



Intersubjectivity at the counter: Artefacts and multimodal interaction in theatre box office encounters

Jan K. Lindström^{a,*}, Catrin Norrby^b, Camilla Wide^c, Jenny Nilsson^d

^a Department of Finnish, Finno-Ugrian and Scandinavian Studies, P.O. Box 24, 00014 University of Helsinki, Finland

^b Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism, Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm, Sweden

^c University of Turku/Scandinavian Languages, 20014 University of Turku, Finland

^d The Institute for Language and Folklore, Vallgatan 22, SE-411 16 Gothenburg, Sweden

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Abstract

The present study investigates the interplay between language, material and embodied resources in one specific type of service encounters: interactions at theatre box offices. The data consist of video recorded interactions in Swedish at three box offices, two in Sweden and one in Finland. Cases representative of the interactions are selected for a multimodal micro-analysis of the customer–seller interactions involving artefacts from the institutional and personal domain.

The study specifically aims at advancing our understanding of the role of artefacts for structuring and facilitating communicative events in (institutional) interaction. In this way, it contributes to the growing research interest in the interactional importance of the material world. Our results show that mutual interactional focus is reached through mutual gaze in strategic moments, such as formulation of the reason for the visit. Artefacts are central in enhancing intersubjectivity and mutual focus in that they effectively invite the participants for negotiation, for example, about a seating plan which can be made visually accessible in different ways. Verbal language can be sparse and deictic in these moments while gaze and pointing to an artefact does more specific referential work. Artefacts are also a resource for signalling interactional inaccessibility, the seller orienting to the computer in order to progress a request and the customer orienting to a personal belonging (like a bag) to mirror and accept such a temporary non-accessibility. We also observe that speech can be paced to match the deployment of an artefact so that a focal verbal item is produced without competing, simultaneous physical activity.

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1. Introduction

This study explores the role of artefacts and multimodal interaction in service encounters at theatre box offices. In these interactions customers enquire about ticket availability to make a purchase or they come to pick up pre-ordered tickets. The encounters were video-recorded at three large theatres in one Finnish and two Swedish major cities and the interactions took place in Swedish. The overall aim is to investigate how intersubjective understanding of the focus and trajectories of actions (cf. Schütz, 1953) is facilitated and achieved through artefacts in a service encounter. In particular, we analyse moments of mutual, simultaneous orientation to the artefact in focus, but also asymmetrical orientations to

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: jan.k.lindstrom@helsinki.fi (J.K. Lindström), catrin.norrby@su.se (C. Norrby), Camilla.wide@utu.fi (C. Wide), jenny.nilsson@sprakochfolkminnen.se (J. Nilsson).

artefacts when they serve as resources for temporary exits from mutual accessibility. Moreover, we analyse the interplay of the verbal formulation of action with embodied cues (gaze, handling of artefacts). The analysis presented in Section 4 focuses on three important activity phases dealing with the reason for the customer's visit: initiation of the encounter, recognition of the reason of visit, and agreeing on the ensuing transactional process. Section 2 below gives a brief overview of previous multimodal studies in interaction and presents the interactional ecologies of the theatre box office encounters. Section 3 introduces the data and analytic approach.

2. Background

The interest in multimodal aspects of interaction within Conversation Analysis (CA), and other closely related methodological frameworks, dates back to at least the 1970s (see, e.g. Goodwin, 1979, 1980, 1981). However, in more recent years we have seen a surge in the number of studies on multimodality in interaction, not least evidenced by the growing number of special issues and edited volumes devoted to such inquiry (e.g. Depperman, 2013; Haddington et al., 2014; Nevile et al., 2014a; Seyfeddinipur and Gullberg, 2014; Stivers and Sidnell, 2005; Streeck et al., 2011a). In a recent state-of-the-art review article, Nevile (2015) introduces the notion of *the embodied turn* in research on language and interaction to capture the growing interest in the role of the human body in social interaction. This includes, for example, gestures, such as pointing; gaze direction; facial expressions; shifting parts of the body, or the entire body as in walking; handling material objects as well as affordances of the physical environment (see Nevile, 2015:122 for further references and examples; cf. also Streeck et al., 2011b; Mondada, 2016).

The inquiry into multimodal aspects of interaction can, broadly speaking, be divided into studies that show the use of multimodal resources, including artefacts, in communication more generally (see, e.g. studies by Goodwin, 1986, 2000, 2013; Mondada, 2009, 2011, 2014; Streeck, 2009, 2014), and studies that address issues of interaction and embodiment in certain contexts and domains, such as meetings, educational or medical contexts. The body of research dedicated to multimodality and embodied interaction in service encounters is small but increasing. One case in point is Sorjonen and Raevaara's (2014) study on requests for goods at a convenience store chain. In addition to the use of language and embodiment, some previous studies have also highlighted the role of artefacts in service encounters. Evidence before the present analysis includes research by Brown (2004) on practices in a queue and certain artefacts in a shop setting; Lewellyn and Hindmarsh (2013) on ticket sales at an art gallery; Raymond and Lerner (2014) on how the handling of artefacts at a restaurant counter launches a "recognizable service routine", and Richardson and Stokoe (2014) on requests in a public bar, which demonstrates the salient role of the computer. In a recent study, Fox and Heinemann (2015) investigate how customers in a shoe repair shop manipulate material objects as part of making a request. Their findings showed that customers handled the objects brought in for repair in ways that aligned with the production of the verbal request. Also of relevance for our own inquiry are Mortensen and Hazel's (2014) study on social encounters at a university helpdesk, which documents how participants literally move into interaction through joint attention to the other's embodied actions, and, in particular, Hazel and Mortensen's (2014) investigation of the employment of material objects, such as pen and paper, to manage the sequential organization of the on-going interaction in study counselling meetings.

