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Explicit positive assessments in personal training: Their design and sequential and embodied environment

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines explicit positive assessments (EPAs) in personal training, that is, the personal trainer's positive evaluations of the client's physical performance, including comments such as *bra* ('good'). The data consist of video-recorded training-sessions in Swedish from Finland and Sweden. The methodological framework is interactional linguistics, and the study explores the actions that EPAs perform as well as their linguistic design and embodied and sequential environment. The main actions performed by EPAs in personal training include transitioning between activities, encouraging the client, and making positive evaluations. The personal trainer (PT) may vary the lexical, syntactic, prosodic, and embodied features of the EPA to emphasize any of these actions or a combination of them. Overall, EPAs are a central resource for fulfilling the institutional goals of personal training by guiding the clients through the training-program and motivating them. In addition to their use as feedback on actions in the present moment, EPAs also include forward-focusing aspects aimed at guiding clients' future behavior.

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1. Introduction

Feedback is essential in pedagogical settings, from classroom interactions to driving lessons. In the best case, feedback allows the expert to inform the novice about aspects of their performance and the means to improve it to attain the goals set for the activity (Hattie and Timperley 2007). Moreover, experimental studies on physical activities have also shown the importance of positive feedback. For example, Mouratidis et al. (2008) found that, in physical education, positive verbal feedback predicted self-reported competence satisfaction among pupils and, in turn, a greater intention to participate in the future (see Ryan et al., 2009). However, we know little about how positive feedback during physical activities is performed and received in naturally occurring interaction.

In this study, we investigate positive feedback during sessions of personal training, where much of the interaction is centered around the personal trainer's (PT) instructions, the client's performances, and the PT's feedback on them (see Huhtamäki et al., 2019). We focus on positive feedback in the form of *explicit positive assessments* (EPAs; Waring, 2008). Waring uses this term to refer to "teacher utterances that contain positive assessment terms such as *good*, *very good*, *excellent*, *perfect*" (Waring, 2008: 578). In our study, we begin by identifying positively evaluating lexical items produced by the trainer,

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such as *snyggt* ('neat') and *bra jobbat* ('well done'). We then analyze the action context, as well as the linguistic, embodied, and sequential environment of the EPAs.

Our research questions are:

- 1) What actions are performed with EPAs?
- 2) What are their linguistic design and embodied and sequential environment?

We identify these actions using sequential analysis following the principles of conversation analysis. By *linguistic*, we refer to the lexical, syntactic, and prosodic features of EPAs. The embodied features we investigate are gaze, body position and movements as well as the handling of gym equipment. Building on previous research, our study provides new knowledge about the design and actions of EPAs in pedagogical settings. More precisely, we study how prosody and embodied features are used for designing and ascribing those actions. By focusing on personal training, our study widens the scope of EPA research, as previous studies have focused on classroom interactions (e.g., Waring, 2008; Margutti and Drew, 2014).

2. Background

2.1. Personal training as institutional interaction

In personal training, interaction is institutional, which means that the activity contains a clear overall goal and that there are specific participant roles (see Drew and Heritage, 1992: 3–4). According to George (2008), the goal is to improve the client's strength, endurance, and, possibly, appearance. The role of the PT includes instructing, encouraging, and providing feedback, while the role of the client involves performing the exercises according to the instructions (see George, 2008; Huhtamäki et al., 2019). The sessions we study concentrate on physical activity, although there might be other sessions where, for instance, the participants discuss the client's goals.

In personal training, the pedagogical objective is to develop the client's embodied skills in a similar way to that described by Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) in the case of basketball coaching. The IRF sequence (Initiative – Response – Feedback, e.g., Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Macbeth, 2003) consists of 1) the PT's instruction (verbal and/or embodied), 2) the client's physical compliance, and 3) the PT's verbal (and embodied) assessment (Huhtamäki et al., 2019; cf. Keevallik, 2013). In this paper, we concentrate on the third part, the PT's assessment. However, as previous studies on learning manual skills have demonstrated, the instructional activity may include several instructions (attempts at) compliance, and corrections before the task is completed (Huhtamäki et al., 2019; cf. Lindwall and Ekström, 2012 on crocheting; De Stefani and Gazin, 2014 on driving lessons).

2.2. Assessments

By *assessments*, we refer to utterances that explicitly evaluate a person or an event (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992: 154). When producing an assessment, speakers demonstrate knowledge about what they assess (Pomerantz, 1984: 57; Mondada, 2009). The meaning of assessments is created with lexical, prosodic, sequential, and embodied features in their spoken and acted context (Pomerantz, 1984; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992; Mondada, 2009). According to Pomerantz (1984), a first assessment generally makes relevant a second assessment by another speaker. This second assessment may agree or disagree with the first assessment. One way to agree is to upgrade the second assessment lexically, for example, *good* > *excellent*. By contrast, a downgraded agreement often foreshadows disagreement.

As Ogden (2006) has shown, phonetic features can also be used to upgrade or downgrade a second assessment. Thus, speakers show agreement with a previous assessment by using a lexical upgrade and/or upgraded phonetics – higher pitch, wider pitch span, slower tempo, and tenser articulations. By contrast, lexical and phonetic downgrading foreshadows disagreement. According to Goodwin and Goodwin (1992: 181–182), assessments are characterized by a peak of involvement. By *involvement*, they refer both to the experience of the participants and the lexical, prosodic, and embodied means to express it (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992: 155). These prosodic features include lengthening and additional stress, while embodied features include gaze, nods, and headshakes (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992: 162; see also Sellman, 2008; Selting, 2017). To these, Mondada (2009) adds change of body arrangement and posture, for example.

As involvement is a central aspect of assessments and the prosodic features of involvement may vary between languages, we shortly refer to some research on prosody and involvement in Swedish. An early study on read utterances in Swedish spoken in Sweden demonstrated that pitch range and loudness correlated with the grade of involvement (Bruce, 1982). Later interactional linguistic studies have supported and elaborated on these findings by specifying the kind of involvement. For example, in other-repetitions¹ in Finland Swedish, turns with an onset high in the speaker's voice range and turns with a higher onset and wider pitch span than the previous turn have been shown to convey an affective stance, such as surprise or engaged listenership (Huhtamäki et al., 2020). Furthermore, research has demonstrated that high pitch peaks are used in

¹ By *other-repetitions*, Huhtamäki et al., 2020 refer to turns in which a speaker repeats either some or all of the previous turn produced by another speaker to initiate repair, react to it, or register it.

Stockholm Swedish when the interviewee produces turns including an “emotionally laden, complaining stance” (Öqvist, 2011: 328). Öqvist argues that the pitch peaks are used to pursue an affiliative response from the interviewer.

