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Instructional sequences in driving lessons: Mobile participants and the temporal and sequential organization of actions

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Abstract

This paper offers an analysis of instructional sequences in driving lessons. It examines how driving instructors direct learner drivers to perform salient driving actions. On the basis of a video-recorded corpus, the paper looks at the temporal and sequential organization of instructional sequences and analyzes how the participants coordinate their actions with the continuously changing spatiotemporal contingencies. In driving lessons, a first set of instructions project actions that learners have to perform by manipulating car controls or by monitoring the traffic situation. A second set of instructions relate to navigation, requiring the student drivers to turn at intersections, etc. This article describes the turn-constructional features of these instructions and studies their temporal, spatial and praxeological corollaries. Moreover, the paper examines episodes of interaction with multiple instructions, which are regularly found in driving lessons. It analyzes their sequential organization to reveal a recurrent order, with navigational instructions preceding car control instructions. Building on prior research on ordinary driving and on instructions, this paper contributes to our understanding of how mobility both affects and is affected by language use and social interaction.

Keywords: Instructional sequences; Driving lessons; Interaction; Temporality; Mobility; Conversation analysis

1. Introduction: from ordinary driving to driving lessons

Interactions which take place in cars and practices of ''passengering'' (Laurier et al., 2008) provide a fertile object for investigation. In recent studies on ordinary, everyday car rides with two or more participants, a strong focus rests on ''social navigation'' (Haddington, 2012), i.e. on how drivers and passengers negotiate the route that brings them to the end-point of their journey (Haddington and Keisanen, 2009; Haddington, 2010, 2012, 2013; Laurier et al., 2012), possibly with the help of maps (Brown and Laurier, 2005). These studies show how the participants coordinate their actions with the continuously changing spatiotemporal contingencies and thus make a fundamental contribution to better understanding of how mobility both affects and is affected by language use and social interaction (see Haddington et al., 2013).

In studies on social navigation, directives are described as a pervasive linguistic resource that passengers employ in route negotiations (Laurier et al., 2012; Haddington, 2013). Extending this line of research, we focus in this article on driving lessons. To our knowledge, this specific kind of in-car interaction has not yet been the target of a concerted

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analysis (but see Gazin, 2012). The subject of this paper is instructional sequences: we look at how the instructor directs the student driver's actions and how the latter complies with these instructions. We focus on the ways in which the participants coordinate instruction giving and following with the locally emerging temporal, spatial and praxeological constraints. Moreover, we identify a recurrent phenomenon in driving lessons, consisting in the formulation of multiple instructions, and describe the sequential organization of such extended instructional sequences. Throughout the paper, we contrast our findings with prior research on ordinary driving, disclosing thereby the interactional practices that are characteristic of driving lessons.

2. Instructions and directives: terminological and conceptual differences

Ethnomethodology developed an early interest in instructions (Amerine and Bilmes, 1988; Lynch and Jordan, 1995), mainly focusing on the accountability of instructions and their situatedness. Both aspects are central to Garfinkel's (2002) work, in which he examines what he calls docile texts – e.g. plans, maps, manuals – which become relevant only ''in vivo'' (202), i.e. when individuals experience the practical problem of acting according to or following an instruction. Garfinkel (2002) is thus particularly interested in the ways in which social actors ''treat'' specific objects (e.g. manuals) and settings (e.g. the arrangement of objects in a kitchen) as instructions for their actions. In recent years, instructions have further developed into a privileged object of investigation within ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. They are generally described as constituting a sequence of two contingent actions, which Garfinkel (2002) identifies as ''instruction'' and ''instructed action'' (or ''following instruction''). In the literature, instructions are sometimes described as ''directives,'' a notion that many conversation analysts have borrowed from pragmatics. The different formats that directives can take are largely discussed within speech act theory (Searle, 1969), and Ervin-Tripp (1976) points out that differences in formulation are defined by the social relationship that speaker and addressee maintain. Whereas these studies focus on formal variation of directives (which can be direct, indirect, mitigated, etc.), conversation analysts describe directives as resources that project action: for Goodwin (1990:67) directives are utterances ''designed to get someone else to do something,'' thus making relevant some kind of response. Directive/response sequences of this sort (Goodwin, 1990, 2006; Goodwin and Cekaite, 2013; Haddington, 2013) have also been discussed in terms of ''directive''/''complying action'' (Mondada, 2011:26), ''request''/''compliance with request'' (Lindwall and Ekström, 2012:45), etc. Although terminological differences are observable in the literature, most authors describe such sequences as composed of a ''first'' that projects a complying ''second.''[1] In this paper, we employ Garfinkel's (2002) terminology, which appears to be preferred in studies that analyze interaction in educational environments. These are indeed a ''perspicuous setting'' (Garfinkel and Wieder, 1992:184) for observing instructional sequences and range from classroom interaction (Weeks, 1985; Lerner, 1995; Macbeth, 2011, among others) to professional training (molecular biology: Lynch and Jordan, 1995; medicine: Sanchez Svensson et al., 2009; Zemel and Koschmann, 2011) and handicraft workshops (e.g. Lindwall and Ekström, 2012 on crochet lessons). Driving lessons are yet another ''instructional setting'' (Weeks, 1985:195), which have received only little attention so far (Gazin, 2012).

3. An initial illustration

In the analytical part of this article we look at instructional sequences, which are very frequent in driving lessons. We base our analyses on a corpus of seven driving lessons of about one hour each, which we recorded in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. Seven student drivers follow their lessons with two different instructors.[2] In this setting, the instructor (INS) routinely initiates instructional sequences, thereby projecting the accomplishment of a complying action by the student driver (STU). Instructions are systematically formulated orally (and possibly also embodied), whereas the projected action is overwhelmingly performed in silence, e.g. by manipulating the controls located in the interior of the car.

[1] Craven and Potter (2010:426) differentiate directives from requests by stating that "requests have to be accepted before they can be performed; directives just need to be complied with." Others use the notions discussed here without a clear functional distinction (e.g. Haddington, 2013:180: "Usually directives come in the form of questions, suggestions, offers, requests, commands, orders, instructions, and so on [. . .]." Furthermore, the notion of "prompting" is sometimes used to describe talk that invites a co-participant's action (e.g. Nevile, 2007).

[2] The corpus was collected during a four-year research project entitled "The constitution of space in interaction: A conversation analytic approach to the study of place names and spatial descriptions" financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation (project number PP001-119138) and based at the University of Berne (2008–2012). Elwys De Stefani directed the project, which benefitted from contributions by Anne-Danièle Gazin, Anna Claudia Ticca and Roberta Iacoletti. This paper feeds into Anne-Danièle Gazin's PhD project on interaction in driving lessons.