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## Composite Social Actions: The Case of Factual Declaratives in Everyday Interaction

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### ABSTRACT

When taking a turn at talk, a speaker normally accomplishes a sequential action such as a question, answer, complaint, or request. Sometimes, however, a turn at talk may accomplish not a single but a composite action, involving a combination of more than one action. I show that factual declaratives (e.g., “the feed drip has finished”) are recurrently used to implement composite actions consisting of both an *informing* and a request or, alternatively, a *criticism* and a request. A key determinant between these is the recipient’s epistemic access to what the speaker is describing. Factual declaratives afford a range of possible responses, which can tell us how the composite action has been understood and give us insights into its underlying structure. Evidence for the stacking of composite actions, however, is not always directly available in the response and may need to be pieced together with the help of other linguistic and contextual considerations. Data are in Italian with English translation.

A central goal of social and linguistic science is to explain how people use talk and other conduct to “do things” with one another (Austin, 1962), a process known in conversation analysis as action formation and ascription (Schegloff, 2007, p. xiv; Levinson, 2013). One of the reasons this process is notoriously complex to explain is that social action is layered. Take an utterance like *can you pass me the salt?* A speaker saying this at the lunch table is “doing something” at different levels (see Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975; Levinson, 2013; Enfield, 2013, chapter 8, among others). At one level, she is articulating sounds and words in a certain language, eliciting attention, and engaging in interaction with another person. At another level, she is asking a question and at the same time requesting an object. At yet another level, she may be pursuing a larger agenda such as clearing the table or helping another person dress his salad.

One level of this lamination, however, is regarded by many as central. This is the sequential (Schegloff, 2007) or “enchronic” level (Enfield, 2013) at which a turn at talk functions as an action that moves the flow of the interaction forward, by making relevant a response—as a question, request, or assessment does—or by responding to a previous action—as an answer, fulfillment, or agreement does. Such forward-feeding effect or contribution of a turn at talk has been referred to as its “main” or “primary” job (Levinson, 2013; see also Schegloff, 1996, pp. 165, 209), to be distinguished from its epistemic modulation (Heritage & Raymond, 2005) and from its affective coloring

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Earlier versions of the analysis were presented at the Annual Conference on Language, Interaction, and Social Organization (Santa Barbara, CA, 2013), the International Pragmatics Conference (New Delhi, India, 2013), and the Intersubjectivity in Action Conference (Helsinki, Finland, 2017). I have greatly benefitted from the feedback I received from the audience on each occasion. I am also grateful to Herb Clark and Ruth Parry for fruitful discussion in the early stages of the study. Finally, I wish to thank the editor and the journal’s anonymous reviewers for their detailed and engaged commentary.

Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at [www.tandfonline.com/hrls](http://www.tandfonline.com/hrls).

(Thompson, Fox, & Couper-Kuhlen, 2015), for instance. But as the example suggests, this level of sequential action can itself be layered or composite: *Can you pass me the salt?* functions simultaneously as a question and as a request and can be responded to at the same time with both an answer (e.g., *yes*) and fulfillment (passing the salt).

Although under different rubrics, utterances implementing more than one action have received much attention in speech act theory and in psychological research building on it to study language comprehension (see Gordon & Lakoff, 1971; Searle, 1975; Clark, 1979; Gibbs, 1983, among others). After a period of maximal growth in the 1970s and 1980s, however, efforts in this area have progressively diminished, partly due to a number of unresolved issues and impasses and partly because of the advancement of other approaches to language and social action, most prominently conversation analysis. For their part, conversation analysts have always been attentive to the layered nature of action but have engaged in the systematic study of its formation and ascription mostly within the bounds of a few established patterns, typically involving questions. We know, for example, that questions are regularly used as “vehicles” for other actions (Schegloff, 2007, pp. 9, 73–78), including requests, invitations, offers, and more, and that this is reflected in the duality of people’s responses (see Raymond, 2013; Rossi, 2015a, among others). And we also know that questions that initiate repair can at the same time do positively valenced actions such as displaying surprise or negatively valenced actions such as pre-disagreeing with or challenging what has been said (see Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977, p. 380; Selting, 1996; Wu, 2006).

Apart from these established patterns, however, the truth is that we know very little about how multiple actions are systematically implemented through practices of speaking that are not interrogatively formatted. Although several observations have been made in the literature—for example, that certain assertions function as both assessments and compliments or as both noticings and complaints (Schegloff, 2007, pp. 73–78)—these have not been followed up by studies demonstrating the regularity of these patterns and the mechanisms that underlie them, with few exceptions (e.g., Fasulo & Monzoni, 2009). This is part of a more general lack of CA research specifically dedicated to the mechanics of action formation and ascription, especially of “first actions” (Heritage, 2012, p. 2), which has continued until relatively recently.<sup>1</sup> Over the past few years, a number of contributions have been made to uncover the principles behind the process (e.g., Benjamin & Walker, 2013; Clayman & Heritage, 2014; Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Heritage, 2012; Persson, 2015; Robinson, 2013; Rossano, 2012; Rossi & Zinken, 2016; Sicoli, Stivers, Enfield, & Levinson, 2015; Sidnell & Enfield, 2014; Stivers & Rossano, 2010). However, there are still relatively few studies tackling head-on the ground rules of action formation and ascription, let alone the formation and ascription of composite actions.

