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Jörg Zinken
Department of Pragmatics, Leibniz-Institute for the German Language (IDS), Mannheim, Germany
Slavic Institute, University of Heidelberg, Germany

The Comparative Study of Social Action: What You *Must* and What You *Can* Do to Align with a Prior Speaker

Abstract: This article makes an empirical and a methodological contribution to the comparative study of action. The empirical contribution is a comparative study of three distinct types of action regularly accomplished with the turn format *du meinst x* ("you mean/think x") in German: candidate understandings, formulations of the other's mind, and requests for a judgment. These empirical materials are the basis for a methodological exploration of different levels of researcher abstraction in the comparative study of action. Two levels are examined: the (coarser) level of conditionally relevant responses (what a response speaker *must* do to align with the action of the prior turn) and the (finer) level of "full alignment" (what a response speaker *can* do to align with the action of a prior turn). Both levels of abstraction provide empirically viable and analytically interesting descriptive concepts for the comparative study of action. Data are in German.

The present article aims to make an empirical and a methodological contribution to the comparative study of action. The methodological challenge is the following. As researchers, we need to abstract from some of the local details of conduct if we are to identify regularities in the formation of action across single cases. As part of that process, we use descriptive terms as comparative concepts (Haspelmath, 2010) that capture and guide observations that we make as we build collections of cases and develop generalizations. But from an emic research perspective, this process is problematic. Most of the time, the comparison of one event, in its local constitution, with another event is not a participant's concern (Watson, 2008), and neither is the naming of some stretch of conduct as an "invitation," an "agreement claiming epistemic priority," etc. (e.g., Sidnell, 2017). Conversation Analysis has always been comparative in the sense of going beyond single cases, aiming at generalizations that preserve and highlight what is constitutive of the relevant phenomenon from the participants' perspective. This means that we face two potentially conflicting requirements in the comparative study of action types: (a) To be sufficiently sensitive to the local constitution of action to capture the participants' own analysis of conduct, and (b) to sufficiently abstract from local detail to make the comparative study of action empirically viable.

The present article proposes that we can identify and compare types of action, within and across languages, with reference to what would be the *fully aligning* response to some sequence-initiating conduct. This proposal is developed via an empirical analysis of types of sequence-initiating action that speakers of German accomplish with a generic practice of talking, what I will call an "other-mind-candidate." Other-mind-candidates overtly address another person's subjectivity with a cognitive verb (such as *du meinst*, "you mean/think"), followed by a candidate of what the other person "means" or "thinks." By articulating an other-mind-candidate, speakers create a slot where the other can affirm the candidate with a polar answer. The practice therefore provides a naturally controlled environment

Contact: *zinken@ids-mannheim.de* | Leibniz-Institute for the German Language (IDS), Mannheim 68161, Germany

(Dingemanse & Floyd, 2014) in which we can examine how different forms of affirmation orient to distinct action relevancies embodied in similar practices of turn construction.

The analysis identifies a "privileged" level of grain in the analysis of action that participants orient to and that provides researchers with a viable abstraction for comparative research. This is the level of action identified by what would be the response *fully aligning* with an action potential in the prior speaker's conduct. In the next section, I lay out the methodological challenge in some more detail, before returning to the empirical materials.

Researcher abstraction in the analysis of action

In his article on action formation and action ascription, Levinson (2013) questions what he perceives as an overemphasis on situation-specific nuances by conversation analysts. This attention to the local "undercurrents" of action, according to Levinson, stands in the way of making progress in a comparative science of social action. His proposal is to focus on the "main job" done by some stretch of conduct. But how do we identify what the main job of some conduct is? A conversation-analytic solution will begin with the "proof-procedure" built into social interaction: A next speaker's response tells us how a prior turn was understood (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 728). But we, as researchers, can still capture participants' displayed analysis of action at different levels of grain. Levinson suggests to go for a coarse level of grain, identifying action by "what the response *must* deal with to count as an adequate next turn" (Levinson, 2013, p. 107, emphasis added). In conversation-analytic terminology, we may understand this as advice to look for the response that some conduct has made conditionally relevant. The present article proposes another level of abstraction at which researchers can compare types of action. The data examined here suggest that participants regularly respond to sequence-initiating turns in a way that goes beyond satisfying conditional relevance. In a nutshell, next speakers regularly orient not just to what a response *must* deal with but to the level of "maximum fit," what a response speaker *can* do to fully align with the prior turn's conduct as action (on alignment as a dimension of cooperation, see Lee & Tanaka, 2016; Steensig, 2013; Stivers, 2008; Stivers et al., 2011).

The present article then considers two levels at which researchers might abstract from local conduct in the comparative study of action: A "minimalist" level of what the response *must* at least deal with to align with the action of a prior turn and a "maximalist" level of what the response *can* do to fully align. To illustrate the difference, consider an example of a well-studied type of action, a "request" in everyday language. This Extract 1 comes from a family mealtime. The main meal is over, Jim is sitting at the table with his 4-year-old daughter Imogen and helping her mix custard ingredients with a fork. Imogen's mother, Rowena, is clearing the table. When she enters the kitchen with a stack of plates, Jim calls after her to "bring the whisk in" (line 2). Rowena initiates repair, Jim repeats his request (line 5), and after finishing some work in the kitchen, Rowena brings the whisk for Jim (lines 8–9).

Extract 1. BB5-1_2640000.

```
01                    (4.6)
                  ((Jim and Imogen whisking with fork,
                  Rowena takes plates, walks into kitchen))
02  ->  JIM:   Can you bring the whisk in darling
03      ROW:   what¿
04                    (0.6)
                  ((Rowena turns head back to Jim))
05  ->  JIM:   Can you bring the whisk in
06                    (1.4)
                  ((Rowena throws away leftovers in kitchen))
07       ROW:  °°(ye::s)°°
08                    (5.0)
```

```
                ((Rowena finishes throwing away leftovers,
                takes whisk from kitchen drawer, walks back))
09                    (1.5)
                ((Rowena holds whisk out for Jim, who takes it, puts it down))
10              ((Rowena goes into kitchen))
```

Rowena's responses (at line 3, and at lines 6–9) show Jim—and us—what she is making of his conduct. Here are some things we can say about this fragment, moving from global to more detailed observations.