In a service encounter both customer and staff need to make themselves available for communication and create a mutual *interactional space* (Mondada, 2009). The physical environment has been shown to impact on the ensuing interaction; if the locality enables a participant to approach his or her target addressee straight on this allows for mutual visibility and early recognition, whereas an approach from the side is usually marked by a delayed recognition (Mondada, 2009:1991). Also, the transition from walking to standing plays an important role for opening the interaction. For example, Sorjonen and Raevaara (2014) found that interactional focus was established through the means of mutual gaze as well as the customer's trajectory towards the counter. In other words, the physical affordances of the venue are important for how the ensuing interaction takes shape.

The ticket counter design varies between the box offices of our study, ranging from an open counter with no partition between the interlocutors to one where staff and customers are fully separated by a glass wall and interact via loudspeakers and microphones. However, common to all three theatres is a layout where customers must approach the ticket counter from the side, thus making visual contact between customer and staff possible only during the last few steps when approaching the counter. The regulation of the flow of customers follows different institutional practices. In the two Swedish ticket offices, customers take a queue number as they enter the premises, and the staff summons the next customer by pressing a button which emits a beeping sound at the same time as the next ticket number is displayed on a monitor. At the theatre in Finland, there is no such central queue management system, and the box office is operated on a first come, first served basis (however, in most cases there is no queue). These differences in the material environment are not the focus of this study: the analysis starts from the initial greeting sequence, leaving the approaching practices aside. Our analysis also shows that the basic interactional trajectories and the facilitating role of artefacts therein are profoundly similar in our data, although the physical construction of the ticket counters and the actual physical form of some of the available artefacts vary.

2.1. Interactional ecologies of objects at a theatre box office

Artefacts of varied kinds appear in our service encounters, some of them essential for the transaction at hand, some peripheral. On the one hand, there are *institutional* artefacts, provided by the theatre box office and handled primarily by the staff member. They include the environmental setting, like the booth and the counter for the transaction, and tools like the computer and the queuing control system. Some artefacts, on the other hand, are the customer's *personal* belongings, including handbags, wallets, mobile phones, calendars etc. In between the institutional and personal artefacts are the essentially *transactional* ones, which are handled by the staff and customer at certain moments: queue number tickets, seating plans and tickets are primarily provided by the institution, while diverse paper documents, discount vouchers and pay cards are presented by the customer. Some of the customers' personal belongings can take on a temporary transactional function; for instance a mobile phone can display the booking reference. Similarly, a principally institutional artefact like the computer screen may become a shared transactional object when the customer and staff both orient to the information displayed on it. In other words, objects from primarily institutional and personal realms can be recruited to serve an interpersonally shared transactional task at a given moment.

In addition to the surrounding environment and the artefacts inhabiting it, a theatre box office encounter consists of a verbal and embodied interaction between a customer and staff member. The particular nature of the business at hand is formulated verbally, with characteristic request forms for particular tasks. The staff member responds to these requests and, in turn, requests certain kinds of information from the customers to be able to progress the ticket order. This transactional talk is accompanied by the participants' embodied conduct, in which gaze direction and gestural practices are of great importance.

2.2. The 'script' for an encounter at a theatre box office

Based on our analyses of the data, the 'script', i.e. the recurrent order of participants' actions at theatre box office, can be summarized as follows (cf. Brown, 2004; Linell, 2010; Richardson and Stokoe, 2014); C refers to the customer, S to the staff member:

- (1) Initializing the encounter: C and S establish mutual attention and exchange greetings.
- (2) Recognition of the reason of visit:
 - a. No pre-booking: C gives the name of the play and date for which tickets are requested;
 - b. Pre-booking: C informs S that s/he has come to collect tickets.
- (3) Agreeing on the ensuing process:
 - a. S initiates a negotiation about preferred seats, C selects the seats;
 - b. S requests a booking reference, C provides it.
- (4) Progressing the order: S retrieves the requested tickets and hands them over; payment transaction (does not occur if the pre-booked tickets are pre-paid).
- (5) Leave-taking: reciprocal thanking and farewells by C and S.

In our analysis we concentrate on the first three steps (1–3), i.e. up to the point when the staff member has received all necessary information to be able to progress the order according to the customer's wishes.

3. Data and analytic approach

This study builds on a data-set of service encounters video recorded at three theatre box offices, two in Sweden, and one in Finland.¹ The collection for this article limits itself to the ticket ordering sequences of the encounters and consists of 44 clips in which customers have various artefacts with them at the counter. In these clips, both interacting parties were visible and the course of the encounters followed the generic "script" that was observed to be the most typical in the data (see Section 2.2). The analysis below presents in great multimodal detail a selection of these interactions at the counter. All three box offices are housed in the theatre building and are located in the city centres of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Helsinki. The theatres perform plays in the Swedish language and the majority of the customers are Swedish speakers.

To capture the customer–staff encounter, a video camera was positioned behind the staff in a side view facing the counter and customer. One or two additional cameras facing the staff were used in the recordings from Gothenburg. All

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participants consented to being recorded and posters were placed in front of the counters to inform the customers, giving them opportunity to opt out. The data were anonymized in the transcripts which follow common CA notation (for transcription symbols, see [Appendix A](#)). The methodological approach is conversation analytic and interactional linguistic with an emphasis on multimodal (or broadly speaking, embodied) resources. The analysis thus keeps track of the coordination of linguistic and other communicative means, the sequential organization of interaction, and the temporal trajectories of actions taking place at a box office counter (see [Streeck et al., 2011b](#); [Mondada, 2014](#)).

