Displays of uncertainty and proximal deontic claims: The case of proposal sequences

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Abstract

Joint planning consists of people making proposals for future actions and events, and others accepting or rejecting these proposals. While proposals convey their speakers' judgments of some ideas as feasible, however, in anticipation of and in an attempt to pre-empt the recipients' rejection of their proposals, the speakers may begin to express doubt with the feasibility of their proposals. It is such "post-proposal displays of uncertainty," and their interactional corollaries, that this paper focuses on. Drawing on video-recorded planning meetings as data, and conversation analysis as a method, I describe three ways for the recipients to respond to post-proposal displays of uncertainty: the recipients may (1) *overcome*, (2) *confirm*, or (3) *dispel* their co-participants' doubts. Even if the outcome of the proposal, in each case, is its abandonment, the analysis points out important differences in how these response options treat the first speakers' "proximal deontic claims" – that is, their implicit assertions of rights to control the participants' local interactional agenda. The paper concludes by discussing the idea of proximal deontics with reference to other related notions.

1. Introduction

Joint planning is an activity that people in everyday life commonly engage in. It consists of people making proposals for future actions and events, and others accepting or rejecting these proposals. While proposals convey their speakers' judgment of some ideas as feasible, the speakers may afterwards change their minds. This is what happens in Extracts 1 and 2, drawn from interactions where pastors and cantors plan their joint work tasks.

```
(1)(MT 30:12)
01 C:    herran siunauksenhan vois  laulaa.
         benediction-GEN-CLI   could sing-INF
         the benediction could be sung.

02       (0.4)

03 C:    #kanssa että#,
          also   PRT
         #also#,
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04        (0.5)

05 C: -> .h vai oliko    niin että Marjaana   puhuu.
             or  be-PST-Q PRT  PRT  FemaleName speak
          .h or was it so that Marjaana speaks.


(2)(KM1 6:41)
01 P:     voisko se olla toi, (2.0) viel tohon aikaan
          could it be that, (2.0) still at that time

02        vuodesta toi suvivirsi?
          of the year that Summer hymn?

03        (2.0)

04 P:     kesäkuun lopussa,
          at the end of June,

05        (4.0)

06 P: -> vai pitäskö se olla joku (.) nuorten virsi
          or should it be some (.) hymn for the youth
```

In both instances, the participants are preparing the next Sunday's mass. In Extract 1, a cantor (C) makes a proposal on how the Benediction (Lord's Blessing) could be realized (line 1). After a silence (line 2), an increment (line 3), and yet another silence (line 4), the cantor, however, invokes a potential objection to her idea (line 5). Similarly, in Extract 2, a pastor (P) makes a proposal for the Hymn of the Day (lines 1–2), but later, after two lengthy silences (lines 3 and 5) separated by an increment (line 4), expresses doubt with the proposal (line 6); she raises a question about a potential necessity (the verb *pitää* 'should') in light of which her proposal appears inapt. It is these kinds of "post-proposal displays of uncertainty," and their interactional corollaries, that this paper will focus on.

Post-proposal displays of uncertainty are regularly preceded by a lack of the recipient's engagement with the proposal, which was also the case in Extracts 1 and 2. This regularity can be clarified with reference to the conversation analytic notion of preference. While proposals make relevant both acceptances and rejections, these are not "symmetrical alternatives" (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 314) but, instead, embody quite different alignments toward the first speakers' projects (Schegloff, 2007: 58). Thus, while both acceptances and rejections are relevant responses to proposals, acceptances are "preferred" in that they promote these projects and rejections are "dispreferred" in that they obstruct them (Schegloff, 2007: 59; Pomerantz, 1984). Given that human social interaction is ordered in ways that allow the participants to maximize their mutual solidarity (Heritage, 1984: 265–280; Clayman, 2002), preferred actions tend to be performed more straightforwardly and faster than the dispreferred actions, which are often accompanied by delays. Such delays not only soften the force of the dispreferred responses, but also facilitate the avoidance of such responses altogether. In the context of proposals, this means that, during the delays, the first speakers have a chance to withdraw their proposals (Pomerantz, 1984; Clayman, 2002: 235; Schegloff, 2007: 64–65), which, indeed, neatly explains the empirical observations about the rarity of rejections to proposals (Houtkoop, 1987; Ekberg, 2011; Stevanovic, 2012). Hence, it seems that it is largely in anticipation of and in an attempt to pre-empt recipients' rejections that proposal speakers begin to express doubt with the feasibility of their ideas.

How do the recipients then respond to post-proposal displays of uncertainty? Commonly, their responses lead to the abandonment of the original proposals. There are, however, several different ways for the recipients to achieve that outcome, and, as I will show in this paper, the recipients' choices in this regard are not without social implications for the proposal speakers. The analysis of these implications draws on the insight of there being different kinds of tacit assertions of social rights that people make in conjunction with their actions (Stevanovic and Svennevig, this issue). The notion of "epistemics" (Heritage, 2013) refers to people's positions vis-à-vis their knowledge of what is being talked about; through the particularities of their interactive conduct, they cannot avoid making *epistemic claims* – that is, implicit assertions of relative knowledgeability in the matter at hand (Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Heritage, 2012, 2013; Stevanovic and Svennevig, this issue). The notion of "deontics" (Stevanovic, 2013b), then again, signifies people's relative authoritative capacities in different domains of action. As epistemic claims, also *deontic claims* are ubiquitous to human social interaction (Stevanovic and Peräkylä, 2012; Stevanovic, 2013b; Stevanovic and Svennevig, this issue). Deontic claims are of two different types: *distal deontic claims* are about people's rights to control and decide about their own and others'

future doings; *proximal deontic claims* are about people's rights to initiate, maintain, or close up local sequences of conversational action.