(1) At the most general level, we can say that Rowena does what Jim asks her to do: She brings him the whisk and thereby aligns with his conduct as a *request for action*.
(2) Zooming further into some of the linguistic and social detail of this case, we can note that Jim formatted his request in such a way that it grammatically created a space for Rowena to accept the job with a polar response, which she might be doing very softly at line 7. Designing his turn as a second-person polar question, Jim acts in a way that the general term "request" might fail to capture. "Requests" for here-and-now action in *this* format orient to the fact that the other had no grounds for expecting this request now, and they are particularly apt for asking assistance with work that is mostly in the requester's interest, what Rossi (2012) has called "unilateral" requests. Such requests do not *necessarily* receive verbal acceptance (Rauniomaa & Keisanen, 2012). However, by overtly accepting the work, request recipients *can* align with the action of such requests as *unilaterally asking for assistance*, and as we might expect, they often do so (Rossi et al., in prep.).
(3) Moving still further into the local detail of this case, it seems that Rowena is putting up some subtle resistance to Jim's request. First, there is the "open" class repair initiation at line 3, which can be a harbinger of dispreference (Drew, 1997). When Jim repeats his request, this is initially met with silence (line 6). Rowena proceeds scraping leftovers into the bin before, eventually, she (possibly, very softly) voices her acceptance. Finally, when she comes with the whisk, rather than putting it down on the table, she holds it out for Jim to take, even though he has both hands occupied, possibly (unsuccessfully) mobilizing a "thanks" by creating an object pass (see Zhan et al., 2018). What reasons could Rowena have to resist Jim's request? Maybe she is taking issue with Jim's phrasing, *bring the whisk in*, which suggested that Rowena was on her way back to the living room anyway and that the job of bringing the whisk could be easily "piggy-backed" on her route. However, as we see (line 10), Rowena goes straight back to the kitchen after having brought the whisk. Complying with Jim's request required an extra round from her, and Jim seems to have underestimated the contingencies standing in the way of Rowena's compliance (Curl & Drew, 2008).

All of the observations under points 1–3 are relevant to a full analysis of this case, as they all capture aspects of the participants' orientations to each other's conduct. The observations under (3) heavily draw on the unique context of this particular case. The more we attend to the local detail of any case, the less appropriate we might find it to talk of a participant's conduct as exemplifying a "type" of action at all, as action in the wild does not come in preformed types (Enfield & Sidnell, 2017; Sidnell, 2017). However, if we want to compare ways of acting that mobilize another's assistance across cases, across situations, or across languages, we are confronted with the *methodological* need for a comparative concept that typifies Jim's conduct. The observations under (2) and (1) suggest two levels at which researchers can abstract from the details of this case. Focusing on what Rowena *must* do for her response to be adequate to the action of Jim's conduct (namely, bring the whisk or reject the request), we can say that Jim made a *request for action*. Focusing on what Rowena *can* do for her response to fully align with the action of Jim's conduct in its specific design (namely, accept the request and do as asked), we can describe Jim's action in more specific terms: as *unilaterally asking for assistance*. The

aim of the present study is to demonstrate that the level of abstraction that focuses on full alignment is empirically viable and analytically interesting. The next section introduces the empirical focus of the present study.

Other-mind-candidates

Requests might be the prototypical example of talk as a medium of action, and the phenomenon has accordingly attracted sustained attention, from language philosophy via (Cross-cultural) Pragmatics to Conversation Analysis. The present study does not start out from a domain of action, such as requesting. Instead, the methodological contribution of this article is developed via an exploration of the different types of action accomplished with a practice of talking: other-mind-candidates (*du meinst x*, "you mean/think x"). The English phrase *you mean* has received attention early in conversation analytic work, as part of a method for initiating repair on another person's prior talk: "*y'mean* + candidate understanding" (Schegloff et al., 1977). It has become apparent in subsequent work that candidate understandings more commonly occur without *you mean* (for English: Kendrick, 2015) and that *you mean* in candidate understandings serves the specific function of locating a trouble source that is not in a contiguously prior turn-constructional unit (Benjamin, 2012). It has also occasionally been noted that *you mean* can be part of actions other than initiating repair. In English, *you mean* + further talk can formulate a prior speaker's talk (Drew, 2003). Similar findings exist for the German phrase *du meinst* (e.g., Egbert, 2009). A study of various practices of articulating an interpretation of a prior speaker's turn found that *du meinst + [phrase]* typically embodies a repair initiation and commonly receives an interjection-only polar response, whereas *du meinst + [clause]* typically embodies a formulation and commonly receives an expanded response (Helmer & Zinken, 2019).

Linguists working in interactional-linguistic or discourse-functional traditions have also examined turns-at-talk that are syntactically framed by a cognitive verb. That work has focused on highly frequent items that have become more or less strongly grammaticalized as discourse markers, such as *I mean, I think*, or *you know* (e.g., Asmuß, 2011; Fox Tree & Schrock, 2002; Kärkkäinen, 2003; Thompson & Mulac, 1991), or similar structures in other languages, such as *ich meine* ("I mean") (Imo, 2007) or *ich dachte* ("I thought") (Deppermann & Reineke, 2017) in German. For example, *I thought x* in English (Kärkkäinen, 2012) and *ich dachte x* in German (Deppermann & Reineke, 2017) can express various stances toward the content articulated in the *x* portion of the TCU. However, this work did not aim to explore different types of action that such utterances can embody (Kärkkäinen, 2012, p. 2195).

The practice of an other-mind-candidate can draw on a range of cognitive verbs, such as, in German, *meinen* ("to mean, think"), *glauben* ("to believe"), or *denken* ("to think"). Of these, *meinen* is the most common one: The present work is based on a collection that includes only two cases with the verb *denken* ("think"), 13 with the verb *glauben* ("believe"), but 166 with the verb *meinen* ("mean"). The verb *meinen* is notoriously polysemous, straddling the traditional distinction between "verbs of speaking" and "cognitive verbs." For the purposes of the present article, I restrict the analysis to "other-mind-candidates" with the verb *meinen* because of its relative frequency and its multifunctionality. I will refer to this practice of talking as "*meinen*-candidates." In the discussion, I come back to the use of other cognitive verbs used as part of "other-mind-candidates."