4. Analysis

In the following we report our findings on the multimodal, embodied interactional practices carried out by customers and staff members in three initial, and for the transactional business crucial, phases of the box office encounter: (1) initialization of the encounter, (2) recognition of the reason for the visit and (3) agreement on the ensuing transactional process. The first analytical section (Section 4.1) is kept short and is based on one representative extract. It serves to illustrate a pattern found in all the service encounters we studied, namely how customers employ material objects in the opening of the encounter for getting ready to do business. Section 4.2 is based on three extracts, from three service encounters, which demonstrate how the transition from the opening to the transactional phase is accomplished. The final section, Section 4.3, builds on ten extracts, sourced from five service encounters, and documents the complexities of negotiating the transaction (including, e.g. seating selection and availability). The increasing length of the analytical sections thus reflects the increased interactional complexity in our data.

4.1. Initializing the encounter

The opening of the encounter is usually brief, often less than a couple of seconds. During this time the customer moves into the staff member's vision, either summoned by the queue management system (Sweden) or by self-selection (Finland). The parties establish eye contact and exchange greetings either while the customer is moving towards the counter, or at the counter. After greetings, customers typically avert their gaze and momentarily attend to some artefact, getting ready to assume what we refer to as the *business position*, i.e. standing still at the counter facing the staff member and possibly having a transactional object in hand. It is also the case that the opening tends to merge rather seamlessly with the next phase – recognition of the reason for visit (see Section 4.2) – but some openings are somewhat longer, as illustrated by extract (1).

In extract (1) the customer (C) is approaching the counter swiftly from the side while the staff (S) is looking at the computer screen. With her, C carries a set of personal belongings: a handbag and a bicycle helmet. When C arrives at the counter she turns her body straight to S; both parties establish brief mutual gaze just prior to the reciprocal greetings (Image 1), C's colloquial *moi* and S's neutral *hej*. After her greeting, C turns gaze to her things which she places on the counter to her left, and then rummages around in her bag, eventually picking out a wallet, opening it up and searching for something in it (Image 2). During this search, S is first oriented to C's activities, then shifts gaze to the computer screen, and back to C as C establishes business position handling the wallet on the counter.

(1) HEL:SVE:065. Box office, Finland. No pre-booking.²



Image 1: Mutual gaze and bodily orientation before greeting in (1).

#Img. 1

- 1 C: moi
hi
2 S: hej
hi
3 (0.6)

² The images are inserted continuously in the transcripts and their position is marked by '#Img.' followed by the image number (e.g. #Img. 1, #Img. 2, etc.). Brackets ([]) indicate the exact positioning of the action on an image in relation to transcribed speech.

has left the floor for S (cf. Streeck, 2014 on gaze). Having heard the name of the show, S signals recognition with the receipt token *mm* in a final overlap in line 3, simultaneously turning his gaze to the computer and mobilizing it by striking the keyboard; with these embodied–artefactual acts he signals readiness to progress C’s request (cf. Mortensen and Hazel, 2014; Hazel and Mortensen, 2014 on the staff member’s use of artefacts to signal the transition from one activity to another).

In extract (3) the customer comes to the box office to collect pre-ordered tickets. Arriving at the counter, C reciprocates the greeting with *hej*, leaning further down to her bag and taking out two sheets of paper (probably print-outs of a pre-booking), placing them on a tray on the counter and formulates the request of collecting tickets (line 4). Through her body posture, and gaze direction S is oriented towards C while she is getting ready and starts producing the request verbally. Towards the end of the request line (4), C finally looks up. Mutual gaze with S is established at the end of the word *biljetter* ‘tickets’ which is a keyword for the business at hand (Image 4).

(3) HEL:SVE:069. Box office Finland, pre-booking.

- 1 S: *hej hej*
hi there
- 2 C: *hej*
hi
- 3 (1.2)
- 4 C: *ja ska ha två bilje[tter me namne Strömberg.*
I want two tickets with the name Strömberg.
[#Img. 4



Image 4: Mutual gaze on keyword *biljetter* ‘tickets’, line 4 in (4).

When C utters *me namne* ‘with the name’ (line 4) S reorients her body and gaze towards the computer screen. Anticipating action closure and a step to the next, C also begins to look towards the computer screen as she offers a last name as booking reference (line 4).

Extract (4) illustrates a parallel case to (3), a customer collecting pre-booked tickets. Just prior to verbalizing her request, C has her gaze on a white envelope in her left hand, holding a queue number in her right hand. Next, C starts formulating her request (line 1). This is prefaced by a prolonged *eh* during which she rapidly deposits the queue number in the bowl intended for this purpose. The first part of C’s request *jag vill hämta ut biljetter* ‘I want to pick up tickets’ is produced slowly and co-ordinated with her physical actions: on *hämta* ‘pick’ she places the envelope on the counter, gazing down, and on *ut* ‘up’ her gaze shifts to her left which coincides with her reaching into her left pocket. So far her gaze, body movements and verbal actions signal that she is not yet ready to proceed. However, on the keyword *biljetter* ‘tickets’, produced with normal tempo and a slight emphasis, she lifts her head and establishes brief eye contact with S, thus signalling her availability for transactional business (Image 5).

(4) GBG2:STA:004 Box office Sweden, pre-booking.

- 1 C: *eh:: <ja: vill hämta ut> [biljetter som ja har beställt]*
um I want to pick up tickets that I have ordered;
[#Img. 5

2 S: *mm̥*



Image 5: C lifts gaze on keyword *biljetter* ‘tickets’, line 1 in (5).