In this article, I pursue this endeavor by examining turns at talk that describe a state of affairs such as “the feed drip has finished,” “the dishes are blocking the drain,” “there’s the coffee here,” which I refer to as factual declaratives. As part of a larger project looking at requests in everyday informal interaction, the central questions that this study seeks to answer are: When functioning as a way of getting another to do something, what else are factual declaratives doing? And how does this other doing relate to the request? The main findings are the following. Factual declaratives are recurrently used to implement composite actions consisting of both an *informing* and a request or, alternatively, a *criticism* and a request, a key determinant between these composites being the recipient’s epistemic access to what the speaker is describing. In line with previous arguments about the underlying structure of dual actions (e.g., Searle, 1975; Schegloff, 2007, pp. 73–78, 127–128), the analysis also suggests that informing or criticizing is the first layer in the stacking of the composite action and that requesting is effected as a result of it, making it possible to see the

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<sup>1</sup>Of course, there is by now a large body of CA research on the design of “first actions” focusing on the selection and organization of alternative forms for implementing questions, requests, offers, proposals, assessments, among other actions. However, this is a distinct analytic issue (see also Drew & Couper-Kuhlen, 2014, p. 13). Explaining people’s use of alternative forms of action tells us how those forms of action are sensitive and adapted to different social-interactive circumstances, but it does not in itself tell us how those forms come to embody and to be interpreted as a certain action in the first place.

composite as consisting of a “vehicle” and a “cargo.” Evidence for this mechanism comes from different sources, including the response, its design, and other linguistic and contextual considerations. The analysis also involves putting factual declaratives in contrast with other forms available for requesting, especially imperatives and interrogatives, leading to a final appraisal of the distinct social-interactional affordances of the practice. I conclude by discussing the implications of the findings for our understanding of the process of action formation and ascription more generally.

In what follows, I set the stage for the main analysis by reviewing previous work on actions accomplished by factual declaratives, presenting the data, defining certain core conceptual distinctions, and by delimiting the phenomenon under examination.

### **Actions accomplished by factual declaratives**

The empirical focus of this article is on factual declaratives—descriptions of states of affairs—and the actions that they accomplish in everyday interaction. As a practice of speaking, factual declaratives such as *you’re standing on my foot* have been discussed in speech act theory for their potential to perform indirect speech acts (Searle, 1975), in particular indirect requests. At the core of the argument is the dual nature of the act performed by the description, involving both a direct act—an assertion or observation that something is the case—and an indirect act—a request (e.g., for the recipient to step off the speaker’s foot). Though on a different methodological footing, this argument resonates with the later conversation analytic treatment of similar matters in terms of “double-barreled” action (Schegloff, 2007, pp. 73–78; see also Heritage, 2012, p. 2), where one action functions as the “vehicle” through which another action is accomplished. A central piece of evidence for double-barreled actions is the duality of the response addressing both “barrels” (see also Sacks, 1992, p. 8). The robustness of this pattern, however, has so far been demonstrated mostly in relation to interrogatively formatted actions (e.g., Raymond, 2013).

Previous research in pragmatics and sociolinguistics has studied the social motivations for using factual declaratives, again with a focus on cases of requesting. Utterances such as *it’s cold in here* or *the matches are all gone* are here seen as allowing the speaker to not commit to a request intention, leaving the interpretation up to the recipient (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Weizman, 1989). Giving options to the recipient is one of the main strategies of “negative politeness,” which aims at leaving the recipient as much as possible free from imposition and unimpeded in their own actions.

In conversation analysis, some early observations of actions accomplished by factual declaratives are found in Pomerantz’s (1980) study of “my-side tellings” (e.g., *your line’s been busy, I saw you drive by last night*), which work as a fishing device for information on the basis of participants’ different access to the same event. Crucially, this strategy gives the recipient the option to withhold the information being fished for and merely confirm the description or respond to it as news.

In a related phenomenon, speakers can make a pre-invitation by describing the occasion or happening that is grounds for the invitation (e.g., *next Saturday night’s a surprise party here for Kevin*) (Drew, 1984). Such reportings do not make explicit the import of the circumstance being described but leave it to the recipient to draw the implications for the invitation and decide how to manage participation. Since the report officially gives some news, the recipient has the option to take it at face value, by receipting and assessing the news, possibly encouraging further talk about it.

Similar observations have also been made about factual declaratives used to make requests, such as *my car is stalled* (Schegloff, 1995, p. 193ff). By characterizing a state of affairs as a failure, such a description may also introduce a possible complaint, thereby extending the range of relevant responses. Once again, this is a result of the speaker’s ostensible focus on an event or fact—put another way, on the reasons for the recipient to undertake a certain task, rather than on the task itself. This is echoed also in Kendrick and Drew’s (2016) recent reanalysis of strategies of requesting within the broader framework of methods of recruitment, among which are “reports of needs, difficulties, or troubles.”

Finally, focusing on somewhat different linguistic forms, Fasulo and Monzoni (2009) have looked more systematically at declaratives implementing multiple actions in a study of assessments in a fashion

atelier. As tailors inspect items of clothing to decide whether they should be modified before being sent for serial production, declaratives such as “here I don’t like it” or “this is uplifted” function both as negative assessments and as proposals to modify the garment. This is reflected in dual uptakes dealing both with the speaker’s evaluation and with its implications for decision making (p. 372). The present study extends this effort to systematically analyze the formation and ascription of composite actions by focusing on factual declaratives—descriptions of states of affairs—that are relevant for the immediate practicalities of everyday life.

## Data and method

The data for this study come from a large corpus of video recordings of informal interactions in Italian and regional varieties spoken in northeastern areas of Italy, made between 2009 and 2016. Informed consent for scientific use of the recordings was obtained from all participants, and all names appearing in the transcripts are pseudonyms.<sup>2</sup> The interactions involve family and friends engaging in a variety of everyday activities, from chatting to having meals to working together. The collection of cases began as part of a larger project on requesting (Rossi, 2015b), broadly understood as any communicative behavior that causes someone to do something practical, such as fetching or circulating objects, performing other kinds of manual tasks (e.g., opening a window), and stopping or changing an ongoing bodily movement. For the purposes of the present study, the collection focused on cases in which getting another to do something was achieved through the use of a factual declarative (e.g., “the water is boiling”). A total of 94 such cases were exhaustively drawn from a sample comprising 54 recordings, totalling about 33 hours, featuring nearly 200 speakers. The criteria for identifying and analyzing the cases are further explained in the next two sections, along with the reasons for focusing the study of factual declaratives on a coherent domain. The analysis draws on the methods of conversation analysis and linguistics.