Meinen most commonly occurs early in the TCU, before the candidate ("you mean x"), but can also occur after the candidate ("x you mean"). This positioning is certainly not arbitrary (Auer & Lindström, 2016), but it is not the topic of the present study. It is worth noting, however, that there are only seven cases of postpositioned *meinst du* in the present collection. This contrasts with earlier research suggesting that in German (in contrast to English), *du meinst* in candidate understandings is often postpositioned (Egbert, 2009, p. 102).

Data for the present study come from two corpora. One is the FOLK corpus of spoken German (version 2.8), which at the time of building the collection comprised about 170 hours of audio and video recordings from diverse informal and institutional settings (transcribed audio recordings are

accessible via www.dgd.ids-mannheim.de). The other is the German part of the *Parallel European Corpus of Informal Interaction* (PECII), which currently comprises about 24 hours of video recordings. All participants have given informed consent for their data to be used. Names of persons and other identifying information, such as place names, have been changed.

After a phase of exploration that focused on the sequential analysis of single cases, some aspects of context, turn design, and response were coded for descriptive statistics (see Table 1).

To assess the reliability of the coding, random samples of 20% of all cases were independently coded by two researchers (the author and a research assistant). Reliability was assessed using Cohen's *kappa*. After an initial round of coding, cases of disagreement were discussed, and the entire collection was coded again by the author. After this, interrater agreement for another sample of cases was very good for all variables (above $k = .79$).

Data were transcribed according to conversation analytic conventions (Jefferson, 2004). Focal parts of the data are translated on two lines: one providing a simplified morpheme gloss based on the Leipzig glossing rules (Bickel et al., 2008), the other providing a more idiomatic translation. The verb *meinen* is glossed as "mean" on the second transcript line but translated more freely as "mean," "think," or with "mean/think" on the third line. Statistical analyses were conducted using the *R*-based tool "KoGra-R" (Falke et al., 2020). Prosodic analyses were done using *Praat* (Boersma & Weenink, 2020).

Three types of social action: candidate understandings, formulating the other's mind, and requesting a judgment

Analysis of individual cases suggested that other-mind-candidates with *meinen* regularly participate in three types of action. I summarize these here, before providing detailed evidence:

(1) Candidate understandings, which offer clarification of what the other "meant to say" (e.g., Benjamin, 2012; Egbert, 2009; Heritage, 1984; Schegloff et al., 1977). Aligning responses to these confirm with a polar interjection such as *ja* ("yes") or *genau* ("exactly") or disconfirm.
(2) Formulations of the other's mind, which offer an interpretation of what the other seems to think, based on what they just said or did (Drew, 2003; Weatherall & Keevallik, 2016; Zinken & Kaiser, in press). Aligning responses do not just confirm that the person holds the relevant belief but expand the response to justify, explain, or defend the veracity of the belief—or they reject the belief attributed to them. The turn-initial response particle used for confirmation in these cases is *ja* and never a marked interjection such as *genau* ("exactly"). This is important

Table 1. The coding scheme.

	Category	Values
A. Context	A1. Does the *meinen*-candidate operate back on the other speaker's prior talk?	1. yes 2. no
B. Turn design	B1. What is the syntax of the *meinen* phrase?	1. declarative 2. interrogative 3. can't tell
	B2. Is the *meinen-candidate* syntactically independent from prior talk?	1. yes (clause with or without complementizer) 2. no (phrase or subordinate clause)
C. Response	C1. Does the next speaker respond to the *meinen*-candidate?	1. yes 2. no
	C2. Does the response affirm or reject the candidate?	1. affirm 2. reject
	C3. Does the response begin with a polar item?	1. yes 2. no
	C4. Does the response contain talk beyond polar items?	1. yes 2. no

because *ja* is only weakly affirmative and in turn-initial position of expanded responses indicates that the response is not a straightforward confirmation (Betz, 2017).

(3) Requesting a judgment on some matter by providing a candidate judgment (see Pomerantz, 1988, on candidate answers). Aligning responses provide a judgment, either supporting the candidate judgment or not. Most of the time, aligning responses do not begin with a polar interjection at all. By avoiding a polar answer, response speakers accomplish answering in their own terms, taking ownership for the judgment as opposed to taking over the terms of the candidate judgment.

Let us first examine a few cases illustrating these three types of action. Extract 2 is an example of a candidate understanding. Helmut and Torsten are talking about the pleasures and perils of owning an e-bike. Here, Helmut asks Torsten a question (lines 1–2), but rather than responding, Torsten initiates an insert sequence in the form of a *meinen*-candidate (line 4). Helmut confirms with *ja* ("yes," line 5), and in next position, Torsten responds to the initial question (line 6), displaying in that way that a simple confirmation of his candidate understanding was all that was needed:

Extract 2. FOLK_INTV_03_A04.

```
01      HEL:  °h un un un ham die_n schuppen oder
              and and and do they have a shed or
02            so wat?
              something?
03                    (0.5)
04  ->  TOR:  mts ach >du< meinst zu hause.=
                  PRT you mean.2S at house
              mts oh you mean at home
05      HEL:  =ja,
              yes
06      TOR:  ja klar dat ham die schon
              yes sure they do have that
```

What is it that makes Torsten's *meinen*-candidate recognizable as an attempt to clarify what Helmut meant to say? One relevant aspect of turn design is the phrasal format (*zu hause*, "at home"). Formatting the candidate as a phrase makes the turn recognizable as continuing or supplementing the other speaker's prior turn, and this can work—with or without *du meinst* ("you mean")—to convey that a simple clarification is sought (Helmer & Zinken, 2019).

Extract 3 is a case where a *meinen*-candidate "formulates the other's mind." Philipp is telling Anita about his preparations for a course at a polytechnic (lines 1–4), an important part of which is to have a "cooperation partner": a company that provides a work placement and could be a future employer.