Unlike everyday conversations, in our data, the use of second assessments by other speakers is rare because it is mainly the expert, the PT, who produces assessments. This is expected, since the participants orient to the situation as an institutional context, that is, a pedagogical activity. Consequently, we analyze the prosodic features of the EPAs themselves and their relation to previous turns by the PT or the client. Thus, we determine whether prosody is large or small,² upgraded or downgraded in relation to another turn by the PT, and, consequently, whether the EPAs can be considered to include involvement.

2.3. Assessments in institutional interaction

In institutional interaction, positive assessments are a resource for maintaining the institutional routine, for example, to close tasks and to contribute to a positive atmosphere. For example, according to Antaki et al. (2000), psychotherapists speaking in English use high-grade assessments, such as *brilliant* and *wonderful*, when a section of an interview form has been completed (Mondada, 2009). Moreover, in Swedish service-encounters, both customers and staff have been found to use assessments for task-completion (Lindström et al., 2019). The transitional quality of these assessments is emphasized with downgraded prosody and a bodily orientation away from the recipient. In turn, Sellman (2008) demonstrated that the feedback turns of therapists providing voice therapy in Finnish were used to maintain the training practice, evaluate a problem and deliver information (Sellman, 2008). Finally, in Swedish university supervision, Magnusson (2020) found that praise was partly connected to learning, as it contributed to a constructive dialogue. The studies of Sellman and Magnusson show that assessments are used not only for evaluating the performance but also for learning in a wider sense.

Although EPAs have previously been studied in classroom interactions, no prior research exists on their use in personal training. However, in the context of sports exercises for children, the assessment *bra* (‘good’) has been shown to be part of the institutional routine, helping children maintain the tempo and marking an exercise as complete (Lundin, 2016). In addition, Evans and Fitzgerald (2017) demonstrate how basketball coaches correct their students through both verbal instructions and by placing their bodies in the position and space of the player. Moreover, a study focused on phrasal instructions in personal training in Swedish found that the most common follow-up turn to such instructions was the utterance *bra* (Huhtamäki et al., 2019). In a pilot study on *bra*, (Huhtamäki and Grahn, 2020) identified its primary function as that of segmenting the activity, while they found it was less commonly used for positive evaluations.

3. Data and methodological framework

The data consist of approximately 7.5 h of personal training sessions in Swedish recorded in Finland and Sweden and quite evenly distributed between the countries (Table 1). Usually, the sessions included one PT and one client, but one of the sessions from Sweden included three clients. In all, the data comprise 5 PTs and 8 clients.

Table 1
Research data from the respective language variety.

	Finland Swedish	Sweden Swedish	Total
Length of recordings	3:53:44 h	3:38:55 h	7:32:39 h
Number of sessions	4	3	7
Number of trainers	3	2	5
Number of clients	4	4	8
Number of EPAs	219	318	537

The theoretical and methodological framework of the study is interactional linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2018).³ In brief, this means that we employed conversation analytic methods to study the sequential, linguistic, and embodied features of the assessments (see Sidnell and Stivers, 2012; Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2018; Mondada, 2018). We also analyzed how they were prosodically designed in relation to a previous turn produced by the PT themselves. Hereafter, we use the terms *prosodically upgraded* or *downgraded* to compare a turn to a previous turn by the same speaker rather to a first assessment by another speaker (see Ogden, 2006).

We identified all sequences where the PT produced an EPA of a physical performance by the client, which provided us with a total of 537 EPAs. Then, we performed a sequential analysis to establish the actions of the EPAs (see Sidnell, 2012:79). We also determined where the EPA was placed in relation to an exercise. Furthermore, we studied the turn-constructive features of the EPA, that is, its lexical grade, syntax, within-turn prosody, whether it was upgraded in relation to a

² For the concepts *large* and *small prosody*, see Pillet-Shore (2018: 217).

³ This study was conducted in the context of the research programme *Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages: Communicative patterns in Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish* funded by The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, grant #M12-0137:1.

previous turn, and its simultaneous bodily features. The prosodic features of the EPA and previous turn were analyzed phonetically, both auditorily and with Praat (Boersma and Weenink, 2020). The prosodic features we focused on were pitch onset, contour and span, loudness, duration, and voice quality. The excerpts were transcribed following Jefferson's conventions (Hepburn and Bolden, 2012), refined with conventions for multimodal transcriptions (Mondada, 2018; For transcript symbols, see Appendix).

4. Sequences with EPAs in personal training

In this section, we initially present the analyses of five extracts in the data including EPAs (4.1–4.3). We use these extracts to demonstrate the main actions EPAs perform in personal training and the features used to construct them. However, they do not represent an exhaustive list of the actions that EPAs *could* be used for. Then, we summarize the analyses (4.4), and, finally, we present a deviant case (4.5).

4.1. EPAs used in transitions between activities

In this section, we analyze two extracts with EPAs that contribute to the transition between activities. Extract (1) shows an EPA that is used after the last exercise of the session when the participants are transitioning from the training-activity to some formal procedures.

Extract (1) That's it (Finland Swedish)

- 01 CL: de va de.
 that's it
 >>leans back in training machine, hands on hips-->
 >>looks down
 pt >>bows down and collects sheets of papers from the floor-->
- 02 (0.3) the turns and the bodily behavior by the participants
- 03 PT: de va de.
 that's it
- 04 CL: &tack
 thank you
 let hands fall down
 pt &straightens back holding the sheets of paper-->
- 05 % +(2.0) & * \$ (1.7)
 cl +looks at PT *rises from the machine-->
 pt --> & \$arranges the sheets of papers
 pt %looks at CL
- 06 CL: °tack h°
 thank you h
 -->rises
- 07 (1.9)
 pt starts to walk away
 cl puts feet on floor

- 08 PT: → ↑ **bra.** #
 good
is turned away from CL
looks at the sheets of papers
cl *straightens body*
#fig. 1
- 09 (2.2)
pt *walks towards the entrance-->>*
cl *walks towards the entrance, grabs bottle-->>*
- 10 PT: vi va färdiga.
 we're done
looks at AS



Fig. 1. The client stands up and the PT walks away.

At this point, both participants orient to the training-activity as finished. The client leans back and says, *de va de* ('that's it') (line 1), which the PT repeats (line 3). During the client's turn, the PT bows down to collect his sheets of paper. The client says, *tack* ('thanks') twice with a breathy voice, thus expressing exhaustion (lines 4, 6; Grahn, 2017). During the later *tack*, she starts to rise (line 6). Then, the PT begins to walk towards the entrance and says, *bra* ('good') (line 8; Fig. 1). During *bra* the client straightens her body and starts to move behind the PT. As they approach the entrance, the PT informs the research assistant that they are finished (line 10).

