's utterance, and the details of its sound production contribute to the interactive organization of the actions of speaker and hearer in the activity they jointly engage in. In this sense the emerging structure of speaker's utterance, and the details of the way in which it is spoken, constitute one aspect of the context that recipients are actively attending to within the turn as consequential for the organization of their own actions. Moreover that context, and the utterance itself, are intrinsically dynamic, and are attended to as such by recipients and speakers alike.

6.1 Extended Overlap

The assessments produced by recipients in these data take the form of complete substantial sentences in their own right. In that they are placed not after speaker's action has come to completion, but while speaker's assessment is also in progress a state of extended simultaneous talk by different participants results (i.e., in length and structure something more than overlap of ongoing talk by continuers or brief assessment tokens such as "oh wow").

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14. For other analysis of how the way in which recipient projects about the future course of a sentence are relevant to the organization of their interaction with speaker see Jefferson (1973) and Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). For analysis of how deictic terms dynamically modify emerging context as an utterance unfolds see Hanks (1986).

15. For more detailed analysis of the interactive organization of brief assessments by recipients see C. Goodwin (1986). Assessments by recipient can range from fully referential and predicational ones down to relatively desemanticized displays of empathy, etc., that lack an explicit referent and evaluation, but do display affective involvement. When recipients make projections about the future course of an utterance, they are not dealing with it as a monolithic whole, or simply as a static string of symbols tied together through grammar and syntax, but rather as a process that emerges through time and carries with it an expanding horizon of projective possibilities that are relevant to the actions that recipient might engage in while acting as a hearer to the utterance.
of assessing it, given its context and how it is interpreted.

If one also considers that the context of both the assessment and the activity is multidimensional, assessing the same event can also be seen as taking into account the participants' perspectives. In this way, the role of a co-participant who is providing a commentary on the assessment can influence how the assessment is perceived by all actors involved. The assessment's success depends on how well it aligns with the expectations of the audience. Thus, the manner in which the assessment is presented is crucial for its success.

6.2 Differential Access as an Organizing Feature of Concurrent Assessments

Though the talk of both speaker and recipient in #4 and #5 is assessing the same material, each party says rather different things. Is such variation simply a result of different perspectives, or does it reveal further aspects of the phenomenon the participants are orienting to as relevant for the organization of their activity? Looking more carefully at precisely what is said, it can be noted that in its details the talk of each party attends to the access each has to the phenomena being assessed. For example, Hyla with her initial use of "it's" makes reference to an actual movie she has seen, and assesses it in unequivocal terms. Nancy, however, by saying "That sounds so: gooo:od?" attends to what she is assessing as being available only through Hyla's current description of it. Similarly in #4 Dianne, who depicts herself as having directly experienced in the past the pie she is now describing, makes reference to that specific pie. However, Clacia, by putting her assessment in present tense, deals not with the specifics but rather with the general idea of the pie. This is visible in her talk, where she constructs her assessment in conditional tense, saying "Oh: Go: ood that'd be fo::t::n::ac::e." Here, by constructing her assessment in this way, she makes visible the limited access she has to the phenomena she is assessing.

Thus, one of the reasons that the assessments of the separate participants differ from each other is that each has different access to and experience of the event being assessed. This feature provides organization for a range of phenomena implicated in the construction of each utterance, such as the choice of particular words and verb tenses. By constructing their assessments in this way, participants also attend in detail to how they have been organized relative to each other by the telling in progress. For example, the different positions of describer and describee are shown to remain relevant even when both are assessing in a similar fashion the events which have been described. This is visible in the way they have been organized relative to each other by the telling in progress.

In brief, despite their apparent simplicity, assessments show a view of the assessable as something perceived by an actor who both takes up a particular alignment to it and sees the assessable from a particular perspective. This view of the assessable as something perceived by an actor who both has access to and experience of the event being assessed is multidimensional and complex, reflecting the dynamic nature of the interaction between the participants and the context in which the assessment is made.

This is not, however, necessarily a situation requiring a remedy.
differences in participant perspective have a temporal organization as well. To note one simple example, in #1 Paul, the party who saw with speaker the dog being assessed, was able to act just after the pre-positioned assessment adjective was spoken. However at that point the assessable itself was not yet available to speaker’s addressed recipient, Debbie, and indeed her response occurred only after the assessable had been described. Issues of emerging perspective within the activity of assessing are clearly relevant to other processes as well, such as ways in which recipients project from an intensifier that an assessment is about to occur.

