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### Where the Action Is: Positioning Matters in Interaction

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*Avenues into Action:*

## Chapter 21

### Where the Action Is: Positioning Matters in Interaction

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Position matters. As a conversation analyst examining any form of recorded synchronous human interaction – be it casual or institutional – I constantly monitor for, and organize my collections of target phenomena around *structural position*: Where on a transcript and when in an unfolding real-time encounter does a participant enact some form of conduct? Because conversation analysis (CA) is primarily focused upon *action sequences*, I use CA methods to examine the ways in which participants' audible utterances and visible body-behaviors accomplish particular social actions due at least in part to their *positioning* within a sequence of interaction – an ordered series of moves between different participants (Heritage, 1984:245).

This chapter attests to the importance of paying close attention to structural position as requisite for understanding how participants design their conduct to be *recognizable as particular social actions* in interaction.<sup>1</sup> The position of target conduct may be described technically relative to various levels of analytic granularity (Schegloff, 2000), including at the levels of:

- (i) *the turn-constructive unit* (TCU), e.g., pre-beginning, beginning, post-beginning, medial, pre-possible completion, or transition space (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 1996a);
- (ii) *the turn* (e.g., within the first TCU of a multi-TCU turn);
- (iii) *the sequence* (e.g., in adjacency pair terms, the first pair part [FPP] or second pair part [SPP]; pre-/insert-/post-expansion; Schegloff, 2007);
- (iv) *the course of action/activity* (e.g., opening an encounter, assessing a student, complaining, introducing, storytelling); and
- (v) *the overall structure* of an entire encounter (Robinson, 2013).

To detail a range of positional issues, this chapter first considers how to tackle the task of identifying the position of participant conduct, and then presents several forms of evidence that an action takes on different meaning based upon how it is positioned – where/when it is done. In the central section, “Position, Action, and Meaning,” I discuss: (i) how the position of a silence affects its meaning; (ii) the reflexive relationship between position and turn design; and (iii) the position of an action within a sequence. I expand this last section by explicating how CA work on preference organization necessitates analyses of structural position, detailing how participants position both their sequence-initiating and sequence-responding actions. Across two sub-sections, I focus on describing how I have gone about analyzing participants' positioning of sequence-*initial* actions in both institutional and casual interactions to exemplify how structural position can serve as a key avenue leading directly to findings about the orderliness of human action.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter's discussion of position inescapably dovetails with discussions of *action formation* (cf. Schegloff, 2007:xiv) and *action ascription* (Levinson, 2013:104).

### Identifying the Position of Participant Conduct

For those new to CA methods, the task of defensibly identifying the position into which a participant enacts some form of conduct may be challenging – it is certainly easier said than done. As a case in point, consider Excerpt 1, which shows two college roommates, Jake and Ken, in a continuing state of incipient talk (Schegloff, 2007:193; Hoey, 2018) as they do their respective homework while sitting in their residence’s living room. Writing up a draft analysis of Excerpt 1, a student in my CA methods course originally identified line 11 as a first-position action, ignoring what comes before it, likely because at line 10, a 2-sec silence elapses which exceeds the 1-sec standard maximum silence proposed by Jefferson (1983; see also Hoey, 2017:77-79). As part of offering my feedback, I advised my student to “look up” above line 11 while inspecting the transcript (which needed revising to incorporate more detail, especially regarding embodied actions observable during the silences), and take into full consideration the prior actions/activity.

#### Excerpt 1 [S21JG]

01 (3.0)/((KEN gazing down to his lap, reading a book))  
 02 JAK: .nhh ((sniff)) °See what I got for tomorrow?° .nnhh  
 03 ((JAK gazing at his laptop))  
 04 (13.0)/((KEN reading book; JAK gazing at laptop))  
 05 KEN: .nhh hhh ((sniff))  
 06 (21.0)/((KEN reading book; JAK gazing at laptop))  
 +fig.21.1.1  
 07 KEN: +hhh! hmhh .hmm .hhhm ((laughing))  
 08 (1.4)  
 09 KEN: **Br:eh.**  
 +fig.21.1.2  
 10 +(2.0)/((**JAK shifts gaze to KEN**))



Fig.21.1.1



Fig.21.1.2

11 JAK: **What book,**  
 12 KEN: Ss::- (.) Um::,=  
 13 JAK: =For class?=Or just readin' it.  
 14 KEN: No=it's for class. It's thuh Comedies? by uh Terence?  
 15 JAK: Interest[ing].  
 16 KEN: [Of- of Rome,=It's like one sixty B C. This one's  
 17 called um the Girl from Andros?

Line 11 is a question, and questions are prototypical FPPs (Schegloff, 2007). In *sequence organizational* terms (Schegloff, 2007:2), line 11 is a first positioned action. But this does not mean that it is a first action in *sequential* terms (ibid). Even though Jake’s utterance at line 11 is

an information-seeking query that makes a type-matched SPP answer relevant next, a closer look and listen reveals that line 11 is *responding* to Ken's audible actions at line 7 and line 9.

At line 7, Ken pierces the lapse (noted at line 6) with laughter while maintaining his gaze down to his book, and at line 9 he says, "Br:eh," a pronunciation version of 'bro' (slang for 'brother') that works as an exclamation stance-display or "response cry" (Goffman, 1978:800) responding to something he is reading. It is in response to Ken's line 9 that Jake shifts his gaze toward Ken (see Fig.21.1.2). While Ken's actions at lines 7 and 9 may not constitute a canonical FPP that normatively requires a response (cf. Goffman, 1981:74, 93-94; Keevallik, 2018:315; Stivers & Rossano 2010:27), they observably work to invite Jake to offer Ken the space to tell – *bidding* for Jake to ask – about the book he is reading.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it is *Ken's* actions at line 7 and line 9 that seem to be initiating – or at least engendering – this sequence/topic.

A participant's current talk and/or other interactional conduct is produced, heard, and understood by reference to immediately prior talk/conduct (unless work is done to index its 'misplacement'<sup>3</sup>). In other words:

“conversation is informed by the general assumption – common to both speakers and hearers – that utterances which are placed immediately next to some prior are to be understood as produced in response to or, more loosely, in relation to that prior. This assumption provides a framework in which speakers can rely on the *positioning* of what they say to contribute to the *sense* of what they say as an action” (Heritage, 1984:261; emphasis in original).

Thus, when I teach CA methods, I encourage students to follow the same basic principles that I follow when doing CA research: always look and listen to what happens leading up to the target conduct, while closely monitoring for embodied actions and keeping a creative, open mind to the different forms of participant conduct that might observably engender and constitute a sequence.

The editors of this volume asked me to write this chapter in a way that conveys my way of working – how I actually *do using* CA methods. Wearing these methodological 'goggles,' I now turn to the next and largest section in which I describe how consistently analyzing structural position served as a key avenue leading me directly to findings about the orderliness of human action.

### **Position, Action, and Meaning**

Position is a critical consideration when analyzing interaction because it is inextricably linked to action. The meaning of a participant's conduct derives, at least in part, from the particular sequential and social context in which it is produced (Schegloff, 1984; Drew & Heritage, 1992:12). In other words, an action takes on different meaning based upon how it is *positioned*—*where/when* it is done.

### **How Position of a Silence Affects its Meaning**

Consider, for example, a silence. Though non-CA approaches have regarded silences as “*prima facie* meaningless because no spoken action is undertaken” (Drew & Heritage, 1992:12), the CA approach demonstrates that a silence can be a highly significant interactional event, depending upon the *position* into which it develops (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974:715).

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<sup>2</sup> Ken's actions at lines 7 and 9 enact a type of “registering” or “noticing” (Pillet-Shore, 2021a; Schegloff, 2007), indexing a referent meriting public comment. Thus, Ken's “Br:eh” certainly makes relevant a so-far-unspecified worthwhile noticeable, and sequentially implicates some type of joint attention to/talk about it.

<sup>3</sup> See Bolden (2009) for a review of ‘misplacement’ markers.



While ‘silence’ is the agnostic term generally referring to a period of no sound, a specific silence can be differentially classified as a “pause” if it occurs intra-turn, a “gap” if it occurs inter-turn (Hoey, 2017:9), or a “lapse” if it occurs well after a transition-relevance place (TRP), the point at which a speaker’s turn is grammatically, prosodically, and pragmatically possibly complete (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974:715; Ford & Thompson, 1996). Thus, how involved participants understand the meaning of a silence hinges upon its *position* during interaction (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974:715, footnote 26).

