

Managing Verbal and Embodied Conduct in Telephone-Mediated Service Encounters.

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Abstract

In telephone-mediated service encounters, there are limits on how parties interact with one another. Speakers are restricted to only verbal (what they say) and aural (what they hear) means of communication. Therefore, a practical problem at the heart of such interactions is how speakers manage embodied conduct, given that they can only hear- rather than see the other person. We investigated how verbal and embodied conduct were managed in a corpus of 63 calls to a New Zealand helpline service where callers (complainants) interact with conciliators (institutional representatives) to complain about, and attempt to resolve disputes with their electricity and gas providers. Using conversation analysis, we document two ways that callers could manage verbal and embodied conduct in a particular type of sequence in these calls.

Keywords: telephone-mediated interaction, conversation analysis, embodied conduct, multi-activity, temporary interactional exits.

1. Introduction

Telephone helplines are an important medium through which the public do business and access important services (Baker, Emmison, and Firth 2005). Nevertheless, in these service encounters (as with other forms of mediated interaction), there are constraints on how speakers communicate with one another. In contrast to co-present interaction, in telephone calls speakers are restricted to only verbal (what they say) and aural (what they hear) semiotic modalities for communication.¹ Accordingly, a practical problem at the heart of telephone-mediated service encounters can be how speakers manage embodied courses of action, given that they do not have visual access to one another (non-co-presence) and are essentially interacting through talk only (uni-modal communication). The present chapter investigates this problem in calls to a helpline service where callers (complainants) interact with conciliators (institutional representatives) to complain about and attempt to resolve disputes with their electricity and gas providers.

One objective of the analysis is to document one type of sequence where this issue regularly occurred; instances where some requested information was not immediately provided. We also describe the practices speakers use to deal with this problem *in situ*. In these sequences, callers used expressions such as “hold on a minute” and “wait a second” to anticipate a disruption to progressivity before moving to find and provide the information. Our work also aims to unpack how several fundamental interactional principles such as engagement, multi-activity and progressivity are implicated in the practical problem examined. We focus on how

¹ Semiotic modalities refer to the various means by which people communicate with one another in talk-in-interaction (Goodwin 2007). For example, talk, gaze, body orientation and gesture.

speakers manage (dis)engagement (i.e. displaying that they are still ‘on the line’), multiple courses of verbal and embodied action at once or simultaneously (multi-activity) and the progression of actions to completion (progressivity).

2. Telephone-mediated service encounters

Telephone calls are a pervasive feature of everyday life. In fact, the advent of mobile phone technology, has “affect[ed] every aspect of our personal and professional lives either directly or indirectly” (Katz and Aakhus 2002, i). Using the telephone, we can carry out everything from mundane tasks such as calling family and friends, to accessing specialized institutional services such as to request assistance in emergencies (Whalen and Zimmerman 1990) and receive counselling (Butler et al. 2010). Conversation analysts have conducted sustained empirical investigations of these latter types of calls.

Such work has investigated a wide range of telephone-mediated service encounters from sales cold-calls (Mazeland 2004) to surveying (Maynard and Schaeffer 1997). However, the majority has focused on helplines (Hepburn, Wilkinson, and Butler 2014) in various forms-where members of the public contact some institutional representative to access a service. These encounters are often geared towards accomplishing a single primary activity (or objective; Kevoe-Feldman 2015). In the case of dispute resolution helplines, these main actions are to seek remedy and assistance with some problem, or to complain about service provision (see Dewar, 2011; Weatherall, 2015).

Our work contributes to the emerging literature on dispute resolution helplines. Previous research in this area has focused on a range of issues and topics. Weatherall and Stubbe (2015)

investigated how emotion was displayed and negotiated in such calls. In particular, they showed how conciliators avoided responding to turns where callers displayed emotion. Weatherall (2016) also documented how a helpline's policy of neutrality was enacted *in situ*. The present chapter extends on this existing research by focusing on an integral task in these interactions; establishing the facts of callers' complaints. Further, we explore the interactional implications of the technologically mediated nature of these encounters.

3. Managing engagement and actions in telephone-mediated interaction

Telephone calls are in some ways different to face-to-face interactions because of the constraints imposed by their technologically mediated nature. In co-present conversations, people can communicate and indicate their engagement using a wealth of semiotic resources including embodied conduct such as gesture, body position and gaze. Technological limits can create a range of practical problems for how engagement and embodied conduct are managed in telephone calls, where users do not have the luxury of these extra resources. Instead, communication is restricted to what speakers say and hear.

A fundamental issue in telephone-mediated interaction is how speakers indicate their disengagement (i.e. temporarily exiting the conversation) from the call. Unlike closings, where parties mutually accomplish the end of an interaction (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), disengagement involves speakers understanding that the call is merely 'on hold'. One practice for doing so (not just in telephone calls) is a temporary interactional exit (Levinson 1983), where a speaker uses an expression such as "hold on a second". The other then displays their understanding of the upcoming suspension with an utterance like "okay" or "alright". In this

manner, the practices used to display (dis)engagement from a call are done with an orientation to the technological affordances or constraints of the interaction.