## Conceptual distinctions for analysis

The focus of this study is on composite actions implemented or effected by a certain linguistic practice. This requires a distinction between *practice* as a formal means, a recognizable and recurrent pattern of behavior (e.g., factual declarative), and *action* as the social-interactive import of using that practice in context, as understood by participants (e.g., a request, an informing, a criticism) (Schegloff, 1996, pp. 168–174, 1997; Sidnell, 2010; p. 61). Another conceptual distinction relates to the sequential position of conversational turns. In sequence organization, perhaps the most fundamental distinction is the one between first pair-parts and second pair-parts—that is, between turns that initiate an adjacency pair sequence and turns that complete the sequence, having been made conditionally relevant by its initiation (Schegloff, 2007, chapter 2; Stivers & Rossano, 2010). However, a turn may be produced in first position without necessarily functioning as a first pair-part (Stivers, 2013, pp. 205–207). Such a turn, even though it may be sequentially related to the previous interaction, is not produced as a response to a prior turn but as a new, autonomous contribution. Sequential position can be used to structurally constrain the range of applications of a certain practice and is one of the criteria adopted in this article for delimiting the focal phenomenon, which I now turn to.

## Delimiting the phenomenon

Relying on the conceptual distinctions laid out in the previous section, I now delimit the boundaries of the focal phenomenon in terms of linguistic practice, sequential position, and action.

The practice under analysis involves a factual declarative—a description of a state of affairs. This typically consists of an existential or presentative construction but also of other nonmodal constructions. Although factual declaratives cannot be captured by a single lexicosyntactic formula, they

<sup>2</sup>The permissions obtained include the use of images without face anonymization.

often refer to the lack of something (e.g., *non ci sono fazzoletti* “there are no handkerchiefs”), the reaching of a stage in a process (e.g., *è finì la flebo* “the feed drip has finished”, Extract 1), a property or quality of an object (e.g., *questo è un po’ unticcio* “this is a bit slimy”), or an untoward circumstance (e.g., *i piatti stanno bloccando lo scarico* “the dishes are blocking the drain”, Extract 6). In some cases what is described can be understood as a “problem” or “trouble” (see Kendrick & Drew, 2016, pp. 6–7); in others it is rather an ordinary circumstance that necessitates some action to be taken for an activity to move forward. Factual declaratives do not refer to a need or want of the speaker (e.g., *ho fame* “I’m hungry”), and while they may refer to the property or quality of an object (e.g., *questo è un po’ unticcio* “this is a bit slimy”), the description does not present a subjective evaluation of taste or liking but rather a verifiable condition or process in the surrounding material environment.

The focal phenomenon is also delimited in terms of sequential position. The turns under analysis here are all produced in first position and not as a response to a prior turn. This serves to structurally constrain the otherwise intractably vast range of uses of factual declaratives, making the study more coherent and focused.

Finally, as already mentioned in the “Data and Method” section, the phenomenon is delimited in terms of action: The composite actions effected by factual declaratives in this study always involve requesting, broadly intended as getting another to do something, and in particular to do something here and now (see Drew & Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Floyd, Rossi, & Enfield, *in press*; Kendrick & Drew, 2016; Rossi, 2015b). While initially motivated by the origin of the present study in a larger project on requesting, this focus serves the coherence and tractability of the object of analysis.

In what follows, I present an analysis of factual declaratives as a practice for composite actions, focusing on the two combinations that are most frequent in the collection: informing + requesting and criticizing + requesting.

### Informing + requesting

In this section, I examine factual declaratives that function both as informing and as a request, where informing is understood as the delivering of new information to someone (see Heritage, 1984, 2012). These sequences represent the largest group in the collection, making up about 40% of all cases.<sup>3</sup> Work on news deliveries and announcements has documented the structure and composition of news delivery sequences, such as the design of pre-announcements, announcements, and elaboration of news (Terasaki, 2004 [1976]; Maynard, 1997, 2003), and different types of responses, including uptakes of the information received as news and assessments dealing with its valence.

Informing always implicates social epistemics, which refers to people’s capacities, rights, and obligations relative to the acquisition, possession, and transfer of knowledge. A central element in the management of knowledge is participants’ epistemic access, which can be intended in two ways. One is people’s *relative*, differential access to information, such that one person is understood as knowing more (K+) about something compared to another (K–) (e.g., Heritage, 2012). Another is *absolute* access, that is, whether someone is understood as knowing (K+) or not knowing (K–) about something to a sufficient degree for a certain purpose (e.g., Robinson, 2013), regardless of whether someone else knows more or less. In this study, it is especially the second aspect that is relevant: whether the recipient does or does not have knowledge of what is described by the speaker.

At an informational level, a factual declarative can be said to function as an informing when its propositional content is unknown to the recipient. And indeed, for the cases examined in this section and others like them, we can establish that what is described is unknown to the recipient on the basis of the context and previous interaction—showing, for example, that the recipient lacks visual or other sensory access to the information. More important, however, is the participants’ treatment of

<sup>3</sup>This percentage is given only as an approximation. While the majority of sequences in this group clearly involve informing as a main action besides requesting, a few exhibit nuances that may preclude a strict categorization. The phenomenon under analysis does not lend itself to formal quantification (Stivers, 2015, p. 13), at least within the limits of the present study.

informing actions. The clearest example of this is when an informing is explicitly formulated as such by the speaker.

In Extract 1, Mirko is working with others in the kitchen. When the extract begins, Emma—who has not been working in the kitchen—walks in, addresses Mirko, and tells him that “the feed drip has finished,” referring to the intravenous drip being administered to a family member who lies ill in bed in another room.