All the above-mentioned assertions of social rights are an inherent part of proposals. The epistemic claims are about speakers implying that they have access to some knowledge, on the basis of which they have judged something as worth proposing (e.g., that a Benediction can be sung in the first place; see Extract 1). The distal deontic claims are about speakers implying that they have a say in some future actions (e.g., in the realization of Benediction). The proximal deontic claims, again, are about speakers implying that they have the right to impose the task of deciding about a particular matter (e.g., the realization of Benediction) on their co-participants and to include it into the participants' local interactional agenda. All these claims are relevant also for the study of post-proposal displays of uncertainty. We may assume that the epistemic claims are "mitigated" (Fraser, 1980; Caffi, 1999) by the expressions of doubt, which imply that their speakers' feasibility judgments may have been premature, given their lack of access to some proposal-relevant knowledge (though, paradoxically, a demonstration of awareness about there being contingencies with an idea constitutes another type of knowledge display). Similarly, we may expect the distal deontic claims to be mitigated by the speakers hinting at the possibility that, given their lack of proposal-relevant knowledge, also their rights to determine the given future actions may not be justified. The proximal deontic claims, however, are different in this respect: they are *not* mitigated by the post-proposal displays of uncertainty. Instead, as pointed out by Goodwin (1987: 116), displays of uncertainty mark things as problematic and tend to bring them into heightened prominence, implying that these are something that the participants *should* get engaged in. Thus, despite their post-proposal displays of uncertainty, the first speakers still hold control over the participants' local interactional agenda, and it is up to the recipients to accept, or not accept, their co-participants' claims of rights to do that.

In this paper, I will ask *how the recipients' different ways of responding to the first speakers' post-proposal displays of uncertainty treat their proximal deontic claims*. While the recipients' responses have implications also for their co-participants' epistemic and distal deontic claims, in this paper, however, I will limit myself to the above-mentioned focus, discussing the other implications only at the end of the paper. My data consist of fifteen video-recorded, dyadic and triadic, planning meetings, where pastors and cantors discuss their joint work tasks. The data were collected in seven congregations in the regions of several bishoprics of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland during the spring 2008 (for a more detailed description of the data set, see Stevanovic, 2013b). While there are about 300 proposal sequences in these data, this paper focuses on a sub-collection of 35 proposal sequences, which involve: (1) a first speaker's post-proposal display of uncertainty occurring in response to a lack of recipient uptake and (2) a *de facto* rejection as an outcome of the proposal.[1] In this sub-collection, the proposal speakers, with greater or lesser degrees of conviction, call into question the feasibility of their original ideas, evoking possible objections to them and/or problematizing some assumptions underlying them. These utterances, which I denote with the overall term "post-proposal displays of uncertainty," usually have the format [*vai* 'or' + interrogative], while there are also a few instances of other formats (e.g., *but I don't know whether X*). The data were transcribed according to the conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Schegloff, 2007: 265–269) and analyzed with conversation analysis (Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 2007).

2. Responding to post-proposal displays of uncertainty

In the analysis below, I will describe three ways for the recipients to respond to the first speakers' post-proposal displays of uncertainty, considering how each of these ways treats the first speaker's proximal deontic claims. These ways involve the recipient *overcoming*, *confirming*, or *dispelling* the first speaker's doubt. Basically, I will argue that, by selecting between these options, the recipients may treat their co-participants' proximal deontic claims in different ways: *endorse*, *challenge*, or *circumvent* them – even if the outcome of the proposal in each case is its abandonment. Next, I will consider these options one by one.

2.1. Overcoming the doubt

The first way in which recipients may respond to post-proposal displays of uncertainty involves them overcoming the proposal speakers' doubts. Thereby, the recipients may succeed in endorsing their co-participants' proximal deontic claims without yet accepting their proposals.

In Extract 3, the participants – two pastors (P1 and P2) and one cantor (C) – are planning the next Sunday's mass. At the beginning of the fragment, one of the pastors (P1) makes a proposal: she suggests that they would include a sermon hymn in the mass (lines 1–2).

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[1] In my data, post-proposal displays of uncertainty regularly lead to the abandonment of the proposals. Those rare instances where this is not the case have been excluded from the present sub-collection.

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(3)(HM2 48:55)
01 P1:    .hh mä  mietin   vaan että <onks> meillä sitte kyl-
              SG1 wonder-1 PRT  PRT  be-Q   we-ADE PRT
          .hh I was just wondering whether we then have e-

02        mut että voisko  käyttää <↑saarnavirttä.>
          but PRT  could-Q use-INF   sermon-hymn-PAR
          but could we have a Sermon Hymn.

03        (0.6) ((P1 looks at P2, who is looking down.))

04 P1: -> vai tuleeks siitä  liikaa   sitte.
          or  come-Q  it-PAR too.much PRT
          or will that be too much then.