In contrast, in co-present settings, the management of verbal and embodied conduct concurrently is visible to both participants. Such “multi-tasking” is a common occurrence in everyday life. Before we proceed, some clarification of terminology is in order. Multi-tasking is a psychological concept concerning how people undertake two or more tasks simultaneously, such as talking on a cell phone whilst driving (Kane and Engle 2002). It is often studied experimentally, and research focuses on how cognitive performance is impaired by doing multiple things at once (Watson and Strayer 2010). We instead take the perspective of conversation and interactional analysis and reconceptualise it as multi-activity (Haddington et al. 2014). Instead of studying it within the artificial confines of a laboratory, we study it through recordings of social interaction *in situ* (Haddington et al. 2014). We focus on the situated practices speakers in telephone-mediated service encounters use to manage verbal and embodied conduct either simultaneously or in a divided manner.

Previous research within conversation and interactional analysis has shown how people in co-present interaction can suspend one activity to focus on another (i.e. in a divided manner; Licoppe and Tuncer 2014). For example, Sutinen (2014) documented the different ways that speakers jointly accomplished switching between mundane conversation and task-focused business (e.g. inventorying receipts) in interactions at home. Such work has also examined how multiple courses of action are undertaken concurrently. In fact, an established body of research focuses on this latter problem in institutional contexts such as service encounters. Ticca (2014) showed how travel agents simultaneously interacted with (co-present) customers whilst also

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making and taking phone calls at their desks. Despite this, little is known about the management of multiple streams of activity in uni-modal communicative contexts such as telephone calls.²

Embodied conduct can still be relevant in uni-modal forms of interaction. Stokoe (2009) studied audio-recorded police interrogations where suspects and officers were co-present and found that when suspects performed an embodied action, such as demonstrating their physical actions during the crime, police officers would describe it aloud “for the benefit of the tape” (1887). These verbal formulations transformed what was visible for the co-present parties and made it accessible for the non-co-present jury who would eventually listen to the recordings at trial.

Although from a different interactional context to this chapter, an upshot of Stokoe’s (2009) work is that in uni-modal forms of communication, speakers can use verbal formulations to make it clear that they are engaged in embodied action. One reason that embodied conduct might become relevant in telephone calls is when speakers need to interact physically with something in their immediate environment. For example, to retrieve some requested information (the exact monthly electricity usage) from a physical item (an electricity bill). To situate such instances within wider interactional principles, we now turn to a discussion of sequence organization, questioning and progressivity.

² The concept of streams of activity is taken from Goodwin and Goodwin (1992). In their work, streams of activity were conceptualized as defined lines of activity accomplished by participants. In this chapter, the term is used in a similar manner- to refer to the defined activity participants are accomplishing through verbal and embodied means.

4. Sequence organization, questioning and progressivity

Conversation analytic research has shown that most social actions are accomplished through sequences of talk (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008). The most basic unit is the adjacency pair sequence; two consecutive turns of talk by different speakers, where the first turn launches an action (first-pair-part) and the second provides a response (second-pair-part; Schegloff 2007). Responses are also typed. That is, certain first-pair-parts make certain second-pair-parts relevant (Schegloff 2007). Such units can also be extended upon through various sequence expansion practices. Of crucial importance for our work are insertion sequences; which are further adjacency pairs that intervene (i.e. are inserted between) a base first and second-pair-part (Schegloff 2007, Chapter 6). Our analysis will document and elaborate upon the role of pre-second insert sequences, those which initiate an activity that is done in the service of progressing the base second-pair-part (see Schegloff 2007).

To further illustrate the concept of adjacency pairs and situate the forthcoming analysis, we can focus on the ubiquitous question-answer sequence. Questions can be formulated in many ways, and thus make different sorts of answers relevant. For example, a “wh”- or content question makes some piece of information relevant as a response (e.g. “who” makes relevant a person’s name). In contrast, polar questions require simple “yes” or “no” replies (Hayano 2014). Further, these latter types of questions can be ‘tilted’ to project either a positive or negative response. For example, “you didn’t want the book?” presupposes “no” as an answer (Raymond 2003). In this chapter we focus specifically on requests for information. Heritage and Raymond (2012) discussed how such questions contain normative expectations that recipients know and can provide the information (as a second-pair-part). Importantly, in our cases- and sequences

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more generally- failing to provide the relevant second-pair-part can become a noticeable and accountable matter for recipients (Schegloff 2007).

Progressivity is a concept crucial to sequence organization and the phenomena analysed in this chapter. Talk normatively progresses sound-by-sound, unit-by-unit, turn-by-turn, sequence-by-sequence, and at a broader level the interaction itself (Schegloff 2007).

Progressivity concerns the temporally continuous nature of talk and how sequences of action unfold (Schegloff 2007). The analysis considers two dimensions of progressivity. First, sequential progressivity is achieved when the relevant response is provided, and the sequence of action is completed. In contrast, it can be disrupted when a response is not immediately forthcoming or not provided at all. Side sequences are another example of disruptions to sequential progressivity. These are instances where a sequence is in progress and another is initiated- say to focus on clarification of talk- before the prior one resumes (Jefferson 1972). The second dimension is the overall progression of an interaction, or conversational progressivity. This can also be bound up with sequential progressivity. For instance, the analysis below focuses on cases where a conversation is disrupted- through it being suspended- when some relevant information is not provided.

Previous research has established a preference for progressivity in conversation, such that speakers are mutually oriented to it as a normative principle in interaction. The conversational analytic concept of preference is structural, sequential, and interactional rather than reflecting speakers' psychological dispositions (Schegloff 2007). Stivers and Robinson (2006) examined questions in multiparty interaction that were directed toward a particular speaker but that were answered by someone else. These sequences involved two conflicting preferences: the preference for a relevant second-pair-part (sequential progressivity) and for the selected speaker to respond.