This EPA contributes to coordinating the end of the training-activity and helps the participants smoothly and simultaneously transition to the final procedures. Moreover, there is low involvement in this EPA. Several features contribute to this: the PT walking away during its production, its low lexical grade, and its diminished loudness, short duration, and narrow pitch movement (Fig. 2; cf. Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992; Lindström et al., 2019). These features combine to reduce its salience in this particular interactional context. The pitch onset, however, is relatively high in the speaker's voice range and helps create a break in the previous low-pitched conversation (see Couper-Kuhlen, 2004).

The EPAs in Extract (2) are designed to help mark the end of a stretching exercise (line 11). Similar to Extract (1), they participate in structuring the training-session, but on a lower level. In this exercise, the client lies on her left leg, which is folded beneath her, with her right leg stretched (Fig. 3).

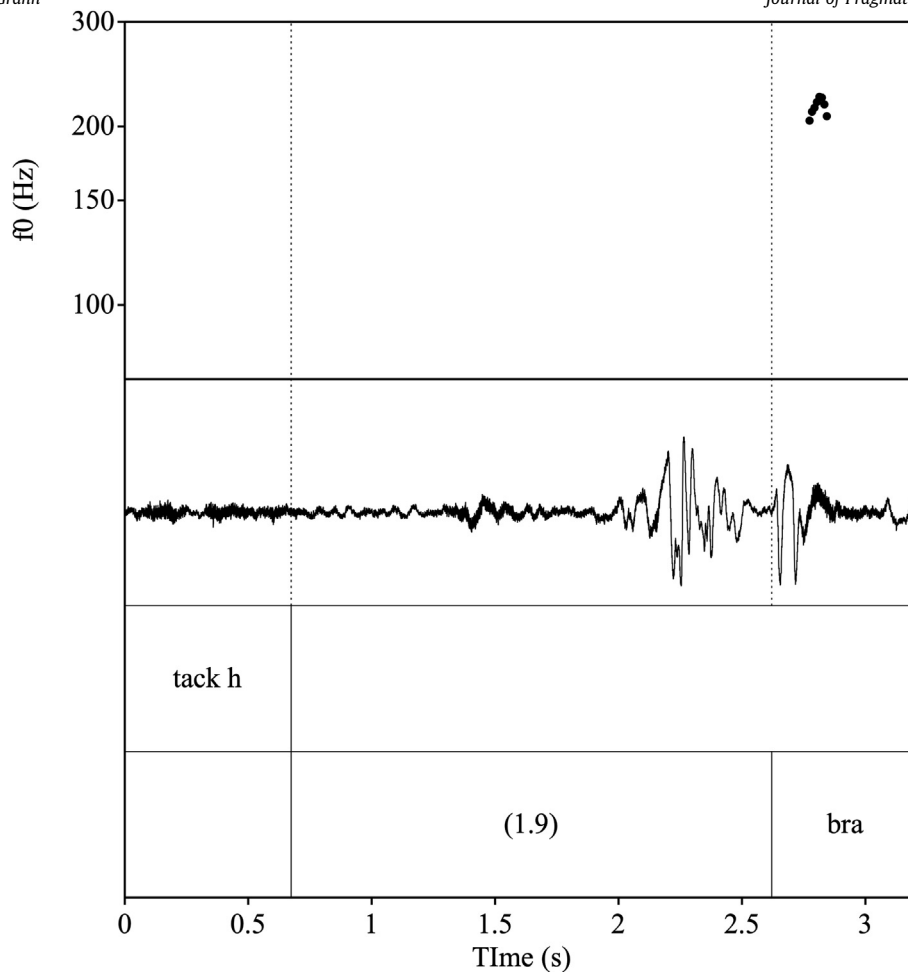


Fig. 2. The EPA and the client's previous turn in Extract (1). Notes: As *tack* is breathy, there is no pitch track.

Extract (2) Just remain lying (Sweden Swedish)

01 PT: bara ligger du kvar där,
 you just remain lying there
 >>stands to the front left of CL, holding tablet computer-->

cl >>moves to starting position

02 (0.2)
cl lies down on the floor with left leg straight,
 right leg folded under stomach

03 PT? (°bra°)

04 (3.9)

05 PT: känns (d)e(t) lika mycke på den här sidan,
 can you feel it equally much on this side

cl *lies in stretch-->

- 06 (0.2)
- 07 CL: näe?
no
looks to the left
- 08 •(0.4)
cl •shakes head-->
- 09 PT: °nä°
no
cl -->•
- 10 (1.0) &(1.8)
pt &glance at CL
- 11 PT: → %↓mpt °bra° %
good
%takes first step %
- 12 #\$(0.5)
#fig. 3
\$walks towards-->
- 13 >°snygg°<, \$
neat
--> training machine \$
(1.0) * (2.0) + &(2.7)
pt stops &touches computer screen
cl *kneels -->>
+ looks at PT-->>



Fig. 3. Client lying in stretch.

The PT invites the client to stretch (line 1), and the client adopts the position (lines 1–2). The PT asks if she can feel it equally much on this side, which the client answers in the negative (lines 5–7). The PT registers her answer by repeating it (line 9; see Huhtamäki et al., 2020). Eventually, the PT glances at the client and starts to walk towards a training machine. As she walks, she says, *mpt bra* ('good') (line 11), and after a pause of 0.5 s, *snyggt* ('neat') (line 13; Fig. 3). The client moves out of the stretching position, thereby orienting to it as finished.

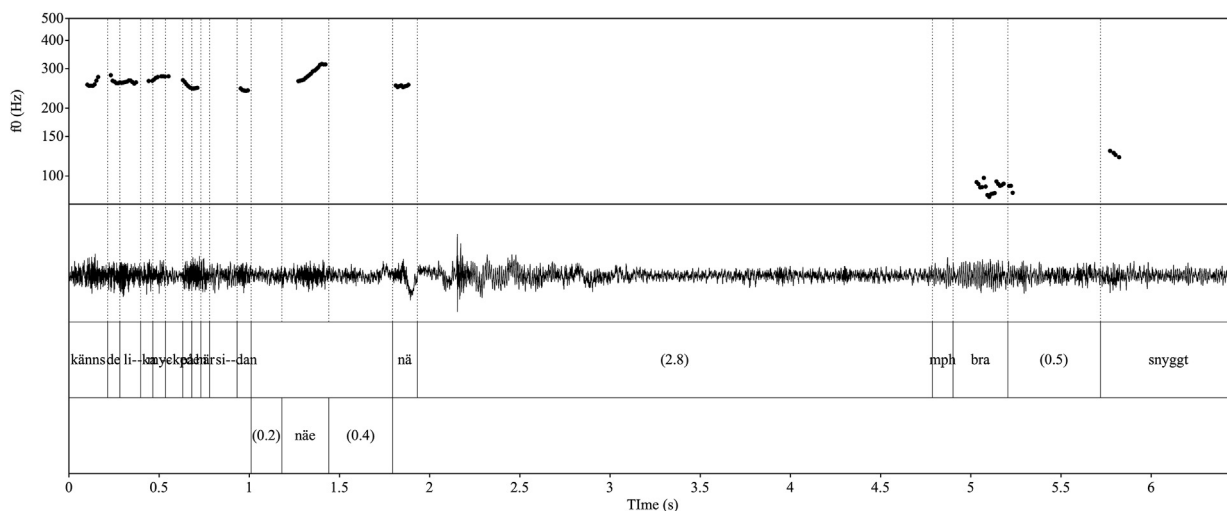


Fig. 4. The EPA turn and the previous turns of Extract (2). Transcript of the PT's speech above, the client's below.

