

## Human-assisted mobility as an interactional accomplishment<sup>1</sup>

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### 1. Introduction

Social interaction takes place not simply between "speakers" and "recipients" but among participants that are variously capable of acting, sensing and moving in the material world. Without forgetting the centrality of language, research on social interaction can be seen to have undergone an 'embodied turn' (Nevile 2015), in which analytical foci, concepts and tools have developed to take into (better) account the various bodily, material and spatial resources that participants may draw on (for seminal early work, see, e.g. Goodwin 1980; Goodwin 1981; Heath 1986). Recent research has indeed explored how the different dimensions of materiality (e.g. Nevile et al. 2014; Tuncer/Haddington/Licoppe 2019), embodiment (e.g. Streeck/Goodwin/LeBaron 2014; Goodwin/Cekaite 2018; Mondada 2019), and mobility (e.g. Haddington/Mondada/Nevile 2013) may feature in the organization of social interaction. Studies have also investigated the coordination, or perhaps synchronization, of individual mobile and sensing bodies (e.g. Broth/Mondada 2013; Kreplak/Mondémé 2014; Mondada 2018), also as formations or units that need to reconcile with mobile others or with some static entities (e.g. Mellvenny/Broth/Haddington 2014; Deppermann et al. 2018; Due/Lange 2018; Deppermann 2019). However, little is known about social meaning-making practices between multiple interconnected bodies in motion, that is, how participants use, together with language and other resources, different forms of bodily contact in situated, locally managed social activities that involve mobility. Further analysis is therefore required to better understand the complex, reflexive link between the organization of social interaction, materiality, embodiment, and mobility; a link that is fundamental to human sociality.

This special issue is concerned with the organization of face-to-face social interaction in relation to human-assisted mobility: the contributions explore how human participants assist another's movement in various indoor and outdoor settings. Human-assisted mobility is in this special issue studied and discussed as embodied interactional practice (see Goodwin 2000). More specifically, the contributions examine how language use, the intertwining of bodies, different sensory modalities and material artifacts in social interaction contribute to meaning-making as an intercorporeal achievement (e.g. Cekaite 2015; Mondada 2016; Goodwin 2017; Meyer/Streeck/Jordan 2017; Cekaite/Mondada 2021). The contributions draw on video recordings and take a point of departure in conversation-analytic, ethnomethodological and micro-sociological perspectives that are interested in participants' methods for establishing and enacting specific – situated and recognizable – social

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<sup>1</sup> We are very happy to be able to publish this special issue in the journal *Gesprächsforschung* and wish to thank the journal editors for a most efficient and agreeable process. We are grateful to our contributors for making the special issue happen! We also wish to thank the participants and attendees of the panel "Intercorporeality: Human-assisted mobility in social interaction", which we organized at the International Conference on Conversation Analysis (ICCA) in 2018, and participants in the European Advanced Workshops on Mobility and Social Interaction (MOB-SIN).

and corporeal orders (e.g. Goffman 1963; Garfinkel 1984 [1967]; Sacks 1992; Crossley 1995; Francis/Hester 2004; Schegloff 2007; Goodwin 2018).

## **2. Human-assisted mobility in context: The studies in this special issue**

Analyses of human-assisted mobility as embodied interactional practice provide a novel context for the study of how social categories, relationships and emotional bonds between participants as embodied subjects are indexically invoked and established. In families, one of the basic and initial practices for human-assisted mobility involves children and caregivers who routinely engage in carrying as a part of their caring and affectionate, intimate encounters. Cekaite et al. (in this special issue) examine carrying in family interaction indoors and outdoors and illustrate that carrying is interactionally organized into a sequence with three distinct phases and specific verbal and embodied designs: 1) the initiation, 2) the carrying proper and 3) the release. Throughout the sequence, both the carrier and the carried deal with different aspects of carrying as a collaborative act that involves negotiation and careful calibration. Although not necessarily the explicit focus of the other articles in the special issue, similar phases can also be recognized in the sequences of human-assisted mobility other than carrying.

Laurier et al. (in this special issue) also draw on family interaction outdoors and examine how family members offer, recruit or request help and then reject or accept that help, drawing upon relationship membership categorizations as a resource in organizing joint mobile action. Carrying transforms into different forms of assistance as children grow older, and as Laurier et al. (in this special issue) succinctly show, providing assistance in mobility between able-bodied adult family members is not the norm. Instead, assistance continues to provide a means for the 'caring work' that family members may engage in during their mundane everyday activities such as walks in the wild. In multiple ways, then, human-assisted mobility may also contribute to constituting what 'being a family' entails.

Contexts of care similarly harbour a wealth of situations where care recipients and caregivers need to engage in joint mobility and where assistance is frequently received or provided physically (e.g. through touch) or through material objects (e.g. assistive devices). Hippi's article (in this special issue) highlights how human-assisted mobility may form the main activity in a care home for older adults, while in other cases it serves the accomplishment of other activities. Most importantly, the article discusses how the variation in the capabilities in autonomous mobility is supported with appropriately scaled assistance, adjusted in collaboration with the older adults and ranging from verbal instructions to embodied means of assistance. Hippi (in this special issue) shows how encouraging older adults to move themselves in a care home supports their autonomy and ability to function in everyday situations.

Likewise, Majlesi/Ekström/Hydén (in this special issue) examine encounters between older adults and their caregivers in a care home. Their focus is on how the caregivers move from using mitigated directive turns with indirect forms to using shorter and clearer imperative turns to make it easier for older adults with dementia to understand how their joint movement is unfolding. In that way, the article by Majlesi/Ekström/Hydén (in this special issue), among others, renders the usually

unnoticed nature of 'walking' visible. Smith's article (in this special issue) on mountain rescue work further highlights how in team work the timing of actions, in particular, needs to be appropriately and intricately combined with other situated resources in order to accomplish the task at hand – here, 'a good lift' – and how the occasioned, then-and-there generated categories related to the stretcher and the surrounding space are constitutive of the safe and smooth progress of mountain rescue work. The analyses are specifically concerned with the relationship between instructed actions and situated doings.

