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## Assistance and Other Forms of Cooperative Engagement

Jörg Zinken<sup>a</sup> and Giovanni Rossi<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Institute for the German Language (IDS), Mannheim, Germany; <sup>b</sup>Finnish Centre of Excellence in Research on Intersubjectivity in Interaction, University of Helsinki, Finland

### ABSTRACT

In their analysis of methods that participants use to manage the realization of practical courses of action, Kendrick and Drew (2016/*this issue*) focus on cases of *assistance*, where the need to be addressed is Self's, and Other lends a helping hand. In our commentary, we point to other forms of cooperative engagement that are ubiquitously recruited in interaction. Imperative requests characteristically expect compliance on the grounds of Other's already established commitment to a wider and shared course of actions. Established commitments can also provide the engine behind recruitment sequences that proceed nonverbally. And forms of cooperative engagement that are well glossed as *assistance* can nevertheless be demonstrably oriented to established commitments. In sum, we find commitment to shared courses of action to be an important element in the design and progression of certain recruitment sequences, where the involvement of Other is best defined as *contribution*. The commentary highlights the importance of interdependent orientations in the organization of cooperation. Data are in German, Italian, and Polish.

In September 2015, about 20,000 refugees from Syria and elsewhere arrived at Munich Central Station over the course of one weekend alone. Commentating in the German weekly *Die Zeit* on how society might respond to these extraordinary events, the sociologist Heinz Bude (2015) draws on the difference between a right to *Gastfreundschaft* ("hospitality"), and a right to *Dienstleistung* ("provision of [social] services"). Whereas the right to service provision has contractual grounds (tax contributions, nationality status, etc.), hospitality is an act of charity that does not ask about entitlements. Any person in need, says Bude, has the right to hospitality, though not necessarily to service provision.

Distinctions revolving around the rights and responsibilities that parties have to particular goods or services are also central to the running of private affairs. Imagine a traditional couple, John and Mary. John occasionally does the dishes, and he feels good about helping his spouse. He just wishes she would thank him for his assistance. But Mary doesn't, precisely because she doesn't want John to feel like he is *helping* with something that is *her* business. She'd much rather he treated his washing-up as taking responsibility for the shared household (see Goodnow & Bowes, 1994). Our engagement in work, in dealing with practical needs, can have different qualities. These different qualities of cooperative engagement will be central to our commentary.

In analyzing methods of recruitment, Kendrick and Drew (2016/*this issue*) restrict their focus to a coherent subset of recruitments, namely those where the quality of the recruited person's engagement is best defined as *assistance*. In terms of the earlier examples, they examine John helping his spouse or a host granting his hospitality to the person in need. However, at other times, what people recruit is not so much "help" but rather a *contribution* that can be expected on the basis of already

**CONTACT** Jörg Zinken ✉ [zinken@ids-mannheim.de](mailto:zinken@ids-mannheim.de) 📍 Institute for the German Language (IDS), R5, 6-13, 68161 Mannheim, Germany.

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established commitments: Mary expects her husband to share in the responsibility for running the home in which they live together, and the citizen expects support from the state in difficult times.

In our commentary, we focus on moments in informal everyday interaction among family and peers in which one person “recruits” another person to do some work that is expectable on the grounds of already established commitments. We offer these data as complementary to those discussed by Kendrick and Drew (2016/*this issue*) and suggest that an analysis of the demonstrable commitments and responsibilities that participants in interaction have to one another is crucial for our understanding of *assistance* and of *recruitment*.

In Extract 1,<sup>1</sup> members of a family are about to have their supper. At lines 1–2, Aga places her baby boy Józio down into a rocking chair, while at the same time accounting for this (ostensively to the baby) with her need for a coffee. At line 3, however, Józio begins to wail. Appreciating the trouble his wife is having, Piotr, who is already sitting at the table, tells her to give the baby to him (line 5), which she then does.

**Extract 1**      **PP5-4\_27139**

01 Aga:             (no) Józio ja sobie &muszę nalać kawę  
                                       Name I self must pour.INF coffee.ACC  
                                       Józio I must pour myself a coffee

**&Fig. 1**

02                     ((1.0) ((placing baby into baby rocking chair))

03 Józio:             y:[::                 [Nyly::

04 Aga:                 [poczek [aj jeszcze chwileczkę=  
                                       wait.IMP still moment.DIM.ACC  
                                       wait just a little moment

05 Piotr:             =daj go tutaj  
                                       give.IMP he.ACC here  
                                       give him here

06 Aga:                 ((brings the baby to Piotr))



**Figure 1.** Aga places Józio into a rocking chair (Extract 1, line 1).

<sup>1</sup>Participants in all recordings gave informed consent to their data being published. Proper names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

In Extract 2, Aga proceeds to fix herself a coffee, but now it is Piotr who is running into difficulties. Holding the baby on his lap, he tries to cut a piece of pizza. Holding a fork, a knife, and a baby with just two hands is not an easy feat, and to make things worse, Józio has taken an interest in the plate with Piotr's pizza on it and is trying to pull it toward him. Piotr responds to this with the kind of exclamation that Goffman termed "floor cues" (1978, p. 804) and that Kendrick and Drew (2016/this issue) call "trouble alerts" (*ku::rcze no*, "oh god/damn it," line 3). Aga announces her assistance (*już go ci biorę stamtąd* "already I am taking him for you from there," line 6), and she comes over and takes the baby from Piotr a few seconds later.