The EPAs *bra* and *snyggt* are one device the PT uses to indicate the end of an exercise. Other devices include walking away, not maintaining gaze-contact with the client, and using low lexical grade and small prosody. *Bra* is very low, lower than previous turn, creaky, and soft, while *snyggt* is slightly higher (Fig. 4).

The use of EPAs in Extracts (1) and (2) resembles the use of task-completing assessments in various pedagogical situations and other institutional contexts (e.g., Antaki et al., 2000; Sellman, 2008; Waring, 2008; Lundin, 2016; Lindström et al., 2019). The PT uses these EPAs to convey the structure of the exercises and the session to the client, thereby demonstrating the direction of the activity at a certain moment. More specifically, they contribute to the organization of transitions from one activity to another. This use resembles *oké* and *occhei* ('okay') in French and Italian institutional interaction, respectively, which, together with other resources, prepare the transition from one course of action to another (De Stefani and Mondada, 2021). The fact that the PT has turned her body away from the client as well as the small and downgraded prosody create low involvement in these EPAs (see Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992; Ogden, 2006).

4.2. EPAs used to encourage the client

In our data, EPAs are also used to encourage the client. In Extract (3), the PT uses an EPA turn (line 9), alongside other resources, to encourage the client to exert maximum effort during the last series of a skater jump exercise.

Extract (3) You'll manage this (Sweden Swedish)

01 PT: %ett (0.3) &>kör vi<,
 one (0.3) here we go
 >>stands in front of CL with left hand lifted
 %moves gaze from watch to CL
 &claps hands once
 cl bowing down over left knee

- 02 &(0.6)
cl jumps to the right-->
pt &follows CL with gaze-->
- 03 CL: HH *
 --> *lands on right foot
- 04 (1.4)
cl jumps to the left
- 05 (1.4)
cl jumps to the right
- 06 (1.2)
cl jumps to the left
- 07 CL: ähh
 lands on left foot
- 08 (0.4)
pt -->&
cl jumps to the right
- 09 PT: → %bra [::] grymt # jobb%&a:t,
 good great work
 %looks at watch %&follows CL with gaze-->
 #fig. 5
- 10 CL: [H]
 lands on right foot
- 11 CL: äh
 jumps to the left
- 12 (0.4)
cl lands on left foot
pt claps hands
- 13 PT: hela vä %gen % nu.
 all the way now
 %claps hands %
cl jumps to the right

- 14 CL: ÄH
 lands on right foot
 pt &%looks at watch-->
- 15 (1.0)
 cl *jumps to the left*
- 16 PT: du fixar de här,
 you'll can do this
 cl *lands on left foot*
- 17 (0.3)
 pt -->%
 cl *jumps to the right-->*
- 18 PT: >fem sekunder< ti:ll,
 five more seconds
 follows CL with gaze-->>
 cl --> **lands on right foot*



Fig. 5. The client after a jump, the PT looking at her watch.

The extract begins at the end of the PT's count-down and go-ahead instruction (line 1). The client begins to jump from side to side, puffing with exhaustion. During the 5th jump, the PT produces the EPA turn *bra:: grymt jobba:t* ('good great work'), while she glances at her watch as she is taking the time (line 9; Fig. 5). The PT also encourages the client by producing other turns, such as *du fixar de här* ('you'll manage this') (line 16) as well as stating that there are only 5 s left (line 18).

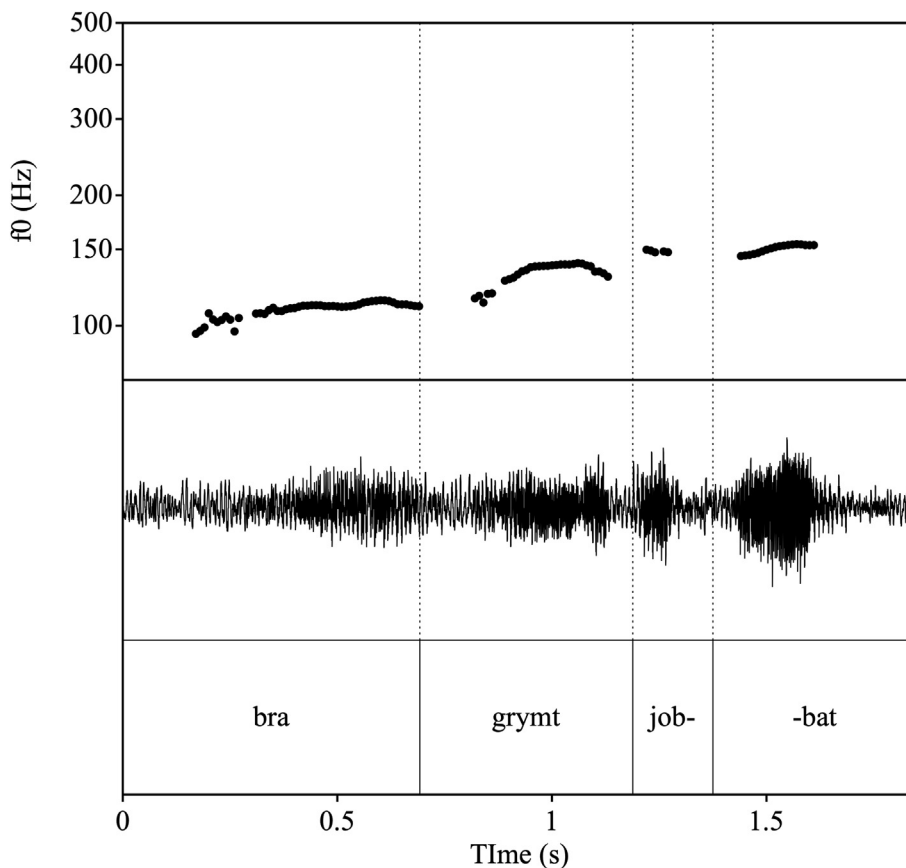


Fig. 6. The EPA turn in Extract (3).

