

## POSTPRINT

# Suspended assessments in German talk-in-interaction

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### **Abstract:**

In this paper we examine the composition and interactional deployment of suspended assessments in ordinary German conversation. We define suspended assessments as lexico-syntactically incomplete assessing TCUs that share a distinct cluster of prosodic-phonetic features which auditorily makes them come off as ‘left hanging’ rather than cut-off (e. g., Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks 1977; Jaspersen 2002) or trailing-off (e. g., Local/Kelly 1986; Walker 2012). Using CA/IL methodology (Couper-Kuhlen/Selting 2018) and drawing on a large body of video-recorded face-to-face conversations, we highlight the verbal, vocal and bodily-visual resources participants use to render such unfinished assessing TCUs recognizably incomplete and identify six recurrent usage types. Overall, the suspension of assessing TCUs appears to either serve as a practice for circumventing the production of assessments that are interactionally inapposite, or as a practice for coping with local contingencies that render the very doing of an assessment problematic for the speaker. Data are in German with English translations.

**Keywords:** assessment, suspension, incomplete TCUs, prosody, Interactional Linguistics, Bewertung, Suspendierung, unvollständige TCUs, Prosodie, Interaktionale Linguistik

## 1 Introduction

Assessing persons, objects, events and states of affairs is a pervasive and routine activity in social interaction (Pomerantz 1984; Lindström/Mondada 2009). As part of this activity, interactants commonly produce positive or negative assessments, which have been studied extensively with regard to their social, sequential and linguistic organization in Conversation Analysis and Interactional Linguistics over the last 30 years (e. g., Pomerantz 1984; Goodwin 1986; Goodwin/Goodwin 1987, 1992; Heritage/Raymond 2005; Thompson/Fox/Couper-Kuhlen 2015).

Once underway, a great number of such assessments are more or less straightforwardly brought to completion, but this need not be the case. In fact, speakers may suspend the progressive realization of a clearly projectable assessment mid-course. This phenomenon first caught our attention in a fragment of conversation between three housemates at

breakfast.<sup>1</sup> The following extract from said conversation sets in at the beginning of a storytelling (see section 5.6 below for a full analysis of this fragment).

Extract 1: PARTY MIT TUTOR (LoE\_VG\_03, 36:40–38:07 min)

- 14 Car: jemand den ich au gestern auf der PARTY getroffen  
hab,  
someone i also met at the party yesterday
- 15 → den ich einglich nIch `so: (0.2)  
*who-SG-M-ACC i actually not PTCL*  
whom i actually don't
- 16 inaJA-  
well
- 17 °h (der) (.) war schon von anfang an beim (.) beim  
RAdio dabei,  
he was already involved in in the radio (thing) from the very start
- 18 ((click)) und der: war halt schon\_n Älteres semester,  
and well he was already somewhat older than us

As part of the introduction of her story's protagonist, Carina (Car) launches a turn-constructive unit (TCU; Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974) that syntactically projects a verb phrase most probably expressing her dislike of this person (line 15). Although she does not go on to produce the projected continuation, and ultimately abandons the TCU-in-progress with the *naja* in line 16, the action underway is clearly recognizable as an assessment. A remarkable feature of this TCU is that it is not only syntactically incomplete, but also prosodically 'left hanging': Rather than being recognizably aborted with a cut-off (Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks 1977; Jaspersen 2002) or being designed as hearably turn-final by trailing off (Local/Kelly 1986; Walker 2012), the TCU-in-progress is realized at constant volume with a pitch that remains at mid-range and a sound stretch on *so*.

Moreover, as can be seen from how Carina's co-participant Hajo (Haj) responds to her telling a little later in the same conversation, participants may pick up on such suspended units despite their incompleteness:

- 77 Haj: [s natü]rlich blöd dass du: äh: (.) ihn nich so: (.)  
MAGST;  
it's a real shame that you uh don't like him that much

<sup>1</sup> Notably, our first noticing of this phenomenon goes back to an open data session in a research colloquium Margret Selting has been offering at the University of Potsdam for many years. Since this colloquium has been formative and inspirational for all the authors, we found it appropriate to pursue this phenomenon further as part of this volume. We would like to thank all participants of the colloquium for their input, especially Christine Sonnenburg, who was of great help during the initial stages of this project.