05        (3.5)

06 P2:    #e# s:iis      niinhän voi kato tehdä: (.) et  otetaan
              PRT        PRT-CLI can PRT  do-INF     PRT take-PASS
          #e# see/I mean we could certainly do so (.) that we take

07        helluntaivirsi saarnan   ja  uskontunnustuksen väliin
          Pentecost.hymn sermon-GEN and confession-GEN    between
          a Pentecost hymn between the sermon and the confession
```

The pastor's proposal (lines 1–2) is followed by a brief silence, during which she gazes at her colleague (P2), thus treating him as her primary recipient. Her colleague, however, is looking down (line 3). Given the lack of recipient uptake, the pastor starts to express doubt with the feasibility of her idea: she acknowledges the possibility that, were her proposal accepted, there may be too many hymns in the mass (line 4). The pastor's display of uncertainty is followed by a relatively long silence (line 5), after which the recipient makes a counter-proposal (lines 6–7), thus indicating an indirect rejection of the original proposal. (The proposal was about a Sermon Hymn, which *precedes* the sermon). The counter-proposal is, nonetheless, prefaced with the particle *siis* 'see'/'I mean,' which marks it as an upshot of what has been said before (Laakso and Sorjonen, 2010), making it appear as an offer of a solution to the problem mentioned by the first speaker. In so doing, the recipient implicitly stresses the relevance of the original proposal and recognizes his co-participant's right to have included it into the participants' local interactional agenda.

While in Extract 3, the recipient does not remark on the first speaker's doubt in any explicit way, in the following instance, the recipient states the doubt as valid, while still getting around its immediate implications for the proposal. In Extract 4, a pastor (P) and a cantor (C) are preparing a mass to be celebrated at the beginning of the following summer. The fragment starts by the pastor proposing that a certain hymn could serve as the Trinitarian hymn (or Hymn of Thanks) in the mass (lines 1–2).

```
(4)(M5SHLT 16:08)
01 P:     entäs sitten toi, (2.0) satakolkytviis, (1.5)
          PRT   PRT    that, (2.0) hundred.thirty.five
          what about that, (2.0) one hundred and thirty-five, (1.5)

02        jumala loi auringon kuun,
          HymnName
          God created the sun and the moon,

03        (1.0)

04        siin on nyt tämmöstä        (1.3) vähän  ninku
          there be PRT this.kind.of-PAR      little PRT
          there is the kind of (1.3) a bit more like

05        <kesäisempi   kiitosvirsi.>
          summerly-COMP thank.hymn
          a summerly hymn of thanks.
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```
06          (1.7)

07 C:       [mm,]

08 P: ->    [vai] onks se sitte, (0.3) ↑tyylillisesti
             or   be-Q it PRT           stylistically
            [or ] is it then, (0.3) stylistically

09          kauheen      erilainen kun noi   muut     virret.
            terrible-GEN different PRT those other-PL hymn-PL
            very different from those other hymns.

10 C:       niin o:nhan se tietysti  mutta tota,
            PRT  be-CLI it of.course but   PRT
            yea of course it is but erm,

11          (12.0)

12 C:       jos otetaan   täältä   kolminaisuusosastosta joku tämmöne
            if  take-PASS from.here trinity.section-ELA   some this.kind.of
            what if we take from this Trinity section something like this
```

The pastor's proposal (lines 1–2) is followed by a silence (line 3), an account for the idea (lines 4–5; cf. Houtkoop, 1990), and by another silence (line 6). Then, in overlap with the cantor's minimal response (line 7), the pastor starts to display doubt whether the proposed hymn really fits with the other hymns of the mass (lines 8–9). The pastor's doubt is met with the cantor's acknowledgment of the problem as self-evident: both 'of course' and the clitic particle -*han* invoke and appeal to knowledge shared by the participants (Hakulinen et al., 2004: 796–798). Still, the cantor's behavior undercuts the fatal implications of the problem for the pastor's proposal (line 10). With the particle *mutta* 'but,' the cantor deviates from the pastor's doubt, marking a return to the original proposal, as it were, from an intervening talk of lesser importance (see Mazeland and Huiskes, 2001; Hakulinen et al., 2004: 1085–1986; Koivisto, 2012). Simultaneously, with the turn-final particle *tota* 'erm,' the cantor indicates that the trajectory of the participants' on-going action is still open (Etelämäki and Jaakola, 2009). All this suggests that the pastor's proposal is still to be considered – an interpretation that is strengthened by the ensuing twelve seconds silence (line 11), during which the participants browse their hymn books, demonstrably thinking about the issue. Thus, when thereafter the cantor nevertheless makes a counter-proposal (line 12), it appears more like a solution to the participants' joint problem than like a competing proposal (as it would have appeared, were it given off straight after the proposal). The cantor implies that the first speaker's proposal has been a relevant contribution to the participants' task at hand, and that the abandonment of the proposal was not done lightly. Hence, again, despite the negative outcome of the first speaker's proposal *per se*, the recipient's conduct worked to ratify its on-the-spot legitimacy.

Extracts 3 and 4 demonstrate that, after post-proposal displays of uncertainty, there is a way for the recipients to abandon their co-participants' proposals, while still conveying that these are worth considering. By overcoming their co-participants' doubts and engaging in activities in line with their proposals–be these activities in the form of a counter-proposal that is markedly in alignment with the original proposal (Extract 3) or in the form of extensive thinking about the original proposals before producing a counter-proposal (Extract 4) – the recipients end up *endorsing* their co-participants' proximal deontic claims.

2.2. Confirming the doubt

Another way for the recipients to respond to post-proposal displays of uncertainty is to immediately confirm the proposal speakers' doubts with their proposals. When such confirmations are followed by no further proposal-related talk, the proposal speakers' proximal deontic claims are being challenged.

The following instance is from the same conversation as Extract 3, where two pastors (P1 and P2) and a cantor (C) are planning the next Sunday's mass. Also in this case, the fragment starts by one of the pastors (P1) making a proposal the proposal now being about a hymn to be sung during the Eucharist (Lord's Supper) (lines 1–2).