This EPA turn is one of the resources the PT uses to help the client strive to the utmost until the end of the exercise. It consists of two phrases, the first, *bra*, being low lexical grade, while the latter, *grymt jobbat*, being high lexical grade. The supine verb form *jobbat* refers to the client's achievement as already accomplished. The combination of the two phrases indicates a high degree of involvement. In addition, the prosody is upgraded in relation to the PT's own turn in line 1 (see Ogden, 2006; Selting, 2017). The pitch rises throughout the turn but does not become high. Moreover, the volume is relatively high, and several syllables are stretched (Fig. 6). The level pitch at the end of the turn connects it with other encouraging turns (lines 1, 16, 18; see Karlsson, 2010).

This EPA turn is similar to those found to be used for maintaining tempo in Lundin (2016) (see also Sellman, 2008: 104). In contrast to Extracts (1) and (2), it is interpreted by the client as an instruction to continue rather than to finish. This interpretation is also supported by the placement of the EPAs during a series that both participants know is unfinished. In addition, the high lexical grade and upgraded prosody of the EPAs contribute to this action by creating a contrast with those used to transition from one activity to another. Moreover, as the PT seeks to affect the client's performance, the turn points forward in time, to the immediate future.

4.3. EPAs as assessments

The EPAs described above may contain evaluative aspects due to their lexical meaning, although these aspects are not oriented to by the participants. However, the data contain other EPAs that the participants clearly orient to as performing a positive evaluation. For example, in Extract (4), the EPA (line 7) is used to evaluate the client's performance positively during the first repetition of a new exercise. The exercise involves lowering and raising the body while holding a weight. To help the client keep her back straight, the PT holds two sticks in front of her.

Extract (4) *That you are straight (Finland Swedish)*

- 01 PT: så (.) &*varsågod.
 so (.) there you go
 right--> &lifts head
 cl breathes out *swallows
- 02 %(1.9)
 pt %gaze down on CL's back-->
 cl -->lowers body-->
- 03 CL: pff
 -->
- 04 (1.7)
 cl presses lips together
 slows down slightly
- 05 CL: pf
 lowers body-->
- 06 (0.3)
 cl slows down slightly
- 07 PT: → bra #[:.]
 good
 moves head upwards to the right
 cl lowers body-->
 #fig. 7
- 08 CL: [p]ff
 slows down slightly-->
 pt nods
- 09 PT: just %de att du e [%rak.]
 exactly that you are straight
 %nods down %nods down
 cl is quite still
- 10 CL: [pff]
 lowers body-->
- 11 (0.4)
 cl stops in lowest position

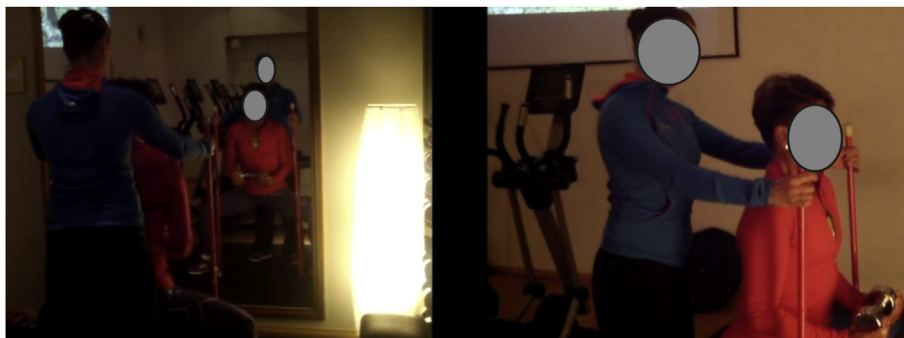


Fig. 7. The client lowering her body, the PT holding sticks in front of her.

The PT produces a go-ahead-instruction (line 1), and the client begins to lower her body, with her eyes closed (line 2). When the client approaches the lowest position, the PT says, *bra*: ('good') (line 7; Fig. 7). The PT has been looking at the client's back, but now she moves her head upwards to the right. She continues by stating, *just de att du e rak* ('exactly that you are straight'), nodding twice (line 9). The client continues her movement during the PT's EPA (line 7), slows down during her following turn (line 9), and stops in the lowest position (line 11).

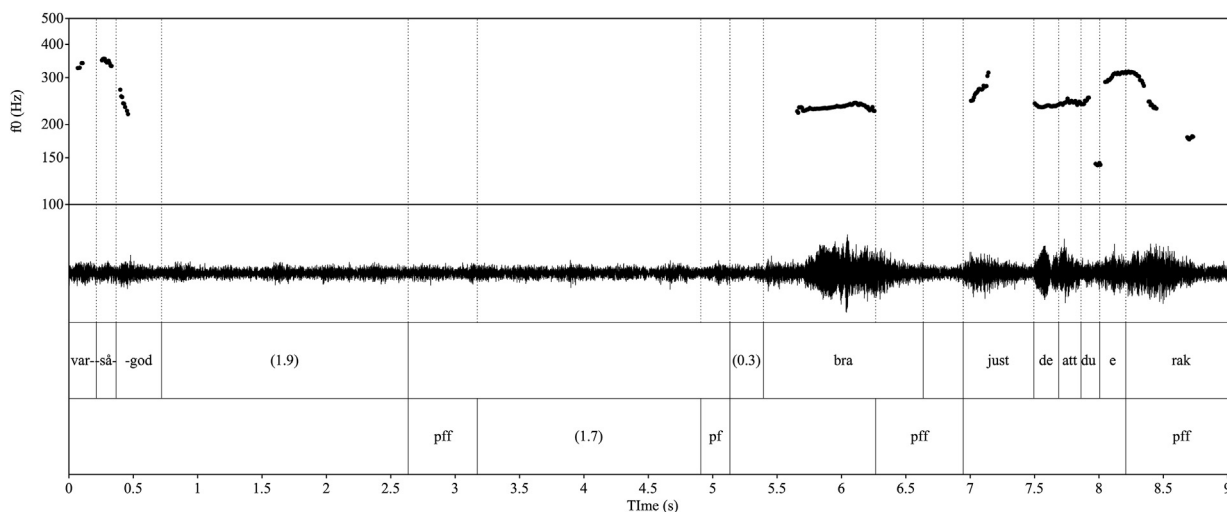


Fig. 8. The EPA and the following and previous turns in Extract (4).