Extract 1 Camillo\_ 2039498

01 Emma Mirko.  
**Mirko**

02 Mirko sì?  
**yes**

03 (0.5)

04 Emma	volevo dirte che è finì la flebo. want-IPF-1SG say-INF=2SG.DAT CMP be.3SG finish-PSTP the feed.drip <b>I wanted to tell you that the feed drip has finished</b>
---------	---

05 (0.3)

06 Mirko	a::h. ITJ <b>o::h</b>
----------	-----------------------------

07 (0.8)

08 Mirko	buono possiamo liberare la Milena allora. good can-1PL free-INF the NAME then <b>good we can release Milena then</b>
----------	--

09 Emma eh.  
ITJ  
**right**

The focal content of Emma’s turn (“the feed drip has finished”) is prefaced by a formulation of the turn as an informing (“I wanted to tell you that”). This characterization of Emma’s action is consonant with Mirko’s first response (line 6) in the form of a change-of-state token *a::h* “o::h” (Heritage, 1984), which signals that his state of knowledge has changed and thus receipts the information reported by Emma as news. A moment later, Mirko expands his response with another unit, which includes an assessment of the news as “good” and then a commitment to going and nursing Milena (“we can release Milena then”). This shows his understanding of Emma’s action not only as an informing but also as a request. Note that the temporal-causal conjunction *allora* (“then”) constructs the fulfillment of the request as an upshot of the news received. This tells us something important about the structure of Emma’s composite action: Mirko understands one component (informing) as a vehicle for the other (requesting), the latter being effected as a result of the former.

The duality of Mirko’s response reflects that of Emma’s initiating action, much in the same way as other composite responses (e.g., *oh okay*) documented in previous literature (e.g. Schegloff, 2007, pp. 127–128). Note, however, that whereas the composite response is constituted by two discrete and serially ordered elements (in this case further separated by a gap, line 7), the initiating action features a single element functioning doubly—a factual declarative.

A question we might ask at this point is: What does Emma achieve by constructing her action in this way? For the purpose of getting Mirko to nurse Milena, Emma could more simply use a “direct” form of requesting. Common request forms such as an imperative (e.g., “please release Milena”) or an interrogative (e.g., “will you release Milena?”), however, would carry with them certain sequential and functional implications that may not be appropriate in this context—for example, that the

requested task is integral to an ongoing project or that it constitutes a low-cost, unproblematic departure from what Mirko is currently doing (Rossi, 2012, 2015b, chapter 3). A factual declarative, on the other hand, leaves it to Mirko to draw the implications of the state of affairs being reported and so gives him more agency in dealing with the task at hand. Moreover, it displays an orientation to Mirko's particular relationship to this task. Mirko is not only Milena's husband but also a doctor, and his wife's primary carer, who is responsible for her daily nursing needs. Making the request through an informing allows Emma to bank on Mirko's competence and commitment to the task. As Mirko cannot monitor the drip-feeding process at this time, Emma provides him with information that helps him fulfill his role as Milena's carer.

The explicit formulation of a factual declarative as an informing ("I wanted to tell you that ...") is rare. But other cases of informing are comparable to Extract 1. In the following, the interaction unfolds in an analogous way: The speaker comes up to the recipient and tells her something she does not know that is grounds for taking a practical action—or rather, in this case, for stopping one.

When Extract 2 begins, Eva is doing the washing up. Gino walks in, addresses her (line 1), and tries to cut into her ongoing conversation with Ada (lines 4 and 6). As soon as he is in the clear (line 8), he produces a description about another person, Eliana, who is taking a shower downstairs. The gist of the report is that, since the house's boiler has a limited capacity, Eva's using hot water for washing up reduces the supply of hot water for the shower, causing Eliana to "get frozen out" by sudden bursts of cold water.

#### Extract 2 NataleCucina01\_514782

01 Gino Eva.  
**Eva**

02 (0.3)

03 Eva [ma la Cinzia arriva. ((to Ada))  
**and Cinzia is she coming**

04 Gino [°'peta°,  
**°wait°**

05 (0.6)

06 Gino [p- s-

07 Ada [vuoi che le telefoni. ((to Eva))  
**do you want me to call her**

08 Gino do- siccome c'è giù la Eliana che si fa la doccia,  
since LOC=be.3SG down the NAME REL RFL make-3SG the shower  
**d- since Eliana is downstairs taking a shower**

09 e allora quando si ha si fa girare l'acqua;  
and then when RFL have-3SG RFL make-3SG go.around-INF the=water  
**then when it when the water runs**

10 (0.5)

11 Gino [òh +òh l- l- la ciapa 'na 'ngiaza+da.  
3SG.SCL grab-3SG a freeze  
**uh uh s- s- she gets frozen out**

12 Eva [a::+:h\_  
ITJ  
**o:::h**

13 eva +.....turns off water,,,,,,,,,+

14 Gino dai che le fa- le finisco io dopo valà.  
PTC CON 3PL.ACC make-3PL.ACC finish-1SG 1SG.NOM after PTC  
**don't worry I'll d- I'll finish them later okay**



Like Extract 1, Extract 2 begins with a summons. As we will see in next section, however, the use of vocatives is not specific to informings. Their use in Extracts 1 and 2 appears connected to the fact that the speaker comes in a room where multiple people are involved in another activity; the summons serves to single out the addressee as well as to cut into the ongoing conversation (see also Gino's "o:wait" in line 4).

As Gino manages to get Eva's attention, he launches into a description of Eliana taking a shower downstairs and getting frozen out when hot water is used upstairs in the kitchen. Even before Gino gets to the bit about Eliana "getting frozen," Eva receipts the description as news (*a:h* "o:h") and immediately proceeds to turn off the water (line 13). Like in the previous extract, we therefore have a dual response that takes up both the informing and the request.

Gino's subsequent volunteering to finish the washing up later ("don't worry I'll d- I'll finish them later okay," line 14) offers a remedy for the premature stopping of Eva's activity. Indeed, the circumstance he is dealing with is somewhat delicate. On the one hand, the fact that Eliana is getting frozen out in the shower makes it urgent to stop using hot water in the kitchen; on the other hand, Eva is legitimately using the water for doing a service to the whole family. Gino's use of a factual declarative foregrounds the unfortunate circumstance as a reason for action, which Eva immediately understands and takes up.