Extract 3. FOLK_STUD_01_A06.

```
01      PHI: dann werd_ch sie ma anrufen und frage:n:: (0.4)
             so I will give her a call and ask

02           inwieweit- wann ich da zusagen muss:: (0.6)
             in how far- when I must accept

03           wie ich an kooperationspartner komm o_ob sicher
             how I get cooperation partners, whether it is certain

04           is dass [ich an ko]
             that I get co-
```

05 ANI: **[was für] kooperationspartner**
what cooperation partners

06 PHI: **bei den ich arbeiten könnte=die meine**
where I could work who would
07 **studiengebühren teilweise übernehmen**
in part cover my study fees

08 **(1.0)**

09 PHI: **das [is doch das ganze system]**
that is what the system is all about

10 -> ANI: **[ach du meinst da dum °h] d(h)u meinst dass du**
PRT you mean.2S that you- you mean.2S that you
oh you mean/think that tha- you- you think that you

11 **°h arbeitest und dass >die=dir< dann auch noch die**
work.2SG and that they you.DAT then also still the
work and that they then also cover your

12 **[studiengebühren z]ahlen**
study.fees pay.INF
study fees

13 PHI: **[ja das]**
yes that

14 **(0.2)**

15 PHI: **anita so läuft da[s halt]**
NAME so runs that PRT
Anita, that's how it works

16 ANI: **[ja aber die] zahlen doch dir auch**
yeah but they also already pay you

17 **schon gehAlt warum sollen die dir noch deine**
a salary why should they pay your

18 **studiengebühren über[nehmen]**
fees on top

Anita initiates repair on the term *kooperationspartner* (line 5), and Philipp describes two aspects of the meaning of this term (lines 6–7): *bei den ich arbeiten könnt* ("where I could work") and *die meine studiengebühren teilweise übernehmen* ("who partly cover my study fees"). When Anita takes the next turn, she expands the repair sequence with a *meinen*-candidate (lines 10–12). One thing that post-expansions can do is to challenge something the other person did in the completed sequence (Schegloff, 2007, p. 159ff.). This is how Philipp takes this *meinen*-candidate: not as an attempt to clarify but as a way of calling Philip to account for something he thinks is the case. He not only confirms the belief attributed to him but expands his response to assert the veracity of what he has said (lines 13 and 15). Anita's further skepticism (lines 16–18) provides evidence that Philipp was right in interpreting her *meinen*-candidate as mobilizing an explanation.

What is it that makes Anita's *meinen*-candidate recognizable as a formulation that calls for an account? Note that it begins in a way that is similar to Torsten's *meinen*-candidate in Extract 2: after a gap, with a turn-initial *ach* that displays that new information has been received but not necessarily understood (Golato & Betz, 2008). A first relevant difference between the two cases lies in the prosody of the unfolding *meinen*-turn: When Anita self-repairs the *du meinst* (line 32), she places focal stress on the personal pronoun *du* ("you"), which might contribute to the design of her action as formulating

a subjective belief (see also Dehé & Wichmann, 2010). Like the candidate understanding in Extract 2, this *meinen*-candidate operates back on the prior speaker's talk, but evidently in a different manner. Anita largely restates what Philipp had said, rather than adding anything to it, which suggests that we are not dealing here with a "helpful" attempt to restore understanding (Antaki, 2012). What she does change serves to build her incredulous stance: She deletes Philipp's *teilweise* ("partly" cover the cost, line 29) and adds the escalating *dann auch noch* ("and then on top," line 33). The agency of this kind of formulation, which is not merely supplemental but calls the prior speaker to account, is embodied in the clausal format of the candidate (Deppermann, 2012; Thompson & Couper-Kuhlen, 2005).

Finally, consider an example of a third type of action done with *meinen*-candidates: a request for a judgment. In Extract 4, Evelyn and Finja are arranging to meet up as part of moving toward closing their telephone conversation. Earlier in the call, the two had talked about an awkward situation that Finja is facing: She is invited to the birthday party of a friend who wants to announce her pregnancy at that party. However, Finja and some other friends already have the news. Here, having agreed to meet in the course of the coming days, Finja is restating her availability, hinting at the upcoming birthday party "tomorrow" (*morgen halt eher schlecht*, "tomorrow won't work," line 1). This occasions a new base sequence that Evelyn initiates with a *meinen*-candidate (line 4), requesting Finja's judgment.

Extract 4. FOLK_TELE_02_A01.

```
01      FIN:   >also morgen halt eher schlecht aber sonst
               so tomorrow won't work but apart from that

02             sonntag oder (.) halt dienstag
               Sunday or then Tuesday

03             (0.8)

04  ->  EVE:   MEINST du denn die fände das schlimm wenn
               mean.2S you PRT she found that terrible when
               do you think she would find it terrible

05             äh (0.7) wenn sie merkt dass ihr das schon
                        when she notices that you.PL that already
               uh       when she notices that you guys already

06             wisst¿
               know.2P
               know?

07  (1.3)

08      FIN:   °k(h)eine ah(h)nung°
               no idea

09             (0.7)

10      FIN:   °h ich glaub es schon weil es wär halt so
               I do believe so because it would be like

11             (.) °h (0.52) ähm (.) von wegen äh dass (.)
                             uhm     because that

12             äh (.) wir halt dann nich irgendwie was gesagt
               uh we then somehow didn't say anything

13             haben oder halt (.) irgendwie °hh
               or you know, somehow

14      EVE:   ach so [hm (kay)        ]
               ,ach so‘ hm okay
```

```
15    FIN:    [äh uns nich gemel]det haben
                didn't get in touch
```

Finja initially responds with *keine ahnung* ("no idea"), which Evelyn takes not as a no-answer response but as a "prefatory epistemic disclaimer" (Schegloff, 1996, pp. 61–62) in preparation of an answer (see line 9). This allows Finja to avoid giving a *yes*/*no* response before providing a considered judgment (lines 10–13). Evelyn takes this up with *achso* (line 14), a response item that displays that an insight has been shared and that makes closure of the sequence relevant (Golato, 2010).