```
(5)(HM2 40:48)
01 P1:      miten sitten (.) tota noin ni  esime's
            how   PRT        PRT  PRT  PRT for.example
            how about then (.) erm for example
```

```
02          kaikki katsovat sinua Herra ni (.) miten se sopis    ehtoolliselle.
            HymnName                       PRT   how  it fit-COND Eucharist-ALL
            They all look at you Lord so (.) how would that fit to the Eucharist.

03          (3.0)((P1 looks at C, who glances P1 and then looks down.))

04 P1: -> vai oisko     se ninku onkse,
          or  be-COND-Q it PRT   be-Q.it
          or would it be erm is it,

05          (2.6)

06 P1:      se on tietysti ↑lyhyt.
            it be of.course short
            of course it is ↑short.

07 C:       se on lyhyt.
            it is short.

08 P1:      se on lyhyt [mut k]u se on niin hieno virsi ky°llä°.
            it be short  but PRT it be PRT  great hymn  PRT
            it is short [but  ] it is such a great hymn.

09 P2:                  [mm.  ]

10          (4.5)

11 P2:      .hh mä  rupesin    kattoon tätä    <kakskakskasia.>
                SG1 start-PST-1 look-INF this-PAR two.two.eight-PAR
            .hh I started to look at this <two-two-eight.>
```

The pastor's (P1) proposal (lines 1–2) is followed by a silence, during which she gazes at the cantor (C), thus treating him as her primary recipient (line 3). The cantor, however, gives the pastor only a brief glance and then looks down. In response to a lack of recipient uptake, the pastor backs off with her proposal: with increasing epistemic commitment, she acknowledges the possibility that the proposed hymn might be too short to be sung during the Eucharist (lines 4–6). With the word *tietysti* 'of course,' she acknowledges the self-evidence of the problem, while still leaving it open whether that would be a reason to abandon the proposal altogether.

The pastor's doubt with the feasibility of her proposal is followed by the cantor immediately confirming the doubt (line 7). The cantor's assertion has the form of a full, subject-initial, sentence, which underscores his own perspective to the matter, suggesting that the problem has been known to him before the pastor has mentioned it (see Hakulinen, 2001; Sorjonen and Hakulinen, 2009). Besides, the cantor's assertion is a word-by-word repetition of the pastor's prior turn (albeit without the word *tietysti* 'of course'). Drawing on Schegloff's (1996) seminal analysis of the interactional work done with repetitions, I suggest that, through his utterance, the cantor "confirms an allusion" that he has given off already through his earlier withholding of response (lines 3–5) – that is, that the proposal is not of much value due to a most obvious reason: the shortness of the hymn. The pastor's own orientation to the value of her proposal having thus been called into question becomes visible in her subsequent turn, where she exhibits a need to justify her proposal by appealing to the "greatness" of the hymn (l. 8). The sequence nevertheless ends by the other pastor (P2) making a counter-proposal (line 11) and the first speaker refrains from pursuing her original proposal any further.

In this instance, the recipient hinted that the problem with the first speaker's proposal should have been shared knowledge, which led the first speaker to account for her proposal to re-establish its legitimacy. While these issues have more to do with the content of the proposal than with the first speaker's action of proposing it (even if we may assume that these two concerns often go together), from the point of view of the pastor's proximal deontic claims, the most important aspects in the recipient's conduct are his confirming the proposal speaker's doubt immediately after its expression and his subsequent refraining from producing any further proposal-relevant talk. In these ways, the bearing of the proposal speaker's interactional contribution on the unfolding of the participants' ongoing activity was minimized. Remarkably, in the subsequent unfolding of interaction, the proposal speaker indeed takes a more passive role (not shown in the transcript).

Extract 6 involves two pastors (P1 and P2) talking to each other (a cantor is present but silent). The fragment starts by one of the pastors (P1) making a proposal, where she refers to a certain hymn as a "must" (lines 1–2). The proposal is an indirect interrogative with the format [*mä aattelin et* 'I was thinking that' + interrogative], which is a common way to

implement proposals in Finnish (Stevanovic, 2013a). After a short pause, during which the pastor looks at her colleague, marking him (P2) as her primary recipient (line 3), the pastor, however, proceeds to a direct interrogative (line 4). The stressed syllable at the beginning of the verb *onkse* 'is it' makes the pastor's action appear, not only as a proposal, but also as an information-seeking question.