Excerpts 2 and 3 show how silence can develop in different positions while physically copresent people are interacting in residential settings. Leading up to Excerpt 2, two resident members of a college sorority, Tasha and Irene, are eating breakfast and talking intermittently while standing and moving about their house kitchen. Line 1 shows a silence classifiable as a lapse, as it occurs in a specific structural position: at a place of possible sequence completion, after the participants have proposed and enacted topic/sequence closure through shared laughter (not shown). Because no speaker-selection technique has occurred in the just-prior talk, and the silence contains no sequentially relevant embodied action (Hoey, 2018:331), the participants do not treat the silence at line 1 as interactionally problematic or accountable; it is simply a manifestation of a continuing state of incipient talk (Schegloff, 2007:193).

**Excerpt 2** [SBfast2 c-1; Pillet-Shore, 2012a:392]

```

+fig.21.2.1
01      -> (1.0)+/((SAL entering kitchen; SAL/TAS in mutual gaze))
02 TAS:  He+y=
+fig.21.2.2
03 TAS:  =Sally;+ ((SAL removing her gaze from TAS))
+fig.21.2.3

```



Fig.21.2.1



Fig.21.2.2



Fig.21.2.3



Fig.21.2.4

```

04      -> (0.2) *(0.2) Δ(0.4)
ire      *gaze shift to SAL-->>
tas      Δgaze shift to SAL-->>
+fig.2.4
05 TAS:  +ptch!
06 TAS:  What's wro:ng. ((TAS/IRE gazing at SAL))

```

During the lapse at line 1, fellow resident Sally first becomes visible, arriving from her upstairs bedroom as she steps over the threshold into the kitchen (see Fig.21.2.1). Sally is entering into physical copresence with Tasha (and Irene) for the first time on this day (after they have spent the preceding evening apart). Thus, these participants orient to Tasha’s utterance at lines 2-3 as a first-position, sequence-initiating action – a sequentially implicative turn constituting the first pair part of an ‘adjacency pair’ (Heritage, 1984:246-247; Schegloff, 2007:9; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973:296). The adjacency pair structure is a normative framework for actions wherein one participant’s recognizable production and completion of a first pair part (FPP) action *initiates* a sequence often by selecting a next speaker who should immediately produce an appropriate,





Fig.3.1

12 CHA: They'r:e engaged? And their wedding date is in hh May.  
 13 -> (.) .h And Mom goes well hh when'd they get enga:ged.  
 14 -> And they're like (.) um: ptch! a w:ek ago:,

At lines 9-10 Chase says, “Listen to the whole story,” which is an utterance devoted to projecting a multi-unit turn that will extend beyond the next TRP. This utterance works to override the default rule that, when a speaker initially gets a turn-at-talk, that speaker only has rights to produce one turn-constructural unit (TCU) at a time (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). Thus, Chase’s line 10, coupled with his concurrent gaze away from Mark as he holds his mouth open (line 11; Fig.21.3.1), invites Mark to hold off talking where he might otherwise start (Schegloff, 1982:75-6). And Mark honors Chase’s multi-unit turn projection by withholding talk during the silences at lines 11, 13, and 14, each of which is classifiable as an intra-turn pause.

Thus, Excerpts 2 and 3 show that it’s not the duration of a silence that makes it significant (e.g., note how the sizable 3.2-sec silence in Excerpt 3-line 11 is co-constructed by both Chase and Mark). Rather, it is the *position* of a silence—relative to both sequential structure and local action—that observably matters to the involved participants, because position is inextricably linked to meaning.

### The Reflexive Relationship between Position and Turn Design

Participants also display their orientation to position as interactionally consequential in ways relating to turn design (Drew & Heritage, 1992:32; Drew, 2013), through which a speaker’s prosodic and lexical choices can encode and reveal that person’s orientation to *where/when* they are delivering an utterance.

As an example of the reflexive relationship between position and *prosodic* turn design, in examining the details of how people produce their very first vocalized utterances when opening copresent encounters, Pillet-Shore (2012a) demonstrates that participants recipient design their greetings on the level of prosody – the ‘musical’ aspects of speech (e.g., pitch, loudness, duration) – tailoring their utterances to both *person* and *position*. When greetings occur more than once during the same occasion between the same participants (e.g., when there is a break in their sustained physical proximity), participants produce their *initial* and *subsequent* greetings with distinctive prosody, evidencing parties’ own analysis of local position (Pillet-Shore, 2012a:380; cf. Schegloff, 1996b).

There is also a reflexive relationship between position and *lexical* turn design. In Excerpt 4, teaching assistant Trent and graduate student Jeff are meeting one another for the first time in a university-campus conference room. At line 9, Jeff shows that he is oriented to going *second* by designing his utterance with a turn-final “too,” marking this as a sequence-responding action (relative to Trent’s line 8).

**Excerpt 4** [UT-6]

01 ((5 knocks on ajar opaque door))  
 02 TRE: Come on i:n,  
 03 (.)  
 04 TRE: **fHow are ya.**  
 05 JEF: Hi=How are you today, ((door closing))  
 06 TRE: Good.=Trent Babag[e. ((TRE, JEF shaking hands))  
 07 JEF: [I'm Jeff Deedham,=  
 08 TRE: =Jeff?=Nice to meet chya.=  
 09 JEF: =It's nice to [meet you **too**,  
 10 TRE: [°Sit down° and have a seat he:re?  
 11 (1.4)/((TRE, JEF sitting, scooting chairs toward table))  
 12 TRE: **hhh °So° how are ya.**  
 13 JEF: Doing well.  
 14 TRE: [That's good to hear  
 15 JEF: [Doing well=**It's a beautiful day outside.**=  
 16 TRE: =**It is a beautiful day,=Is:n't it.**  
 17 JEF: Yeah.=It is.

Once Jeff and Trent get situated in their seats at a table (line 11), Trent initiates a new sequence by producing a personal-state sequence FPP (Pillet-Shore, 2018b) at line 12. Trent's "so"-preface (Bolden, 2006) treats this utterance as an other-attentive action addressing some pending matter that has not yet been resolved. But what is the pending matter? This is the *second* time in this opening phase of interaction (Pillet-Shore, 2018a) that Trent is delivering a personal-state inquiry to Jeff (with line 4 being the first time), and his 'so'-preface at line 12 displays his orientation to this action as occurring in *subsequent position*. Note that Jeff treats Trent's line 4 as a 'greeting substitute' (Sacks, 1975) by delivering a return-greeting at the start of line 5, thereby orienting to it as a *pro forma* inquiry (Pillet-Shore, 2008; 2018a:220). At lines 12-13, however, once they have established an engagement framework (Pillet-Shore, 2018a), Jeff treats Trent's subsequently positioned personal state inquiry as *bona fide* (Pillet-Shore, 2008:38; 2018a:220; 2018b:234).

In addition, with the second TCU of his turn at line 15, Jeff initiates an assessment sequence, doing a first-position assessment (Pomerantz, 1984) that praises the day's weather – an impersonal referent to which Trent has concurrent access. In the way that Trent designs his responsive turn at line 16, he shows that he is oriented to going *second*, agreeing with Jeff by replicating his evaluative term "beautiful" while emphasizing "is" (Stivers, 2005) and appending a tag question. But by deploying this [assessment + tag] format in second position, Trent invites Jeff to agree with *his* assessment. That is, Trent's turn design at line 16 upgrades his claimed epistemic rights, "manipulating the sequence to 'reclaim' the first position assessment slot and thereby the epistemic rights which accrue to that position" (Heritage & Raymond, 2005:28-30; cf. Pillet-Shore, 2021b).<sup>6</sup>

While the temporal ordering of the flow of Excerpt 4 might show that Jeff is chronologically first to assess the day's weather, Trent deploys a turn design in next position that enacts a stance claiming to have primary rights to assess that same referent.<sup>7</sup> Thus, we can see

<sup>6</sup> Positionality can also be negotiated through more subtle turn-design features (e.g., by using a locally initial reference form in locally subsequent position; for review, see Raymond, Clift & Heritage [2021]).

<sup>7</sup> More generally, people can play on shared expectations for utterances canonically recognizable as 'firsts' or 'seconds' to make sanctioning meta-comments, as when parents say, 'You're welcome' (e.g., often a 'second' action) to their children who've failed to say 'Thank you' in first position.

how important it is for a conversation analyst to monitor for structural position when analyzing interaction, because involved participants manifest concern to negotiate when/where they perform actions as a way of designing their conduct to be *recognizable as a particular action*.

### The Position of an Action within a Sequence: Preference Organization

The preceding sections (on how position matters for action and meaning vis-à-vis silence, and turn design) lead us directly to CA research on preference organization, which elucidates how people accomplish particular social actions – to either support or undermine social solidarity – due to their positioning within a sequence of interaction (Clayman, 2002; Heritage, 1984:265; Pillet-Shore, 2017).

As mentioned earlier, much of conversational interaction is organized around the basic unit of sequence construction, the adjacency pair, wherein one participant's recognizable production and completion of a FPP *initiates* a sequence often by selecting a next speaker who should *immediately respond* by producing an appropriate, type-fitted SPP. This means that the precise positioning – or timing – of participants' adjacency pair actions matters.