They found robust evidence that in such cases speakers prioritized sequential progressivity over the preference for a next speaker to respond. Our analysis will also consider the ways that speakers manage sequential and conversational progressivity.

The objective of this chapter is to analyse how verbal and embodied conduct are managed in telephone-mediated service encounters, given the technological constraints of the medium. In order to answer this question, our work focuses on instances in the calls where some physical activity is required to further a locally relevant action- retrieving requested information- when it may conflict with the demands of remaining verbally engaged on the phone. Before proceeding to the analysis, we turn to a description of the data and methodological approach.

5. Methodology

5.1. Data

Our work examines audio-recorded calls to a New Zealand telephone helpline. Members of the public call the service to complain about, and resolve disputes with, their electricity and gas service providers. The service functions as a third-party mediator between customers and companies. It is independent, neutral, and freely accessible. The service is separate from the utility industries and central government (i.e. independent) and does not advocate directly for either consumers or providers (i.e. neutral) (Weatherall 2015).

Callers speak to helpline representatives, known as conciliators, and after providing personal details describe their issues in narrative form. Conciliators will then further establish the details of the complaint by questioning callers about relevant matters (e.g. amount of money they have been overcharged) (Edmonds 2016; Weatherall and Stubbe 2015). It is important that

conciliators obtain all the necessary information from callers because it forms part of the official institutional record of the complaint going forward in the dispute resolution process.

Our analysis draws on a corpus of 63 of these calls. The data was recorded and collected in two waves; 42 calls were collected in 2008 and 21 in 2016 (see Edmonds 2016; Weatherall and Stubbe 2015). Calls were then transcribed using the system developed by Jefferson (2004), presented in Appendix A. Ethical approval to record and collect calls was obtained through the organization and the university's ethical review committee.

5.2. Procedure

We analyse the calls using conversation analysis, which is a grounded, empirical and participant-oriented method for studying talk-in-interaction. Using audio-recorded data (and when possible video-recordings) of naturally occurring social interaction, the conversation analytic approach aims to establish the interactional practices used to accomplish social actions and to provide an in-depth understanding of how talk-in-interaction is structured (Sidnell 2014). The method studies what participants themselves orient to, and display as relevant, in and through their talk (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008).

Conversation analytic research is undertaken through building collections of particular interactional phenomena, to identify their general features and functions in talk (Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008; Sidnell 2014). Accordingly, we built a collection based upon a recurrent observation from a systematic examination of all the calls. This observation was the occasional, yet consequential, disruptions to the calls' progressivity. Thus, the impetus for the collection examined in this chapter was to ask- for what interactional reasons did disruptions to progressivity occur?

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Our collection centres on one routine way that speakers mark such disruptions, by using expressions such as “wait a second” and “hold on a minute”, as well as accounts and/or informings. The entire collection numbers 56 cases. However, the analysis below focuses on the largest sub-set of 28 cases that occurred in a particular sequence. In these sub-set instances, conciliators requested some information from callers, which was not immediately forthcoming. Callers then marked a disruption to progressivity or some interactional difficulty through the target expressions. Reasons for the non-immediate provision included callers not having the information to hand, not knowing it, or they were less than certain in their answers being correct. Nevertheless, callers treated it as necessary to find and provide the information.

A fundamental problem for the callers in the sub-set of cases examined in this chapter was managing two streams of activity: continuing to talk to the conciliator (verbal stream of activity) and physically retrieving some information (embodied stream of activity). We observed two distinct interactional trajectories in response to the non-forthcoming information in these sequences³. The interactional trajectories can be considered as related, albeit different, solutions to the practical problem presented by these two streams of activity: do they manage both at once or do they suspend the conversation in order to find the information?

In these cases, we also see speakers enacting and orienting to their respective institutional roles and concomitant rights and responsibilities (Heritage and Clayman 2010). Conciliators display their rights to question callers to establish the relevant facts of the matter (Edmonds

³ This chapter draws on Liddicoat's (2009) conceptualization of interactional trajectories as the discernible direction the conversation takes in response to disrupted request for information sequences. So, streams of activity refer to the activity being done- whereas interactional trajectories are related to the general shape of, or the path the interaction takes.

2016). Most importantly, we see callers orienting to their responsibility to know and provide details of their complaint when requested.

The sections below are structured around an analysis of the two different interactional trajectories. The five cases we present are selected as the clearest examples of the phenomenon, whilst still being representative of the wider collection. The extracts are anonymized, and pseudonyms have been used. The turns of interest are indicated in boldface.

6. Analysis

6.1. Managing verbal and embodied activity simultaneously

The first interactional trajectory involves callers talking to conciliators whilst physically finding some requested information. In doing so, we can see callers treating both streams of activity as compatible, in that both can be undertaken simultaneously. Essentially, some form of embodied conduct was required to further the locally relevant action. In these cases, expressions such as “wait a minute” anticipated a disruption to the interaction’s progression.

Two clear cases are presented in this section to illustrate how callers managed verbal and embodied conduct simultaneously in telephone-mediated service encounters. Extract (1) shows a caller using self-talk as a practice to make their embodied conduct understandable to the conciliator. At line 01, the conciliator asks when the caller’s electricity meter was read.