Starting from the observation that assessments can be suspended in this way but still be interactionally meaningful for the participants, the aim of the present study is twofold. First, we seek to explore and describe the multimodal (verbal, vocal and bodily-visual) resources participants use to recognizably produce such suspended assessments in ordinary German talk-in-interaction. Secondly, by doing detailed sequential analyses of the environments in which they occur, we aim to shed light on the specific interactional contingencies and contextual circumstances that recurrently inform their production, thereby exposing the kinds of issues for which their suspension can be seen to offer a practical solution (Sacks 1984). Following a brief overview of prior research on suspended and incomplete utterances in talk-in-interaction (section 2) and an outline of the data and methods used for this study (section 3), we highlight prosodic-phonetic, lexico-syntactic and bodily-visual features that recurrently enter into the composition of such suspended assessments (section 4). We will then illustrate the array of interactional problems and exigencies that we found speakers to recurrently manage by suspending their assessments in this manner (section 5). The paper will end with a brief summary of our results and a discussion of their implications.

## 2 Background: Suspensions and incompletions in talk-in-interaction

In a very general sense, the suspension of an ongoing TCU prior to a point of possible completion constitutes a remarkable occurrence in interaction. It does so not only because the possible completion of TCUs plays an important role in the organization of turn-taking (Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974), but also because it disturbs the “forward development” of the current TCU towards such possible completion (Lerner 2013, p. 96) and thus interferes with a general preference for retaining the progressivity of a turn's talk (Schegloff 2007, pp. 14 f.). Interferences of this sort are generally accountable events, and so participants will examine them for their interactional import and may use them as the basis for further inference or adjustments of their understanding-so-far (*ibid.*). And yet, it is an empirical fact that speakers occasionally do suspend their talk-in-progress prior to a point of possible completion, a phenomenon that has been studied in various languages and from a range of different angles.

Roughly, there are three main ways in which this phenomenon has been approached in prior research. First, there are those studies that have looked at turn suspension as a practice for accomplishing particular interactional ends in specific sequential environments. Iwasaki (2015, 2018), for example, has shown that, especially in the context of stance-takings, speakers of Japanese quite commonly delay the further realization of an unfolding but clearly projectable unit to create interstitial spaces for co-participation, thus enabling them to negotiate their stance with their interlocutor prior to articulating it.<sup>2</sup> In a similar way, it has been shown that speakers of English may suspend the progressive

<sup>2</sup> This practice is obviously facilitated by the “predicate-final structure and the agglutinative morphology of Japanese” (Iwasaki 2018, p. 73).

realization of a TCU underway, so as to furnish opportunities for other-completion, especially in the context of talk about recognizably delicate matters (Lerner 2013; see also Lerner 1996 on anticipatory completions).<sup>3</sup> Their capacity to mobilize other-completions may also render suspended TCUs an effective device in more task-oriented settings. As Koshik (2002) has shown, teachers in one-on-one second language writing conferences may deploy what she calls ‘designedly incomplete utterances’ for pedagogical purposes, to elicit correction by students of their writing errors (see also Margutti 2010). In contrast to the phenomenon considered here, however, the suspensions in these cases most commonly end up being only temporary, either because they are used to invite other-completions (Koshik 2002; Lerner 2013), or, alternatively, because the speakers ultimately complete the suspended talk themselves, either after a co-participant’s contribution (Iwasaki 2015, 2018), or in case of its absence (Lerner 2013).