```
(6)(HM2 20:41)
01 P1:    se kosketa minua Henki mä aattelin    et
          it HymnName            I  think-PST-1 PRT
          that Touch me Holy Spirit I was thinking that

02        onks se sit semmonem <mast>,
          be-Q it PRT sort.of  EnglishWord(must)
          is it then a sort of <must>,

03        (0.3)((P1 looks at P2, who is looking down))

04 P1:    onkse ninku semmonem mast,
          is it PRT   sort.of  EnglishWord(must)
          is it like a sort of must,

05        (2.5)

06 P1: -> mä  en    tiedä,
          SG1 NEG-1 know
          I don't know,

07 P2:    ↑e:i:hän se ↑mast,
          NEG-CLI  it EnglishWord(must)
          ↑ce:rtainly it's no ↑must,

08        (4.0)((P1 smiles looking down, while glancing briefly at P2.))

09 P1:    ♫mm:: ↑mm::::♫

10        (1.0)

11 P1:    .thh >mä  katoin    et< neljäkuusseittemän o  semmone ä:i-
               SG1 look-PST-1 PRT four.six.seven      be sort.of
          .thh >I saw that< the four-six-seven is a sort of Mo:-

12        äitiempäivävirsi mutta ei se tähän k#äy
          mothers.day.hymn
          Mothers' Day hymn but it doesn't fit here
```

As typical in my data, the first speaker's display of uncertainty takes place in response to a lack of recipient uptake: it is only after a lengthy pause, during which her colleague gives no sign of starting to respond (line 5), that the pastor makes it clear that, instead of proposing anything, she is now sincerely asking for her recipient's opinion about the hymn (line 6). This implies the pastor's awareness of the possibility that her proposal might have been based on a wrong assumption.

The pastor's display of uncertainty is followed by her recipient immediately confirming the doubt. This happens through a heavily emphasized utterance, with strong pitch accents on its first and last syllables (line 7). While, technically, the recipient's utterance is merely an answer to the pastor's question in line 4, simultaneously, it disagrees with the assumption about the hymn that was embedded in the original proposal (lines 1–2). In addition, with the clitic particle *-hän*, the recipient invokes and appeals to the participants' shared knowledge (Hakulinen et al., 2004: 796–798), which, in this case, adds a moral connotation to the recipient's action: also his co-participant should have known that the hymn is ''no must'' (on ''epistemic responsibility,'' see Stivers et al., 2011).

As in Extract 5, also here, the pastor's own orientation to the problematic implications of her recipient's conduct can be perceived in what happens next. During the silence that follows her colleague's denial of the privileged status of the hymn, the pastor gazes down and puts a non-Duchenne smile on her face (line 8) – a behavior that reminds one of the archetypical displays of embarrassment described in the psychological literature (see e.g., Keltner and Buswell, 1997). At one point during the silence, she glances at her colleague, as if searching for clues that would frame the whole episode as having been a tease

or a joke. Given the lack of any such clues, she, however, looks down again and starts humming (line 9) – a practice associated with the management of different kinds of interactional turbulences (Stevanovic, 2013c). Then, after yet a further silence (line 10), the pastor starts to talk about another hymn. Using the past tense (*mä katoin* 'I saw,' line 11) she tells about her having considered it before realizing its unsuitability for the purpose (lines 11–12). Given the sequential context of the pastor's telling, it comes across as an account of the circumstances that led her to propose *Kosketa minua henki* 'Touch me Holy Spirit.' Thus, albeit more indirectly than in Extract 5, also here the first speaker exhibits a need to justify her proposal.

Also in this instance, the participants displayed an orientation of there having been a problem with the content of the first speaker's proposal. As in Extract 5, also here the recipient hinted that the proposal speaker lacked knowledge about something that should have been known to her, which was reflected in the proposal speaker's subsequent behaviors. From the perspective of the proposal speaker's proximal deontic claims, however, the most important features in the recipient's conduct were the speedy timing of his confirmation of the proposal speaker's doubt and his lack of any further proposal-relevant talk. In so doing, the recipient minimized the proposal speaker's degree of control over the participants' local interactional agenda. Also in this case, this may have pertained into the participants' subsequent interaction: as the participants later discussed the hymn of the day, the speaker of the original proposal remained remarkably silent (not shown in the transcript).

In Extracts 5 and 6, post-proposal displays of uncertainty were followed by the recipients immediately confirming their co-participants doubts, while producing no further proposal-related talk. In so doing, the recipients called into question, not only the content-value of the first speakers' proposals, but also the relevance of these proposals as actions then and there. In other words, the recipients *challenged* the first speakers' proximal deontic claims. The first speakers' own orientations to such challenges could be perceived indirectly: after having accounted for their original proposals, they assumed a rather passive role in the interaction.

2.3. Dispelling the doubt

Besides overcoming the doubt or confirming it, there is yet another way for the recipients to respond to post-proposal displays of uncertainty. They may indicate that the possible problems that their co-participants' see there to be with the feasibility of their proposals do not exist, or that the assumptions, upon which their proposals are based but with which they have started to have second thoughts, are totally fine. At a first glance, such dispelling of doubt appears to endorse whatever the first speakers have been up to when making their proposals. However, as I will show below, the dispelling of doubt allows the recipients to avoid responding to their co-participants' proposals. Thereby, the proposal speakers' proximal deontic claims are circumvented.

In Extract 7, a pastor (P) and a cantor (C) are discussing a song that the church choir (under the leadership of the cantor) has been practicing for the next Sunday's mass. Now, the participants try to find a suitable place for it in the liturgy. At the beginning of the fragment, the pastor proposes that the song be sung during the Eucharist (line 1).