Extract (1): “Meter Reading”:

01 CON: a:::nd (0.6) #thuh# (0.2) d’you know whe:n thu:h m:
02 meter was read?
03 (0.2)
04 CAL: .hh

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05 CON: <last?
 06 (0.2)
 07 CAL: u::h it would have been- (.) o:wh I would have it
 08 on the bill here, .hh (.) u:h last week I would
 09 thi:nk;
 10 CON: [okay. and before that when >was the] last< time=
 11 CAL: [((rustling)) ughh]
 12 CON: =it was read before [that? do you know?]
 13 CAL: [((rustling))]
 14 CAL: **ah yes: °hold on I'll just get this° ou:t °.hh° .snih**
 15 (0.9)
 16 CON: °I just [(wonder-)°]
 17 CAL: [ac- actual read, h u::m
 18 (2.7)
 19 CAL: °(o:wh) it doesn't have° (.) actual read °here (does)°
 20 it? °.hh° (0.2) should do, ((rustling)) u::m=
 21 =((rustling continued))
 22 CON: ↑whi[ch]
 23 CAL: [the] o:ne before tha::t actual reading °.hh°
 24 uh was (.) April?
 25 (0.2)
 26 CON: ↑okay.

The caller begins to answer the conciliator's question, "it would've been" (line 07), but abandons it and instead accounts for an inability to answer immediately, "I would have it on the bill" (lines 07-08). The account displays the potential relevance of some embodied course of action as it alludes to the information possibly being located on something that the caller may have to physically access. As such, in this case, embodied conduct is made relevant before the caller marks a disruption to progressivity. The caller provides an answer with hedged certainty, "last week I would think" (lines 08-09), which the conciliator accepts as sufficient (line 10). In this instance, the caller provides the requested information from an official source- their electricity bill. During the conciliator's question, the caller can be heard interacting with something (presumably the bill) in the background- as captured through the rustling indicated on the transcript. Rustling provides an aural resource for the conciliator to understand that the caller may be managing two concurrent streams of activity (i.e. doing two things at once).

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The conciliator then requests another specific date from the caller (lines 10-12). We know that such questions contain normative expectations and obligations for recipients (see Heritage and Raymond 2012). The question that follows, “do you know” (line 12), can be understood as relaxing an expectation for the caller to provide the information; by explicitly orienting to the possibility that they may not know it. The caller confirms that they know the information and alerts the conciliator to “hold on...” (line 14), anticipating some disruption to the interaction. The following talk, “I’ll get this out” marks the caller’s embodied interaction with some item (line 14). Presumably, the caller is inspecting the bill to ascertain when the meter was last read. Furthermore, in moving to find the information the caller displays an orientation to their obligation and responsibility as a “caller” to know about and be able to provide details related to their complaint.

The caller’s talk between lines 14 and 21 overcomes the problem of non-co-presence and makes their embodied conduct hearable and accessible to the other. When combined with the rustling, the caller’s talk makes it clear that they are searching for the requested information and managing simultaneous streams of activity. Owing to our lack of visual access (as analysts) to the caller’s surroundings, it would be too speculative to state what- beyond the bill- the caller is searching for.

The caller produces some self-talk between lines 19 and 20. Goffman (1981) described self-talk as utterances that we say aloud- usually in our own company-that are not intended for a response. However, in this instance, the self-talk is produced with the awareness of the conciliator as an over-hearing audience and serves important functions. First, it acts as a commentary of what the caller is doing -visually perusing their documents- and renders this

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hearable for the conciliator. Finally, the self-talk means that the caller is still verbally engaged in the conversation and that they are treating both verbal and embodied conduct as compatible.

Sequential progressivity was disrupted because the information was not immediately forthcoming. However, the caller made an effort to secure and provide the second-pair-part. As such, the caller can be understood as working to promote sequential progressivity. The caller provides the date the meter was last read, which the conciliator acknowledges and accepts as sufficient (lines 23-26).

The next extract provides a clear, albeit extended, example of a caller managing verbal and embodied action simultaneously. The caller makes a sustained effort, with some difficulty, to find the customer number given to them by their electricity provider.

Extract (2): "Customer Number":

01 CON: .hhh and uh:::::::::: .hh what's y:our (0.6)
02 mch .hh have you got you:r um cus:tomer
03 number with blue[tower]
04 CAL: [.hhhh]
05 (0.8)
06 CAL: uh yes I can ge:t that (.)[(on again)]
07 CON: [thank you]
08 (0.2)
09 CAL: **ha::ng on a seco:nd (.) let me deal with this**
10 **he::re for <a se:co::nd> u::::h (oh I hope- I**
11 **have-) (.) (uh) just hang (on) a s(h)ec(h)ond**
12 **.hhhh (0.2) (°just hang a sec let me- I'll**
13 **jus get that°)(° °)**
14 (2.0)
15 CAL?: °.hhhhh° ((rustling))
16 CAL: I'll get that bluetower bill. (°hang on°)
17 (1.1)
18 CAL: .hh (I'm on)(I'm after) () jus tryna get
19 onli:ne and it's (frozen)=yeah (that's what I
20 needed today)(literally/let me just) .hhh (.) (hh)
21 u::hm
22 (1.2)
23 CAL: () °this is not good is it° °hang on°
24 () (oh we) just have to reboot this
25 again (.) give me a bit of ti::me to come up back
26 up again

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27 (0.8)
28 CAL?: .hhhhhhh
29 (0.5)
30 CAL: (eh) um- hh
31 ((background noise))
32 (1.1)
33 CAL: °let me just° °um° (1.4) °see whats goin on here°
34 (2.0)
35 ((2.8 seconds with some faint noise))
36 CAL: in meantime while this: going do
37 you [want the the (eye vee/eye pee)]
38 CON: [.hh that that's okay]
39 (0.5)
40 CAL: [>d'ya wan-<] >d'ya want< the eye pee- (.) <eye=
41 CON: [()]
42 CAL: =see [pee> number]
43 CON: [yes. if you] give me the eye see pee that
44 would be very helpful.