The positive evaluation of the client's performance is created by the production of the EPA during the first repetition of a new exercise, when the client requires feedback on her performance. The EPA's long duration, relatively high volume, and the gently rising-falling pitch express involvement, although prosody is not upgraded in relation to the previous turn (Fig. 8). Furthermore, the PT emphasizes the assessment by nodding. The PT then uses her next turn to specify what was good about the client's performance, thereby providing advice on how to continue. As the client slows down after the EPA, she may also interpret it as contributing to the end of the first micro-phase of this repetition. This EPA contains aspects of both evaluating the performance in a positive way and of performing a transition from one phase to another (see Extract [1] and [2]); that is, it is multifunctional.

In Extract (5), the PT uses two EPAs in direct succession (line 5). The EPA turn is multifunctional, just as in Extract (4). During this exercise, the client steps forward and backward with weights in his hands.

Extract (5) Equally much on each leg (Sweden Swedish)

- 01 PT: [el]va, (.) †en till,
eleven (.) one more
>>stands to the right of CL, watching him-->
cl >>does the exercise, gaze straight ahead
- 02 CL: [H]
touches the floor with left foot

(1.0)
cl returns to starting position, steps forward and back with left foot
- 03 CL: H
touches the floor with left foot
- 04 (0.5)
cl starts to return to starting position
- 05 PT: → †bra: #snyggt.
good neat
lifts head somewhat
cl returns to starting position
#fig. 9
- 06 (0.7)
cl turns body towards PT
cl lowers weights
cl gazes downwards
- 07 PT: % †mycke bättre &me: ö: djö: at-%
much better with eh djö to-
%shakes head several times
&moves hands several times in front of face

cl walks alongside PT to the left of her-->
- 08 PT: att > \$få lika mycke på †varje +ben<ζ
to get equally much on each leg
\$lowers right hand
† touches nose with left hand

cl -->
cl +gaze at PT-->

- 09 (0.3)
cl turns body towards PT
- 10 CL: >m+m< +
 --> +
- 11 PT: de e inte alls så &hära: %
 it is not like this at all
 &shakes head
 %sways body slightly left-right-left
cl bows down with weights to the floor
- 12 (0.3)
- 13 CL: ja men dom här har ja kört lite,
 yes but I have done these a bit
puts weights on the floor
pt holds hand still on her chin



Fig. 9. Client returns to the starting position.

Initially, the PT counts and produces the phrasal instruction *en till* ('one more') (line 1). The client produces one more repetition, and, as he is returning to starting position, the PT lifts her head and delivers two EPAs in direct succession, *bra* ('good') and *snyggt* ('neat') (line 5; Fig. 9). Next, the client comes out of the training-position (line 6). The PT produces another turn, beginning *mycket bättre* ('much better'), where she offers an account of her EPAs by specifying why the performance was good (lines 7–8). Simultaneously, she shakes her head and gestures with her hands. The client responds *m+m* (line 10). The PT describes and demonstrates how not to perform the exercise (line 11), and the client responds by stating that he has been practicing at home (line 13). By providing a reason for the good performance, he accepts the positive assessment.

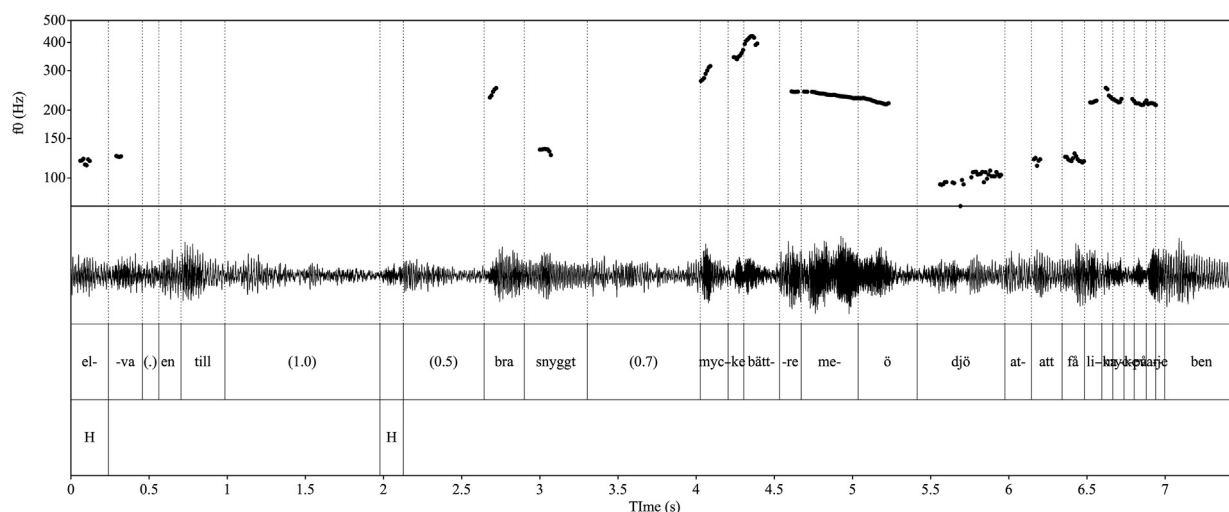


Fig. 10. The EPA turns and the previous turn in Extract (5).

First, the EPAs in line 5 mark the end of a series and are therefore similar to the EPAs in Extract (1), (2) and (4). Second, they involve a positive evaluation of the client's performance (see Extract [4]). Subsequently, the PT provides an account of the positive evaluation (lines 7–8). Several features of the evaluating action contribute to the creation of involvement, including the PT's head and hand movements that stress the lexical content of the EPAs and also the production of two EPAs in direct succession. Finally, as the turn is higher and louder, with a wider pitch span than the PT's previous turn, the prosody expresses involvement and serves to highlight and emphasize these assessments in their particular context (Fig. 10).

The EPAs in Extracts (4) and (5) convey to the clients that they have performed well in the exercise. Similar to the EPAs used to encourage the client (see Extract [3]) they include involvement by the PT, conveyed through both prosodic and bodily features. These EPAs are both directed backward and forward in time: backward because they address an action the client has already performed, such as the EPAs in Extracts (1) and (2), forward because they point towards the preferred performance and hence become a means for learning (see Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Magnusson, 2020). Moreover, learning may be particularly enhanced by the specific information about the performance included in both extracts (see Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

4.4. Summary of the analyses

As demonstrated in the analyses above, EPAs are used for a multiplicity of actions in personal training. These actions are shaped by a combination of lexical, syntactic, prosodic, and embodied resources. Furthermore, the placement of the EPA in relation to the exercise is central for meaning making, as are the cues from other turns in the sequence. In this section, we focus on how involvement is created in EPAs.