While in some settings human-assisted mobility may provide participants with possibilities for intimate moments of being together and experiencing corporeal closeness (and these moments can be sought by care recipients and caregivers alike), in other settings human-assisted mobility may be enforced, such as in encounters that the police have with the public. Pehkonen (in this special issue) shows how police officers balance the boundary between care and control, or compliance and resistance, in directive sequences through which intoxicated members of the public are possibly woken up, helped up and shepherded on the move or escorted into the police van. The study indicates that officers verbally parse the requested action into smaller steps if a drunken person does not carry it out but resists. There are also other kinds of public social situations in which constraints in terms of ability and autonomous mobility may become interactionally relevant, public transport being a central one. In these situations strangers volunteering their assistance to others likewise balance between the norms of civil distance between strangers and the offering of support in the face of some observable trouble. Muñoz (in this special issue) shows that although being assisted by strangers when moving in the public transport, an older adult with reduced mobility is able, via language use, to maintain her autonomy and control the joint action with the assistance-giver.

### **3. Configurations of multiple modalities in human-assisted mobility**

The need for seeking or receiving assistance in mobility arises frequently in social interaction, and there are multiple ways of designing this assistance collaboratively. Situations of human-assisted mobility involve complex configurations of modalities, where physical contact and talk may mutually inform each other. In general, mobility may be the result of recruitment (see, e.g. Drew/Couper-Kuhlen 2014; Kendrick/Drew 2016) when a participant is having trouble moving from one place to another, or a part of directive sequences that aim at getting the other to do the nominated task that entails movement. In both cases, the assistance-giver and the assistance-receiver treat human-assisted mobility as their joint accomplishment and often negotiate verbally on the need for it or how to conduct it, thus orienting to the other's volition, autonomy and bodily integrity. In this way, directive turns such as requests for or offers of assistance are frequently employed in such situations. It is noteworthy that should a person with reduced mobility be unable to perform the requested mobile action by themselves, the assistance-giver may turn the action into a joint one also by using linguistic resources (e.g. the assistance-giver's directive "get up" is followed by the same speaker's directive "let's get up") (see Pehkonen in this special issue; see also Hippi and Majlesi/Ekström/Hydén in this special issue). Several studies show that, for instance, the touch recipient's autonomy of ac-

tion is honed by using verbalizations. Especially notable is the complex and recurrent coordination of talk and touch: talk may index a next step in human-assisted mobility and create a mutual understanding of the relevant course of action (e.g. Hippi, Majlesi/Ekström/Hydén and Pehkonen in this special issue), and haptic resources can be used to downgrade or upgrade the social meaning of the directives. There is a coordination of corporeal and verbal actions that orients to the recipient's willingness or inability to perform the requested action and to engage in mobility (e.g. Cekaite et al. and Laurier et al. in this special issue).

In that touch as physical contact between bodies is a special sensory modality that can escalate the balance of intimacy (Montagu 1971; Cekaite 2010), its use in human-assisted mobility provides an intricate resource that affects the organization of social interaction. Material objects are used as prosthetic assisting devices when physical contact for various reasons is avoided (e.g. wheelchairs in care contexts, stretchers in mountain rescue and rollators in public transport, see Hippi, Smith and Muñoz, respectively, in this special issue). Variations in the character (e.g. skin-to-skin, through assistive device) and 'force' or 'quality' of physical contact feature the practices of collaborative mobility. The contributions in this special issue demonstrate that physical contact is used to force, initiate, or simply suggest the recipient's mobile action. Notably, physical assistance cannot be equated with the participants' being treated as "non-responsive objects" who are simply lifted over an obstacle (Laurier et al. in this special issue). Studies that examine human-assisted mobility in adult caregiver – care-recipient contexts show that "touching in form of holding hands, gently pulling or pushing the resident's arm or back, or giving physical support when lending a hand to someone" have impact on the social meaning of a directive, for instance (Majlesi/Ekström/Hydén in this special issue; see also Hippi in this special issue). So called "socio-emotional touch" can also be intertwined with steering physical contact to accomplish socially downgraded management of a care recipient's movement: physical assistance may involve "close bodily contact while also supporting a resident emotionally" (Hippi in this special issue).

Similarly, Laurier et al. and Cekaite et al. (in this special issue), in their examination of adults' assisting children and other family members, show how physical contact is used as both physically forceful and affectionate means of conveyance. Various haptic formations, defined as positions of two touching bodies vis-à-vis each other (Cekaite et al. in this special issue) provide specific affordances for carrying because the adult can exert control on the recipient who experiences different possibilities for decision making concerning the spatial trajectory of walking. In all, the contributions show that human-assisted mobility may involve close physical contact that is calibrated to indicate multifaceted concerns, both those aimed at managing the recipient's mobility, and maintaining social relations.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This special issue shows that situations of human-assisted mobility involve an intricate deployment of multiple modalities: talk informs about impending or concurrent touch and shapes the recipient's physical responses. Moreover, it is acknowledged that human-assisted mobility may not be easily achieved and is not taken for granted; rather, it requires participants' attention to a complex of factors concerning its physical and relational characteristics, such as reverence to the other's bodily

integrity, different degrees of capacity for independent movement, as well as material conditions and possibilities for assistance. Indeed, by exploring situations in which human-assisted mobility is oriented to as relevant, the studies in this special issue give new insight into the characteristics of social interaction between participants as embodied subjects in motion.

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Veröffentlicht am 20.10.2021

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