With the tempo shifts, C had delayed talk to adjust to embodied activities involving artefacts (cf. Mondada, 2014) until she had reached business position at the counter. Up to this point S has been following C's movements, but when C utters *biljetter*, S glances quickly towards the computer screen and then back to the customer. This might signal that the computer needs to be mobilized, but the measure is dependent on more information from C. During the rest of the request formulation *som jag har beställt* 'that I have ordered' C takes out her mobile phone, clearly visible on the word *beställt*, the point at which she also lowers gaze down to the phone (which mediates the booking reference). Her request is received minimally by S with *mm* at the same time as S moves her head and gaze towards the computer screen, signalling readiness to progress the request.

4.2.1. Summary

As the analysis of the extracts above demonstrates, verbal interaction is closely coordinated with embodied resources and orientations to artefacts in the initial stages of the box office encounters. The participants establish brief eye-contact while the customer is approaching the counter. Then the customer averts gaze while arranging personal belongings and displaying the key objects for the transaction at hand (vouchers, queue tickets, booking references). Such behaviour marks that the customer is still preparing for the transaction. Mutual gaze is established at the beginning of the opening request line, in particular during the keyword which defines the reason for the visit, either buying a ticket (temporal reference) or collecting a pre-ordered one (reference to tickets). The participants synchronize their verbal and non-verbal actions by pacing talk to match the delivery of the keyword and establishing eye-contact – both central for recognitional procedures. Customers may take their time arranging personal belongings. Such orientations to non-transactional objects suspend the transactional progress and thus regulate interactional accessibility (see Ayaß, 2014 on accessibility). Furthermore, from the very start of an encounter, artefacts can be handled in a way to project upcoming trajectories of interaction: for example, a wallet made visible anticipates the final payment transaction. The analysis points to the importance of the display and manipulation of artefacts for structuring and facilitating the communicative events in the type of institutional interaction that theatre box office encounters belong to. Intersubjectivity is secured through the coordination of verbal, visual and material resources the participants employ.

4.3. Agreeing on the ensuing transactional process

Having dealt with the initialization and recognition of the reason for the visit, we now move forward to the next phase where the customer's order is being progressed by the staff member and negotiated by both participants. While the staff member signals recognition of the business at hand, the customer has typically reached the business position, standing firmly in front of the counter and (usually) keeping hands and some personal belongings on the counter. In case of no pre-booking, the next course of action involves choice of available seats. This negotiation is initiated by S, as seen in extract (5), the direct continuation of (2) above. Having recognized the business at hand (the receipt *mm* in line 6), S gazes quickly at C halfway through his question *vilken sektion vill du sitta i?* 'which section do you want to sit in?' and then removes the queue ticket from the seating plan on the counter while holding a pen in his hand. He then reorients his gaze to the computer screen while keeping the pen up in a hold-position (see Image 6). Immediately prior to S's question C has finished handling a personal object (a mobile phone with earphones that she has placed to her right on the counter). Upon hearing the question, C redirects her gaze and her left hand from her mobile phone to the seating plan, which is physically accessible on the counter for both parties to look and point at.

(6) STO:DRA:002. Box office, Sweden.

- 6 S: mm̥ (.) vilken sektion vill du #sitta i#.
mm̥ (.) which section do you want to sit in.
- 7 C: eh: ja tro- (.) ja va inne å titta på: (0.4) eh Dramatens hemsida.
eh I think- (.) I checked (0.4) uh the Dramaten website.
- 8 S: mm
- 9 C: [(tror de) fanns på: (0.7)
 [#img. 6
I think there were on



Image 6: Mutual orientation to the seating plan, line 9 in (6); S with pen in a hold-position.

C retains visual focus on the seating plan and places her left index finger on it, indicating that she is on her way to specify the seats. C's response about the seats (line 7) is prefaced with *eh*, which signals that it may be somehow inapposite, and it is then cut off after the initial epistemic marker *ja tror* 'I think'. The cut-off is followed by an account, which informs S that C has pre-checked the availability of certain seats, which enables her to launch an exact request. During the production of this account C and S establish mutual gaze briefly before orienting gaze to the seating plan on which C's index finger is pointing. Simultaneously, C takes a wallet from her pocket in her right hand (Image 6, line 9).

As the continued transcript in (7) shows, C has some difficulty in pinpointing exactly which seats she had pre-checked, but makes a guess that they were located in the first or second row (line 10). During this specification, C moves her finger across the seating plan and gazes in the direction of the computer, apparently mobilizing a response (Stivers and Rossano, 2010) while S shifts his gaze between the computer, the customer and the seating plan, following in the end C's finger on the seating plan. S confirms the availability of the seats, first with the recognitional *mm* (line 11), and then, after a turn-holding pause of half a second, with a deictic reference to their location, *parkett där* 'stalls there'. The pause is designed to delay talk to adjust to gesture (see Mondada, 2014, 2016): for S to stretch his right arm out on the counter and to point to a spot on the seating plan with the pen prolonging his arm at the same time as he articulates the deictic adverb *där* 'there' (Image 7).

(7) STO:DRA:002. Box office, Sweden.

- 9 C: undrar om de var andra raden eller
(I) wonder if it was the second row or
- 10 C: slutet av första, (0.6) andra raden tror ja de fanns nåt.
the end of the first, (0.6) on the second row I think there was something.
- 11 S: mm̥ (0.5) (parkett) (.) [där.
mm (0.5) (the stalls) (.) there.
[#Img. 7
- 12 C: ja precis.
yes exactly.
- 13 S: mm̥
- 14 C: två stycken där e jättebra.
two there are great.



Image 7: S points to a spot and produces deictic verbal reference *där* 'there', line 11 in (7).

C has kept her gaze and finger on the seating plan while S places the pen on it; C then withdraws her finger a bit, leaving room for S's pointing gesture. It is during this moment of mutual attention that the exact location of the seats is specified, achieved in more exact terms with the help of the available artefacts (seating plan, pen) and embodied resources (calibrated vision, pointing gestures) than with verbal language (no seat or row number is named by S). Such combinations of verbal language with embodied and environmental resources arguably constitute *complex multimodal gestalts* (see Mondada, 2014, 2016).