```
(7)(HM1 19:17)
01 P:    eikö  se sitten ninku, (0.3) kävis   toho:n  ehtoollisen   ajalle,
         NEG-Q it PRT  PRT         fit-COND in.there Eucharist-GEN time-ALL
         would not that then erm, (0.3) fit the:re during the Eucharist,

02       (0.2)((P looks at C, who is looking down.))

03   -> ajaksi  laulettavaksi.=vai onks teillä  siinä jotain    muuta,
        time-TRA to.be.sung-TRA or  be-Q PL2-ADE in.it something else
        to be sung during that.=or do you have something else there,

04       (1.0)

05 C:    ei  oo siinä mittään. ei  siin  oo (.) ei  siin  oo muuta,
         NEG be in.it anything NEG in.it be     NEG in.it be other-PAR
         there isn't anything. there isn't (.) there isn't anything else,

06 P:    onks siinä onhan  siinä ehtoollinen.
         be-Q in.it be-CLI in.it Eucharist
         will there will there be the Eucharist. ((P looks at the mass schedule.))

07 P:    on siinä.
         be in.it
         there will.
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```
08 C:    joo.
         yea.

09 P:    on. °on tietysti,° .hhhh
         be   be of.course
         yes. °yes of course,° .hhhh

10       (0.7)

11 P:    tietty    onhan  yks et  jos te  haluutte
         of.course be-CLI one PRT PRT PL2 want-PL2
         of course there is the option that you could, if you want,

12       ↑ehtoo]llisen aikana    laulaa    °tämän,°
         Eucharist-GEN  time-ESS sing-INF this-ACC
         sing this during the Eucharist,
```

The pastor's proposal (line 1) is followed by a lack of recipient uptake, which would have been due in line 2. While the cantor remains silent, the pastor clarifies an (apparently self-evident) element of her proposal (that the song be ''sung''), but then, in the same breath, goes on asking whether the cantor has some other plans for the Eucharist (line 3). After a one-second pause (line 4) the cantor asserts the absence of any such plans (line 5). Thereby, he indicates that the preconditions for the acceptance of the proposal are filled, while avoiding responding to the proposal itself (Houtkoop, 1987: 77; Stevanovic, 2012). The cantor, in other words, produces talk that is prompted by the pastor's very latest interactional contribution: the post-proposal display of uncertainty, while yet refraining from considering that turn in its wider context.

The pastor's subsequent behavior makes obvious her orientation to the ambiguity of the situation. After some intermediate talk, by which the participants ascertain that there will be the Eucharist next Sunday (lines 6–9), and yet another silence (line 10), the pastor delivers her proposal anew (lines 11–12). The renewed proposal has the form of an independent *jos* ''(what) if'' clause, which represents a typical Finnish way of making proposals (Hakulinen et al., 2004: 1570; Laury, 2012; Stevanovic, 2013a), exhibiting no orientation to the same proposal having already been made. While the pastor thus implies that the cantor has not responded to her proposal in an adequate way, she does not treat the cantor's omission in this regard as an indication of any problem with the local legitimacy of her proposal. Instead, as if the whole preceding talk had not occurred at all, she starts the proposal sequence all over again, claiming just as much proximal deontic rights as before.

In Extract 8, the participants – a pastor (P) and a cantor (C) – are planning a trip that their parish members are going to make to Germany, where they plan to celebrate a mass together with a local Finnish parish. Previously, the participants have discussed some details of the mass but now the cantor makes a proposal – or, actually, *two* proposals. First, she suggests that the participants select the hymns for the mass (lines 1–2). Then, after a short silence (line 3), she points out to *Jeesus kuule rukoukset* 'Jesus hear my prayer,' or another hymn of the same type, as a possible hymn choice (lines 4–7).

```
(8)(MT 15:41)
01 C:    sit tosiaan ne   virret että, (2.6) että: ois     ihan ↑hienoo
         PRT really  they hymn-PL PRT        PRT  be-COND pRT  great-PAR
         then really those hymns so, (2.6) so: it would be quite good

02       jos meki    voitas     valita   vähän näitä (1.0) ↑virsiä   että.
         if  we.also could-PASS select-INF little these-PAR   hymn-PL-PAR PRT
         if also we could a little bit select these (1.0) hymns so.

03       (0.8)

04 C:    .hhhh olisitko   voisitko aja- ajatuksissa    että olis
               be-COND-2-Q could-2-Q    thought-PL-INE PRT  be-COND
         .hhhh would you be could you in tho- thoughts that there would be

05       <@nimenomaan@>   (.) joitain (.) jeesus kuuler rukoukset
         specifically         some        HymnName
         <@specifically@> (.) some    (.) Jesus hear my Prayer
```

```
06        tai joku tämmönen, (1.4) näistä    mis   kerrotaan näistä.
          or  some this.kind.of    these-ELA where tell-PASS these-ELA
          or something like this, (1.4) from these that tell about these.

07        hh (0.9) tän       ↓#päivän teemaan#.
                   this-GEN day-GEN  theme-ILL
          hh (0.9) to the #theme of the day#.

08        (0.7)

09 C: ->  vai sitten lähdetäänkö ↓#jollekin#,(2.0) muull[e   linjalle että,   ]
          or  PRT    go-PASS-Q   into.some         other-ALL line-ALL PRT
          or do we then go            into some  (2.0) other[ direction so that,]

10 P:                                                  [jos se on sydämme]n
                                                        if  it be heart-GEN
                                                       [if  it is  Talk o]f

11        puhetta  jumalan kanssa ni (.) sehän  on ninku [lähi]nnä,
          talk-PAR God-GEN with   PRT    it-CLI be PRT    primarily
          the Heart with God       so (.) it  is like prim[aril]y,

12 C:                                                 [nii.]
                                                      [yea.]