What is it that makes Evelyn's *meinen*-candidate recognizable as requesting a judgment? One crucial difference to the previous cases lies in the sequential relationship to prior talk. Candidate understandings (Extract 2) as well as formulations (Extract 3) offer an interpretation of the prior speaker's adjacent talk. In contrast, the *meinen*-candidate in Extract 4, although touched off by prior talk (as displayed by the particle *denn*, Deppermann, 2009), does not interpret what Finja has just said. Instead, Evelyn initiates a new base sequence that requests a judgment by offering a "candidate judgment." A prosodic design feature of this sequential "newness" (and one that sets this case apart from Extracts 2 and 3) is a noticeable rise in intensity at the beginning of Evelyn's turn at line 4 (reaching 79 dB during *meinst*) relative to Finja's turn at lines 1–2 (falling from 73 dB to 61 dB on *dienstag*) (Goldberg, 1978). A relevant grammatical feature of turn construction is sentence type: Candidate understandings and formulations are declarative more often than not, and this was also the case in Extracts 2 and 3. Requests for a judgment, on the other hand, are virtually always interrogative (there is one declarative case in the collection). With the declarative format, a speaker can claim some knowledge of the relevant matter (Heritage, 2012; G. Raymond, 2010; Spranz-Fogasy, 2010). Declarative polar turns are therefore apt for addressing something that has been said or implied in the talk so far (Seuren & Huiskes, 2017). Interrogative syntax (*meinst du* rather than *du meinst*), in contrast, indexes the speaker's stance of relatively little knowledge and contributes to designing the turn as in search of an answer rather than of confirmation (G. Raymond, 2010).

The three cases (Extracts 2 to 4) are characterized by similarities and differences at different levels of organization. In all of them, we find a turn that draws on the resource of a "*meinen*-candidate": an articulation of what the other person might mean or think. In terms of sequential connections, we can distinguish *meinen*-candidates that *offer an interpretation* based on what the other person just said (Extracts 2 and 3) from *meinen*-candidates that *request new information* by providing a "candidate judgment" (Extract 4). This is a level of abstraction at which we can identify a difference in terms of what the response speaker *must* do to align with the action of the *meinen*-turn: *Interpretations of prior talk* minimally require a *confirmation* (or disconfirmation) of the interpretation. *Requests for a judgment* minimally require the *provision of a judgment* (or rejecting the provision of a judgment).

At a finer level of grain, we can distinguish two types of interpretation: candidate understandings (Extract 2) and formulations of the other's mind (Extract 3). This is a level of abstraction at which we can identify differences in terms of what the response speaker *can* do to fully align an interpretation. *Simple confirmation with an interjection* fully aligns with a *candidate understanding*, while *confirmation plus account* fully aligns with a *formulation of mind*. The next sections examine further evidence for distinguishing types of interpretation at the level of full alignment.

Recognizability and openness of conduct as action

Descriptive statistics provide some support for the finding that participants regularly analyze action at the level of full alignment. *Meinen*-candidates that operate back on the other's prior talk in a phrasal format—typical candidate understandings—most often receive simple confirmation with an interjection such as *ja* ("yes") or *genau* ("exactly"). Responses to *meinen*-candidates that operate back on the

Table 2. Association between *meinen* turns and response (N = 113). Cases with a disconfirmation response or no response were excluded.

	Interjection-only confirmation	Confirmation plus account	Expanded response without polar answer
Phrasal *meinen*-candidate operating back on prior talk	36	10	7
Clausal *meinen*-candidate operating back on prior talk	11	16	11
Clausal *meinen*-candidate not operating back on prior talk	2	6	14

other's prior talk in a clausal format—typical formulations of the other's mind—most commonly begin with a confirmation and then continue with a justification or explanation. Finally, *meinen*-candidates that do not operate back on the other's prior talk—typical requests for a judgment—most often receive responses that provide a considered judgment without any initial token confirmation (see Table 2).

The association between the different gestalts of position and composition of *meinen*-candidates on the one hand and the different response formats on the other hand is statistically significant with a moderate effect size, as confirmed by a chi-squared test, $N = 113$, $X^2(4) = 33.354$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .4$. However, an examination of the standardized residuals shows that this result is driven by candidate understandings and requests for a judgment. As the mosaic plot in Figure 1 shows, *meinen*-candidates operating back on prior talk in a phrasal format strongly attract simple confirmation responses and hardly ever get expanded responses with no confirmation token at all. The reverse is true for *meinen*-candidates that do not operate back on prior talk: These predominantly receive expanded responses with no confirmation and hardly ever simple confirmation. However, for *meinen*-candidates operating back on prior talk in a clausal format, the picture is less clear: Although responses that expand a confirming response with an account are relatively more frequent, the distribution across the response space is quite even.

The statistical analysis suggests two things. First, what I have called "full alignment" with the action of some sequence-initiating conduct is not conditionally relevant. Otherwise, we would expect associations with larger effect sizes. Second, there does seem to be a normative orientation toward

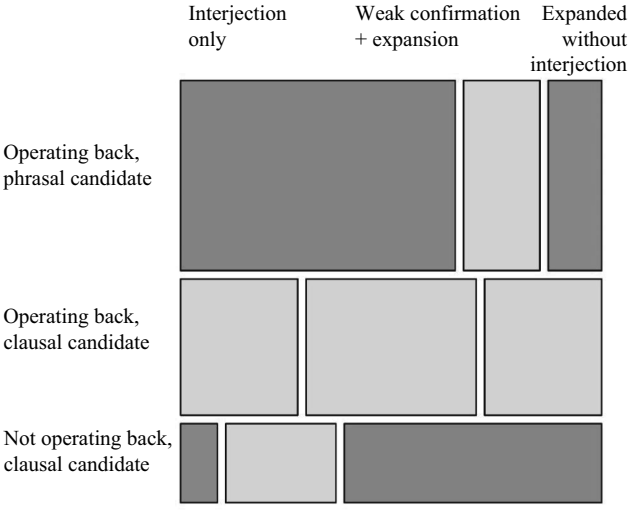

Figure 1. Associations between practices of building *meinen*-candidates and responses. Dark shading means that the observed value departs significantly from the value expected by chance. *Meinen*-candidates receiving a dispreferred response or no response were excluded.

full alignment, a relevance rule that is weaker than conditional relevance. Otherwise, we would not expect statistically significant associations at all.

For the further qualitative analysis of how participants treat *meinen*-turns as action, we focus on cases that interpret the prior speaker's talk with a candidate formatted as a clause. So far, these were treated as typically accomplishing formulations of the other's mind. However, such *meinen*-turns might only be unambiguous formulations with additional cues. Consider again Extract 3. Anita's stress on the personal pronoun (*du meinst*, "you think") and the semantic proximity of her *meinen*-candidate to what Philipp had said were crucial for the recognizability of her turn as a formulation. In the absence of such additional action-formation-help from prosody or semantic proximity, clausal *meinen*-candidates that interpret prior talk are systematically open to being taken either as a candidate understanding ("this is what you meant to say") or as a formulation ("this is what you think is the case").