Unlike in Extract 1, the response here does not make explicit the structure of the composite action—that is to say, which is the vehicle and which is the "cargo," the action being transported. One reason for this difference is that in Extract 2 the fulfillment of the request is immediate, nearly simultaneous with the information uptake (line 13). The two components of Eva's response run parallel to each other, in the verbal and nonverbal streams of her behavior. What we can note, however, is that the verbal component (information uptake) addresses the layer of Gino's composite action (informing) that is arguably closer to the surface form of what he has done (a description of a state of affairs). Along with the timing of the information uptake, which starts a bit earlier than the fulfillment, this suggests that the informing is the vehicle and the request is the cargo. The evidence for this, however, is more indirect than in Extract 1—a point we can further explore by considering another example.

Furio is seated at the table in the kitchen making dough for biscuits, while his sister Eliana is in another room. When the extract begins, Furio has just noticed that the pot of water on the cooker is boiling.

### Extract 3 BiscottiPome02\_323267

01 (1.6)

02 Furio Eliana::  
Eliana::

03 (2.0)

04 Furio	sta bollendo l'acqua. stay-3SG boil-GER the=water <b>the water is boiling</b>
----------	---

05 (1.9)

06 Eliana bolle l'acqua? ((from another room))  
boil-3SG the=water  
**the water is boiling**

07 Furio sì,  
**yes**

08 (4.5)

09 Eliana ((comes into the kitchen and puts stock  
cube and small pasta in the water))

Furio calls out to Eliana and tells her that “the water is boiling.” In response, from another room, Eliana first repeats Furio’s turn (with slight modification of verbal aspect) to seek confirmation and then, a few seconds later, comes in the kitchen and puts ingredients in the water for making soup.

The basic structure of this episode is analogous to that of the previous two: The speaker reports a state of affairs to a recipient who doesn’t have access to it (informing), and by doing so he also gets her to carry out a practical task (request). In this case, however, the recipient’s verbal response—a confirmation-seeking repetition—does not overtly orient to the composite action as involving an informing. Our understanding of this relies on the physical and epistemic context, which is analogous to that of the previous two episodes: The recipient is in another room and couldn’t possibly know that the water is boiling before the speaker tells her.

This case also shows that recipients may not be obliged to ostensibly respond to the vehicle action, at least in the case of an informing, and may limit their response to a nonverbal uptake of the cargo action, the request. This pattern is in line with previous findings concerning responses to interrogatively formatted requests (Rossi, 2015a, 2015b).

### Criticizing + requesting

In this section, I examine factual declaratives that function both as a criticism and as a request, which make up about 25% of all cases (see fn. 1). Criticizing is intended as the expression of disapproval of someone’s behavior (Pino, 2016). This makes relevant the recognition of fault with an apology or justification or alternatively its deflection or denial. Criticizing can be seen as part of a larger family of actions of complaining (see Heinemann & Traverso, 2009 for a review), which are implemented through practices such as idiomatic expressions (Drew & Holt, 1988), rhetorical negative questions (Monzoni, 2009), negative assessments (e.g., Drew, 1998; Edwards, 2005; Pomerantz, 1984), and also factual observations. Among the latter are negative observations—that is, observations of something that did not happen, as in *you didn’t get an ice cream sandwich* (Schegloff, 1988, pp. 119–127), and other observations that characterize an event or state of affairs as a failure (Schegloff, 1995, p. 193ff).

In what follows, I show how factual declaratives can be used to criticize the recipient’s ongoing or immediately prior behavior. Like in cases of informing + requesting, the target turns involve the speaker describing a state of affairs that is grounds for the recipient to do something or to stop doing something. In contrast to informings, however, the information conveyed by the description is not understood as news, as it refers to a state of affairs in the near environment that is accessible to both speaker and recipient, often to do with objects that the recipient has been manipulating. Here the recipient is not treated as someone who lacks knowledge of what is being described (K–) but instead as someone who does or should know. In the first case, the recipient evidently knows (K+).

Before Extract 4 begins, Dad has poured hot water for tea in the cup of his young daughter Elena. The extract begins as Elena tries to draw Mum’s attention to how much hot water Dad is now pouring himself (“Mum look,” “look how much,” lines 1–4), hinting at the fact that the amount is considerably, and unfairly, more than he has just poured for Elena. After initially trying to divert Elena’s call for attention (line 2), Mum realizes what is going on and says: “Dad you’ve put a rather small amount for Elena actually.”

#### Extract 4 DupoProve10\_1285234

01 Elena *gua-* mamma [guarda? ((points to Dad’s cup))  
**loo- Mum look**

02 Mum [papà è il papà il tuo interlo[cutore. ((to Elena))  
**Dad your interlocutor is Dad**

03 Elena [guarda quanto ne s-\_  
**look how much it-**

04 (0.5)/((Elena keeps pointing to Dad’s cup))

05 Mum papà +gliene hai messo ben poco+.  
 Dad 3SG.DAT=PTV have-2SG put-PSTP well little  
**Dad you've put a rather small amount**

06 mum +.....points to cup,,,,,+

07 al+la Elena in effe(hh)t\*ti.  
 at-the NAME in effects  
**for Elena actu(hh)ally**

08 +..gazes at Dad----->

09 dad \*leans forward

10 gazes to and reaches for kettle (0.3)

11 shifts gaze to Mum (0.2)

12 Dad innanzitutto(hh). ((halts reach))  
**first of a(hh)ll**

13 Mum \*heh heh heh

14 dad \*hand hovers over table

15 Dad fdoveva rimanerne:\*:.  
 must-IPF-3SG remain-INF  
**fthere had to be some left for::**

16 \*moves hand to kettle and grabs it

17 Dad \*no.  
**no**

18 \*lifts kettle

19 Mum eh,=  
**huh**

20 Dad =ma \*òh ho paura che si::\*: \*mm\_  
 but have-1SG fear that RFL  
**but uhm I fear that she::: mm**

21 dad \*puts kettle down \* \*lifts kettle again

22 tilts kettle to pour water in Elena's cup (0.8)

23 Mum dagliene un goccettino ancora un poco,  
**give her one more dash a bit more**

24 Mum dopo casoma se avanza lo bevo io. (.) ecco così.  
**then if there is any left I'll drink it there like this**

25 (0.7)

26 Dad che si scottasse mm sbrodolasse,  
 CMP RFL burn-SBJ.PST-3SG dribble-SBJ.PST.3SG  
**that she'd burn herself mm make a mess of herself**



Figure 1. Frame from line 7, Extract 4, as Mum is saying ‘Elena’.