The conciliator abandons an initial content question and instead produces a polar interrogative. The first question, had it been completed, could have contained an assumption that the caller had the requested information. However, the re-formulated question displays an assumption that- for whatever reason- the caller may not have, or not know, their customer number; relaxing the assumption that they will be able to provide it immediately.

The caller confirms they have the information and commits to finding it, “I can get that” (line 06). Up until this point, the parties had been verbally interacting. Now, embodied conduct becomes relevant because of the physical retrieval inferred from “getting it”. However, it is unclear yet as to whether the caller is treating verbal and embodied action as compatible. An appreciation, “thank you”, acknowledges the effort the caller will make (line 07). “Hang on a second”, anticipates a disruption to the interaction and is followed by an informing, “let me deal with this here” (lines 09-10). The latter makes it clear that the caller is now engaged in concurrent streams of verbal and embodied activity. Further disruptions are marked between lines 10 and 12. A two second lapse occurs at line 14, providing evidence that despite the caller

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managing two simultaneous streams of activity, the production of talk is not entirely continuous. The caller makes it clear that they are attempting to find their customer number on the electricity bill (line 16).

A practical problem emerges when the caller alludes to the bill being located on a computer (“tryna get online”; line 18) and that it could take some time to find it because of technological difficulties (“it’s frozen”; line 19). The caller negatively evaluates the continued delay, “this is not good is it” (line 23). As with the previous case, and others in the collection, an informing and commentary between lines 18 and 33 overcome the technologically mediated constraints of the interaction by providing as much access to the conciliator as possible regarding the caller’s predicament. These practices can be understood as ways of transforming semiotic modalities by making what is visually accessible for the caller, hearable for the conciliator.

Eventually, the caller offers a different piece of information. The interaction reached a point where the requested information was not forthcoming and because of the technical difficulty with the computer, it may not be provided soon. To satisfy their own commitment to finding the information, the caller gives some similar details to further progress the conversation. Later in the interaction, the caller offers their customer number after apparently finding it, but the conciliator rejects it as no longer necessary (not included in the extract). This observation is evidence of a speaker going to great lengths to satisfy the responsibility associated with their role as a “caller”.

6.2. Treating verbal and embodied activity as incompatible

The cases discussed so far show that sometimes in telephone-mediated service encounters speakers can manage both verbal and embodied conduct simultaneously. However, sometimes speakers do not- or cannot- manage both concurrently, treating them as incompatible. In doing

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so, callers could initiate a temporary interactional exit (Levinson 1983), which involved the call being temporarily suspended- or put ‘on hold’- while they retrieved the information, to resume their engagement in the conversation shortly after. Three cases are presented below to illustrate how callers displayed that they were sacrificing verbal engagement in favour of embodied action.

Extract (3) shows a caller displaying some uncertainty as to whether they have the requested information, before moving to find it. The caller uses the turn “bear with me for a....” to mark and initiate the upcoming temporary interactional exit (line 05).

Extract (3): “Actual Supply Period”:

01 CON: okay. .hh so on that bill is there an
02 actual supply:, (.) period?
03 (1.5)
04 CAL: u::m (0.5) I don’t (0.2) thi:nk so ‘uh’ can I check=
05 =can you [bear with me for a () (please)]
06 CON: [sure yeah yep.]
07 (1.4)
08 ((receiver possibly down))
09 ((52.5 seconds of rustling, noise from television in
10 background, interspersed typing and possible
11 interference with receiver))
12 CAL: hello?
13 CON: yes:.
14 CAL: .hhh u::::m: well- (#mmghm# um) twenty second (of)
15 October two thousand and eight?

The question in line 01 requests confirmation that the “actual supply period” is on the caller’s electricity bill. The question presupposes an affirmative response, and thus, contains an expectation that the caller knows the details of their complaint, in particular because the information is on an official record (“the bill”). In conversation analysis, what a turn of talk is doing is established by the next turn proof procedure- where evidence of the action is found in what speakers do in their next turns (Sidnell 2014). The response, “can I check”, demonstrates that the caller treated the question as requesting that information (line 04). The caller’s response,

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“I don’t know”, marks a displayed lack of certainty and what follows, “can I check”, displays that they treat the answer as insufficient and an orientation to their normative obligation to provide information when requested (line 06).

In producing the request, the caller marks the emergent relevance of embodied conduct, by treating it as necessary to find the “actual supply period”. The caller requests permission to leave the interaction, “can you bear with me”. The format suggests the caller orients to the upcoming disruption as a breach. “Can you bear...” forms the first-pair-part of a hold-acceptance insert sequence (line 05; Levinson 1983). In this case, the insert sequence comes between the initial request and the eventual provision of that information. The hold-acceptance sequence initiates the caller’s exit to find the relevant information. As a pre-second insert sequence, it serves to progress the action of providing the information- the base second-pair-part.

The request explicitly marks an upcoming disruption to the interaction’s progression. The caller is temporarily ceasing continued conversation in order to physically find the relevant detail. In doing so they treat the two streams of activity as incompatible (i.e. unable to be done at the same time), and prioritise the embodied over the verbal. One reason for this is that the information might be located on “the bill”, which the caller may not have to hand. The conciliator grants the request with “sure” (line 06, second-pair-part of insert sequence) and displays a joint understanding of the upcoming suspension.