Therefore, we can ask what next speakers do when they encounter such a *meinen*-candidate. Do they take it at the general level of an *interpretation*? The data that we now turn to show that this is not the case. Instead, response speakers in such situations commonly decide to fix the open action potential of such *meinen*-candidates at the finer level of grain and treat them either as a candidate understanding or as a formulation. We first discuss such cases in Extracts 5 and 6. We then turn to one case (Extract 7) where a next speaker does indeed respond to a relatively "open" *meinen*-turn at the minimal level of an "interpretation." As that case shows, such a response is offered for cause, to navigate delicate interactional territory.

Fixing action potentials by fully aligning

Extract 5 comes from a language biography interview, the same interaction as in Extract 2. Helmut is telling Torsten about developments in the library where he works. Pupils used to come to his library in groups to do their homework after school together. In this context, he mentions pupils with a migration background, who would not be allowed to do "that" at home (lines 7–8) and who would use the library as an *ausweichquartier* ("makeshift quarters"). In next position, Torsten formulates a *meinen*-candidate: *du meinst dat die zu hause nich äh lernen dürfen?* ("you mean/think that they are not allowed to learn at home?," lines 9–10).

Extract 5. FOLK_INTV_03_A04.

01	HEL:	**gebbet ja auch viele mi- m- >san wa mal< °h**
		there are also many with, let's say
02		**(0.3) wat heute heißt mit ausländischem mi- oder**
		what is now called with foreign wi- or
03		**mit migrationshintergrund °h: die ham nich die**
		with migration background, those don't have the
04		**möglichkeit, oder ↑dürfen sich nicht zu äh=äh=äh**
		opportunity o rare not allowed to eh
05		**treffen >oder sonst< un die kommen dann auch un**
		meet or else and those then come too and
06		**nehmen dat aus °h als äh äh (0.3) hilfe oder als**
		use that out as eh (0.3) help or as
07		**ausweichquartier °h wenn se zu hause dat nich**
		a makeshift quarter when at home they are not
08		**dürfen un dann kommen sie inne gruppe.=**
		allowed and then they come in a group

09 -> TOR: =du meinst dat die zu hause nich äh lernen
you mean.2S that they at home not learn
you mean/think that they are not allowed to

10 dürfe[n? (oder)]
may (or)
learn at home (or)

11 HEL: [ja:=gib]t et ey >[kenn ich] weiß ich
yes that happens I'm familiar with that I know that

12 TOR: [im ernst]
seriously

13 HEL: ja:.=°h: [oder wenn se wollen] dann können
yes or if they want then they can

14 TOR: [(okay) hehe]

15 HEL: se ja au_zwischendurch ma knutschen oder wat
snog from time to time or something

Torsten's *meinen*-candidate can be understood as a candidate understanding, explicating Helmut's "that" at line 7 (*with "that," you meant to say that they are not allowed to learn at home*). But it can also be understood as a formulation mobilizing an account of what Helmut believes to be the case (*you think that they are not allowed to learn at home*). Treating Torsten's turn as a mistaken candidate understanding would be entirely plausible: Saying that pupils with a migration background are not at all allowed to learn at home might not be what Helmut "meant," since earlier he talks about these pupils not being allowed to learn *together*, to "meet" (lines 4–5).

Despite these grounds for taking Torsten's *meinen*-candidate as a candidate understanding, Helmut treats it as a formulation of what he, Helmut, thinks. He begins to respond with the weakly affirmative *ja* ("yes," line 11) and extends his response to assert what he said as a fact (*gibt et ey kenn ich weiß ich*, "that happens, I'm familiar with that, I know that"). By treating the *meinen*-candidate as ascribing an (extraordinary) belief mobilizing an account for the narrated state of affairs, Helmut prioritizes the progression of his current activity: sharing insights his job gives him into the pupils' postschool lives and the library as a place for romantic exploration. In next position (line 12), Torsten mobilizes further elaboration by expressing his surprise (C. W. Raymond & Stivers, 2016), aligning with Helmut's treatment of the *meinen*-candidate as making room for further talk about this topic.

In Extract 6, we encounter another clausal *meinen*-candidate. This time, the response speaker takes it as a candidate understanding. This extract comes from a recording of four adults playing a board game in which success hinges upon luck in throwing the dice. Torsten isn't having much luck, and the players repeatedly tease him about this. Here, Anna does it again (*hat torsten nen andern würfel als wir*, "does torsten have a different dice from us?," line 1), and Torsten joins in with another scenario that could explain his bad luck (*sind magneten oder so was unterm tisch versteckt irgendwie*, "are there magnets or something hidden under the table somehow," lines 3–4). When Torsten begins yet another turn describing something as "maybe a special component" (*vielleicht is das ne besondere komponente*, lines 8–9), it seems that he is about to spell out another scenario that could explain his lack of fortune. However, he is having difficulty finding the right words and finding a recipient (lines 8–11).

Extract 6. PECII_DE_Game1_20150913_10810182.

01 ANN: hat torsten nen andern würfel als wir?=
does Torsten have different dice from us

02 CAR: =hehehehehehe .H::[he

03 TOR: [sind magneten oder
are there magnets or

04 so [was unterm tisch versteckt irgendwie
something hidden under the table somehow

05 OSK: [hehe hehe hehehe

06 TOR: so .h::=
so

07 ANN: =(h)Eh::

08 TOR: .m(h) vielleicht ist das ne besondere
maybe that is a special

09 kompon↑ente dass hier einer (2.2) ((gaze to ANN))
component that one here

10 mUtwillig immer (0.3) ((gaze to OSK))
is wantonly always

11 benachteiligt wird und dann (1.1) ((gaze to CAR))
disadvantaged and then

12 [wird eigentlich so die stressresistenz]
is actually the resilience to stress

13 -> ANN: [du meinst das ist inszeniert und es wird jetzt ge-]
you mean.2S that is staged and it is now
you mean/think this is staged and now it is

14 -> TOR: [hier>↑(jaja)]
here yesyes

15 ANN: [n(h) wird echt] deine stressresistenz g[etestet
your resilience to stress is being tested

16 TOR: [genau
exactly

17 CAR: Kh[(h):

18 ANN: [bin ich ja froh dass ich mich für grün entschieden
well I'm glad I decided on green

Torsten's turn-in-progress is interspersed with some lengthy silences, as he moves his gaze from one player to the next in search of uptake (lines 9–11). Anna comes to his rescue when she enters his turn space with a *meinen*-candidate (*du meinst das ist inszeniert und es wird jetzt ge-*, "you mean/think this is staged and now it is being-," line 13). The idea that the game is staged for the sake of the video camera is an interpretation of Torsten's opaque reference to a "special component" that fits the requirements of a next humorous scenario explaining Torsten's bad luck.