6.3 Making Visible Congruent Understanding

Though the talk of the separate parties shows that each is viewing the assessable from a different perspective, in other ways the assessments do not reveal such a difference. For example, the assessable is clearly visible to all parties involved. Thus, the participants in #4 both speaker and recipient assess asparagus pie as the phenomena being assessed in a similar way. Moreover, by virtue of the way in which each assessment relates to the phenomena, the assessments also show that the talk so far produced has provided materials (for example the intensifier) that strongly suggest, and perhaps actually project, a favorable assessment. Hence, when speaker produces her assessment, she is in agreement with Dianne’s. Indeed, with her nods she marks that talk nonvocally as an agreement. Then, the participants in #4 both speaker and recipient assess asparagus pie as the phenomena being assessed in a similar way. With the content of her utterance she states a view of the assessable that is compatible with Dianne’s. Second, with her nods she marks that talk nonvocally as an agreement. Third, with her nods she marks that talk nonvocally as an agreement. Fourth, with her nods she marks that talk nonvocally as an agreement.

Goodwin (1981:111-119) and Goodwin and Jefferson (1983) offer other analyses of displaying congruent understanding. C.

Further support for active attention to such an issue is found when a visual record of the actions of the participants in #4 is examined. As Clacia produces her assessment she nods toward Dianne: With her nods Clacia proposes that the talk she is producing, and the position taken up through that talk, is in agreement with Dianne’s. Indeed, taken as a whole the actions she performs here provide a strong display of position taken up through talk that is in agreement with Dianne’s. Indeed, taken as a whole the actions she performs here provide a strong display of position taken up through talk that is in agreement with Dianne’s.

6.3.1.6 Making Visible Congruent Understanding

Assessment: reveal not just neutral objects in the world, but an alignment taken up toward phenomena by a particular actor. Moreover, this alignment can be of some moment in revealing significant attributes of the actor. To this extent, and the way in which they establish a pre-positioned assessment adjective can be a powerful indicator of the assessable. Nevertheless, the way in which they establish a pre-positioned assessment adjective can be a powerful indicator of the assessable.

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For other analysis of displaying congruent understanding see C.
Thus with the content of her talk, nonvocal displays about it, and its sequential placement, Clacia argues strongly that her view of the assessable is congruent with Dianne’s.

It is being argued that recipients produce concurrent assessments by making projections about events which have not yet occurred. If this is indeed the case then it would be expected that on ... position being argued in this paper, such an event would constitute strong evidence that recipients are in fact engaged in the activity of anticipating future events on the basis of the limited information currently available to them.

The following provides an example of how a recipient’s concurrent assessment can be erroneous. Consider the following sequence, where a second speaker is responding to a first speaker’s description:

In the beginning of this sequence Emma describes a “DARLING DRESS” and Nancy replies with concurrent assessments in lines 5, 13, and 20. In line 19 Emma starts to move towards a recognizable assessment, following which Nancy produces an elaborated, appreciative “... A...”. The positive affect displayed by Nancy is quite congruent with the favorable way the dress has been described in the sequence until this point. However, it turns out that the dress was not what the first speaker meant, and by relying on cues of the type being analyzed in the present paper Nancy has attempted to produce an error in a response to what has just been said.

Pomerantz (1984a) describes how recipients prepared to disagree frequently delay a response to what has just been said in order to anticipate disagreement. In the following exchange, first speaker Emma describes a “DARLING DRESS” and second speaker Nancy produces concurrent assessments in the sequence.

Nancy's concurrent assessments are quite congruent with the favorable way the dress has been described in the sequence until this point. However, it turns out that the dress was not what the first speaker meant, and by relying on cues of the type being analyzed in the present paper Nancy has attempted to produce an error in a response to what has just been said.
Actually produced, but the talk has progressed in ways quite incompatible with her projection of it, with the effect that she is responding inappropriately to what Emma is saying. Such data provide a strong demonstration of how projecting what another is about to say so as to concurrently coparticipate in it constitutes a contingent accomplishment. Fortunately the emerging structure of interaction provides resources for moving past, and attempting to recover from, such... producing a concurrent assessment to Emma's description of the weather, only this time her response is quite appropriate.