The call is suspended for nearly 52 seconds, as the caller presumably makes an effort to find the information. The caller resumes the conversation with “hello” (line 12), or as Leung (1997) termed, an “availability check”, as it functions to establish whether the other speaker is still on the line. Extract (3) provides particularly strong evidence that the caller treats verbal and embodied action as incompatible because they re-established verbal engagement with the

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conciliator. Almost a minute has passed, yet the date provided by the caller at line 13 is understood as representing the “actual supply period” requested in the initial question. With the requested information provided, the conditional relevance of a response is satisfied, and the interaction can further progress.

The progressivity of the interaction was disrupted when callers initiated temporary interactional exits. However, extract (4) illustrates that these disruptions were done in the service of promoting sequential progressivity. At line 01, the conciliator enquires about the caller’s personal details for future contact purposes.

Extract (4): “Contact Phone Number”:

```
01 CON:  and is the:re another contact (.) phone number for
02        you?
03        (0.5)
04 CAL:  (.hh) u:::m it's: my: (u:h) mobile phone
05        number? [.hh      u:h]
06 CON:  [okay (      )]
07        (0.3)
08 CAL:  ju:st one second. hh=
09 CON:  =[sure thing.]
10        [((receiver ]down))
11        (13.9)
12        ((receiver[      up)]
13 CAL:  [oh 'three' ] it's u:h o:h three five?
14        (0.4)
15 CON:  oh three five,
16        (0.3)
17 CAL:  oh six two
18        (0.4)
19 CON:  oh six two
20        (0.4)
21 CAL:  three (.) six (.) nine (.) two.
22 CON:  three six nine two. thank you
```

The caller treats the question at line 01 as a request for an alternate contact number. The information’s presence is inferentially confirmed, “it’s”, and the caller specifies what type of

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phone the number is for, “my mobile phone number” (line 04-05). As the caller has confirmed that they have another phone number, provision of this information now becomes relevant to satisfy sequential progressivity (Schegloff 2007). Instead, the caller states “just one second” (line 08), with the minimal time reference marking that the conversation will be suspended and resumed shortly. “Just” has been found to have a minimizing function in conversation (Lindemann and Mauranten 2001). Alongside the minimal time reference “one second”, the use of “just” can be understood as an attempt to minimize the upcoming breach of the interactional exit.

A mutual understanding of the upcoming suspension is achieved in lines 08 and 09. The caller does not explicitly state that they will be finding the information. Rather, the conciliator can infer the purpose of the suspension because the caller has yet to provide the required second-pair-part and because the latter has indicated the presence of a specific type of number. The sound of the phone being put down (line 10) provides an aural resource for the conciliator to understand that the caller is removing themselves from the conversation.

Two levels of progressivity are disrupted at this point. Sequential progressivity is disrupted because of the non-forthcoming second-pair-part. The hold-acceptance insert sequence (lines 08-09) further delays provision of the information by filling the place where an answer could be provided (Schegloff 2007). Conversational progressivity is also disrupted through the suspension of turn taking during the interactional exit.

The call is put on hold for around fourteen seconds and resumes with the caller tying their talk as the answer to the initial question (“it’s...”). It is not clear what the caller did to find the information, as there were no verbal references to embodied conduct- unlike the prior case where it was understandable that the caller was checking “the bill”. However, the caller presumably did

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some extra-interactional work to find and provide the relevant second-pair-part, and thus worked to promote sequential progressivity. In fact, by suspending the interaction, the caller displayed that they were prioritising sequential over conversational progressivity. The caller treated it as more important to fulfil their normative obligation to provide the information, rather than remain involved in the conversation.

Extract (5) provides a final example of a caller treating verbal and embodied action as incompatible. The conciliator has just initiated a topic shift following the caller complaining about their power company's service. The conciliator switches to an institutionally relevant task-gathering personal details- as a way to avoid affiliating with the caller's complaint and to maintain their neutral institutional role (c.f. Weatherall 2015).

Extract (5): "Email Address":

01 CON: [you] ↑said that you had email? can i get your
02 email address?
03 CAL: no:w (0.2) i'm not- (0.2) °i can nev-° i've only had
04 it for about .hhh (.) three or four months but i'll
05 get my: ((.hh/rustling)) uhhh °because°
06 sometimes (0.4) on my (.hhh) (hhh) ((background
07 noise)) uhhh
08 (0.9)
09 CAL: (i've been)
10 (0.7)
11 CAL: °u:::hhm° °.hhh° (owh ch) i'll put the ↑phone down
12 [please just (one/a) moment]
13 CON: [↑sure no (problem)] no problem.
14 ((receiver down))
15 ((CAL away for 27.7 seconds))
16 ((Receiver up))
17 CAL: oh (i'm) sorry.=I have it in my diary [here: .hh]=
18 CON: [oh ↑great.]
19 CAL: so- because my children have uh done this
20 for me [originally] put it in. .hh[h it's]
21 CON: [↑good ((echoes))] [↑m(h)m]
22 (0.3)
23 CAL: Meg, .hh eh no capitals

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The conciliator requests another specific piece of information- an email address- to which the caller has previously referred (lines 01-02). An expectation is set up that the caller can provide the information because they have already indicated that they have it. Furthermore, it is their “institutional responsibility” to provide it. However, the initial response, “now...I’m not”, does not provide the information (line 03). “I’ve only had it for...” inferentially confirms that the caller does have, and knows, their email address (lines 03-04). The caller describes the length of time that they have had their email address for, which also accounts for its non-immediate provision. Apparently, three to four months is a time seemingly insufficient for the caller to know their email address by heart.