In line 12, C confirms the location pointed to with *ja precis* 'yes exactly', gazing to S who, after a brief reciprocating gaze and *mm*, has turned to the computer, mobilizing the booking mode to progress the order. C finalizes the negotiation sequence by confirming the number of requested seats, *två stycken där* 'two (seats) there', reusing the deictic adverb. This concluding turn also contains an evaluation of the satisfactory outcome of the process (*e jättebra* 'is great'). Having completed this utterance, C gazes down, signalling action closure. C then assumes a hold position – waiting while S is processing the tickets – through subsidiary activities: C strokes hair on her left side and mobilizes her wallet, holding it visibly and unzipping it. By handling the wallet in this fashion, C projects the next action, paying for the tickets.

The next extract (8) also illustrates how the participants orient to the seating plan, this time visible on a computer screen. Inviting C to a negotiation about the seats, S turns the screen with her left hand in the direction of C to make the seating plan visible (line 1); S explicates this move with the verbal formulation *så här ser de ut* 'this is what it looks like'.

- (8) HEL:SVE:065. Box office, Finland.
 1 S: [mm så här ser de ut
mm this is what it looks like
 [(S turns computer screen towards C)]
 2 (0.3)
 3 S: alltså [de gråa e (.) e bokade]
you see the grey is booked
 [(S points at the screen)] #img. 8
 4 C: okej
okay
 5 (0.4)



Image 8: Making the seating plan on the screen available and pointing to it, line 3 in (8).

C leans towards the screen, focusing her gaze on it. S offers an explanation of how the colour codes on the plan should be interpreted: ‘the grey is booked’ (line 3), simultaneously pointing to a circular area on the display (Image 8). C okays, and both S and C look at the screen. Mutual attention to the seating plan is retained when C, unable to make a decision, asks for a recommendation about good seats (in interest of space, this request and following clarification are omitted in (8) and (9)). S then makes a suggestion, seen in line 8 in extract (9). This suggestion is accompanied by a sequence of gestures with the left hand in front of the computer screen: first a level hand movement which is slightly tilting and matches the verbal spatial description ‘it goes a bit upward’, then a more precise pointing gesture which matches temporally the production of the deictic adverb *där* ‘there’ (line 9) – similar to the gestural – verbal matching in extract (7) above.

- (9) HEL:SVE:065. Box office, Finland.
 8 S: mm mt “här e ju riktigt bra”;
mm mt “this is really good”;
 de går ju lite uppåt [där
it goes a bit upwards there
 [(S points to a spot on the display)]
 10 (1.1)
 11 C: jä (.) nå “men ta dom”.
yeah (.) well “but take them”.
 12 S: [#tar ja mitten här#]
I take the middle there
 13 C: [(de e helt okej)]
it's fully okay
 14 S: #jä#
yes

C accepts ‘yes but take them’ (line 11) and S confirms ‘I take the middle there’ (line 12), and after an affirmative *jå* ‘yes’ she turns the screen back to facing herself, ending the opportunity to share the information on the display. C looks down, signalling action closure on her part, while S retains focus on the screen, continuing to progress the ticket order.

Extract (10) also illustrates a transaction with no pre-order, this time involving some problems with ticket availability. The formulation of the problem is initiated by S. While searching for seats in the booking system she leans forward, punches the keyboard and utters *frågan e om jag har nånting kvar* ‘the question is whether I have any left’ (line 5). C lifts her head and her gaze towards S on *om jag* ‘whether I’. Her gaze remains on the computer, also when C says *jaså e de så illa* ‘oh really, is it so bad?’ produced while she is still looking at S.

- (10) STO:DRA:054. Box office, Sweden.
- 1 C: två
two
- 2 S: °mm°
- 3 (4.1) ((S searches in the computer))
- 4 mm
- 5 frågan e om ja har nånting kvar:
the question is whether I have anything left
- 6 C: jaså e de så [illa]
oh really, is it so bad
- 7 S: [ja:]
yes
- 8 C: oj [oj oj]
oh no no no
- 9 S: [(laughing)] nu ska vi se, lörd
let's see now, Saturday
- 10 C: ja
yes
- 11 (3.9) ((S searches in the computer))

C's face during this complication phase is one of astonishment: eyes wide open, corner of mouth first curled up and then mouth open. S responds to C's statement fairly minimally with *jaa* (line 7) which signals that compliance with the request for tickets is unlikely. C receives the bad news with a series of exclamatives (*oj oj oj*). S responds in overlap with laughter (line 9), further underscoring the problem at hand. In other words, several actions in combination signal the problematic nature of granting the request: S's unspecific verbal actions and laughter, and most importantly her body and gaze orientation towards the computer, away from C. As it turns out after the search in line 11, the problem is quickly resolved and the availability of seats is confirmed. This is followed by a negotiation of seats with the help of the seating plan, much in accordance with extracts (6) and (7).

Some problems arise also in extract (11) – a continuation of extract (4) – in which the customer is collecting pre-ordered tickets. C has given a last name as booking reference, but it does not suffice in this case as S requests more information, *till vilken föreställning* 'for which show?', retaining focus on the computer screen.

- (11) HEL:SVE:068. Box office,
Finland.
- 6 S: till vilken föreställning?
to which show?
- 7 C: [eh ja tror att Kappan?
uh I think The Overcoat?
[#Img. 9
- 8 S: [i kväll]
tonight
- 9 C: [klockan] arton jä
eighteen o'clock yeah
- 10 (1.3)
- 11 S: °hm°
- 12 (3.5)



Image 9: Customer with a thinking face, line 7 in (11).