A second strand of research focuses on turns that are suspended indefinitely, taking the outcome of such suspensions (i. e., unfinished turns) as a starting point for the analysis. In a series of papers, Chevalier (2008, 2009) has examined the contexts in which such unfinished turns are produced in French conversations and how, despite their incompleteness, they become interpretable and ‘actionable’ for their recipients (see also Chevalier/Clift 2008). Her studies focus on syntactically incomplete turns that are nevertheless treated as interactionally complete in their local context and receive sequentially appropriate responses from their recipients (as opposed to other-completions). In her data, too, such unfinished turns normally occur in environments of talk that can be characterized as “in some way delicate or problematic either in the development of the sequences or in the type of social actions that speakers seek to accomplish” (Chevalier/Clift 2008, p. 1746), suggesting that their incompleteness constitutes a way of doing facework (Chevalier 2009). More precisely, she argues that not completing a turn can be viewed as a generically available resource for addressing such delicate or problematic talk (Chevalier 2008, p. 20; see also Chevalier/Clift 2008, p. 1746). And although she stresses that this is a resource that is locally managed and carefully adapted to the local contextual particulars of the ongoing sequence, she refrains from further specifying the range of interactional factors and contingencies that may inform its use (*ibid.*).<sup>4</sup>

A third and final strand of research, headed by Selting’s (2001) study of ‘(unfinished) fragments of units’, has looked at the phenomenon of incomplete utterances from a turn-

<sup>3</sup> Rather than being tied to specific interactional contexts, anticipatory completions are more strongly associated with certain conventionalized compound turn formats (such as the conditional *If X, (then) Y* structure), though.

<sup>4</sup> A number of considerations concerning such factors are offered in Imo’s (2011) analysis of possible *aposiopesis*-constructions in ordinary German conversations. *Aposiopeses* are defined as syntactically incomplete utterances for which the missing elements can count as ‘intended’ but are left unarticulated (*ibid.*, p. 267), and so they bear resemblance to the phenomenon reported here. In addition to the avoidance of certain expressions or topics, Imo mentions the sufficient inferability of the missing element, problems in the on-line production of talk (e. g., the inaccessibility of a fitting or adequate descriptor) and a general abidance by principles of language economy as possible reasons for their use (pp. 269 f., 278 et seq.).



constructional perspective.<sup>5</sup> Selting (2001) argues that fragments of units only become recognizable as such in retrospect, as the result of “unfulfilled projections of various kinds” (p. 230),<sup>6</sup> and distinguishes three types of unit fragments, depending on how they become recognizable for their recipients:

- a) Those where an ongoing unit is cut off with an alveolar or glottal stop (see also Jaspersen 2002) and followed by a next unit with a recognizable new beginning (via the start of a new syntactic construction and a pitch up- or downstep),
- b) those where a projected syntactic construction is abandoned before a point of possible completion but where the pitch is ‘left hanging’ without the possible ending of a contour, optionally in combination with sound lengthening (see also Imo 2011, pp. 269–271, 279), and
- c) those where more global semantic-pragmatic or sequential projections that are as-yet-unfulfilled render a given stretch of talk fragmentary or incomplete, regardless of, or in addition to, its syntactic or prosodic (in)completeness.

For the phenomenon considered here, the second type is of immediate interest. Selting (2001) argues that the non-final, ‘hanging’ pitch and the possibly co-occurring sound stretches do not primarily signal incompleteness, but serve to signal “‘doing turn-holding’ [...] at the end of yet unfinished units” (p. 249, see also Local/Kelly 1986) – a claim to which we will return below (see section 4).

Bringing these different threads together, we can record the following: Prior research has shown that current speakers have a number of methods available for suspending the progressive realization of an ongoing TCU prior to a point of possible completion. Moreover, the existing literature suggests that, for recipients, such suspensions generally constitute meaningful and potentially accountable occurrences in interaction, regardless of how they are accomplished and whether they end up being momentary or indefinite in extension (thus yielding incomplete turns or TCUs). Not uncommonly these various kinds of suspensions have been related to and accounted for in terms of the interactionally problematic character of the talk-in-progress, typically by referring to their use as a resource for marking the social delicacy of the matter being talked about or the action(s) being carried out. Yet, the specific though arguably recurrent interactional contingencies that give rise to their treatment *as* delicate or problematic often remain obscure.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that the aforementioned studies do not offer form-based characterizations of their respective target phenomenon: Chevalier (2008, p. 23, fn. 3), for instance, mentions sound stretches and *eah* (‘uh’) as characteristic turn-design features of unfinished turns in French (see also Chevalier/Clift 2008, pp. 1743, 1746), and Lerner (2013, pp. 107–110) lists cut-offs, trail-offs, unmarked suspensions as well as emotive expressions as practices for suspending the progressive realization of a turn-in-progress prior to a potentially delicate item. However, these studies do not predominantly focus on aspects of turn-construction.