The informing, “but I’ll get my” (lines 04-05), displays to the conciliator that the caller may be moving to find the information and makes embodied action potentially relevant. At this point at least, the caller appears to be treating both streams of activity as compatible, because they are still talking whilst displaying a possible search for the information. After some lapses in the interaction, the caller announces, “I’ll put the phone down”, to suspend the call (line 11). This is perhaps the most explicit formulation possible from a caller that they would be physically disengaging themselves from their telephone to search for something. As with the other cases in this section, the caller treats the upcoming disruption as a breach. The “please”, minimal time reference “a moment” and “just” can be understood as politeness strategies to minimize the breach of the upcoming suspension and mitigate it as a potentially face-threatening act (line 12). The expression was produced in overlap, so the conciliator may have been unable to hear it. Yet, clearly, the caller treated the disruption as an issue, as evidenced by the need to minimise it. Again, a pre-second insert sequence is used to advance the base sequence to completion.

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The call is suspended for around 28 seconds. Prior fragments of talk, “I’ll get my...” (lines 04-05) and “sometimes on my...” (line 06) alluded to the information possibly being located on some item external to the interaction. Therefore, the conciliator could have inferred that the caller was working to promote sequential progressivity by making an effort to physically find and provide the second-pair-part. The caller resumes the interaction by apologising for the interactional exit (line 17), providing further evidence that the disruption was treated as a normative breach of conversational progressivity. The account “I have it in my diary here” makes it clear that the caller found their email address on something during the interactional exit (line 17). Thus, they treated verbal and embodied conduct as incompatible, because they had to interact with an item in their immediate environment at the expense of talking on the phone.

7. Discussion and conclusions

This chapter has sought to understand how speakers manage verbal and embodied conduct in telephone-mediated dispute resolution. For ease of reference, the findings are visually summarised below.

@ @Insert figure-1.jpg here

Figure 1. Streams of activity and interactional trajectories in response to disrupted request for information sequences.

Parties had been interacting verbally throughout the calls. However, when callers had to find some requested information, an embodied stream of activity became relevant. Callers had to manage these streams of activity *in situ*. In the sequences examined, verbal and embodied conduct could be potentially conflicting as speakers were not always able to manage both concurrently.

Managing verbal and embodied conduct could be done in two ways. As shown above, callers could continue talking to conciliators whilst they tried to find the information (compatible trajectory). Callers used informings, announcements, commentary and self-talk to verbally formulate their embodied action and thus to manage multi-activity. These practices overcame the technological constraints of the mediated interaction. They transformed semiotic modalities, providing as much access to conciliators as possible regarding the callers' embodied action and situated circumstances.

Multi-activity has been primarily (if not exclusively) studied in co-present talk-in-interaction. Although, recent research has begun to examine multi-activity in technologically mediated forms of interaction such as Skype video chat (e.g. Licoppe and Tuncer 2014). However, there exists, to the best of our knowledge, no research investigating speakers managing multi-activity in non-co-present telephone-mediated interactions. Ultimately, research does not have to focus only on face-to-face interactions, because as these findings suggest, multiple semiotic modalities are not necessary for multi-activity to be relevant (Haddington et al. 2014).

Callers could also treat the streams of activity as incompatible and take a temporary interactional exit in order to find the requested information. Temporary interactional exits have primarily been studied in co-present forms of interaction (e.g. DeLand 2012; Szymanski 1999). Nevertheless, our work supports the established finding that hold-acceptance adjacency pairs are

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a practice to suspend verbal engagement in telephone calls (e.g. Hopper 1993; Leung 1997). Based on the allusions or explicit references to embodied conduct in prior talk, such as “can I check”, it was inferable to conciliators that callers were exiting the interaction in order to physically find the relevant information. We also observed that callers oriented to the suspensions as breaches, shown through the minimising features of the turn’s design. This observation points to a preference for conversational progressivity that might benefit from further investigation.

The sequences examined in this chapter often formed part of the broader institutional tasks of establishing the facts of the complaint and gathering the caller’s personal details (Edmonds 2016; Weatherall and Stubbe 2015). Therefore, the management of verbal and embodied conduct was reflexively tied to particular institutional tasks in telephone-mediated dispute resolution. Thus, we further contribute to an established literature showing that managing multi-activity is crucial for how institutional work is carried out *in situ* (Nevile 2015). Yet, it would be worth further investigating how the management of multi-activity is implicated in accomplishing other institutional tasks in telephone-mediated service encounters, given the paucity of research on this topic.

The analysis also showed how these cases were bound up with speakers’ institutional roles and associated responsibilities. Importantly, these roles were not influencing the interaction in an *a priori* sense (Heritage and Clayman 2010), but rather, they were produced and oriented to through speakers’ conduct. The requests for information contained normative expectations that callers knew and could provide information pertaining to their complaint. These questions were a display of conciliators’ rights to ask about the relevant information to form an official record.

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Callers' conduct- moving to find the information- fulfilled the rights and responsibilities associated with their institutional role.

An important finding was that callers made efforts to find and provide the requested information and as such, they were working to promote sequential progressivity. In fact, in the cases in section 5.2, callers prioritised sequential over conversational progressivity. These findings support previous research that has established a preference for progressivity in interaction, in particular at the level of the sequence (Stivers and Robinson 2006). Our unique contribution is to show the use of pre-second insert sequences (i.e. the hold-acceptance adjacency pair) as structural and sequential evidence for such a preference.