**Extract 2**                    **PP5-4\_0134460**

01                    ((Piotr cuts pizza on his plate))

02                    ((Józio pulls the table mat))

03	Piotr:	ku::rcze no,
		EXPL        PRT
		<b>oh god/damn it</b>

04 Patryk: Hh:: ((laughter))

05 Leszek: A: hhahaha .H ((laughter))

06	Aga:	już	go	ci	biorę	stamtąd
		Already	him.ACC	you.DAT	take.IPFV.1S	from.there
		<b>Already I'm taking him for you from there</b>				

07                    ((Aga comes to the table and takes Józio))

Aga's involvement in the trouble that Piotr is encountering here is surely appropriately glossed as "assistance" or "help," an analysis that is supported by Aga's use of a benefactive dative, *ci* ("for you") (line 6). But while the benefit is Piotr's, a question we may ask in this case is "whose *problem* is this?" (see Wootton, 1997, p. 167). Aga's assistance seems to be motivated not only by a wish to be helpful but also by an appreciation that Piotr's trouble is also her problem. In this family, it is generally Aga who takes care of the baby during mealtimes. Her role as primary caregiver is embodied in her choice to put the baby down in a rocking chair initially, rather than handing it to Piotr straight away. Her announcement of assistance also displays her responsibility for the trouble at hand. First, she announces her help, rather than offering it. Second, she begins the formulation of her turn with the temporal adverbial *już* ("already"). This element of turn design suggests that Piotr was only ever meant to take care of the baby for a short moment (compare "I'm already taking him from you" versus "I'm taking him from you").

So Aga's assistance here is a different kind of *assistance* from that which Kevin offers to Travis's trouble alert in Kendrick and Drew's (2016/this issue) Extract 3. Whereas in the case discussed by Kendrick and Drew the assistance had the quality of lending a helping hand in something that was not really the helper's responsibility, the help that Aga provides in Extract 2 is at least *also* shaped by established commitments.

But commitment can be even more consequential for recruitment, forcing us to characterize a person's cooperative engagement in terms other than *assistance* altogether. Typical cases in point are explicit requests in imperative form—a type of request that Kendrick and Drew (2016/this issue) do not discuss. Across languages, imperative turns are the most common practice for recruiting another person for some “work” (Floyd et al., 2014; Floyd, Rossi, & Enfield, 2015). However, the kind of work recruited by imperative turns often rather falls out of the scope of Kendrick and Drew's *assistance* as “actions done by one person that may resolve troubles or difficulties in the progressive realization of a practical course of action by another.” Consider Extract 3.

Pauline and her sister Tamara are about to redecorate a room. Their dad, August, has dropped by, and here he is helping them to move a wardrobe away from the wall, so that the wall behind it could be painted. August and Pauline are working together to slide rugs underneath the two ends of the wardrobe, so that it could be moved more easily and without scratching the floor. At the beginning of the transcribed extract, August and Pauline have just managed to put a rug underneath one end of the wardrobe, and the task now is to slide one underneath the other end, too (see lines 1–2). Pauline locates and picks up another rug (line 3). August now carefully pulls one end of the wardrobe, so that the other end would lift up, while Pauline crouches down with the rug at the ready. As August pulls the wardrobe toward him, its other end moves a bit across the floor. This occasions Pauline's observation that the wardrobe is moving quite “peacefully” (lines 18–19). In overlap with this (at lines 20–21), August formulates an imperative request: *jetzt schieb des schieb mal drunter* (“now slide this slide [it] underneath”). As it happens, Pauline can't slide the rug underneath because the wardrobe is not sufficiently off the ground. Pauline's formulation of that problem (line 22) recruits Tamara to walk over to the far edge of the wardrobe and help lifting it. With Tamara's additional pulling, the wardrobe finally lifts and Pauline slides the rug underneath it.

**Extract 3 FOLK\_STRA\_01\_A01a\_513470**

- 01 August: SO:: jetzt müsst ma s gleiche  
so now must.COND us it same  
okay, now we would have to do the same
- 02 eigentlich auf der Seite a: mache  
actually on that side too make.INF  
on the other side, too
- 03 Pauline: m: dA ist noch einer  
there is still one  
m: there's another one
- 04 ((Pauline picks up rug))  
  
((14 lines omitted))
- 18 Pauline: der rutscht eigentlich (.) ziemlich friedlich  
it slides actually quite peacefully  
actually, it slides quite peacefully
- 19 (.) [vor sich hin]  
front RFL PRT  
along

20	August:	[ja je sch- ] jetzt schi: (.) schieb mal yes now sh- now sh- push PRT yes now p- now pu- (.) push it
21		drunter underneath
22	Pauline:	kann ich ja net=is ja net %oben can I yes not is yes not up well I can't it's not up
23		((Tamara walks over, joins pulling the wardrobe))  ((four lines omitted))
28		(1.0) ((Pauline slides rug underneath))