<sup>6</sup> Chevalier/Clift (2008) forward a similar argument which is, however, more narrowly confined to the role of syntactic and pragmatic/sequential projections and does not (or only very marginally) take prosodic projections into account.



Here, we want to move beyond such general characterizations by 1) focusing on one particular turn-constructive method, characterized by a specific cluster of prosodic-phonetic and other multimodal resources, that speakers evidently have at their disposal for suspending a TCU-in-progress (as illustrated in Extract 1 above), and 2) by examining the array of interactional problems and exigencies that participants recurrently manage with it in more detail. In doing so, we will refrain from making a distinction between suspensions that yield unfinished turns and those that yield unfinished TCUs. Since speakers can draw on the focal turn-constructive resource pretty much anywhere in their talk, regardless of whether they are in the midst of producing a single-unit turn or some later TCU in a multi-unit turn, any such distinction would appear to be a purely analytic one (Selting 2001, p. 254). In accordance with CA/IL methodology, our study will be confined to the action type we initially encountered in Extract 1, however. This serves to ensure that at least similar pragmatic relevancies are in play in each case, which provides for their comparability, especially with regard to the possible interactional contingencies that may be seen to inform the suspension (see, e.g., Clift/Raymond 2018; Thompson/Fox/Couper-Kuhlen 2015). Therefore, our analysis will exclusively focus on suspended *assessments*.<sup>7</sup>

### 3 Data and method

This study draws on video recordings of German face-to-face interactions from the *Languages of Emotion* (LoE) corpus<sup>8</sup> and the *Forschungs- und Lehrkorpus für gesprochenes Deutsch* (FOLK)<sup>9</sup> as data. The vast majority of our cases are taken from recordings of informal, ‘everyday’ conversations between friends and family members, including breakfast- and dinner-table conversations as well as conversations during other joint activities. Two additional cases stem from an informal rehearsal session of a university theater group.

For the collection, we gathered instances of suspended assessments, i.e., cases in which the current speaker is clearly and projectably concerned with evaluating some kind of referent, but stops the progressive realization of the assessing TCU prior to a point of possible completion. The assessments in our data feature persons as well as

<sup>7</sup> While work on this project was underway, we learned that a comparable endeavor is currently pursued by Li (2019; in prep.), who looks at incomplete assessments in Mandarin conversation. In contrast to the phenomenon discussed here, however, her incomplete assessments feature completion-implicative prosody.

<sup>8</sup> The LoE corpus comprises video recordings of about nine hours of conversation between friends and was compiled under the direction of Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen and Margret Selting for the project *Emotive involvement in conversational storytelling* as part of the cluster of excellence *Languages of Emotion* (Freie Universität Berlin).

<sup>9</sup> In its current version (2.12; May 26, 2019), FOLK comprises video and audio recordings of approximately 229 hours of interaction in a wide range of private, institutional and other contexts, out of which we reviewed 29.5 hours of video-recorded conversational data. For more information on FOLK, see IDS, Datenbank für Gesprochenes Deutsch (DGD), FOLK [<http://dgd.ids-mannheim.de>, last access: Feb 05, 2020].

objects, states-of-affairs and events as assessables, permitting a well-rounded investigation of this action type (Goodwin/Goodwin 1987; Couper-Kuhlen/Selting 2018). Candidate cases were identified auditorily from the recorded data; where possible, we corroborated our auditory impression with acoustic measurements. In a second step, we excluded cases if