The type of phone that callers used raises a problem for interpreting the findings. Mobile phones are portable and thus talking while finding information would be easier. If the majority of cases in section 6.1 involved mobile phones, the findings could be better explained by the technology callers used. Landline phones are in a physically fixed location and thus substantial movement from users is less likely. If a majority of the temporary interactional exit cases involved landline calls then, again, the findings could be due to the constraints of the technology used rather than speakers treating streams of activity as incompatible. An examination of the influence of the telephone technology used by callers could force a re-think of the analytic argument of the interactional trajectories.

Several reasons make it difficult to account for the technology used by callers and argue against its potential influence on the analysis. The call recording equipment and software we used did not indicate whether callers were using a landline, cordless or mobile phone. In addition, it was not always clear what type of phone was used when listening to the audio recordings. However, some of the compatible interactional trajectory cases appeared to involve

mobile phones, yet there was no clear pattern⁴. Similarly, some of the interactional exit cases appeared to be made from landline numbers; possible evidence for the influence of technology⁵. However, it is common for such numbers to be linked to portable cordless handsets (Redmayne 2013). If callers used handsets during temporary interactional exit cases, this would provide evidence for them treating the streams of activity as incompatible, because they would have the option to move around and talk. Future research should be cognizant of this issue and tease out whether the form of technology is relevant for how speakers manage concurrent streams of activity in telephone-mediated interactions.

Despite the analytic benefits of using audio-recorded telephone calls (Schegloff 2002), limitations still exist. What is missed is how speakers conduct themselves in their situated environments. We have a good idea as to how they managed verbal and embodied action in these calls. However, aside from knowing that callers were retrieving information from external sources (such as computers and electricity bills), we were unable to answer why, in some cases, they treated streams of activity as incompatible or compatible. Accordingly, future research could video record callers in their situated environment as they interact over the phone. Such an approach is not unprecedented; Relieu (2010) discussed some advanced technological ways to capture how people interact with their mobile phones in relation to the demands of their surroundings.

This approach would provide a greater understanding of how callers manage verbal and embodied conduct in telephone-mediated interaction. Video recordings would allow an analysis of what callers do during the temporary interactional exits. In the compatible interactional

⁴ This observation is based on what callers said when providing their personal details during these encounters.

⁵ Again, this is based on the details provided to conciliators.

trajectory, recordings could show us how callers coordinate talking to conciliators whilst finding the requested information. This method would also allow us to know what type of phone speakers were using. In sum, video recording the calls would establish whether the interactional trajectories we found are due to caller's management of streams of activity or the telephone technology used.

The essentially uni-modal constraints of telephone-mediated service encounters mean that when it is necessary to find or retrieve some requested information speakers may have two options concerning competing streams of activity. Speakers can stay on the phone and find it- if they can, or briefly disengage to find it. It was beyond the intentions of this paper to ask whether there is any interactional preference for either solution. This practical problem and its interactional consequences are probably not unique to dispute resolution helplines. Rather it is likely inherent to all telephone-mediated interactions, institutional or otherwise.

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Appendix A:

Conversation Analytic Transcription Conventions

Temporal and Sequential Notation

Notation	Description
[Overlap onset: where two (or more) speakers begin talking at once.
]	Overlap offset: the end of overlapping talk.
CON: word= CAL: =word	Equals signs indicate no pauses between speaker's turns.
CON: word=word	Equals signs within same turn indicates no silence between words, a rush-through in speech.
(.)	A micropause, less than 0.2 seconds.
(0.5), (1.4)	Silences timed to tenths of a second.

Characteristics of Speech Delivery

Notation	Description
Wo:rd	Upward intonation contour, sound moves down-to-up.
Wo:rd	Downward intonation contour, sound moves up-to-down.
Wo::::rd	Extension of prior sound. The more colons, the longer the extension.
Wor-	Sound cut-off.
.	Falling intonation.

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?	Rising intonation.
,	Slight rise in intonation.
¿	Rising intonation that is in between a question mark and comma.
<u>word</u>	Emphasis or stress on part of a word.
WOrd	Capital letters indicate louder talk (louder than simple emphasis).
°word°	Words enclosed by degrees signs are spoken quietly
↑	Shift to a higher pitch.
↓	Shift to a lower pitch.
£word£	Words enclosed by pound signs are spoken in a “smiling” voice
#word#	Words enclosed by hash signs are spoken with a “creaky” voice.
~word~	Words enclosed by tildes are spoken with a “shaky” voice.
>word<	Indicates a portion of talk that is quicker relative to that surrounding it.
<word>	Indicates a portion of talk that is slower relative to that surrounding it.
<word	Indicates talk that is begun quicker than expected or jump-started.

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.hhhhh	Audible inhalation. The more h's the longer the inhalation.
hhhhh	Audible exhalation. The more h's the longer the exhalation.
hah, hih and variants	Indicate laughter tokens. Each token represents a single 'beat' of laughter. Tokens are transcribed as they sound phonetically.
Wo(h)rd	Interpolated particles of aspiration. Laughter or plosive aspiration occurring within a word.
.snih	Sniffing.

Transcriber Descriptions

Notation	Description
(word word word)	Transcriber's best guess as to what was said.
(word/word)	Transcriber's provision of two potential hearings.
()	Transcriber unsure as to what was said.
((Receiver lifted))	Double brackets indicate transcriber comments or interpretation of something they hear that is not talk.