13 C:     n:ii:.
          y:ea:.

14 P:     aika  paljon          rukousaihetta [hh, ] ettei   sitä   oikee  voi,
          quite a.lot           prayer.topic-PAR     PRT-NEG it-PAR really can
          quite a lot about the topic of prayer [hh, ] so it can't really be,

15 C:                                          [nii,]
                                               [yea,]

16 C:     nii,
          yea,

17 P:     sivuuttaa.
          ignore-INF
          ignored.

((19 lines removed.))

37 C:     mm,

38        (3.0)

39 C:     tuota vois vaikka     miettiä näitä   virsiä    että, hhhhm
          PRT   could for.example think-INF these-PAR hymn-PL-PAR PRT
          erm one might for example think about these hymns so, hhhhm
```

Again, the first speaker's post-proposal display of uncertainty (line 9) appears as a reaction to a lack of response by the recipient (note the three silences in lines 6–8). While the cantor's proposal has been based on the assumption that the hymns for the mass should be linked to the theme of the day (see line 7), she, however, starts to express doubt with this assumption. The pastor responds in overlap with the cantor's utterance. However, instead of starting to select hymns or comment on the one proposed by the cantor, the pastor responds by addressing the cantor's target of doubt: in a long explanation (lines 10, 11, 14, and 17, as well as lines 18–36 not included in the transcript), he makes it clear that the cantor's assumption has been accurate (lines 10, 11, 14, and 17, as well as lines 18–36 not included in the transcript). Thereby, the pastor indicates that the preconditions for the acceptance of the cantor's proposals are met, without yet pursuing the cantor's actual line of action. Instead, after the cantor has received the pastor's explanation with *mm* (l. 37), a

silence emerges (line 38). Thus, again, the recipient produces talk that is prompted by the first speaker's post-proposal display of uncertainty, while refraining from addressing the preceding proposal.

As in Extract 7, also here, the proposal speaker's subsequent behavior exhibits her orientation to the ambiguity of the situation. After the above-mentioned silence (line 38), the cantor repeats her proposal as if the original proposal had never been made (line 39). Thereby, she indicates that her proposal has not been met with a satisfactory response, while treating the recipient's failure in this regard as being void of any problematic implications that she would have needed to take into account when repeating her proposal.

The analysis of Extracts 7 and 8 has demonstrated that the affirmations underscoring the feasibility of the first speakers' proposals can be an effective way for the recipients to abandon the very same proposals. In providing matter-of-fact responses targeting their co-participants' doubts with their proposals, the recipients underline the sensibleness of these doubts, while entirely bypassing the question about the first speakers' rights to impose their original proposals on the participants' local interactional agenda. The first speakers' own orientations to their proximal deontic claims as having thus been *circumvented* can be seen in their peculiar ways of repeating their proposals as if making them for the first time.

2.4. Summary

In this paper, I have described the main options for the recipients to respond to the first speakers' post-proposal displays of uncertainty, considering the differences in the ways in which each option treats the first speakers' proximal deontic claims, while the outcome of the original proposals is their *de facto* rejection. The findings of the paper can be summarized in the following way:

(1) When the recipients *overcome* their co-participants' doubts with the feasibility of their proposals and engage in further activities in line with the initial proposals, they end up *endorsing* their co-participants' proximal deontic claims.
(2) When the recipients *confirm* their co-participants' doubts with the feasibility of their proposals, while engaging in no further activities pushing further the initial proposals, they end up *challenging* their co-participants' proximal deontic claims.
(3) When the recipients *dispel* their co-participants' doubts with the feasibility of their proposals, without yet implying actual acceptance of these proposals, they end up *circumventing* their co-participants' proximal deontic claims.

3. Conclusions

While responses to proposals have often been accounted for in terms of how acceptances and rejections promote or discourage speakers' projects (Davidson, 1984; Pomerantz, 1984; Schegloff, 2007), this paper has dealt with a further intricacy in responses to proposals. I have assumed that, in addition to their overt projects regarding some future actions, proposal speakers are engaged in tacit projects regarding their implicit assertions of social rights, and that these projects can be promoted or discouraged by the recipients, independently of what happens to the speakers' overt projects (Heritage and Raymond, 2005; Stevanovic and Peräkylä, 2012). In this paper, I have focused on one type of such assertions – proximal deontic claims – in a specific sequential environment – one where a speaker has made a proposal, but then, in response to a lack of recipient uptake, starts to doubt its feasibility. My analysis has shown that, through the specifics of the recipients' responses, the proposal speakers' claims of rights to impose topics and items on the participants' local interactional agenda can be endorsed, challenged, or circumvented – even if the outcome of the proposal in each case is its abandonment.