- the assessment ended up being completed after some delay or was completed with sound objects or through embodied actions that were recognizable as ‘doing assessing’, since our focus is on assessments that are left incomplete;
- the TCU exhibited prosodic-phonetic features associated with cut-offs (i.e., truncation by bilabial or glottal closure), since this would suggest an immediate ‘abortion’ of the unit in question rather than a suspension<sup>10</sup> (Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks 1977; Jaspersen 2002);
- the TCU exhibited prosodic-phonetic and bodily-visual features associated with trail-offs (i.e., gradually decreasing loudness and tempo in combination with turn-final pitch and lax phonation), as these are commonly employed by speakers to suggest that they relinquish their right to the floor (Local/Kelly 1986; Walker 2012);
- speakers recognizably started a word-search in the relevant TCU (i.e., were ‘doing searching for a word’, see Lerner 2013, pp. 98–102; Goodwin/Goodwin 1986).

This procedure yielded a collection of 29 cases. We (re)transcribed relevant extracts according to the GAT 2 conventions for basic transcripts and notated the target TCUs as fine transcripts (Selting et al. 2009; see appendix to this book).<sup>11</sup> Our analyses follow the methodological principles of Conversation Analysis (e.g., Heritage 1984) and Interactional Linguistics (e.g., Couper-Kuhlen/Selting 2018). Even though at first glance suspended assessments appear to be a primarily verbal phenomenon, we follow Stivers/Sidnell (2005, p. 2) as well as Selting (2013, p. 590) in understanding face-to-face interaction as a multimodal event that can only be understood in full if all aspects of interactional conduct are investigated, and in which no modality is regarded as more important than others. Hence, we considered the “entire multisemiotic toolbox” (Pekarek Doehler 2018, p. 3), i.e., verbal, vocal and bodily-visual conduct, including gaze, gestures and body movements, in the analysis of our cases. As the GAT 2 conventions do not include recommendations for multimodal transcription, we used the GAT 1 conventions (Selting et al. 1998) for the notation of selected bodily-visual conduct, also to ensure that the transcripts remain easily accessible to the reader. What is more, we included still frames for a better holistic understanding of relevant moments in the interaction. In the transcripts, these are

<sup>10</sup> While suspended TCUs may be explicitly marked as abandoned in retrospect, this is only one possible outcome *after* a suspension. By using the term ‘suspension’ we aim to do justice to the on-line emergence of TCUs and to capture that particular moment in which participants locally *delay* the further progression of a unit-in-progress, rather than straightforwardly ‘aborting’ it.

<sup>11</sup> Since, by the nature of our phenomenon, the focal TCUs are suspended prior to a possible completion point, secondary accents within them (if any) indicate merely *relative* phonetic prominence. Our transcription cannot, and indeed is not intended to, be indicative of the potential status of these prominent syllables as focus or secondary accents.



referred to with an asterisk and the corresponding image number (e.g., \*1). The data are provided in German with an idiomatic English translation and interlinear glosses for the target line (see Selting et al. 2009, pp. 389f. for a list of glossing symbols).

#### 4 The composition of suspended assessments

While there naturally is some variability as regards their specific composition, the suspended assessments in our collection are characterized by a number of turn-design features that are relatively recurrent and stable. In this section, we will describe these common ‘formal’ features in more detail. For illustration, we will draw on a slightly expanded version of the example from the introduction to this paper, provided here again as extract 2. The expanded fragment actually contains two suspended assessments, which are to be found in lines 15 and 20, respectively. Both of them exhibit design features that are representative of the other cases in our collection.