By not attending to C with gaze, S probably signals a problem in progressing the order. C has looked briefly at S during the question in line 6, then turns gaze to the screen and displays ‘a thinking face’ (cf. Goodwin and Goodwin, 1986), conveying problems with retrieving the requested information; apparently, S’s question is treated as unexpected (Image 9). Accompanied by try-marked lexical (*eh ja tror* ‘uh I think’), prosodic (rising tone on *Kappan* ‘The Overcoat’) and facial cues (frown with eyebrows), C delivers the name of the play (line 7) and, following S’s overlapping suggestion *ikväll* ‘tonight’, the time of the show.³

A pause of 3.5 s ensues during which S is concentrated on the computer screen. C is also looking in the direction of the screen, then checks something in her right jacket pocket and places both hands again on the counter and resumes looking at the computer screen. The subsidiary activity, handling the pocket, mirrors S’s concentration on a third party,⁴ the computer (cf. Richardson and Stokoe, 2014). S then initiates a re-check of the order name with the apology-based repair marker *ursäkta* ‘sorry’,⁵ but she aborts the repair and comes up with the correct name (including a first and a last name), see line 13 in (12). Looking at S, C repeats the last name in partial overlap, delivered with a hyper-articulate pronunciation, and confirms with a turn-final *jå* ‘yeah’.

- (12) HEL:SVE:068. Box office, Finland.
 13 S: *ursäkta vil-* (.) [Strömberg Mia (.) *jå*]
 sorry wha- (.) *Strömberg Mia* (.) *yes*
 14 C: [pt (0.4) <Strömberg>] (.) *jå*
 mt (0.4) *Strömberg* (.) *yes*
 15 (11.8) ((S takes out the tickets, C looks into her bag)) #Img. 10



Image 10: Temporary interactional exits through orientation to artefacts, line 15 in (12).

A lengthy pause in verbal activities follows during which S prints out and checks the tickets (Image 10). C mirrors this interactional non-accessibility by resorting to subsidiary activities; she looks down to the counter, then turns down to her bag hanging on her left arm. She looks briefly into the bag, closes it again and leaves it in its original position, on her left arm, and eventually returns to her business position, directing gaze to S’s activities at the desk.

As a final example, starting with extract (13), we present a case in which the customer displays awareness of the ‘script’ for collecting tickets (cf. Section 2.2). At the point we come in, C has announced that she is collecting tickets and S is prepared to progress the order; see (5) for the opening of this encounter. C is looking at her mobile phone, pressing a button while formulating her next turn in line 11: *vill du ha numret?* ‘do you want the number?’. This unprompted verbal action displays her competence: a customer picking up pre-ordered tickets is routinely requested to specify a booking reference.

- (13) GBG2:STA:004 Box office Sweden, pre-booking.
 11 C: *vill du ha numret?*
 do you want the number?
 12 S: *ja tack* (.) *ett två sex,*
 yes please (.) *one two six,*
 13 C: *ska vi <se h:är>* (4.6) [*ett två sex, (.) åtta ett*]

³ Our background data suggest that C’s uncertainty about the name of the play may depend on the fact that she is not the person who has booked the tickets.

⁴ Linell (2009) discusses “third parties” and their role in interaction. Such third parties range from physically present bystanders to remote and abstract entities such as the judicial system (2009:75). According to Linell (p. 104) “third parties must be somehow demonstrably oriented to by primary parties, as being or representing somebody (or something?) with an agency and mind”.

⁵ Robinson (2006) argues that apology-based repair initiation formats, like *I’m sorry?* or *Sorry?* in English, “communicate a stance that trouble responsibility belongs to repair-initiators rather than to their addressees” (p. 139); see also Dingemans et al. (2014).

let's see (4.6) one two six, (.) eight one¿
 [#Img. 11

- 14 (1.8)
 15 S: mm¿=
 16 C: =tre nie, (.) åtta.
 =three nine, (.) eight.
 17 (2.5)



Image 11: Customer retrieving booking reference through her mobile phone in (13).

In line 12, S responds *ja tack* 'yes please' followed immediately by *ett två sex* 'one two six', the institutional prefix for all bookings. This can be heard as an alignment with the customer's proactive behaviour and as signalling preparedness for the next action. S looks at the computer screen while C looks at her mobile phone display producing the relevant number series (Image 11). When C starts producing the booking reference she displays her institutional skills again, by reading it out in chunks. While producing the first chunks in line 13, C leans forward towards S, possibly to ensure hearability. C's "list intonation" (Jefferson, 1990) indicates that she is not finished, but that she intends to allow for S to enter the numbers in her computer system. S starts punching the keyboard, and when she has completed the number series she produces an acknowledgement *mm* which prompts C to continue reading the numbers *tre nio (.) åtta* 'three nine (.) eight'. She looks up briefly to S on *nio* to monitor the coordination of her dictating and S's embodied registering activities.

When the booking reference has been entered S reads from the screen: *två stycken ja* 'two yes', line 18 in extract (14). C is still oriented to her mobile phone while confirming this information with *två biljetter* 'two tickets' and also further specifying it: *fö:r personer under tjusex* 'for people under twenty-six'. S, in turn, is still oriented to the computer screen when she poses a question about the payment method in partial overlap (line 20).

(14) GBG2:STA:004 Box office Sweden, pre-booking.