The different actions performed by EPAs can be viewed as a continuum from transitions, where the EPA contains low involvement, to encouragement, where the EPA is characterized by higher involvement, to evaluation, which contains the highest involvement. Nevertheless, it is also possible for the PT to vary the resources and the grade of involvement in a certain EPA. EPAs where speakers display low involvement are characterized by a low grade of lexical intensity, downgraded and/or small prosody as well as bodily withdrawal (see Extracts [1] and [2]). By contrast, EPAs where speakers display high involvement include lexical items with a high grade of intensity or several phrases (Extracts [2], [3], [5]), large and/or upgraded prosody (Extracts [3], [4] and [5]), head movements (Extracts [4], [5]) and gaze towards the client's face (Extract [5]).

In sum, EPAs that are used for transitions between activities are produced with prosodic features that are consistent with the spoken context in the exchange. Furthermore, the embodied features with which they are combined relate to the progression of the exercises and training-session. These EPAs exhibit similar features to those of third-turn assessments in service-encounters, which also are concentrated on the performance of certain tasks (see Lindström et al., 2019). In turn, encouraging and evaluating EPAs are characterized by features that foreground them vis-à-vis their interactional context and stress their literal, positive lexical meaning. The features used to display involvement are described in previous research on assessments in everyday interaction (see Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992; Ogden, 2006; Mondada, 2009). Similar features have also been found in various types of actions used for communicating the affective dimensions of turns (see Öqvist, 2011; Selting, 2017; Huhtamäki et al., 2020). Of all the EPAs found in our data, those used for evaluation purposes most resemble, both prosodically and bodily, assessments in everyday interactions (see Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992). However, in personal training, contrary to everyday interactions, PTs possess epistemic authority and the right to decide what constitutes a good performance (cf. Drew and Heritage, 1992).

4.5. A deviant case

In Extract (6), we analyze a sequence with an EPA that the participants do not treat the same way. It is produced during the transition from an exercise where the client has repeatedly lifted her pelvis with her feet on a large gym ball to an exercise where she is required to sway from side to side with her feet on the ball.

Extract (6) That's enough (Finland Swedish)

- 01 PT: de här e nu fö din rygg dit *som du ha +h [aft]. (.) .jä
now this is for your back there that you have had (.) yes
*cl >>lowers pelvis with feet on ball *pelvis touches floor*
- 02 CL: [jä]
yes
+removes right leg from ball
+turns head towards pt-->
- 03 (0.4)
cl lifts right leg onto ball-->
- 04 CL: [(-----)]
- 05 PT: → [↑bra:] #
good
reaches for ball with left hand
cl -->
#Figure 11
- 06 (0.5)
pt touches ball
cl -->
- 07 PT: de räche:r. (.) jä? *(0.3) nu får du dedär (0.3)
that's enough (.) yes (0.3) now you got PRT (0.3)
*cl --> *takes legs off ball*
- 08 +den där sköna som du *vagga. (0.3)
that relaxing one that you sway (0.3)
gestures with right hand beside her face
gaze on cl-->
*cl +both feet on floor *pulls feet nearer butt*
- 09 PT: mt §dendär vagg får du göra på nytt. *(.) du får vagg°a dig°.
mt that swing you may do once more (.) you may rock yourself
§shows a swaying movement in the air
gaze on cl-->
*cl *lifts legs onto ball*

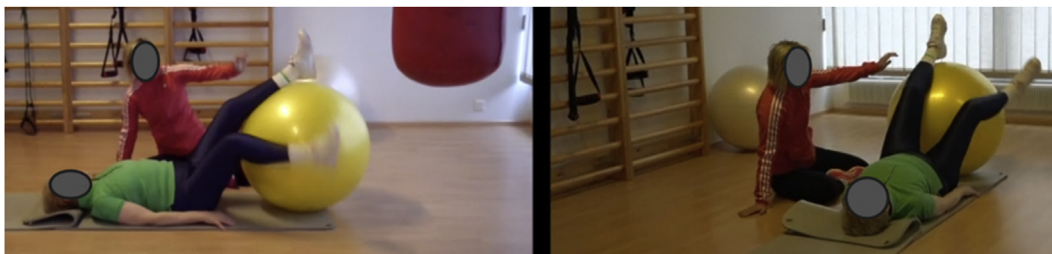


Fig. 11. Client lifting right leg, PT reaching for ball.

The client has performed the last lift, and, while she lowers her pelvis, the PT remarks on the positive effect of the exercise on her back (line 1). At the end of the PT’s turn, the client turns her face towards the PT, removes her right foot from the ball and acknowledges her turn with *jå* (‘yes’) (line 2). However, the client immediately begins to lift her right foot back onto the ball, while the PT remains silent (line 3). While the client lifts her leg and produces an utterance that cannot be distinguished from the recording, the PT says, *bra* and reaches for the ball with her left hand (line 5; Fig. 11). The prosody of *bra* is large, as the PT produces it with high onset, a wide pitch span, and long duration; moreover, it is upgraded in relation to the previous turn (Fig. 12). The bodily behavior of the PT demonstrates that she orients to the exercise as finished. However, the orientation of the client to whether the exercise is finished is unclear at this point, as she has removed and lifted her leg again. Then, after *bra*, the client continues to lift her leg onto the ball (line 6 and partly line 7). The PT touches the ball (line 6) and says, *de räcker* (‘that’s enough’) and *jå* (‘yes’) (line 7). The clarification and touching the ball demonstrate that the PT is orienting to the client’s lack of comprehension. Only then does the client remove both feet from the ball and place them on the floor. Now, the PT begins to introduce the next exercise (lines 7–9). Although this exercise also includes keeping one’s feet on the ball, the PT waits for the client to remove her feet before issuing the instruction. As the PT comes to the end of her instruction, the client again lifts her feet onto the ball.