##### Extract 2: PARTY MIT TUTOR (LoE\_VG\_03, 36:40–38:07 min)

- 14 Car: jemand den ich au gestern auf der PARTY getroffen hab,  
someone i also met at the party yesterday
- 15 → den ich einglich nIch `so: (0.2)  
*who-SG-M-ACC i actually not PTCL*  
whom i actually don't
- 16 |naJA-  
well
- 17 °h (der) (.) war schon von anfang an beim (.) beim  
RADio dabei,  
he was already involved in in the radio (thing) from the very start
- 18 ((click)) und der: war halt schon\_n Älteres semester,  
and well he was already somewhat older than us
- 19 Haj: [hm\_hm, ]
- 20 → Car: [ °h ] und war halt so\_n bis'sel: (0.2)  
*and be-3-SG-PRT PTCL PTCL a little*  
and well (he) was a little
- 21 (|also er) hat dafür GELD gekriegt,=  
(well he) got paid
- 22 =dass er uns die TECHnik erklärt;=  
for explaining the equipment to us
- 23 =im RAdiostudio (.) so.  
in the radio studio so

Besides obviously being lexico-syntactically incomplete, it can be noted that both of the suspended assessments (lines 15 and 20) are declaratively (rather than interrogatively) formatted, which is true for all the instances in our collection. Moreover, a number of cases feature subject ellipsis (see also line 20 above), which may have to do with the fact that, except for six cases, the suspended assessments in our collection are not produced in turn-initial position but later in the speaker's turn. In terms of their lexico-syntactic com-



position, it is remarkable that the vast majority of instances in our collection ( $n = 24$ ) feature hedging and/or some other form of modulation via modal adverbs, degree adverbs, modal particles or the like (e. g., *einglich*, *(nich) so*, *halt*, *so\_n bissel*). Quite regularly, these hedging forms are also the last elements the speaker produces prior to the suspension. Besides being potentially indicative of what the assessing term might have been if the speaker had gone on to produce it, they may also be decisive for hearing that an assessment has been in the making at all.

More importantly perhaps, the suspended assessments in our collection appear to be uniquely characterized by a distinct cluster of prosodic-phonetic features. As was mentioned earlier, they are generally designed in a way that auditorily makes them come off as ‘left hanging’ (see also Selting 2001, pp. 241, 243). This auditory impression results from a cluster of recurrent, locally produced and recognizable configurations concerning pitch, loudness and durational aspects of the suspended assessing TCUs.

In terms of pitch, the cases in our collection are characterized by relatively flat (level or globally falling) overall pitch contours and a lack of major pitch excursions at their suspended end. In other words, the intonation on the pre-suspension elements is neither strongly rising, nor falling and thus not audibly suggesting possible TCU-/turn-completion. Instead, the pitch on these last items (indicated in the transcripts by superscript GAT 2 intonation symbols) typically either remains level at, or is falling only very slightly to, about mid pitch range (see figures A and B for pitch traces of the two suspended assessments in extract 2 above).<sup>12</sup>

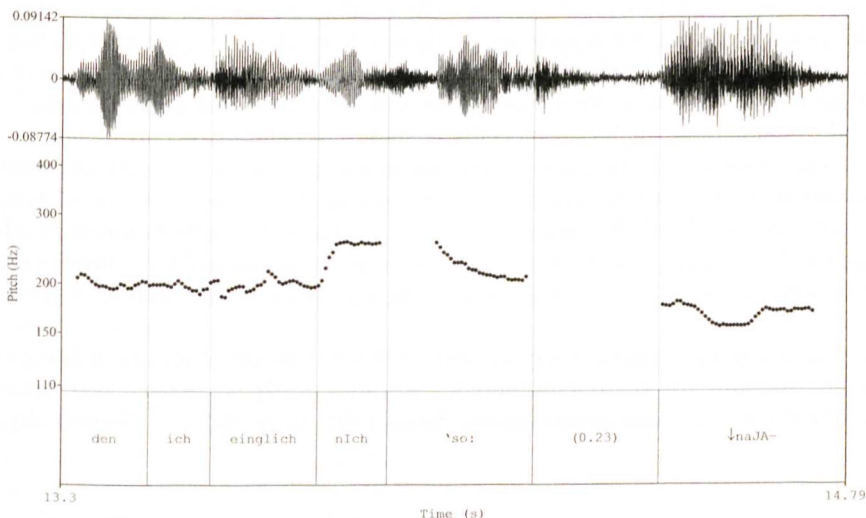


Figure A: Waveform and pitch trace for the suspended assessment in line 15

<sup>12</sup> Acoustically, the maximum pitch excursion on the pre-suspension element we could measure for the cases in our collection is 3 semitones (e. g., in line 15 of the extract above). Overall, however, the vast majority of instances that feature a slightly falling pitch movement on the pre-suspension element in our collection exhibit pitch excursions of less than 2 semitones.