Many action types – both sequence-initiating and sequence-responding – involve at least two relevant alternatives. For example, when transferring something of value (object, service, information) from one person to another, the person who has the valued transferable (e.g., a drink, a ride, an unfamiliar person's name) may *offer* it through a FPP, or the person who is the potential recipient of the valued transferable may *request* it through a FPP (Schegloff, 2007:82). And when presented with a FPP offer, the recipient may deliver a SPP that *accepts* or *declines* it. Preference organization research demonstrates that these alternatives are positioned/timed differently (Pillet-Shore, 2017; Robinson, 2020).

Both FPPs and SPPs can be analyzed in terms of their positioning relative to preference organization.<sup>8</sup> Consider Excerpt 5, which shows a sequence involving two participants, Nina and Charles. Charles is Nina's adult nephew, and this sequence occurs shortly after he knocks on the door to Nina's home. As Nina and Charles walk from the door entry area toward the kitchen, Nina produces the utterance at lines 1-2, to which Charles responds at line 3.

**Excerpt 5** [F15SB-2 (simplified)]

01 NIN: Do you want:m: (a-/uh-) cuppa coffee er  
02 somethi[n]?  
03 CHA: [Ye:ah.=I would absolutely lo:ve a cup of coffee.]

Nina's utterance at lines 1-2 is a FPP question that she uses as a vehicle for doing the action of offering. Nina positions her offer of a cup of coffee to Charles at the earliest relevant moment in their interaction, just as they pass from the residence's family room into its kitchen (where beverages are stored and prepared). Thus, through the positioning of her offer, Nina does 'being a good host,' doing 'hospitality'.

Nina's *offer* makes relevant next a SPP that either *accepts* or *declines* it. But these alternative relevant actions are not *socially, interactionally* symmetrical – they are not equally-valued by participants (Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 2007; Pillet-Shore, 2010; 2011; 2017; 2021a), because each alternative has different implications for 'face' (participants' interdependent, public

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<sup>8</sup> While CA literature features many investigations of dis/preferred SPPs, there is comparatively little work demonstrating the important finding that FPPs can also be designed as preferred or dispreferred. For several different studies examining the preference organization of FPPs, see Pillet-Shore (2010, 2011, 2012a, 2016, 2017, 2021a).

images of self; Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Lerner, 1996) and ‘affiliation’ (participants’ continually updated displays of being ‘with’ or ‘against’ one another; Sidnell, 2010; cf. Lindstrom & Sorjonen, 2013), and thus the relationship of the participants involved. To accept another’s offer is to align and go along with it, and thereby perform an affiliative, face-affirming SPP action that is supportive of social solidarity.<sup>9</sup> But to decline another’s offer is a distancing action (Schegloff, 2007:59) that hinders the accomplishment of the activity proffered by the FPP, and thus constitutes a disaffiliative, face-threatening SPP action that is destructive of social solidarity (Heritage, 1984:268). Because one alternative is face-affirming/preserving and affiliative, and the other is face-threatening and disaffiliative, participants characteristically *position/time* each differently.

At line 3, Charles positions/times his SPP response so it starts in terminal overlap with line 2,<sup>10</sup> and he deploys a prosodically and lexically definitive (certain, unqualified) and enthusiastic acceptance that begins with “Ye:ah.” in turn-initial position, contiguous with the offer. The CA term for these properties of turn/sequence design is ‘preferred’ (Heritage, 1984; Pillet-Shore, 2017; Schegloff, 2007). Through this utterance, Charles accepts Nina’s offer, continuing the action sequence that her FPP set in motion. Participants doing affiliative actions (e.g., SPPs that do *accepting/granting*; FPPs that do *offering*) regularly design their utterances as Charles does, simply and straightforwardly – without delay, qualification/mitigation, or account (and indeed, Charles upgrades his preferred response with “absolutely lo:ve”).

In contrast, participants doing disaffiliative actions (e.g., SPPs that do *declining/refusing*; FPPs that do *requesting*) regularly position their actions later by delaying, qualifying/mitigating, and/or accounting for their utterances/actions. The CA term for this alternative non-straightforward turn/sequence design is ‘dispreferred’ (ibid). Excerpt 6 shows a classic telephone call analyzed by Schegloff (2007:98), who observes that, over the course of this call, Donny implies – but never explicitly states – a FPP request for assistance from Marcia (lines 4, 6, 9-10, 12-13 and 15); and Marcia implies – but never explicitly states – a SPP that refuses Donny’s request (lines 16-18).

**Excerpt 6** [Stalled; Schegloff, 2007:98]

```
01 MAR:    Hi Donny.=
02 DON:    =Guess what.hh
03 MAR:    What.
04 DON:    .hh My ca:r is sta:lled.
05         -> (0.2)
06 DON:    -> >('n) I'm up here in the Glen?<
07 MAR:    -> Oh::..
08         -> {(0.4)}
09 DON:    -> {'hhh }
10 DON:    -> A:nd.hh
```

<sup>9</sup> Although Schegloff (2007:60) observes that “generally it appears that accepting is the preferred response to offers,” he and others (e.g., Pomerantz & Heritage, 2013; Heritage & Raymond, 2021; Raymond & Heritage, 2021) warn analysts to *not* take away from this an oversimplified and distorted notion that participants orient to a single preference principle as applying to all instances of an action (like offering). Instead, when responding to a prior utterance, participants infer the intent of the prior speaker and take into account the action being done (e.g., offering, including consideration of the referent being offered, e.g., “the last piece of pie”), the precise way it is designed (e.g., formulated as “the last piece”), and the context of the offer (e.g., delivered to a guest by a dinner host who has not yet had a piece) to determine the preference principles that are most relevant.

<sup>10</sup> Nina’s utterance at line 1 is not designed as being possibly prosodically complete at/after she says “coffee”, and in this respect her “er somethin” is hearable as part of this same TCU.

11           -> (0.2)  
 12 DON: -> I don' know if this is po:ssible, but `hhh see  
 13           -> I haveta open up the ba:nk.hh  
 14           -> (0.3)  
 15 DON: -> A:t uh: (.) in Brentwood?hh=  
 16 MAR:   =Y:eah:- En I know you want- (.) en I whoa- (.) en I  
 17           would, but- except I've gotta leave in aybout five  
 18           min(h)utes. [(hheh)  
 19 DON:                           [Okay then I gotta call somebody else.right away.

Both Donny and Marcia design their respective utterances as dispreferred by *positioning* their actions as *delayed* relative to points in the interaction when they might otherwise have been initially relevantly performed (see also Robinson & Bolden, 2010:503). The arrows in Excerpt 6 indicate points when: (i) Donny could have produced – but instead chooses to *withhold* – an explicit FPP request; and (ii) Marcia could have produced – but instead chooses to *withhold* – either an offer of help, or (particularly at lines 8-15) an explicit refusal.<sup>11</sup>

After Donny announces his current problem (line 4) and location (line 6), he prefaces the projected portion of utterance at line 12 with, “I don’ know if this is po:ssible, but”—a conventionally indirect way (Brown & Levinson, 1987) of invoking Marcia’s ability to grant his implied/impending request. Precisely where/when he could have articulated a FPP request (e.g., “Could you [give me a ride]/[bring me some jumper cables]?”) Donny instead produces audible breathiness (line 12) and then delivers an account, stating his need to “open up the ba:nk” (lines 13, 15). Thus, Donny’s use of a dispreferred design – delayed positioning and accounting – implies a request for Marcia’s help without explicitly asking for it (Pillet-Shore, 2017).

For her part, Marcia designs her SPP response at lines 16-18 as dispreferred, producing a series of speech disfluencies (Pillet-Shore, 2016:42-45) that further delay, and manifest reluctance to articulate, her (implied) refusal to help. She also positions the more affiliating, optimistic component of her SPP earlier in her turn-at-talk (e.g., “en I would,”) to express her willingness to help, but then delivers an account (“except I’ve gotta leave in aybout five min(h)utes”) to defer and imply the more disaffiliating, pessimistic component of her turn – delaying her SPP refusal “to the vanishing point” (Schegloff, 2007:64).

A participant’s delay in doing some projected action is often (negative) inference-rich, such that delayed positioning portends a disaffiliating/face-threatening action. In his analysis of Excerpt 7, Sacks (1987:64) observes that, after Speaker A delivers a polar question FPP at line 1 that proffers the *ability* to walk, a silence develops at line 2, constituting a delay in Speaker B’s delivery of a SPP.