Again, Anna's *meinen*-candidate can be taken in two ways. It can be understood as humorously attributing a belief to Torsten, a belief that would provide a faux account of his bad luck (*you think this is staged*). Alternatively, it can be understood as a candidate understanding, attributing to him a communicative intention (*you meant to say that this is staged*). Taking Anna's move as a formulation of his belief and defending a *faux* belief in a staged game, Torsten could further develop this humorous scenario (with "yeah that seems to be what's going on" or the like). However, this is not what he does. Instead, he responds with *genau* ("exactly," line 16), treating Anna's move as a candidate

understanding.[1] With this response, Torsten can orient to Anna's turn as having assisted him with *his* joke, reclaiming authorship of the humorous scenario (*this is exactly what I meant to say*).

We have now seen two cases where recipients used response shapes that were fit for specifically aligning with the prior turn either as a formulation or as a candidate understanding. Although the *meinen*-candidates in both cases launched "open" interpretations of the prior speaker's move, recipients did not respond at the minimal level of an "interpretation" by simply affirming the prior. Of course, doing so is also a possibility. But when participants do so, it seems to be for cause. As a final case, the next section discusses one example.

Withholding full alignment

The existence of practices for fully aligning with the action of a *meinen*-candidate at the level of "maximum fit" provides off-record possibilities for *refraining* from commitment to a particular action. Extract 7 comes from a conversation between Anita and Philipp, the couple we encountered in Extract 4. Here, Anita has told Philipp about an experience her sister has had. She had planned to go out with her boyfriend but then fell ill. Instead of caring for his sick girlfriend, her partner then went to town with his mates instead. The sequence that interests us begins when Anita asks Philipp what he would do in such a situation. Philipp says that he cannot answer "globally" (*pauschal*, data not shown here). After some back and forth, in which Anita tries to get Philipp to come clean about what he would do, Philipp justifies his refusal to answer with his wish to avoid "remonstrations" (*vorhaltungen*) (line 5). Anita initiates repair, *wie (.) keine vorhaltungen* ("how, no remonstrations," line 7) (see Selting, 1987, on *wie* as a repair initiator indicating pre-disagreement). After Philipp provides a further hint about his motivations, Anita builds a *meinen*-candidate: *ach du meinst wenn du jetzt sagst ja ich wär dann natürlich zu dir gekommen und dann machst du's anders dass ich das dir dann vorhalten würde* ("oh you mean/think if you now say, yes I would have stayed with you of course, and then you do it differently, that I would remonstrate with you," lines 16–19).

Extract (7) FOLK_STUD_01_A06

01	ANI:	**ja aber ich mein (.) [warum kannst du des]**
		yes but I mean why can't you
02	PHI:	**[((laughs))]**
03	ANI:	**denn nich sagen jetz=warum w(h)illst du_s**
		say it now, why don't you want to
04		**denn nich j(h)etz nich entsch(h)eiden**
		decide it now
05	PHI:	**°h damit man später °h keine vorhaltungen bekommt**
		to make sure that there won't be remonstrations later
06		**(0.7)**
07	ANI:	**wie (.) keine vorhaltungen**
		how, remonstrations
08		**(0.4)**
09	PHI:	**falls es mal eintreten sollte**
		if it should occur
10		**(.)**

[1]His earlier *jaja* ("yes yes") is not a confirmation but a way of aligning with the joking mode of Anna's formulation, see Barth-Weingarten (2011).

11 PHI: der unwahrscheinliche fall
the unlikely case

12 (0.7)

13 PHI: und dann heißt_s du hast doch da und da (2.1)
and then it's like at such-and-such a time you

14 mal des und des gesagt
once said so-and-so

15 (0.6)

16 -> ANI: °h ach du meinst wenn du jetz sags jA
PTCL you mean.2SG if you now say.2SG yes
oh you mean/think if you now say, yes

17 ich wär dann natürlich zu dir gekommen
I would then naturally to you came.PTCP
I would have come to you of course

18 un dann machst du_s anders dass ich das
and then make.2SG you.it different that I that
and then you do it differently that I would

19 dir dann vorhalten würde=
you.DAT then remonstrate.INF would.1S
remonstrate with you

Once more, Anita's *meinen*-candidate can be understood either as a candidate understanding (*you meant to say that…*) or as a formulation of Philipp's mind (*you think that…*). However, as Anita attributes to Philipp a stance that betrays a certain lack of confidence in the relationship, Philipp might not wish to own up to this content either as a communicative intention or as a belief. Here we see how Philipp navigates this situation:

Extract (7) FOLK_STUD_01_A06 (continued)

20 PHI: =ja:.
yes

21 (0.8)

22 PHI: oder ich sach jetz (0.7) ja, (0.2) recht
or I say now, yes, he's

23 hat_er [der sa
right, sa-

24 ANI: [was machst du denn mit deinen augen
what are you doing with your eyes

((four lines omitted))

29 PHI: [ich k]önnt ja jetz sagen recht hat_er
I could say now he's right

30 ANI: [(ah)]

31 PHI: de samuel [der s]oll schön (.) einen drauf machen
samuel, have a night out on the town

32 ANI: [ja]
yes

33 **ANI: jA h°**
yes

34 **(0.2)**

35 **ANI: des is::**
that is

36 **PHI: paar frauen klar machen**
pull a few women

37 **(0.6)**

38 **ANI: °h des is absolut unmögliche haltung des hätts**
that is an impossible attitude you would

39 **du nie gesagt**
never have said that

He responds initially with *ja* ("yes"). A weakly affirmative *ja* can treat a *meinen*-candidate as a candidate understanding, as we saw in Extract 2. However, this minimal response seems to be apt only if the sequence was subordinate to an overarching activity, for example, an inserted repair sequence (Keevallik, 2010). In the present case, where the *meinen*-candidate comes after a prolonged search for understanding, the marked particle *genau* ("exactly") would be apt if Philipp wanted to treat Anita's candidate as (correctly) capturing his communicative intention (Oloff, 2017, see also Extract 6). However, this is not what Philipp does. Alternatively, a turn-initial *ja* can also begin a response that treats the *meinen*-candidate as a formulation, as we have seen in Extracts 3 and 5. In such cases, responses that align with that action potential are expanded to defend the attributed belief. However, Philipp does not do that either. After the *ja*, then, Philipp has not clearly treated the *meinen*-candidate either as a candidate understanding or as a formulation.