- 18 S: två stycken ja¿=
 two yes=
 19 C: =två biljetter [fö:r] personer under [tjusex]
 =two tickets for people under twenty-six
 20 S: [mm] [kommer du] å betala
 will you pay
 21 S: kontant¿ eller hur,
 in cash¿ or (how),
 22 C: presentkort.
 gift voucher.
 23 S: presentkort ha.
 gift voucher right.
 24 C: ja
 yes
 25 (2.1)

C says she will pay with a gift voucher and S receipts this information in line 23. C then reaches for the envelope she placed on the desk at the beginning of this encounter (see extract 5). While opening the envelope, C delays its opening, matched with a slowed down speech pace, and asks: *å de var för personer under tjusex va* 'and it was for people under twenty-six, huh?', lifting her gaze to S on *tjusex va* (Image 12).

- (15) GBG2:STA:004 Box office Sweden, pre-booking.
 26 C: å de va för personer under [tjusex va_i
and it was people under twenty-six huh_i
 [#Img. 12
 27 S: ja:a
yes
 28 C: behöver ja <vi:sa:> [legitimation eller ()]
do I need to show identification or ()
 29 S: [vi litar på våra] kunder ((laughs))
we trust our customers
 30 C: bra. (0.9) [“där har du den”.
good. (0.9) “there you are”.
 [#Img. 13a
 31 S: jättefint
very good #Img. 13b



Image 12: Customer delays the opening of an envelope when initiating a repair, line 26 in (15).

The customer has already produced this information earlier (in extract 14, line 19), and now looks for its recognition (cf. [Streeck, 2014](#)). S did not explicitly acknowledge it in the earlier turn exchange, neither verbally nor visually, and in fact, she produced her own question about the payment method in overlap with this information; line 19–20 in (14). In other words, the absence of verbal or visual recognition of an action has interactional consequences, a delayed repair sequence in this case.

While taking out the voucher from the envelope, C asks if she needs to show ID (line 28). S responds in overlap that they trust their customers, accompanied by a slight headshake and laughter (still with gaze on C). C nods and smiles and utters *bra* ‘good’. C hands over the voucher and verbalizes the action *där har du den* ‘there you are’ (Image 13a); S reaches for the voucher and moves gaze to it, producing a receipt assessment, *jättefint* ‘very good’ at the same time as turning away towards the screen. Simultaneously, C moves her head and gaze down towards the floor (Image 13b).



Image 13a/b: C hands over the voucher (a); exiting from interaction (b); lines 30–31 in (15).

S and C look and move away in a co-ordinated manner, effectively signalling the closure of a course of action. By handing over of the transactional artefact, the gift voucher, an interactional boundary is symbolically reached and marked.

4.3.1. Summary

To summarize, in case of no pre-order, there is a moment of significant mutual attention when the customer is about to specify the locations of the seats she prefers. The participants reciprocate gaze to each other and to their gestures on the artefact in focus, the seating plan: the task of specifying the seats is thus explicitly attended to by both parties (see [Streeck, 2014](#)). Notably, the specification of the preferred seats is done with and through embodiment and artefacts rather than with verbal language: with pointing gestures and devices on the seating plan while the verbal reference remains general and deictic (see [Stevanovic and Monzoni, 2016](#) for the precedence of embodied behaviour over the verbal one in joint activities with material objects). When the seating plan is available on the computer rather than lying on the counter, the computer screen is utilized as a means of inviting the customer to a negotiation about preferred seats, and as an object which coordinates joint visual attention. The artefacts' affordances, e.g. a rotating screen, also serve to close the joint negotiation and signal the exit to a mode where the customer takes a *hold position*, looking away, while the staff member continues progressing the order oriented to the 'third party', the computer (cf. [Richardson and Stokoe, 2014](#)).

An encounter which involves collecting pre-ordered tickets does not lead to a negotiation sequence about preferred seats. Disregarding this transactional difference, there are nonetheless many similarities in how embodied and object-oriented acts are coordinated with verbal resources. The keyword for the business at hand, as well as key objects, like vouchers and tickets, are produced and handled during the participants' mutual gaze, enabling the reciprocal acts of action verification and recognition. The computer is mobilized as a third party, providing temporary exits from interaction (for the term, see [Levinson, 1983](#)). In case of a pre-booking, in particular, the customer may have anticipated the "script" of the transaction. Such institutional skills may be displayed through anticipatory behaviour, the customer projecting the next actions and producing them at a pace that facilitates the completion of the staff member's tasks as they emerge step by step in the order of service (cf. [Brown, 2004](#)).

While progressing the order, the staff member, turning to the computer and the booking system, must regularly every now and then exit from a dyadic customer–staff interaction. However, such temporary exits do not terminate the interaction, but rather serve as means of suspending the transactional progress and regulating interactional accessibility ([Ayaß, 2014](#)). It is noteworthy in our data that the staff member's exits are mirrored by the customer's corresponding exits to subsidiary activities, for example, by turning attention to personal belongings such as a wallet or a bag, or to the computer screen in the box office booth. Embodied activities, such as looking away and touching one's hair similarly signal the customer's hold position. Orienting to and handling artefacts thus offer the customer a possibility to do *something else* than transactional business. By doing this, the customer accepts the temporary non-accessibility of the institutional party, who is busy trying to comply with the customer's request.

5. Conclusions

Our analysis shows that embodied acts, and artefacts intertwined with them, essentially facilitate and enhance intersubjectivity – attending to and understanding a joint task at hand – in the kind of interaction a theatre box office encounter represents. We concentrated on the initial steps of such encounters: initialization of the encounter, recognition of the reason for the visit, and agreement on the ensuing transactional process (which then leads to progressing the order).