Mum’s factual declarative voices Elena’s protest, which she has not been able to fully express. Dad’s response to the description is extended and complex. So let us focus on the nonverbal stream of his behavior first; we will come back to the verbal stream later.

As Mum produces the factual declarative, Dad is leaning back on his chair, with his hands crossed on his lap, looking at her (Figure 1). In overlap with the end of Mum’s turn, Dad leans forward and reaches for the kettle, preparing to pour more water in Elena’s cup (lines 9–10), thus beginning to comply with the request. In the next few seconds, however, Dad’s conduct wavers between compliance and noncompliance, his hands first hovering over the table (line 14), then grabbing and lifting the kettle (line 16–18), only to put it back down a moment later (line 21). Eventually, Dad goes ahead and pours more water in Elena’s cup (lines 21–22). Although hesitant, then, Dad’s nonverbal compliance treats Mum’s factual declarative as a request.

But what else is Mum’s factual declarative doing? Unlike in the cases examined in the previous section, here the recipient has direct epistemic access to the state of affairs being described. Dad knows how much water he has poured in Elena’s cup not only because he can see it (Figure 1) but also because, as it turns out, he has a reason for it. Describing something that the recipient knows already has a different effect than telling him something he does not know: It suggests a failure to attend to the circumstance being described (see Schegloff, 1988, pp. 119–127). This is central to how a factual declarative conveys a criticism.

There are other elements to Mum’s turn here that contribute to characterizing it as a criticism. The amount of water is described as *ben poco* “rather small”, where the modifier *ben* “rather” accentuates the divergence from a sufficient amount. Also, the final phrase *in effetti* “actually” establishes a contrast with Mum’s preceding stance and in so doing connects the turn to Elena’s earlier protest, which Mum had initially disregarded (lines 1–4). Finally, the last part of the turn is infused with laughter, plausibly indicating Mum’s amusement at the fact that Dad’s actions stand to be corrected.

Let us now turn to Dad’s verbal response. Unlike the verbal responses examined in the previous section, this is not a receipt or assessment of new information but instead a justification of his behavior. The phrase “first of all” (line 12) launches a multi-unit turn and projects a list of

reasons, which begins with “there had to be some left for-” (line 15) (meaning for others wishing to drink tea). This unit is left incomplete and abandoned (“no,” line 17) for another reason “but uhm I fear that she::: mm” (line 20), which is again left off as Dad eventually persuades himself to pour more water in Elena’s cup (lines 21–22). Moments later, Dad finishes explaining his concern as one for his young child’s capability and safety in handling hot water (“that she’d burn herself mm make a mess of herself,” line 26). This extended justification demonstrates Dad’s understanding of Mum’s factual declarative as a criticism.

What is the structure of the composite action here? Unlike in Extract 1, and similarly to Extract 2, the stacking of criticizing and requesting is not made explicit by the recipient’s response. However, what we can say, again, is that the verbal component of the response (justification) addresses the layer of action (criticizing) that is arguably closer (than requesting) to the surface, ostensible form of what the speaker has done (a description of the recipient’s unfair behavior). This closer relation is supported also by the meaningful opposition between using a factual declarative and using a “direct” form of requesting such as the imperative, which occurs later in the extract as Dad is already complying (“give her one more dash a bit more,” line 23). Mum could have plausibly used an imperative in the first place to get Dad to pour more water. In so doing, however, she would have focused on mobilizing the requested action, prioritizing its performance over other concerns (Kent & Kendrick, 2016). A factual declarative, on the other hand, foregrounds the reason for getting Dad to act—the unfairness of his previous behavior—which puts Dad in a position to justify himself.

Consider another case, where the speaker’s factual declarative is again aimed at rectifying the untoward behavior of the recipient, and where the state of affairs described is similarly accessible to both participants. Nino and Giorgio sit chatting at the table while a child, Luca, plays with a puppet (lines 1–3). While playing, Luca punches the puppet down on the table (line 4); the puppet bounces over and hits Nino’s arm, causing him to wince slightly, then landing dangerously close to his coffee (lines 5–6). Nino then interrupts his talk and says “there’s the coffee here Luca you know” (Figure 2).

#### Extract 5 Fratelli01\_1939385

01 Luca ↑ye:::::↑ ((holds puppet up in the air))  
 02 (0.4)  
 03 Nino +sai cheΔ\*:\_ ((to Giorgio))  
       **do you know tha:t**  
 04 luca +punches puppet down on the table  
 05 Δpuppet hits Nino and lands close to coffee  
 06 nino \*winces slightly, looks down and grabs puppet  
 07 Luca [°oh scusa.°  
       ITJ excuse-IMP.2SG  
       °oh sorry°  
 09 Nino [di u:::h\_ ((still to Giorgio))  
       **of u:::h**  
 10 luca titters (0.2)

11 Nino	*ò:h +c'è il caffè qui +Luca [sai, LOC=be.3SG the coffee here NAME know-2SG <b>u:hm there's the coffee here Luca you know</b>
12 nino	*...points at coffee----->, , ,

13 luca +looks at coffee----->

- 14 *+leans forward towards coffee*
- 15 Luca [ops\_whoops]
- 16 (0.3)
- 17 Nino °(+[ ]°
- 18 luca *+grabs puppet*
- 19 Giorgio [stacci attento \*a [ste cose.  
**be careful with these things**
- 20 luca *+holds puppet out towards coffee and pretends it wants to drink from it (0.3)*
- 21 nino *\*removes coffee from Luca's reach*
- 22 Nino [°(si)°  
°(yes)°
- 23 Giorgio stai attento\_ ((louder))  
**be careful**
- 24 Luca vuole bere.  
**he wants to drink**



Figure 2. Frame from line 11, Extract 5, as Nino is saying *il caffè* 'the coffee'.