When August requests that Pauline slide the rug underneath the wardrobe, this recruitment is addressed to a recipient who has already committed to the wider project of redecorating the room, who has a responsibility for seeing to the actions that lead to that overarching goal. In fact, in the local context, Pauline's embodied conduct is already geared toward the progression of the relevant course of actions: She is crouching at the far end of the wardrobe, rug in hand, and thus visibly engaged in the local project of getting a rug underneath the wardrobe. This is the kind of context in which speakers of various languages regularly select imperatives to request another's work (see, e.g., Rossi, 2012, 2015; Wootton, 1997; Zinken & Ogiermann, 2013). The work in such cases is not well characterized as *assistance*. Rather, August's imperative recruits Pauline to make a particular *contribution* to a project to which she is already committed.

Kendrick and Drew (2016/*this issue*) are concerned with *methods* that participants to interaction have for recruiting another to provide some good or some service. By analyzing methods, rather than singular actions, they show that certain interactional phenomena are better understood as transcending the boundaries of linguistic units, emerging over the course of multiple turns or moves, from the coordination of multiple streams of behavior. This perspective usefully complements the so far predominant focus on singular actions produced in sedimented formats or packages. Restricting the focus to *assistance* as actions that help another in an individual project ("their problem") allows Kendrick and Drew to make the domain of recruitment coherent and its organization easily integrated with other accounts of requesting and offering (Clayman & Heritage, 2014; Couper-Kuhlen, 2014). However, it also leaves out an important part of the management of cooperation, which is the solicitation of contributions to joint courses of action. As Extract 3 illustrates, imperative requests provide rich material for studying the connections of requests to larger courses of action.

Finally, another reason for not losing sight of contributions to shared courses of action is that they speak to the symbiotic relation and continuum between requesting and offering argued for by Kendrick and Drew (2016/*this issue*). Consider a last extract from Italian, where some friends are chatting around a table while simultaneously peeling and cutting potatoes in preparation for lunch. Sofia is among the participants responsible for peeling the potatoes, whereas Paolo is among those responsible for cutting them.

**Extract 4** CampUniPictionary01\_2210552

- 1 Lidia potremmo mandarla a Focus Uno lì [cos'è che era  
can-CND-1P send-INF=3s.A to NAME there what=be.3s REL be-IPF-3s  
we could send her to that Focus One, what was it?
- 2 Viola [perché  
why?
- 3 (0.9)/((Sofia finishes peeling potato))
- 4 Sofia [((places potato on Paolo's cutting board,  
for him to take it and cut it))
- 5 Lidia [quello dell'atl- cos'era [l'atleta che puzzava di più  
that of-the athlete what=be-IPF-3s the=athlete REL stink-IPF-3s of  
more  
the one with the ath- what was it, {the one with} the  
athlete that stinks the most?
- 6 Paolo [((begins cutting potato))

Throughout lines 1–3, Paolo stands next to the table, momentarily idle, holding the knife on his cutting board. As Sofia finishes peeling a potato (line 3), she places it on Paolo's cutting board (line 4, [Figure 2](#)), and then he begins cutting it.

An important feature of this sequence is the high projectability of the recruited action, cutting the potato (Rossi, 2014). Preparing potatoes here is a joint activity made of ordered moves: The potatoes are to be peeled first, then cut, and finally gathered in a container. The participants understand this procedure and their respective roles within it. When a “peeler” finishes peeling a potato, the projectable next action is cutting, which is to be done by a “cutter,” one of the participants who have a cutting board in front of them. In placing a peeled potato on Paolo's cutting board, Sofia relies on his understanding of this procedure and on him to respond to Sofia's nonverbal action appropriately, that is, by taking on the work of cutting



**Figure 2.** Frame from line 4, Extract 2. Sofia places a potato on Paolo's cutting board for him to cut.

the potato. But how should we gloss Sofia's nonverbal action here? Is it a request or an offer? What this and other similar cases share with requests is that the nonverbal action of placing the potato on the cutting board can be said to *solicit* another's work. At the same time, however, placing the potato on another's cutting board can be said to *enable* them to do their part in the activity, which brings the action very close to an offer (see Sidnell & Enfield, 2014, p. 423). What is ultimately more important than adjudicating between these labels (certainly for the participants) is that the established commitments and respective roles in the joint activity can function as an engine that progresses the sequence to its relevant outcome, a potato that is peeled and cut.

*Assistance* can be designed as lending a helping hand to somebody in need, but as we have shown in this commentary, it can also be designed as taking responsibility for some trouble at hand. We have further pointed to forms of recruitment in which Other's engagement is better characterized as *contributing* to a shared course of action, rather than assisting. And finally, we have seen that recruitment sequences can be progressed nonverbally based on established commitments and activity roles. These cases illustrate that social commitments within ongoing courses of action are crucial to the design, trajectory, and social meaning of diverse types of recruitment sequences. More generally, they point to the importance of interdependent orientations in the organization of cooperation.

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