**Excerpt 7** [Sacks, 1987:64]

01 A:       Ken you walk?  
 02           (0.4)  
 03 A:       Ud be too hard for yuh?  
 04 B:       Oh::: darling I don’t know. Uh it’s bleeding a little,

At line 3, Speaker A displays an understanding of the emerging silence at line 2 (constituting “broken contiguity” between FPP and SPP) as foreshadowing an upcoming disaffiliating

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<sup>11</sup> As mentioned earlier, though CA literature boasts many studies of dis/preferred SPPs, there is comparatively little work demonstrating the important finding that FPPs can also be designed as preferred or dispreferred. For several different studies examining the preference organization of FPPs, see Pillet-Shore (2010, 2011, 2012a, 2016, 2017, 2021a).



response, revising the FPP question to proffer an *inability* to walk. Thus, delayed positioning of a SPP can, and often does prompt a FPP speaker to reformulate their FPP in an effort to forestall or attenuate projected disaffiliating actions.<sup>12</sup>

Another exemplification of this, Excerpt 8 shows Madge delivering a FPP request to her friend Tina's mom Linda at lines 1-5. But the SPP response due next from Linda is delayed by: the silence at line 6 (and possibly also the turn re-completing components at lines 4-5), Linda's turn-initial "Wull-" at line 7 (which works to alert Madge to an incipient non-straightforward and/or disaffiliative, face-threatening action; Schegloff & Lerner, 2009), Linda's launch of an insert sequence at line 9 (which further defers her delivery of the projected base SPP; Schegloff, 2007: 98-99), the silence at line 11, and Linda's "It's just" turn-beginning at line 12 and subsequent trail-off engendering additional silence. Thus, at line 13, Madge displays her understanding of Linda's delayed SPP response as foreshadowing an upcoming disaffiliating refusal.

**Excerpt 8** [Marcia MTRAC 60 1-7]

01 MAD: I wa:s just wondering y'know .hhh (0.3) could-  
 02 (.) d'yo:u thi:nk you might (.) wanna rent (.)  
 03 you know like the bottom part (of/a) yer: (.)  
 04 g'ra::ge like to me: fer a whi:le, °a sump'm  
 05 like that.°  
 06 (.)  
 07 LIN: [Wull-  
 08 MAD: [.hh I think [( )  
 09 LIN: [Oh- you mean for living in: Madge?=  
 10 MAD: =Ye:ah.  
 11 (0.3)  
 12 LIN: .h It's just? (0.8)  
 13 MAD: No:t possible.=h[uh,  
 14 LIN: [Ye:ah.=We- Tina tri:ed that one  
 15 ti:[me.=But-  
 16 MAD: [I remember she was doing that (once),=  
 17 LIN: =We could not get it tu:h (0.3) clo:sed.

Anticipating Linda's refusal, Madge articulates it *for her*, designing her utterance at line 13 such that Linda can *agree* with it at line 14. So position clearly matters—to the participants—for action and meaning within a sequence of interaction. As we have seen, preferred design involves a participant positioning an action early/on time, whereas dispreferred design involves a participant positioning an action after some delay(s). While participants' on time/as-soon-as-possible delivery of preferred actions maximizes the likelihood of their occurrence (Pomerantz, 1984), their delayed delivery of dispreferred actions minimizes the likelihood of their occurrence by enabling the possibility that they will be preempted (Heritage, 1984:276).<sup>13</sup> Thus, at a

<sup>12</sup> This observation may shed additional light on Excerpt 2 (see Note 4).

<sup>13</sup> Extant literature implies the existence of a preference matrix containing both congruent and incongruent possibilities (Pillet-Shore, 2017). Congruence occurs when a person produces a preferred action with preferred design features (as in Excerpt 5), or when a person produces a dispreferred action with dispreferred design features (as in Excerpts 6 and 8). Incongruence occurs when a person produces a preferred action with (some) dispreferred design features (e.g., accepting an invitation after some delay, which can sound 'reluctant'), or when a person produces a dispreferred action with some preferred design features (e.g., declining/rejecting an offer/proposal/request quickly or without mitigation or account, which can sound 'rude'; Heritage, 1984:268; Pillet-Shore, 2021a; Schegloff, 2007:73; Sidnell, 2010:86).

fundamental level, the differential structural *positioning* of actions systematically biases interaction toward the maintenance of social solidarity.<sup>14</sup>

In designing and positioning their actions, however, participants may have to manage *multiple* conflicting, or ‘cross-cutting,’ preferences (Schegloff, 2007:76), as exemplified by Excerpt 9. Two Resident Assistants, Sean and Hailey, are sitting side-by-side at their university residence hall’s duty desk one evening. Sean has been watching the TV show ‘Lucifer’ on his laptop, and Hailey has just taken a break from orienting to her homework to ask Sean about the show. During the lapse at line 1, both Sean and Hailey watch a scene, and at line 2, as Sean laughs at what has just transpired in the show, he pauses it in preparation for delivering his utterance starting at line 3.

**Excerpt 9** [S20HR]

01 (5.0)/((SEA/HAI watching show “Lucifer” on SEA’s laptop))  
 02 SEA: \*hhh hah hah ((\*SEA pauses show))  
 03 0:kay, so: (1.0) eh:you think you’re ever  
 04 gonna watch this show,+ ((SEA gazing at HAI))  
 +fig.21.9.1  
 +fig.21.9.2  
 05 (2.0) +Δ (1.0) Δ ((HAI gazing at laptop))  
 hai ΔsquintsΔ

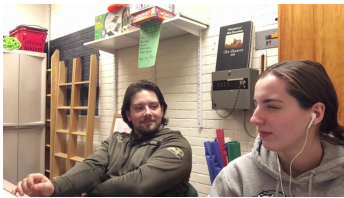


Fig.21.9.1

Fig.21.9.2

Fig.21.9.3

+fig.21.9.3  
 06 HAI: +There’s a lot of other shows on my lis:t[, so (.) it  
 07 SEA: [Mhm  
 08 HAI: would be a very long time.  
 09 SEA: Ohkay. .hh So(hh), Lucifer:, the fallen angel, Right?

At lines 3-4, Sean delivers a FPP question to Hailey. Hailey starts visibly responding by squinting her eyes during the silence at line 5 (see Fig.21.9.2), and then produces her SPP utterance at lines 6 and 8. What is of interest is how Hailey positions (i.e., times and designs) her SPP response relative to Sean’s FPP, which has set in motion two types of constraints: one of grammar, and one of action.

Sean’s FPP is constructed as a polar question, making conditionally relevant a ‘yes’ or ‘no’-type answer. As Hailey designs her SPP response, she finds herself in a bit of an interactional bind. On the one hand, Sean’s FPP is done as a “pre-expansion” (Schegloff, 2007:28-29), hearably preliminary to his projected action of divulging additional information about the show. By including the negative polarity item “ever” in his question, Sean builds it to invite or “prefer” a ‘no’ SPP from Hailey (Heritage & Clayman, 2010; Heritage & Raymond,

<sup>14</sup> Though see Robinson (2020) for an analysis of positioning in sequences involving unqualified disaffirmations to information seeking questions.

2021), which would constitute a “go-ahead” response (Schegloff, 2007:30) promoting the progress of the sequence by encouraging Sean to proceed telling about the show without fear of spoiling it for Hailey. On the other hand, Sean has already demonstrated that he is a fan of the show; thus if Hailey’s SPP were to include a bald ‘no’ she would be displaying disaffiliation by not adopting the same affective stance toward the show that Sean has expressed.

Hailey observably manages these multiple conflicting or “cross-cutting” preferences (Schegloff, 2007:76) in how she positions (i.e., times and designs) her SPP. Starting with the sizable silence noted at line 5, Hailey breaks the contiguity (Sacks, 1987) between the end of Sean’s FPP and the start of her SPP, thereby delaying the start of her audible response and conveying reluctance to perform a possibly face-threatening action (Heritage, 1984:268; Pillet-Shore, 2017). When she launches her spoken utterance at line 6, she starts by first producing a face-saving account (for not planning to watch the show any time soon). Moreover, Hailey’s turn at lines 6 and 8 is non-conforming—she builds it to include neither a ‘yes’ nor a ‘no’ (Raymond, 2003). Thus, Hailey positions the components of her SPP sensitive to ‘face’ and affiliation concerns, calibrating her response to preserve her relationship with Sean.