Returning now to example #4 we find that Dianne also performs a number of relevant nonvocal actions. As she produces the assessment term she lowers her head into a nod while... Dianne's nonvocal behavior like her talk seems to display a progression toward heightened involvement in the assessment as her utterance unfolds. These actions become most intense over the assessment itself, and indeed at this point in the talk quite a range of both vocal and nonvocal action is occurring. The ensemble of things done over the assessment does not, however, seem a collection of separate actions, but rather integrated elements of a single interactive activity of assessment. Moreover the visible behavior of the speaker, as well as the interaction, provide a range of different possible interpretations of the assessment. However it seems most relevant to note that the nods are solicited or at least triggered by the body movement of speaker's head and upper body in a way that shows heightened involvement over the intensifier, and indeed at this point in the talk...
Once they have been validly performed they cannot be immediately redone. Assessments, however, are repeatable. Moreover while some repeatable actions are used to progressively operate on new material for recognizable actions are used to progressively operate on new material for recognizable actions, however, are recognizable. Moreover while some repeatable actions are used to progressively operate on new material for recognizable actions, however, are recognizable.
The use of both vocal and nonvocal phenomena to produce repeated assessments of the assessable. 21

Paul's continued assessments co-occur with Eileen's return to her story. It can be noted that Paul's talk is produced with noticeably lowered volume and that he does not orient toward the same recipients Eileen is then gazing at. He thus seems to produce minimal ... he shows others present that though that talk overlaps Eileen's, it should not be heard as competitive with hers, and indeed she does not treat it this way. Moreover, even while continuing in the assessment, Paul seems to remain aware of the emerging structure of Eileen's talk, and to organize at least some features of his actions in terms of it. For example as she comes to the completion of the background material in her story he brings his assessment activity to a close and returns his gaze to her as the climax segment of the story is entered (for more detailed analysis of how participants might attend to the emerging structure of a story to organize even actions unrelated to the story see C.)

Returning to #4 it is found that just after the assessment produced concurrently with Dianne's, Clacia repeats that assessment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Clacia  | 2:45 | Good.
| Cladia | 2:45 | Good.

However, during this second assessment Clacia acts differently than she had during the first. Thus the second assessment is spoken with markedly lowered volume (this is indicated in the transcript by the smaller typeface). Moreover, while speaking Cladia actually withdraws from her coparticipant. This is consistent with the ongoing orientation toward the talk in progress by the speaker, which has been lowered. However, during this second assessment Cladia acts differently than her.

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what is occurring here are successive stages of a single natural activity that emerges, comes to a climax and is then withdrawn from.

6.5 Assessments as Resources for Closing Topics

Instead of just analyzing these different participation structures as successive stages of an unfolding activity it is also useful to examine in more detail how the possibility of investing assessments with different kinds of participation might provide participants with resources for the organization of their activity. For example, assessments are one of the characteristic activities used to exit from larger topics. How such assessments are spoken it is found that frequently they are operating not only to exit from what was being talked about in the story to topic, but that in addition the different participation possibilities provided by assessments are systematically being used to bring the heightened mutual involvement in the subject of the talk to a close. A simple example is found shortly after the sequences analyzed in 4 & 5. In the interaction below, Dianne has just described in greater detail the asparagus pie that Jeff made. As Dianne moves from a description of the pie to an assessment of it, she noticeably reduces the volume of her talk while simultaneously withdrawing her gaze from Clancia. Thus she has not only moved into a different kind of talk (e.g. from description to assessment), but also changed the nature of her involvement in that talk and the structure of her orientation to coparticipant. Despite the apparent simplicity of what Dianne has done, the changes produced are in fact rather intricate. Thus some of what happens — the move from description to assessment, the reduction in volume and the withdrawal of gaze from recipient — displays heightened involvement in the substance of the talk. The assessment itself displays heightened involvement in the substance of the talk, as Dianne moves from a description of the pie to an assessment of it.
such a way is to implicitly assume that topics run out only because participants lose interest in them. If a topic has in fact engrossed the attention of those talking, this would be a very poor way to end it. On the other hand, one would not want to talk about that topic forever. Thus one might want to look for ways of dealing with talk in progress that show heightened appreciation of it, without however proposing that others need continue talking about it forever. Dianne's assessment has precisely these properties. She is able to show coparticipant (for example with her gaze withdrawal) that she is not awaiting further talk from her, while simultaneously appreciating what has just been said. Indeed one of the reasons why assessments might be so extensively used to close stories and topics is that they provide this mixture of participation possibilities for organizing the interaction then in progress.