Already before the target turns, Luca orients to the untowardness of his behavior by apologizing (°oh sorry°, line 7) and tittering softly (line 10). A moment later, Nino produces the factual declarative “u:hm there’s the coffee here Luca you know.” Let us analyze how this functions both as a criticism of Luca’s careless conduct and as a request for the child to stop misbehaving.

Unlike in Extract 4, the factual declarative here does not refer to what the recipient has done; however, it still describes a state of affairs that is accessible to him, something that he could and should already know but has apparently failed to pay heed to. This is made overt by the turn-final epistemic element *sai* (“you know”), which works as an appeal to shared knowledge in an environment of disalignment (Asmuß, 2011). The final part of Nino’s turn also includes a vocative (“Luca”), which in this position conveys a particular stance toward the recipient (Lerner, 2003), involving heightened significance and greater seriousness (Clayman, 2010). At the same time, the pointing gesture that accompanies the description (line 12) contributes to bringing the child’s focus to the matter (line 13).

Even though the recipient here may not be fully cognizant of the delicacy of the situation, he does have visual access to what is being reported and is treated as someone who could and should already know about it. This epistemic status is proximate to K+ but not fully equivalent to it, so we might represent it with the notation  $\sim K+$ , where the tilde indicates approximation. In line with this epistemic configuration, the recipient does not acknowledge the information as news but displays an understanding of what he has done as a misbehavior (“whoops,” line 15).

Besides criticizing, Nino’s factual declarative is also aimed at stopping and preventing further misbehavior by Luca. The relevance of such a request or directive becomes apparent when, despite his previous expressions of regret, Luca continues to play with his puppet dangerously close to the coffee (lines 18 and 20). Nino then removes the coffee from Luca’s reach (line 21) while Giorgio issues another admonishment with louder voice (“be ca::reful,” line 23). Whereas Giorgio’s imperatives are focused on compelling Luca to stop or alter his behavior, Nino’s factual declarative serves a socializing function by giving the child the opportunity to stop himself on the basis of his understanding of the relevant circumstance.

Let us look at one last case of criticizing + requesting where the recipient’s response differs from what we have seen so far: Instead of recognizing fault or responsibility, it deflects the criticism to someone else. Sofia and Furio are working in the kitchen. As Furio washes his hands at the sink, Sofia tells him that the dishes piled up in it are blocking the drain. Furio immediately complies with the underlying request by moving the pile so as to let the water flow again (lines 5–7).

#### Extract 6 BiscottiMattina02\_2372221

01 (5.0)/((Furio washes his hands))

02 Sofia e- +e:: i piatti stanno blocca+ndo lo scarico, <small>the plates stay-3PL block-GER the drain</small> <b>u- u:h the dishes are blocking the drain</b>
--

03 sofia +.....points at dishes,,,,+

04 (0.2)

05 furio reaches behind pile of dishes (0.6)

06 Furio lo so *è sempre così. <small>3SG.ACC know-1SG be.3SG always like.this</small> <b>I know it's always like this</b>
--

07 \*pulls pile of dishes away from drain hole-->

08 c'è il Mirko che ogni volta li mette lì, <small>LOC=be.3SG the NAME REL each time 3PL.ACC put-3SG there</small> <b>Mirko puts them there every time</b>
--

09 Sofia ((chuckles))

10 (0.3)

11 Furio e c'è lo scarico [che stagna, <small>and EXT=be.3SG the drain REL stagnate-3SG</small> <b>and the drain stagnates</b>
--

The import of the focal description as a criticism is once again supported by the physical and epistemic context in which it is produced. Whereas reporting a problem that is outside the recipient's perceptual field is a robust basis for informing, observing a problem that is right in front of him is vulnerable to being heard as criticizing, as it potentially implicates his failure to attend to it. In this case, Furio is not entirely responsible for causing the problem in the first place, as the pile of dishes was there before he and Sofia started working in the kitchen. However, Furio has been at the sink washing his hands for about half a minute, during which more water has been added to the stagnation—something that he could and possibly should have noticed and acted on.

Unlike in Extracts 4 and 5, the recipient's verbal response here does not present either a justification or an acknowledgement of misbehavior but addresses the relevance of the criticism in a different way. The first unit "I know" claims prior knowledge about the circumstance being described and thus casts aside the possible import of the description as an informing (see Schegloff, 1988, pp. 122–124). This claim is then strengthened by an assertion of greater epistemic authority ("it's always like this"), supported by the fact that the interaction takes place in Furio's home, where Sofia is a guest. Finally, by saying "Mirko puts them there every time," Furio not only adds to his epistemic authority but also puts the blame for the problem on another person, thereby exonerating himself.

Sofia's reaction to Furio's response is an amused chuckle (line 9), which may be directed at Furio's disgruntlement with Mirko's negligence or at his attempt to disclaim culpability for the problem (cf. Mum's laughter in Extract 4). The fact that Sofia does not follow up on her criticism—by countering Furio's disclaimer, for instance—is compatible with the relative delicacy with which she packaged her action.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, this section has illustrated composite actions that involve criticizing and requesting. The factual declaratives that implement these actions may differ from those examined in the previous section in certain constructional details, such as the modifier *ben poco* ("rather small") (Extract 4), the inclusion of a turn-final vocative and of the epistemic appeal *sai* ("you know") (Extract 5); these elements, however, are not always present (Extract 6). A more systematic basis for distinguishing between informing and criticizing is the recipient's epistemic access to what is being reported: Instead of not knowing (K–), the recipient is either fully or partially knowing (K+ or ~K+). This section has also further demonstrated the range of responses afforded by factual declaratives. When the factual declarative effects a criticism, possible responses include justification, acknowledgment of misbehavior, a claim of prior knowledge, and the deflection of blame to someone else.