Proximal deontic claims are a special case of deontic claims in general, which denote people's implicit assertions of rights to determine their own and others' actions in both the proximal and distal domains (Stevanovic, 2013b). In the instances of post-proposal displays of uncertainty, these two domains of action are intertwined in complex ways (see e.g., Stevanovic, 2013a). On the one hand, when the first speakers have expressed doubt with their proposals and thus indicated that the distal deontic claims involved in their original proposals may not have been fully justified, the recipients may support these claims by engaging in talk and/or visible behaviors, such as publicly visible ''thinking,'' thus underlining the local appropriateness of their proposals (see Extracts 3 and 4). On the other hand, an experience of having one's proximal deontic claims challenged may serve as a motivation to boost one's distal deontic claims (i.e., accounting for proposals to re-establish their legitimacy) (see Extracts 5 and 6). In addition, recipients may emphasize the feasibility of their co-participants' proposals and thus acknowledge the competence basis underlying the legitimacy of their distal deontic rights, while still disregarding the on-the-spot relevance of their proposals for the participants' actions then and there (see Extracts 7 and 8).

Proximal deontics, as well as deontics in general, are also intertwined with ''epistemics'' (Heritage, 2013). The sequential environment after the post-proposal displays of uncertainty is particularly intricate in this regard. While the first speakers' expressions of doubt indicate a lack of access to some proposal-relevant knowledge and thus mitigate the epistemic claims involved in the first speakers' proposals, the recipients may either share their co-participants' unknowing epistemic stances or claim to be more knowledgeable than they are. It is the choice between these two options that essentially determines what happens to the first speakers' proximal deontic claims. By displaying unknowing epistemic stances, the recipients refrain from taking the role of epistemic authority that is offered to them by the first speakers. Unknowing epistemic stances, with their associated silences, convey that neither acceptances nor rejections are self-evident options, but that the first speakers' proposals necessitate further thought (Extract 4). In a paradoxical way, the ''thinking silence'' conveys that the first speaker has not made her proposal in vein, but that her proposal has consequences on what her co-participants will do next (i.e., evidently think about something specific). In this way, the recipients' unknowing stances lead to the endorsement of the first speakers' proximal deontic claims. Straightforward displays of knowledge, then again – be they in the form of the recipient confirming (Extracts 5 and 6) or dispelling (Extracts 7 and 8) their co-participants' doubts – are much more problematic in this regard.

The notion of ''proximal deontic claims'' involves the idea of participants imposing topics and items on their local interactional agenda. Thereby, it strongly reminds one of the classical conversation analytic concept of ''conditional relevance,'' which is about actions posing constraints on actions to come (Schegloff, 2007). What is then the difference between proximal deontic claims and conditional relevance? The difference is subtle but fundamental. While the notion of conditional relevance refers to *items* – that is, utterances or actions and their relations to one another (Schegloff, 2010: 39) – the notion of proximal deontic claims denotes the *actors* who produce these items. It is the speakers of the first pair parts who put their recipients under the normative constraints to produce relevant second pair parts, and who thereby implicitly claim to have the right to do so.

As an actor-centered notion, the idea of proximal deontic claims provides for several analytic advantages. First, it makes it possible to analyze people's orientations to the different degrees of legitimacy that they attribute to the so-called ''first actions,'' invoking the question about the complex social circumstances that endow speakers with confidence to make the claims of social rights involved in their initiating actions, such as proposals. For example, I may have the right to decide whether or when to take a shower, but still no right to bother others about that decision. Second, the idea of proximal deontic claims allows one to consider how ''negative phenomena'', such silences, may sometimes work to support the first speaker. While in response to proposals, silences are seen to indicate the recipients' trouble in formulating a rejecting response, however, in response to post-proposal displays of uncertainty, silences can also be seen as a way for the recipients to share the first speakers' uncertainty and, in this way, to appreciate their interactional contributions. Third, and finally, while the concept of conditional relevance is about speakers making their recipients accountable for producing relevant responses to their utterances (Heritage, 1984: 245–253), the focus on speakers making claims of social rights implies a reversal of accountability. Speakers are vulnerable with respect to the validity of their claims of social rights; it is the speakers, not their recipients, who exhibit a need to account for their actions in those instances where their claims of social rights have been challenged (Extracts 5 and 6). Thus, ultimately, the notion of proximal deontic claims seeks to draw attention to ''real people'' whose senses of self-esteem as contributing participants in people's joint undertaking are at stake at every moment of interaction.

Acknowledgments

Appendix 1. Transcription symbols

.	pitch fall
?	pitch rise
,	level pitch
↑↓	marked pitch movement
underlining	emphasis
-	truncation
[]	overlap
=	latching of turns
(0.5)	pause (length in tenths of a second)

(.)	micropause
:	lengthening of a sound
hhh	audible out-breath
.hhh	audible in-breath
(h)	within-speech aspiration, usually indicating laughter
#	creaky voice quality
€	smiley voice quality
°	whispering
♫	humming
@	other change in voice quality
mt, tch, krh	vocal noises
<word>	slow speech rate
>word<	fast speech rate

Appendix 2. Glossing abbreviations

1, 2	person
PL	plural
GEN	genetive
PAR	partitive
ESS	essive
TRA	translative
INE	inessive
ELA	elative
ILL	illative
ADE	adessive
ABL	ablative
ALL	allative
ACC	accusative
COMP	comparative
INF	infinitive
COND	conditional
IMP	imperative
CLI	clitic
Q	question clitic
NEG	negation
PST	past tense
PASS	passive
PPC	past participle
PPPC	passive past participle
POSS	possessive suffix

Singular, third person, nominative, *active* and *present tense* are forms that have been considered unmarked. These have not been glossed.

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