The exchange of affect provided by the exchange of assessments gives the withdrawal the intimacy of a parting touch, in which the character of the apparent referent of the assessment becomes far less important than the shared affect and coexperience the participants display to each other. In these data, Dianne's assessment is immediately followed by the following assessment of Clcia, which in turn is immediately followed by the withdrawal of Clcia's gaze from her coparticipant. Second, the talk produced by Clcia responds to the assessment Dianne just made: Her talk is produced with not simply lowered volume, but drastically reduced volume (indicated in the transcript by the two degree signs before it.) Clcia begins to speak with a marked upgrade of her assessment. Her talk is produced with not simply lowered cooperation, but also with a marked upgrade of her assessment. Her talk is produced with not simply lowered cooperation, but also with a marked upgrade of her assessment.

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through the process of phased withdrawal, it is quite appropriate to their current actions.

Refusal by Recipient to Coparticipate in the Assessment

In the data so far examined recipients have accepted speaker's proposals about how the entity being assessed should be evaluated. However not all assessments are responded to in such a felicitous fashion. Recipients can refuse to treat something that speaker proposes should be assessed as assessable, and in so doing call into question a speaker's competence to properly evaluate the phenomenon being assessed. Example #2, which has not yet been examined in detail, provides data in which this happens. By looking at it we will be able to investigate some of the consequences that producing something as an assessable has for both the party making the assessment, and the talk in progress.

This utterance was produced as speaker was beginning an extended story. In form it is quite similar to #1:

Mike: This guy had a beautiful thirty-two Olds.
Curt: What! you mean thirty-two Olds?
Mike: Yes.
Curt: Oh, really original.
Mike: Oh, yes, really original.
Curt: What! you mean thirty-two Olds?
Mike: Well I can't say they're of any extreme
c. 1986) 33

For more extended analysis of the organization of engagement see C. Goodwin (1986), chapter 3. For more extended analysis of the organization of engagement see C. Goodwin (1986), chapter 3.

23. For more extended analysis of how speakers analyze the absence of response and how recipients respond to the absence of response to their talk and use that absence to pursue such response see C. Goodwin (1986).

22. For more extended analysis of the organization of engagement see C. Goodwin (1986), chapter 3.
visible interactively the absence of such a response, Curt produces further talk:

By providing further information about the car being described Curt shows that he is still awaiting a response to his earlier talk. Moreover the word chosen is informative about the type of response he is seeking. Specifically this term provides recipient with further grounds for treating what has just been described as something to be assessed. Indeed "original" was the very first attribute used by Curt to assess the cords two minutes earlier (c.f. #8).

At this point Mike does provide a response:

Mike's nod receipts Curt's talk but in no way assesses it. Rather the nod seems to constitute a type of continuer, an action which deals with the talk received as preliminary to further talk, rather than as something to be appreciated in its own right (C. Goodwin 1986; Schegloff 1980). Insofar as Curt's talk is recognizably one of the early stages of a story it is quite possible to deal with such talk in this way. However, as #1 demonstrated it is also possible to deal with such talk in a different way, something to be appreciated in its own right as commentary on the story in which this turn has been exchanged as preliminary to further talk which deals with the talk received as something to be assessed directly. Thus by responding in the way that he does Mike provides a response to what Curt has said, without action receiving can do no participant in this way by responding to his talk in this way. Therefore, if Curt's talk is to be assessed it is critical that Mike actually assess it and indeed Curt will have failed to provide this assessment if Mike does not respond to it. Moreover, this talk is part of a story which has been exchanged as preliminary to further talk which deals with the talk received as something to be appreciated in its own right.