Moments of mutual gaze are relatively rare and short in duration during the parts of the encounters we studied. It is thus noteworthy that gaze is typically shared at the keyword of the transaction-initiating request line. This is an intersubjectively charged moment because the keyword not only specifies the actual target of the request (a particular show) but also the type of business at hand (purchase on site or collecting pre-booked tickets). By looking up, the customer seeks to verify her action, and by directing gaze, the staff member signals recognition of this action (cf. [Streeck, 2014](#)). Conversely, when the interactants anticipate problems in the progressivity of the task, they may distinctly withhold gaze from the other party and, instead, direct their visual attention to an artefact, such as the computer screen. We also saw that not attending to the other party's action explicitly (through vision or verbal means) may cause a repair sequence in which (delayed) verification is sought.

Making an artefact visually available may mark a transition to a certain action (see [Mortensen and Hazel, 2014](#); [Hazel and Mortensen, 2014](#); [Raymond and Lerner, 2014](#)) and serves, in effect, as an invitation to a joint action that involves the artefact in question. For example, the staff member can offer better mutual visibility of the seating plan on the counter or computer display, the customer can present a paper document which up to that point has been lying immobilized on the counter. Moreover, artefacts are central for the coordination of joint attention at points of decision-making, such as choosing seats. With the help of a seating plan, both parties can orientate to a virtual representation of a physical space and establish mutual understanding of the qualities of this space and the symbols used to represent it. Verbal interaction, usually generally deictic in nature during these negotiations, is crucially enhanced through the use of artefacts and embodied acts: jointly calibrated vision, pointing gestures and devices.

Given their status as institutional and private objects respectively, artefacts can be oriented to in an asymmetrical fashion to mark that one of the parties is not available for mutual interaction at a certain moment. The customer may suspend the initialization of an encounter by handling and focusing on personal belongings, like a bag, a wallet, or a mobile phone. Such initial activity is carried out in order to remove peripheral objects and mobilizing transactional objects to enable achievement of the customer's *business position*, making her available for interaction at the counter. Similarly, there are moments when the staff member must exit from the dyadic customer–staff interaction to mobilize the computer as a third party – instrumental to progressing the order in the sales management system. Mirroring these interactional exits, the customer may turn to subsidiary activities which, in effect, ratify the other party's exit; thus, the customer assumes a *hold position* which signifies the acceptance of the staff member's temporary non-accessibility. Embodied acts, such as looking away, stroking the hair and handling personal belongings are essential resources in marking a hold position.

Artefacts are not just handled here and now when a certain step in the transactional progress makes them relevant. A wallet is typically placed visibly on the counter at an initial stage when the customer takes business position, although nothing demands its deployment until the final step of the payment transaction. Nonetheless, the wallet signifies that the customer is committed to doing business. Similarly, the staff member can mobilize the computer in a visually and acoustically distinct way when the customer has signalled the type of business at hand. The computer may not be relevant at once, not before the seating is negotiated, but striking the keys of the keyboard signals readiness to proceed and comply with the customer's request (cf. Mortensen and Hazel, 2014).

Finally, we want to point out that different modalities are carefully synchronized in intersubjectively charged moments in the encounters. The customers may delay the initiation of the opening line until they have sorted out their belongings and reached business position, or delay talk to adjust to activities with artefacts and speed it up when business position is reached. Such adjustments match the production of the transactional key word free from simultaneous, competing activities. Similarly, an activity with an object (like opening an envelope) may be delayed to match the verbal action completion, again to produce focus on the central transactional element (a gift card in the envelope). Furthermore, we saw examples in which talk was paced to match temporally a gestural orientation to an artefact and the production of a deictic expression referring to the same focal point as the gesture. These practices maximize the participants' joint attention to the action at hand, thus preparing for action recognition and shared understanding of the upcoming direction of action.

Appendix A. Transcription symbols

.	falling intonation
,	level intonation
ˆ	slightly rising intonation
?	rising intonation
↑	local rise in pitch
[point of overlap onset; indicates also the alignment of embodied acts that are commented on in the transcripts and the alignment of images with talk
]	point where overlapping talk stops
=	"latching", i.e. no silence between two adjacent utterances
(.)	micropause, less than 0.2 seconds
(0.5)	silences timed in tenths of a second
> <	talk inside is at a faster pace than the surrounding talk
< >	talk inside is at a slower pace than the surrounding talk
*	start of an embodied action in overlap with verbal action
va-	cut off
va:	lengthening of a sound
<u>va</u>	emphasis indicated by underlining
VA	higher volume indicated by capitals
#va#	creaky voice
°va°	talk inside is more quiet than the surrounding talk
"va"	altered voice quality
(va)	uncertain transcription
((laughter))	transcriber's comments, including embodied acts
#lmg.	indicates in the transcript the position of a numbered image

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Jan Lindström is professor of Scandinavian languages at the University of Helsinki. He has done extensive research on grammar and interaction, including cross-language comparison and language contact phenomena. His other areas of interest include Construction Grammar and language policy. He is currently PI in two large-scale projects: The Finnish Centre of Excellence in Research on Intersubjectivity in Interaction and Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages – Communicative Patterns in Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish.

Catrin Norrby is professor of Scandinavian Languages in the Department of Swedish Language and Multilingualism at Stockholm University as well as Principal Fellow in the School of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research interests are in sociolinguistics, intercultural pragmatics, interactional studies as well as language policy and second language acquisition. She is PI in the research programme Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages – Communicative Patterns in Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish.

Camilla Wide is professor of Scandinavian Languages at the University of Turku. In her research she focuses primarily on grammar in spoken interaction and variation from different perspectives. She is currently PI in the research programme Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages – Communicative Patterns in Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish.

Jenny Nilsson is a Swedish Academy researcher at the Swedish Institute for Language and Folklore. Her research interests include language variation and change as well as interactional linguistics. She is PI in the research programme Interaction and Variation in Pluricentric Languages – Communicative Patterns in Sweden Swedish and Finland Swedish.