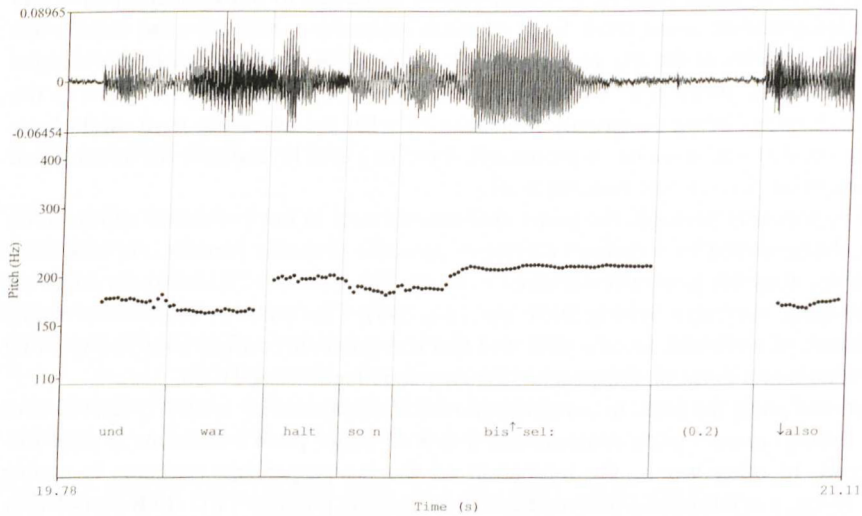


Figure B: Waveform and pitch trace for the suspended assessment in line 20

Similarly, there is no noticeable drop-off in volume over the course of the suspended TCUs. Acoustically, this is reflected in the fact that – where measurable – the mean intensity of the pre-suspension element is typically roughly the same as the mean intensity of the entire TCU (see the waveforms in figures A and B).<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that there is no straightforward relationship between perceived loudness and intensity (Hewlett/Beck 2006), and that, for various other reasons, loudness is generally a difficult prosodic parameter to analyze, especially in studies of naturally occurring talk-in-interaction (Szczepek Reed 2011, p. 180), this appears to go against a general tendency for a decrease in loudness (*diminuendo*) to occur towards the end of utterances (Laver 1994, p. 505; see also Barth-Weingarten 2016, p. 129 for similar observations based on interactional materials). We therefore take it as supporting our auditory impression that maintenance of the TCU's overall loudness is a prosodic design feature of these suspensions.

Turning to durational aspects, it is quite obvious that a constitutive feature of doing a recognizable suspension is that one or more lexico-syntactically projectable next items are *not* said and a pause or gap ensues instead (Sacks 1995, II, pp. 429 f.).<sup>14</sup> Phonetically,

<sup>13</sup> The phrasing as ‘roughly the same’ is intended to capture the fact that minor variations in the mean intensity of the pre-suspension elements relative to the mean intensity of the entire TCUs that they are part of are measurable (increases or decreases of up to 4 dB). These variations appear to be attributable to the segmental composition and/or the metrical status of the pre-suspension elements (stressed vs. unstressed, accented vs. unaccented) relative to the metrical composition of the TCU as a whole (e.g., the strength of any preceding accented syllables).