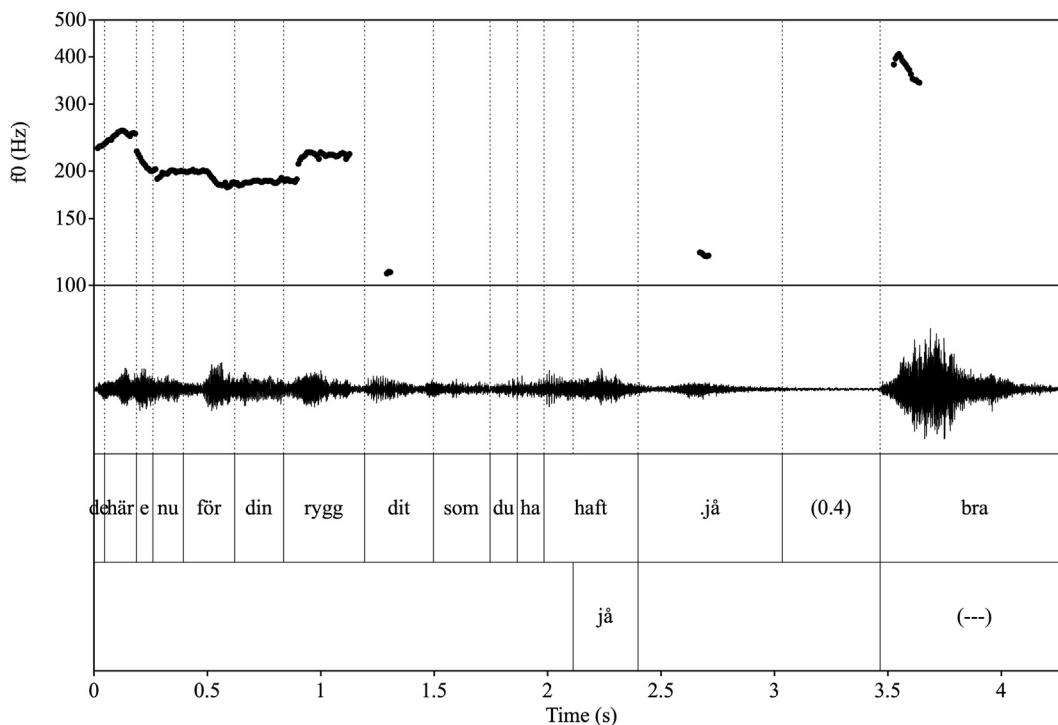


Fig. 12. The EPA turn and the previous turn of Extract (6).

In this extract, the PT is required to do more than simply say *bra* before the client orients to the exercise as finished. This may be because the PT uses *bra* as a multifunctional turn – performing both a transitional action and a positive evaluation. The client, in turn, understands it as only performing an evaluation and fails to orient to its transitional aspect. The large and

upgraded prosody may have contributed to this interpretation (see 4.4 above). As the next exercise also includes keeping one's feet on the ball, it is significant that the PT wishes the client to withdraw them between the exercises. This could be an indication of the importance that the PT assigns to transitions between exercises. Extract (6) demonstrates that the meaning of EPAs is not always straightforward for the participants. Furthermore, it shows that prosody plays an important role in constructing and ascribing their actions.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated explicit positive assessments (EPAs) produced by personal trainers (PTs). We examined the actions and design features as well as the sequential and embodied environment of these EPAs. The findings contribute to our understanding of the diverse actions performed with assessments and the various resources for producing them in an embodied activity such as personal training. We demonstrated that it is not only the feedback itself that matters to clients (see Mouratidis et al., 2008; Ryan et al., 2009) but also how and when it is produced. Our analyses highlighted the complexity of EPAs in personal training regarding both their composition and the actions performed. We broadened the scope of EPAs from classroom-settings to personal training, thereby describing EPAs from a different perspective than that of previous research. We demonstrated that, similar to assessments used for task-completion in other types of institutional interaction (see Antaki et al., 2000; Lindström et al., 2019), EPAs are a central resource for organizing the transition between activities during training-sessions. They also resemble the use of “*oké* and *occhei* ('okay') in French and Italian institutional interaction, respectively, where they are used in transitions from one course of action to another (De Stefani and Mondada, 2021). In addition, EPAs are used for encouraging clients and assessing their performance (see Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992; Sellman, 2008; Lundin, 2016). An EPA may also be multifunctional; that is, it can combine, for example, transitional and evaluative functions.

As EPAs with the same lexical form can be used for various actions, we attempted to determine how participants can distinguish between these actions. We demonstrated that in this task prosody and embodied features play a crucial role, as does the placement of the EPA in the action sequence. Prosodic features help participants distinguish whether an EPA is used for transition, on the one hand, or encouragement or assessment, on the other. Here, a further significant factor is whether the prosodic features display the speaker's involvement (see Goodwin and Goodwin, 1992: 162; Mondada, 2009). In this respect, pitch level, span, loudness, and duration are particularly important. Moreover, the placement of the EPA in relation to the sequence and exercise creates an interpretive framework for the action. An EPA that is produced at a point where the exercise could be finished is readily heard as contributing to a transition or possibly to an evaluation, while an EPA produced during an ongoing exercise can be understood as encouraging the client. Embodied features also help indicate which of the actions a certain EPA is used for; as our study shows, withdrawing one's body from the previous exercise and directing it to the next activity help create the transitional meaning of certain EPAs (see Lindström et al., 2019).

EPAs are a crucial resource for fulfilling the institutional goals of personal training, that is, to instruct, encourage, and offer feedback to the client (see George, 2008). PTs use EPAs to help their clients perform exercises in a smooth and effective way as they guide them through the training-program. Furthermore, they push clients to exert more effort in the exercises and reward them when they succeed in their performance. Our analyses demonstrate that EPAs are not simply *feedback*, something directed backward to a previous performance; rather, they can also be used to improve clients' performance in the present moment, or they can contain a forward-orientation as part of the learning process (see Hattie and Timperley, 2007; Magnusson, 2020; see Extract [4] and [5]). Thus, EPAs resemble instructions, and our study demonstrates that the border between instructions and feedback is rather indistinct, as both contribute to the activity of instructing. EPAs are well suited to the tasks in personal training as, thanks to their positive lexical content, they also contribute to a positive relationship between the participants (see Magnusson, 2020). On the other hand, by downgrading the prosodic and embodied features of EPAs, the PT can demonstrate that although the lexical meaning is positive, the assessment was not intended to be interpreted literally; rather, it serves a segmenting function. Clients' treatment of most EPAs in personal training differs from their orientation to everyday assessments, as they do not comment on the former. Furthermore, it is almost exclusively the PT who produces EPAs, with no second assessments by the other speaker. To conclude, EPAs are a useful resource in personal training for maintaining and creating the various institutional roles of personal trainer and client.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

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Appendix. Transcript symbols

[Overlap onset
]	Overlap offset
(.)	Micropause
(1.2)	Pause measured in seconds
H	Loud exhalation
m+m	Uttered as two sounds
mpt	Clicking sound
(–)	Inaudible
(du)	Uncertain hearing
ja-	Cut-off sound

Prosody

°eh°	Silent compared to previous talk
BRA	Loud compared to previous talk
<u>super</u>	Stressed syllable
fī:nt	Lengthened sound
>sen då>	Faster than previous talk
↑okej	High compared to previous talk
↓bra	Low compared to previous talk
.	Falling final intonation
?	Rising final intonation
,	Level final intonation
˘	Slightly rising final intonation

Embodied actions

* *	Embodied movements are delimited between two identical symbols,
+ +	the symbols may vary.
% %	(and so on)
*->	Action continues on subsequent line(s)
->*	until same symbol is reached
>>	Action begins before transcript
->>	Action continues after transcript's end
cl	Participant doing the embodied action when not the speaker
#	Location of picture

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