### ***How Participants Position Sequence-Initial Actions***

While the preceding section discussed how participants position both their sequence-*initiating* FPP and sequence-*responding* SPP actions, those new to CA methods may find the task of describing SPP positioning easier (given its anchoring to a FPP) than describing FPP positioning. Aiming to aid with this task, this section discusses some extant CA work uncovering the preference organization of sequence-*initial* actions, elucidating how FPPs can be performed with preferred design (positioned without delay) or with dispreferred design (delayed or withheld).<sup>15</sup>

As one example, in analyzing how people repair problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding one another in conversation, Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks (1977) observe that participants treat correcting an addressed-recipient as dispreferred. When others initiate repair, they tend to position their initiations after some delay, withholding them a bit past the possible completion of the turn containing the trouble-source (Kendrick, 2015; Kendrick & Torreira, 2015). As a second example, Robinson & Bolden (2010) show that speakers explicitly soliciting an account for an addressed-recipient’s conduct with a *why*-type interrogative (e.g., ‘Why [not]?’, ‘How come?’) often design their FPPs as dispreferred, withholding or delaying this action relative to points in the interaction when they might otherwise have initially relevantly performed it (Robinson & Bolden, 2010:503).<sup>16</sup> And as a third example, Pillet-Shore (2010, 2011) demonstrates that, when opening interaction, participants position their FPP *offers* of information (e.g., an unfamiliar person’s name; a previous activity/conversational topic formulation) as preferred, while they position their FPP *requests* for information as dispreferred. Participants *offer* their own names during introducing sequences (Pillet-Shore, 2011), and *offer* previous activity formulations that enable newcomers to join already in-progress interactions (Pillet-Shore, 2010) *as soon as possible*, at the *earliest* moment in the interaction when those actions may be initially relevantly performed. This contrasts with how participants position their explicit FPP *requests* for this same information after observable delay (Pillet-Shore, 2010; 2011).

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<sup>15</sup> For reviews of this CA work, see Robinson & Bolden (2010) and Pillet-Shore (2017).

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, speakers often try an ‘off-record’ account solicitation first (e.g., a known-answer request for confirmation), and if/when this ‘fails’, they move to an ‘on-record’ why-type interrogative, which further delays the ‘why’ action (Raymond & Stivers, 2016).

In addition, CA work examining both casual and institutional interaction has shown that participants position *the same FPP action differently* sensitive to their own observable orientations to salient social identities (e.g., ‘host’ or ‘guest’ during a residential gathering; ‘parent/caregiver’ or ‘teacher’ during a parent-teacher conference). For instance, Pillet-Shore (2012b, 2015a, 2016) elucidates how, during parent-teacher conference encounters, when teachers and parents deliver FPP utterances that assess (*praise* or *criticize*) the focal student, there is a marked contrast between *when* and *how* they each position and perform these actions. This contrast is embodied in the structural preference organization outlined in Table 21.1.

Table 21.1 Preference Organization of Parent-Teacher Interaction (Pillet-Shore, 2016:37)

	PRAISING STUDENT	CRITICIZING STUDENT
TEACHER	preferred	dispreferred
PARENT/CAREGIVER	dispreferred	preferred

Whereas teachers praise students with preferred design, producing their student-praising utterances straightforwardly and without delay, parents treat their articulation of student-praising utterances as dispreferred, working to either avoid praising students altogether or to delay, qualify and account for their student-praising utterances (Pillet-Shore, 2012b, 2015a). Reciprocally, while parents routinely criticize students/their own children straightforwardly and without delay (Pillet-Shore, 2015a), teachers systematically delay, qualify/mitigate and/or account for their student-criticizing utterances (Pillet-Shore, 2016).

Excerpt 10 shows part of this preference organization manifesting within one short sequence of interaction, exemplifying how teachers differentially position their student-praising versus student-criticizing FPPs. At lines 1 through 8, Teacher (T) delivers student-praising utterances about the seventh-grade student to his Mom (M). At line 10, however, Teacher delivers one mild student-criticism, acknowledging the student’s tendency to be a bit too social/talkative in class.

**Excerpt 10** [PT02]

01 T: He’s getting all of his assignments in:,  
 02 [.hhh so: (.) (ehyeah/yihknow).=  
 03 [(M moves gaze up from doc to T, starts nodding))  
 04 T: =He- (.) he’s really one uh thuh- one uh thuh  
 05 starz in the class in thet (.) I don’t have tih .hh  
 06 constan- JASON. WHERE’s yer HOMEWORK.  
 07 M: Ri[:ght,  
 08 T: [He’s: (.) always got it in:,  
 09 (0.5)  
 10 T: .hh Uh:: (.) **Li:ttle socialization,**  
 11 **but (.)/(open palms gesture))**  
 12 M: (Ah) tha[t doesn’t surpr:se me  
 13 T: [it’s- it’s **seventh fgra:de.hh[h hih heh hhhh**  
 14 M: [Yea(h)h

Teacher positions his one student-criticizing utterance relatively *late* in this sequence, only after he has *first* delivered a series of student-praising utterances (Pillet, 2001).<sup>17</sup> And he further

<sup>17</sup> This seems related to Maynard’s (2003) finding that people tend to deliver good news first and bad news later.

delays his articulation of this student-critique by allowing silence to develop at line 9 and then doing a turn-initial delay via “Uh: (.)” at line 10.<sup>18</sup>

Excerpt 11 exemplifies the holistic preference organization outlined in Table 21.1, showing how both a teacher and a parent/caregiver differentially position their respective student-praising and student-criticizing utterances over the course of a sequence. Starting at line 1, Teacher (T) is displaying category report documents to the fourth-grade student’s legal guardian Grandma (GM). After announcing that she has a pile of these documents (‘e:m’ at line 1) for all the subjects – with each document showing a detailed evaluation of the student’s performance in a particular subject category – Teacher pulls out a document on the student’s writing (line 3), placing it on the tabletop facing Grandma. During the silence at line 4, Grandma starts to look at this writing document as Teacher mobilizes the next category report document. Just as Teacher is starting to name this next document’s subject at line 5, Grandma indexes her continued orientation to the writing document. At lines 6, 8, and 10, Grandma articulates a criticism of the student’s writing, and it is no accident that she does this *before* Teacher articulates her assessment of the student’s writing. Teacher *facilitates* Grandma being first to articulate this criticism by *delaying* her own delivery of additional details about the writing evaluation document (e.g., at line 4).

**Excerpt 11** [PT07a]

01 T: We have ‘e:m for all thuh su:bject[s.  
02 GM: [O:ka#:y.  
03 T: Here’s one fer: writing? ((T placing document in front of GM))  
04 (1.0)/((GM looking at, touching writing document))  
05 T: (Then/An’) here’[s one- ((T mobilizing next document))  
06 GM: [\*His wri:ting skills. ↑°wel-° An’=  
07 ((\*GM doing lateral headshake; T retracts next document))  
08 GM: =he’s-? d- uhuh! [.hh °w’l° \*I think= ((\*GM brings palms to chest))  
09 T: [Yeah.  
10 GM: =they’re te:rrible. \*But what I’m seeing he:re, it’s: uh:¿  
11 ((\*GM lowers hand from chest to document))  
12 T: \*This:¿ is an indicator that= ((\*T pointing to spot on document))  
13 =he’s really watching me= ((T, GM gazing down at document))  
14 =in cla:ss?=Cause we go over all th[is dee oh el=  
15 GM: [Mkay,  
16 T: =bufore he se:es i[t.  
17 GM: [pt!  
18 T: .hh So, (.) that to me:, (0.3)\*/((\*T lifts gaze to GM))  
19 He’s- (.) \* wi:th me? ((\*GM lifts gaze to meet T’s gaze))  
20 He’s wa:tching? He’s lea:rning?\* ((\*GM shifts gaze to doc))  
21 [He’s re\*me:mbering? ((\*T shifts gaze to doc))  
22 GM: [ptch! °Okay,°  
23 T: .hh An’ then when I: give him a: (0.4)\* ((\*T, GM in mutual gaze))  
24 >test at thee end a thuh we:ek.< He recalls  
25 [what it was thet= ((T, GM gazing down at document))  
26 GM: [°Oka:y.°  
27 T: =we ta:lked about. .hh Now if we looked at (.) his  
28 (.) actual writing? Yesh.You’re righ[t.We’r:e=  
29 GM: [Yeah.  
30 T: =We’r:e (0.3) >havin’ a li:ttle bit a difficulty  
31 there.

<sup>18</sup> For detailed analysis of how Teacher designs his student-criticism in this excerpt, see Pillet-Shore (2016:44-45).

Through the design of her utterance at lines 6, 8, and 10, Grandma treats her articulation of a negative assessment of her grandson's writing differently than her articulation of a positive assessment. On the one hand, Grandma produces her talk *criticizing* the student's writing skills (e.g., '°W'I° I think they're te:rrible.') fluently and without mitigation or qualification, treating her articulation of this student-criticism as preferred (Pillet-Shore, 2015a). On the other hand, Grandma produces her talk projecting delivery of a *praising* comment ('An' he's-? d- uhuh!'; 'But what I'm seeing he:re,it's: uh:ç') with a series of speech disfluencies, cutting off her in-progress talk each time it projects student-praise (Pillet-Shore, 2012b; see also Lerner, 2013) and ultimately suppressing her articulation of a favorable assessment altogether via trail-off. Grandma thereby displays her reluctance to articulate the projected praising assessment of her grandson that she sees on Teacher's document. Through her work to avoid explicitly stating a favorable assessment of the student, Grandma treats her articulation of student-praise as dispreferred (Pillet-Shore, 2012b; see also Pomerantz, 1978).