Mike, not reciprocating Curt, moves back into no way assesses it. Rather the nod...
Assessing Phenomena Experienced Only Through Talk

One might wonder how Mike, or any recipient who hasn't actually himself experienced the assessable being described, could be expected to evaluate it. Quite clearly, as the data examined earlier in this paper demonstrate, recipients do assess phenomena available to them only through a speaker's talk. What is involved in such a process? Some issues relevant to this question will be briefly noted. First, as has already been seen, recipients do organize their assessment with attention to ways in which their access to the assessable differs from speaker's. Second, recipients may choose to trust the competence of speaker to properly evaluate what she is treating as an assessable. Third, it would appear that the assessable character of at least some phenomena can be adequately established entirely through an appropriate description of them. For example, neither "homemade ice cream" nor "Cord" is preceded by an explicit assessment term (such as "beautiful") but recipients receive both with assessments. This suggests that independent of the specifics of the particular entity being described, its membership in the classes of phenomena identified by those terms is itself adequate grounds for finding it to be an assessable. As Curt says elsewhere, "Any Cord is nice."

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some occasions assessments performed on phenomena in such a position might nonetheless also be relevant to the larger organizational structure of the emerging story. Indeed attending to the kind of work that assessments could do here would help us to uncover in more detail the range of activities that participants are engaged in while attending the initiation of a story. In Curt’s story it is eventually revealed that the ex-wife of the owner of this car caused its engine to blow up by stuffing a rag in its radiator hose. After the story reaches its climax the participants deal with it by debating what would be proper punishment for the ex-wife — the mildest (and only printable) suggestion being Curt’s “I’d kill y’know that’d be enough t’go after a shotgun with.” Quite clearly punishment like this would not be appropriate for someone who damaged the car. Indeed, in order to properly punish a story for some infringement, one must first have a concept of what is being punished. Thus, when Curt introduces the car early in the story he is faced with the task of aligning his recipients to it in a particular way. A process well suited to not only displaying alignment, but securing it from others, is the activity of assessments. When used to introduce entities that will figure prominently in a story a noun phrase containing an assessment adjective, such as “a beautiful thirty-two O’Ids”, contains within its structure elements capable of performing two of the central tasks posed during story initiation: making phenomena available for subsequent reference and aligning participants to those phenomena in an appropriate fashion. From such a perspective Curt’s attempt to have the car evaluated in a particular way would appear to be neither idiosyncratic, nor simply an attempt to remedy an affront to his judgment, but rather a systematic part of the work he is faced with in preparing his recipients to understand what he is to tell them in an appropriate way, or at least the way that he wants them to understand it.

Assessments are found to occur in a diverse range of sequential positions within talk, for example, as subordinate parts of sentences dealing primarily with other matters, in the background segments of stories, and as extended sequences when stories and topics are brought to completion. The phenomena just noted would suggest that the assessments in these apparently heterogeneous positions might in fact be related to each other. For example, the understanding of a story displayed in a sequence of assessments at its conclusion is intimately tied to ways in which participants were led to see characters and events in the story when they were first introduced. Assessments thus constitute a most important resource for collaboratively building within the talk itself an interpretive context that will be utilized for the analysis of subsequent talk and action. In brief, despite their apparent simplicity assessments constitute one central resource available to participants for organizing the perception and interpretation of what is being talked about, providing them with the ability to not simply display alignment to ongoing talk, but establish and negotiate that alignment through a systematic process of interaction while the talk being aligned to is still in progress.

The data which have been investigated here have enabled us to investigate a range of issues relevant to how assessments are organized as an activity within the turn at talk. One of the very interesting things about assessments is the way in which they integrate a range of phenomena occurring within the turn that are frequently studied quite separately. Insofar as assessments are achieved through the collaborative action of multiple participants they provide an opportunity within the context of social interaction for the exploration and refinement of our understanding of the complex interplay of phenomena that occur within the turn at talk. One of the very interesting aspects of assessments is that they are often found in a diverse range of sequential positions within talk, in a diverse range of semantic domains where they are found to occur. Assessments are found to occur in a diverse range of sequential positions within talk, in a diverse range of semantic domains where they are found to occur. Assessments are found to occur in a diverse range of sequential positions within talk, in a diverse range of semantic domains where they are found to occur. Assessments are found to occur in a diverse range of sequential positions within talk, in a diverse range of semantic domains where they are found to occur.
what is happening in the stream of speech, and the recognizable structure of the activity itself. The study of assessments thus permits analysis in an integrated fashion of a range of phenomena relevant to the organization of language, culture, cognition and emotion in the midst of actual interaction.

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