After a gap, Philipp does indeed take the turn again. However, what he says now is not a defense of his putative belief (that Anita would remonstrate with him). Instead, he begins to formulate a hypothetical scenario unrelated to Anita's *meinen*-turn, presented as an alternative with *oder* ("or"). This scenario has Philipp egging the partner of Anita's sister on in flirting with women on a night out, something that, as Anita maintains (see lines 38–39), Philipp would never do. By presenting such a designedly "further," but actually unrelated and supposedly outlandish scenario of problematic behavior in a relationship, Philipp can treat Anita's *meinen*-candidate as articulating merely a "possible-but-implausible interpretation" as part of his attempts to move out of the interactional fix he's in. In sum, the present case suggests that responses to *meinen*-candidates at the level of what a speaker minimally must do point us to special cases.

Discussion

The present study examined types of social action that speakers of German accomplish with turns-at-talk that articulate a candidate of what the other person "means" or "thinks" framed by the phrase *du meinst* ("you mean/think x"). In terms of what a response speaker *must* minimally do to satisfy the conditional relevance set up by the prior turn, we can distinguish two types of action: *Interpretations*, which prefer confirmation, and *requests for a judgment*, which prefer the provision of a judgment. However, if we ask what a response speaker *can* do to make sure that their conduct is hearable as fulfilling the (or an) action potential of the prior turn, the domain of interpretations receives a further subdivision: into candidate understandings, which prefer simple confirmation, and formulations of the other's mind, which prefer confirmation followed by an account. These fully aligning responses do more than satisfy conditional relevance; they go for the maximum fit of the response to the first speaker's conduct. We might think of the maximum fit response as a weaker kind of relevance rule that provides grounds for the analysis (by participants) of conduct that is less than fully cooperative (see

Robinson, 2016, on relevance rules). Both levels, minimal alignment and full alignment, provide comparative concepts for researchers who need to abstract from the details of how social action is locally accomplished, and both are viable analytic tools for a comparative study of social action.

In contrast to the present proposal, Levinson (2013) has argued that the level of minimal alignment should be preferred in the comparative study of social action types. That choice might be motivated by Levinson's interest in action ascription as a cognitive heuristic in the process of preparing a response. However, as conversation analysts we are more interested in the constitution of action as an interactive and public process. From that perspective, the "formation" of action is complete not at the point of possible completion of the first speaker's turn but much later, after the other's response, when the first speaker has let pass the last "structurally provided" opportunity for initiating repair (Schegloff, 1992). Taking up a metaphor used by George Herbert Mead, we might say that response speakers do not "ascribe" action to the other's conduct but that they "complete" the other's action (Mead, 1934, p. 146). The metaphor of action ascription emphasizes that the response speaker's sense of what the other is doing might sometimes, at an early point at least, only be a "best guess" (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018, p. 211). Mead's metaphor of completion, and the proposal in this article, emphasize a facet of action formation that seems to lie at the opposite end: our experience that we usually know full well what exactly the other person is going for.

The level of abstraction identified by full alignment is sufficiently general to make similarities within and across languages visible. At the same time, it has enough empirical bite to point us to loci of subtle diversity within and across languages. Let us briefly consider what the next steps for a comparative study of "other-mind-candidates" could be. We know that other cognitive verbs in German, such as *glauben* ("believe"), are used to request a judgment or formulate the other's mind (Zinken & Kaiser, in press). We also know that in English, other-mind-candidates with *you mean* can be used to accomplish candidate understandings (Benjamin, 2012; Schegloff et al., 1977) and formulations (Drew, 2003). Adopting the method of "semantic maps" from typology (e.g., Haspelmath, 2003), the similarities and differences between other-mind-candidates as practices for acting within and across languages can be visualized as in Figure 2.

The gist of the semantic map method is to arrange functions of a structure—in our case: social actions accomplished with the practice of an "other-mind-candidate"—in such a way that for any practice, the range of actions that it is a practice for is arranged contiguously on the map. For our (very simple) map of other-mind-candidates, the only arrangement that makes this possible is the one in Figure 2. The beauty of a semantic map is that it suggests working hypotheses about (cross-cultural) commonalities. For example, if the map in Figure 2 is correct, we should find that across languages, any practice of talking that is used to request a judgment and to articulate a candidate understanding will also be used to formulate another's mind. To put it boldly, such semantic maps represent hypotheses about universal structures of human sociality.

As well as pointing us to commonalities, the analysis of action at the level of fully aligning responses suggests foci for a controlled exploration of cross-cultural diversity. For example, requesting a judgment with German *meinen* might not be the same as requesting a judgment with German *glauben*. Formulating the other's mind with German *meinen* might not be the same as formulating the other's mind with English *mean*, etc. In sum, the level of full alignment seems to be interesting for the analysis of both commonalities and diversity of social action within and across languages.

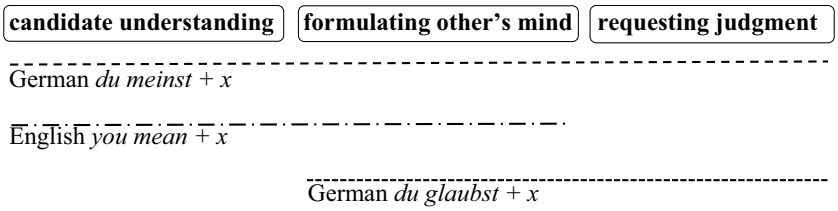

Figure 2. A semantic map of other-mind-candidates.

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