Reciprocally, through the design of her utterances spanning lines 12 through 31, Teacher treats her articulation of a *positive* evaluation of the student's writing differently than her articulation of a *negative* evaluation. On the one hand, Teacher *prioritizes* explicating the part of the writing evaluation document that shows a positive student-evaluation (lines 12-27), producing her talk *praising* the student's attentiveness and retention (e.g., at lines 13-14 and 20-21) fluently (without speech perturbations, e.g., sound cut-offs or silences) and straightforwardly, without delay, mitigation, qualification or account (Pillet-Shore, 2016). During this portion of her turn, Teacher also uses the pronoun "he" consistently to explicitly refer to the student as the agent responsible for doing the formulated actions (e.g., watching, learning, remembering). Through these design features, Teacher displays her orientation to her articulation of this student-praise as preferred.

On the other hand, Teacher *delays* her explicit acknowledgement of a negative student-evaluation until midway into line 27. Teacher produces her talk *criticizing* the student's "actual writing" non-fluently, allowing small silences to develop at lines 27, 28, and 30, and repeating "We'r:e" at lines 28 and 30. Teacher also designs this portion of her turn less straightforwardly, mitigating the student-criticism (with "a li:ttle bit") and delaying mention of the student's "difficulty" until lines 30-31. By including "Yesh.You're right" at line 28, Teacher positions the incipient, negatively-valenced portion of her utterance as an explicit agreement with Grandma's prior critical assessment, which also works to *further delay* Teacher's articulation of this student-criticism. In addition, Teacher's selection of "We'r:e" at lines 28 and 30 is significant, constituting a switch from her consistent use of the pronoun "he" (from lines 12-27, during which the valence of her student-evaluating utterance was *positive*) to "we" right when the valence of her student-evaluating utterance turns *negative* (Pillet-Shore, 2016:37-39). By shifting from "he" to "we", Teacher avoids directly referring to the student as the agent responsible for this trouble (cf. Drew & Heritage, 1992:31; Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007).

Thus, through the positioning/timing and design of her utterances at lines 27-31, Teacher treats her *articulation* of student-criticism as dispreferred, even though she has already provided GM with the document showing Teacher's previously-written evaluation of the student's performance in this writing subject category. This suggests that participants orient to the positioning of their actions in complex, multimodal ways: while Teacher presents GM with her *document*-based student-assessment first, Teacher and GM tacitly collaborate to enable GM to be first to *articulate* that student-assessment. Indeed, it is courtesy of the complementarity built into the preference organization outlined in Table 21.1 that parents and teachers regularly collaborate

to produce sequences in which *a parent is first to articulate* a particular student-trouble/criticism (Pillet-Shore, 2015a; 2016).

Using the institutional interaction case of the parent-teacher conference, we can also see how position matters for action formation and ascription – in other words, how actions take on different meaning based upon how they are positioned. When teachers *delay* their student-criticisms, treating their articulation of student-troubles as dispreferred (Pillet-Shore, 2016:53), they thereby display *unease* about what they are saying, treating this action as difficult to perform. If, however, a teacher were to articulate a criticism about the focal student *early* in the encounter without mitigation or account, that positioning and design would fundamentally alter the action, converting it to being hearable as doing ‘harsh criticism,’ ‘hostility,’ or even ‘complaint’ (Pillet-Shore, 2016:54), thereby potentially precipitating conflict with parents (Pillet-Shore, 2016:33-35). Thus, by positioning/timing and designing their actions consistent with the preference organization outlined in Table 21.1, participants tacitly collaborate to avoid conflict.

### ***How Position of a Sequence-Initial Action Affects Action Recognition: The Case of Openings***

Robust evidence that actions take on different meaning based on how they are positioned is observable during the opening phase of both institutional and casual interactions. For example, in his analysis of landline telephone call openings, Schegloff (1986) finds that one of the major organizational issues that parties work out is “not only what their ‘talkables’ or ‘tellables’ *are*, but where they should go: what may be a high priority, early item for one interlocutor is a late mentionable... for another” (Schegloff, 1986:116). Participants routinely negotiate this issue by opening their phone conversations with four core adjacency pair sequences (summons/answer, identification and/or recognition, greeting, and personal state/‘howareyou’), subsequently initiating the first topic of conversation in the next ‘anchor position’ turn. But “at very nearly every position in the developing course of these openings, there is an opportunity for one party or the other to preempt control of first topic” (ibid:117). Thus, a participant may *position* a self-attentive first topic earlier than anchor position in the call as a way of doing urgency.<sup>19</sup>

As another example, in his analysis of physician-patient primary care visits, Robinson (1999) shows that the same action – a physician’s ‘How are you?’ – is understood differently based upon how it is positioned. This FPP is understood as a social/relational personal-state inquiry soliciting a general evaluation when it is positioned prior to completion of the opening phase of the medical visit; but it is understood as a medical solicitation of concerns (signs/symptoms) when it is positioned upon completion of the opening phase.

In my own research, I have found striking evidence that participants’ differential positioning of the same action, even *within the activity of opening* an encounter, can observably affect action recognition. This became particularly clear through my analysis of the social action of *registering* – the linguistic and embodied ways that people call joint attention to a selected, publicly perceivable referent so others shift their sensory attention to it (see Pillet-Shore, 2021a for literature review and discussion of the various terms, including ‘noticing,’ that have been used to refer to this pervasive social action).

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<sup>19</sup> For example, in the “Stalled” phone call from which Excerpt 6 originates, caller Donny preempts the personal state/‘howareyou’ sequence with his utterance at line 2, thereby conveying urgency. For analysis of how copresent participants position self-attentive first topic utterances/actions during openings of face-to-face encounters, see Pillet-Shore (2018b).



The opening phase of face-to-face interaction is an opportune site for (producing and examining) the social action of registering, since the beginning of a copresent encounter is a time of heightened exposure to novel sensory stimuli and heightened self- and other- awareness and attentiveness. People can register referents that are either owned by someone in the interaction (i.e., a referent for which a participant is regarded as responsible), or unowned (i.e., an impersonal referent for which no participant is regarded as responsible, e.g., the weather). During openings, participants display that they are monitoring for registerable owned referents – diverse and distributed manifestations of the self, including presentation of participants’ bodies (e.g., how persons look, smell, sound) as well as participants’ self-extensions, like living quarters (e.g., how a person’s residence looks and smells; Pillet-Shore 2017, 2018a, 2021a; Schegloff 2007:86–88).

Examining sequence-initial actions that register owned referents, I have found participants to produce and understand this action guided by the systematic structural preference organization outlined in Table 21.2, which is sensitive to *ownership* (‘yours,’ ‘mine’) of, and *displayed stance* (e.g., positive[+], negative[-]) toward, the target referent.

Table 21.2 Preference Organization when Registering an Owned Publicly-Perceivable Referent (Pillet-Shore, 2021a:19)

	DISPLAYING (+)STANCE PRAISING	DISPLAYING (-)STANCE CRITICIZING
REGISTERING ‘YOURS’	preferred	dispreferred
REGISTERING ‘MINE’	dispreferred	preferred

Sequence-initial registering actions are done along a preference continuum, positioned either: (i) *sooner*, with preferred design – close to initial perceptual exposure (Schegloff 2007:86) and at the earliest moment in the interaction when that registering action may be initially relevantly performed – and straightforwardly (without mitigation, qualification, account, uncertainty); or (ii) *later*, with dispreferred design – delayed relative to points in the interaction when that registering action might otherwise have been initially relevantly performed. Each of the next four excerpts (Excerpts 12 through 15) exemplifies one cell in Table 21.2, showing how people differentially position their registering FPPs.

Excerpt 12 shows a case of a participant registering ‘yours’ at the earliest moment in the interaction when this action may be initially relevantly performed. As Alec is entering his friend Linda’s apartment – and while still standing at the door’s threshold (Fig.21.12a) – he does a registering ‘yours’ action about a referent on Linda’s shirt, toward which he displays a positive stance at line 4.