## Discussion

The formation and ascription of sequential actions (e.g., questions, answers, assessments, agreements, complaints, requests) is a central level of social organization that has been extensively studied in a variety of disciplines and approaches (Searle, 1969; Schegloff, 1996, 2007; Clark, 1996; Enfield, 2013; Levinson, 2013; Sidnell & Enfield, 2014, among others). Yet we are still far from achieving a satisfactory understanding of how its machinery works. In this article, I contribute to this endeavor by looking at how a single turn at talk comes to accomplish more than one action, focusing on turns that describe a state of affairs such as "the feed drip has finished," "the dishes are blocking the drain," "there's the coffee here." As part of a larger project looking at requests in everyday informal interaction among speakers of Italian, I examine the way in which such factual declaratives are used to get another to do something while at the same time accomplishing another main action.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>In this respect, the sequence bears some resemblance with a pattern observed by Pomerantz (1978), where a "wrongdoing" is initially brought up with an agentless report of an "unhappy incident," deferring attributions of blame to later in the interaction. Thank you to John Heritage for pointing out this connection.

<sup>5</sup>As explained in the introduction, "main action" is intended as an action that has sequential import, an action that can stand alone and make another main action relevant next (e.g., request > compliance/refusal; informing > receipt), to be distinguished from an action's epistemic modulation or affective coloring, for instance. The status of "main action" is a separate issue from the hierarchical relation between two main actions.



The goal of this study is twofold: to uncover the functioning and structure of composite actions effected by factual declaratives and to explain the distinct social-interactive affordances of this practice as a tool for requesting.

When using a factual declarative for requesting, a speaker focuses on the reasons for undertaking a certain task rather than on the task itself—in particular, on reasons that do not concern the internal needs, wants, or obligations of participants but instead external, material conditions and processes: in other words, facts (see also Edwards & Potter, 1993, pp. 35–36). By foregrounding a factual reason for action, the speaker relies on the recipient to infer what is requested on the basis of a common understanding of the practical circumstances. This allows the speaker to manage potentially delicate aspects of the situation such as recognizing the recipient's competence and commitment to the task (Extract 1), conflicting urgencies (Extract 2), or the socialization of a child into responsible behavior (Extract 5).

But using a factual declarative is not only a matter of delicacy. At a sequential level, this practice allows the speaker to build the request as a part of a composite action, which recurrently involves either *informing* or *criticizing* the recipient. Central to the distinction between these two actions is the recipient's epistemic access relative to the state of affairs being reported. Whereas informings are based on the recipient's lack of knowledge (K–), criticisms rely on the accessibility of the state of affairs to both participants: Here the recipient is treated as someone who does or should already know (K+ or ~K+), suggesting their failure to attend to the problem. These findings demonstrate another way in which epistemics systematically partakes in the process of action formation (Heritage, 2012; Robinson, 2013; among others) and, at the same time, add to our understanding of how epistemics—the normative distribution of knowledge—intersects with deontics—the organization of rights and obligations surrounding practical action (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014).

This study also tackles some of the complexity of analyzing the underlying structure or stacking of a composite action, following up on previous conversation-analytic arguments that put at center stage participant orientation (see Schegloff, 2007, p. 78) and at the same time bringing in linguistic and contextual considerations.

In most of the cases examined, the response addresses both the request and either the informing (e.g., with an uptake) or the criticism (e.g., with a justification). This is in line with previously documented double-barreled actions (e.g., Schegloff, 2007, pp. 73–78; Raymond, 2013), where one action—typically a question, e.g., *would you like a cup of coffee?*—functions as the vehicle through which another is accomplished—e.g., an offer. However, the stacking of the actions effected by a factual declarative is not always transparent.

Cases like Extract 1, in which the response makes verbally explicit which action is the vehicle and which is the cargo, are rare. More often, the evidence for the stacking of the composite action is more indirect. In cases like Extracts 2, 4, 5, and 6, what we can say is that the verbal component of the response addresses the layer of action (informing or criticizing) that is arguably closer (than requesting) to the surface form of what the speaker has done (a description of a state of affairs). This is based on two interrelated reasons. One is that the actions of delivering new information and of presenting a complainable to someone typically involve asserting that something is the case (see, e.g., Drew & Holt, 1988; Edwards, 2005; Maynard, 1997; Schegloff, 1988).<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the action of requesting has instead a stronger association with other practices, particularly the imperative and certain kinds of interrogatives (see, e.g., Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Rossi, 2015b). The closer relation of a factual declarative to informing or criticizing than to requesting therefore emerges also from the paradigmatic opposition of this practice with others that have a tighter functional bond to getting another to do something. This opposition can be seen at work in Extracts 4 and 5, where the use of a factual declarative to foreground the circumstance *motivating* the doing of something contrasts with the subsequent use of an imperative primarily concerned with *mobilizing* the doing.

<sup>6</sup>Even when complaints come in the guise of rhetorical questions, these are understood as asserting rather than seeking information (Monzoni, 2009, p. 2468; Heritage, 2012, p. 23).

These considerations can help us make sense of yet other cases like Extract 3, where the recipient does not overtly orient to the factual declarative as an informing, and where our understanding of this import relies on the surface form of what the speaker has said together with its physical and epistemic context.

Future research may delve further into the mechanics and layering of composite actions by looking more closely at the speaker's accountability, asking to what extent the actions that can be inferred from a practice like a factual declarative may be deniable or defeasible (see Sidnell, 2012; cf. Levinson, 2000). Another avenue of research may continue to explore the social-interactional affordances of requesting through describing a state of affairs by comparing it with other declarative practices, such as stating a need or want of the speaker ("I need x," "I would like x") (see Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski, 2005) or stating a generic need or obligation ("it is necessary to x") (see Rossi & Zinken, 2016).

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