**Excerpt 12** [LMG-11-27-04]

```
01 ((LIN opening opaque door))
02 LIN:      =*He:llo:[:::~? ((*LIN and ALE enter mutual gaze))
03 ALE:      [Hi: the:re,=It was open
04      -> downstairs-[=<Oh my gosh.>=Yer tee shirt fis so: +cute,=
05 LIN:      [Oh good.                                +fig.21.12a
```



Fig.21.12a



Fig.21.12b ALE's referent

06 DAI:        =ɸI know=[I said that thuh last time I saw th#et?=-  
 07 LIN:                [Oh my lucky kitty? ((patting her shirt))

Just after greeting Linda and accounting for how he got through the locked gate downstairs (lines 2-4), Alec registers his visual perception of Linda's T-shirt, which features a maneki-neko (lucky kitty) graphic (Fig.21.12b). Alec indexes his realization of the referent through his "<Oh my gosh.>" reaction token, rushing to explicate his target referent ("=Yer tee shirt") and then display a clear positive stance toward it by smiling as he gazes at it and delivers his praising assessment (Pomerantz, 1984) of it as "so: cute." As Alec says the positive descriptor "cute," Linda gazes down (Fig.21.12a) to her own chest, subsequently patting the graphic on her shirt with her hand as she delivers her utterance at line 7. Alec positions his *registering yours* action as preferred, timing it to start at the *earliest* relevant moment in the emergent encounter and as *close as possible* to his apparent initial perceptual exposure to the referent (Schegloff 2007:86). Analyzing this and other cases like it, Pillet-Shore (2021a) demonstrates that, when non-owners of a target referent (like Alec) initiate a registering sequence positioned early, they are using the registering action as a vehicle for achieving a particular social-relational purpose: *complimenting* the owner of the referent.

Excerpt 13 shows a case of a participant registering 'mine' at an early moment in the interaction. Emma's welcoming her Dad into her new single-occupant apartment after recently relocating from a smaller, run-down apartment. After invoking the reason for their encounter (Dad seeing her new residence for the first time) at line 8 by registering the entire space (and Dad positively assesses it at line 11), Emma starts an utterance comparing this place to the last, but then self-repairs at line 13 to register a visible, potentially criticizable referent.

**Excerpt 13** [F15EA]

01                ((EMM opening opaque door))  
 02 DAD:        [He:::y  
 03 EMM:        [Hello:ɔ  
 04                (1.0)/((DAD/EMM move into hug))  
 05 DAD:        >How are ya< honey?= ((DAD, EMM hugging))  
 06 EMM:        =hhhHi(hh) ((breathy))  
 07                (1.0)/((DAD pats, rubs EMM's back as they hug))  
 08 EMM:        .hh hh \*So this is i:t.hh= ((\*hug disengage; EMM turns  
 09                away from DAD, gesturing with right hand toward  
 10                inner apartment))  
 11 DAD:        =Very ni:ce,

12 EMM: .hh Ye:ah(h).=It's hh much bigger than .hh  
 13 -> >last wa-<=\*It's ptch! <ve:ry ((\*DAD, EMM gaze to couch))  
 14 messy[:,>=This=  
 15 DAD: [Yea:h  
 16 EMM: =is:[:,(.) kinda- fYeah=°Well.° .hhh  
 17 DAD: [f↓No::

Emma displays a negative stance toward her target referent by prosodically producing her utterance at lines 13-14 as a concession, registering her apartment's appearance using the negative descriptor “<ve:ry messy:,>” – a criticizable referent, particularly by a parent (Dad) to an adult child (Emma). Emma precisely *positions* her registering so it is timed to coincide with Dad's initial gaze toward her visibly untidy couch, apparently using it not only to self-deprecate but also – and more importantly – to *preempt* her Dad from possibly registering this criticizable referent first (cf. Pillet-Shore, 2015a), thereby explicitly acknowledging as valid, and even agreeing with, her Dad's presumed critical point of view. Through their actions at lines 13-17, Emma and Dad tacitly collaborate to produce a registering sequence in which a potential for criticism-by-other becomes an opportunity for affiliation around a self-criticism, achieving shared, concurrent smiling (lines 16-17). Analyzing this and other cases like it, Pillet-Shore (2021a) demonstrates that owners (like Emma) of criticizable referents can initiate a registering sequence as a vehicle for both *self-deprecating* and *preempting criticism* from a fellow participant.

Excerpt 14 shows a case of a participant registering ‘mine’ in a position that is observably *delayed* relative to points in the interaction when she might otherwise have initially relevantly performed it. After waking up on Saturday morning, 12-year-old Layla enters her living room (at line 3) to find her neighbor and nanny Addison playing a board game with her younger sister Sue. Layla has had a hair cut in the week since she last saw Addison. As Layla first becomes visible (Fig.21.14a), she runs both of her hands through her hair, displaying its freshly cut ends. After briefly gazing up at Layla to greet her at line 4, Addison returns her gaze down to the game. About 44-seconds later, after Layla has sat down on the floor to watch the others play, she once again touches her hair at lines 12 and 13 as she addresses her talk at line 14 to Addison. But it is not until line 27 that Layla explicitly registers the change to her hair, exactly 60-seconds after she has established copresence with Addison.

**Excerpt 14** [S17AD]

01 SUE: One,=two,= ((SUE tapping pawn on game board))  
 02 SUE: =thr[ee,= ((SUE, Ad gazing down at *Sorry!* game board))  
 03 LAY: [Hi: ((LAY audibly entering room from off screen))  
 04 SUE: =fou:r\*¿= ((\*ADD shifts gaze up to LAY))  
 05 ADD: =↑Hi:,\* ((\*ADD returns gaze down to board game))  
 06 SUE: Five,=six,=seven:-  
 07 (0.2)/((SUE placing pawn; LAY enters frame))  
 08 LAY: .nhh!+ ((LAY runs hands through her hair, displays ends))  
 +fig.21.14a



Fig.21.14a

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09      (0.5)
10 SUE:  You:r turn, ((to ADD; ADD starts moving pawn))
11      (0.8)/((SUE shifts gaze to LAY; ADD gazing down to game))
...     ((41-sec omitted; ADD explains camera to LAY, continues
...     playing board game with SUE))
12 SUE:  t(h)ome*work. ((*LAY bringing hands to her hair))
13      [((LAY runs hands through her hair, displaying ends))
14 LAY:  [I: don't think you're gonna wanna turn this in,
15 SUE:  [I °°(got s::ix)°°
16 ADD:  hhh [hm hm
17 LAY:  [hh .hh=
18 SUE:  =One,=two,=th[ree,=four >blah=blah< blah,=
19 ADD:  [.hh                               Yihknow,
20 SUE:  =five six seven:: ((SUE moving pawn))
21 ADD:  °This is something- This is something=
22 ADD:  =*el[s:e.° ((*ADD reaches for card on game board))
23 LAY:  [hh!
24 SUE:  hih hih hih .hh!
25      (.)/((ADD places card down onto game board))
26      Eleven,= ((ADD gazing down at game board))
27 LAY:  -> =I cho:pped my hai:r.hh*
28      (.)/((*ADD shifting gaze from board game to LAY))
29 ADD:  It looks so go:od? ((ADD/LAY in mutual gaze))

```

Layla observably *delays* her registering utterance relative to Addison’s initial perceptual exposure (which occurs as early as line 4; Schegloff 2007:86) and relative to earlier points in the opening phase when Addison might have relevantly registered her hair cut. During this time, Layla displays the freshly cut ends of her hair twice (lines 8, 12-13), apparently to enhance the opportunity for Addison to do the preferred alternative (of registering ‘yours’ while displaying a [+]stance). Moreover, in the way that Layla designs her sequence-initial registering utterance at line 27, she specifically avoids articulating a valenced-stance toward her own hair, allowing her recipient Addison to be first to articulate a positive stance toward the target referent (through her positive descriptor “so go:od”) at line 29. Analyzing this and other cases like it, Pillet-Shore (2021a) demonstrates that, when an owner of a referent initiates a registering sequence with an utterance designed to be neutral/nonvalenced (as Layla does at line 27), participants are likely to infer that the owner is *fishing* (cf. Pomerantz, 1980) *for a recipient’s positive stance-display* toward that target referent.

Excerpt 15 shows a case of a participant registering ‘yours’ both in a lexically neutral/nonvalenced way, and in a position that is observably *delayed*. Moments after arriving to her home and greeting her daughter’s friend Elsa, Mom shifts her attention to greeting her college-aged daughter Kelly, who is visiting home before leaving with Elsa for a Spring Break trip to Florida. As Mom walks toward Kelly, she lowers her gaze from her daughter’s face to her

chest (Fig.21.15a), embodying a registering action as she delivers a quiet neutral/nonvalenced utterance (line 2) that registers her entire daughter as referent. Over 1-second elapses between the end of Mom's utterance at line 2 and the start of her utterance at line 6, time during which she does not start a next TCU to lexicalize a stance-display toward her target referent.

**Excerpt 15** [S12KA-2]  
 01 (0.5)/((MOM approaches KEL, gazing to KEL's chest))  
 02 MOM: -> °Look at +chyou::° ((MOM splays arms))  
 +fig.21.15a



Fig.21.15a

Fig.21.15b

03 (1.0)/((MOM and KEL hugging))=  
 04 =pwtch!= ((MOM's kiss on KEL's cheek sound))  
 05 =(MOM squeezes KEL tighter during hug))=  
 06 MOM: =Don't go any ta:nner,+  
 +fig.21.15b  
 07 KEL: \*Mom it's fake.=It's spray.= ((\*hug disengage))  
 08 ELS: =Why [would you spray tan before we go.  
 09 MOM: [Oh.  
 10 KEL: So I will be ta(h)nhh

Through her utterance at line 6, Mom issues a directive that constitutes an implied registering and criticism of how tan Kelly's skin looks, performing an action constitutive of the rights and obligations of the mother-daughter relationship. This encounter occurs in late-winter in the Northeastern United States, and Mom's manifest concern is that her daughter looks (too) tan as a result of exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays from tanning salon lamps, which increase the risk of skin cancer. From the moment of initial perceptual exposure, Mom *delays* making this specific referent explicit, and she also avoids articulating a negative stance toward this referent, both of which show her orientation to her actions as dispreferred. And Kelly responds by providing an account (line 7) for the target referent (her skin color) which displays her orientation to, and aims to assuage, her Mom's implied concern ("It's spray" conveys that her tan is not from UV rays). At line 8, Elsa delivers a *why*-type interrogative (Robinson & Bolden, 2010) that solicits further account from Kelly, thereby continuing a criticizing sequence. Analyzing this and other cases like it, Pillet-Shore (2021a) demonstrates that when a non-owner of a referent initiates a registering sequence with an utterance designed to be neutral/nonvalenced (as Mom does at line 2—registering the referent without expressing a clear +/- stance toward it—participants are likely to infer that the non-owner is *implying and eliding a negative stance* toward that referent and thereby *criticizing* its owner.

While the foregoing analysis has shown that/how participants produce and understand sequence-initial registering actions consistent with the structural preference organization outlined in Table 21.2, Excerpt 16 offers an opportunity for a deviant case analysis, showing a participant

flouting this accountable preference organization structure for effect on action. Shortly after entering his friends' apartment, Greg initiates a registering sequence starting at line 8.

**Excerpt 16** [F12AW-1]

01 ((ALI opening locked, opaque door))  
 02 ALI: [He:llo::,=  
 03 GRE: [Hello,  
 04 GRE: =>How co:me we don't have broomball tonight.=  
 05 ((GRE standing in ajar doorway))  
 06 LIS: =Hi:e::[:,  
 07 ALI: [It's tuhmorrow.= ((ALI sits on couch))  
 08 GRE: -> =**This room smells:.** ((GRE closing door))  
 09 ALI: **Wha(h)t?=  
 10 GRE: =**E:W:+:..=nhh!** ((sniff))  
           +fig.21.16.1**



Fig.21.16.1

11 (0.2)/((GRE walking from door to window))  
 12 GRE: **Open a window.**  
 13 LIS: °Yeah=will you?°  
 14 GRE: **Gross.** ((GRE at window, opening it))  
 15 GRE: .hh [Ih-  
 16 ALI: [>Oh my god<=That's bad.=[If- (I can't smell)  
 17 GRE: [Smells like T Tyler's room.  
 18 ALI: hhh! fWh(h)[at?  
 19 LIS: [I don't (even) know what it i:[s.  
 20 GRE: [((throat clear))  
 21 ALI: **O:h no:..=That's bad.hh**  
 22 GRE: **E::[w.** ((GRE opening 2<sup>nd</sup> window))  
 23 LIS: [°Did Kayla puke yesterday?°

With his declarative, “This room smells:,” Greg registers his sensorial experience of perceiving an olfactible referent. While he does not use a clear assessment (e.g., “smells bad;” “stinks”), his use of the verb “smells” idiomatically connotes an unpleasant odor—a criticizable and complainable referent (Pillet-Shore, 2015b; 2016). Moreover, as an arriving visitor to his friends’ residence, Greg is a non-owner of this referent. And yet, rather than designing his registering ‘yours’ action as dispreferred (by delaying it, and/or producing it non-straightforwardly with mitigation, qualification, or uncertainty) he positions it *early* (close to apparent initial perceptual exposure) and straightforwardly, in effect doing a face-threatening/dispreferred action with preferred design (Pillet-Shore, 2017).

Resident Ali responds at line 9 with an ‘open’ class repair initiator (Drew, 1997), treating Greg’s preceding action—which constituted an abrupt topic shift—as problematic, but leaves unclear if the problem is one of hearing, understanding, or affiliation. Based on coparticipants’

next actions and Ali's similar utterance at line 18, however, it becomes clear that it is a problem of affiliation. At line 10, Greg displays a clear negative stance toward his target referent (through his "E:W:", a dedicated negative stance-display that he renews through his utterances at lines 14 and 22), treating it as not only criticizable but also complainable (Pillet-Shore, 2015b; 2016). By then audibly sniffing, moving toward the apartment's windows as he delivers the directive at line 12, and opening two windows (at lines 14 and 22), Greg moves to remedy the complainable smell.

Given the structural preference organization outlined in Table 21.2, how can we explain Greg's registering actions in Excerpt 16? First, olfactory fatigue (a case of sensory adaptation) is apparently at work: the residents' subsequent talk (line 16–23 and beyond) reveals that, after their prolonged exposure to this odor they are unable to detect it, thus precluding the possibility that they could preemptively register (or remedy) the smell. Greg's registering actions may thus be articulating a trouble relevant to his recipients, formulating it as a shared adversity/witnessing (cf. Sacks, 1992 I:236–246). Second, the target referent in this case is communal: four college students share this apartment, thus creating a diffusion of responsibility around who owns the criticizable referent (see line 23). And third and perhaps most importantly, these participants orient to one another as incumbents in a very relaxed, close relationship: ethnographically we know that Greg is a frequent visitor to this residence, a familiarity he embodies through his entitled (non-deferential) action of opening his friends' windows. Thus, Excerpt 16 shows how people can use early-positioned registering 'yours' actions to display a high degree of social closeness/intimacy: When participants orient to one another as having an unguarded and highly familiar relationship—the strength of which they treat *in situ* as able to withstand the momentary strain posed by a face-threatening action—they may not only perform a dispreferred action, but may do so with relatively preferred design. Indeed, as suggested by Pillet-Shore (2017), this may be one of a larger class of activities permitted between persons who are incumbents of intimate relationships—a way of doing “being intimate” (cf. Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2005) that transcends registering sequences to include many other social action sequences (Pillet-Shore 2017:37). So it seems Excerpt 16 is an exception that still proves the rule.

In sum, this section has presented evidence attesting to the fact that the *position* of an action within a sequence affects its meaning – how that action is understood. Now that we have considered how participants position sequence-initial actions, we can juxtapose Tables 21.1 and 21.2 (above), and observe that they have important similarities. Indeed, Table 21.2 is likely the *context-free* version of the more *context-sensitive* Table 21.1.<sup>20</sup> The preference for teachers to praise students, and for parents to avoid praising their own children, seems to be a specific manifestation of the more general preference for the person least/not responsible for a praisable referent (i.e., a non-owner) to be first to call attention to it. Correlatively, the preference for parents to criticize their own children seems to be a specific manifestation of the more general preference for the person (most) responsible for a criticizable/complainable referent (i.e., an owner) to be first to call attention to it (Pillet-Shore, 2017). Thus, we can see how CA work examining both casual and institutional interaction shows that participants can position *the same FPP action differently* sensitive to their own observable orientations to salient social identities (e.g., ‘owner’ of a referent during a residential gathering; ‘parent/caregiver’ or ‘teacher’ during a parent-teacher conference).

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<sup>20</sup> For discussion of how the organization of conversation can be both context-free and yet capable of context-sensitivity, see Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974).



We have also seen how people can differentially position the same social action of *registering an owned referent* as a vehicle for doing other stance-implicative actions, including complimenting, self-deprecating to preempt a fellow participant's potential criticism, fishing for another's praise, or implicitly criticizing a fellow participant. It is clear that participants can use the *positioning/timing* of the registering vehicle to partially constitute (along with concomitant lexical, prosodic, and embodied stance-displays), and make recognizable, which other action they are doing through it. Thus, participants' differential *positioning* of the same action—even *within the activity of opening* an encounter—can observably affect action recognition.

### Conclusion

Throughout my career as a conversation analyst, I have found it productive to assume that there is a fractal-like order to be discovered within the realm of human social interaction—including *within* the activity of opening (Pillet-Shore, 2018a), and nested within that (like a matryoshka doll) within each of its constitutive components, including greetings (Pillet-Shore, 2012a), introductions (Pillet-Shore, 2011), and registerings (Pillet-Shore, 2021a). This stance informs and pervades all of my work, and it is resonant with, and manifested in, this chapter's focus on structural position. There is orderliness to how participants precisely position and design their actions at many levels of analytic granularity. This chapter has presented evidence that actions take on different meaning based upon how they are positioned. When we pay close attention to *structural position*, we are poised to better understand how participants design their conduct to be *recognizable as particular—and meaningful—social actions* in interaction.

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