<sup>14</sup> Theoretically, these terms are not interchangeable, as they carry different implications in terms of turn-ownership (see Sacks/Schegloff/Jefferson 1974, p. 715, esp. fn. 26), but for simplicity's sake, we will refer to them as post-suspension gaps or just gaps in the following.

this gap may consist of silence, audible in-/outbreaths or a combination of these. The length of these post-suspension gaps varies from micropauses of less than 0.2 seconds at the lower end of the spectrum to ones that last for up to 1.2 seconds at its higher end (the longer gaps typically involve a combination of silence and audible breathing). A second recurrent durational feature of our cases appears to be that the pre-suspension items are audibly lengthened. The *so* in line 15, for instance, is 277 milliseconds long and the *bissel* in line 20 is 375 milliseconds long, primarily because the final lateral /l/ is noticeably lengthened. By way of comparison, in similar utterances from surrounding talk, Carina produces the same lexical items in a much shorter amount of time (see table 1 for an overview).

TCU	Absolute duration of the boldfaced item	Tempo of the boldfaced item	Tempo of the entire TCU
<i>den ich einglich n<b>Ich so</b>:</i>	277 ms	3.6 syll./sec	6.7 syll./sec
<i>die_ich N<b>ICH so</b> spannend fand;</i>	129 ms	7.8 syll./sec	5.2 syll./sec
<i>und war halt so_n <b>bissel</b>:</i>	375 ms	5.3 syll./sec	7.9 syll./sec
<i>und der kam_mer <b>bissel</b> arroGANT,</i>	141 ms	14 syll./sec	7.0 syll./sec

Table 1: Absolute duration of the pre-suspension elements in extract 2 and the same lexical items in comparable TCUs produced by Carina in surrounding talk, as well as their tempo (measured as speech rate in syllables per second) vis-à-vis the tempo of the entire TCU that these items are part of, including the bold-faced items

The table shows that the target items are not only considerably longer in the suspended assessments than they are in comparable non-suspended assessing TCUs in absolute terms, it also highlights that these items are produced at a slower relative tempo than the entire TCU of which they are a part if they act as pre-suspension elements in suspended assessments. As the two rightmost columns of the table show, the opposite relationship holds for the two non-suspended assessing TCUs, where these items are produced at a faster pace than the entire TCU to which they belong. This suggests that audibly lengthening the pre-suspension element is another design feature of doing a recognizable suspension. Moreover, it regularly results in a slower tempo of the suspended assessment as a whole relative to prior talk from the same speaker.<sup>15</sup> This decrease in tempo is then, of course, further reinforced by the gap following the suspension.

These prosodic-phonetic characteristics render the suspended assessments in our collection audibly distinct from both cut-offs and trail-offs. Moreover, as was men-

<sup>15</sup> In terms of speech rate, this decrease in tempo typically involves a drop-off of 1–2 syllables per second relative to the immediately preceding TCU. Line 14 in extract 2, for instance, is produced with a speech rate of 8.8 syllables per second, which then drops to 6.7 syllables per second during the suspended assessment in line 15.



tioned earlier, the assessments are generally not only momentarily, but indefinitely suspended by the speaker. In other words, they are not resumed after the suspension and the post-suspension gap. Instead, speakers typically either explicitly mark their abandonment in retrospect (as Carina does with *naja* in line 16 above), or they simply launch a new TCU, which is commonly accompanied by a pitch reset (i. e., an up- or downstep in pitch).

Now it may be argued that the prosodic-phonetic design of the suspended assessments may therefore be seen to cue turn-holding, i. e., to project same-speaker continuation post the suspended TCU (Selting 2001, pp. 248 f.; Barth-Weingarten 2016). However, it is not the case that the speaker who produces the suspended assessment invariably continues. There are several instances in our collection in which the suspended assessment ends up being the sole or final TCU of a turn and speaker change ensues. As extract 3 illustrates, when it occurs, such speaker change generally appears to be unproblematic (i. e., it does not lead to overlap or competition for the floor, as we would expect if there were divergent orientations to the turn-taking implications of Franz's suspended assessment turn in line 07).

Extract 3: OSTBAHNHOF (LoE\_VG\_03, 02:06–02:14 min)

- 01 Car: und ihr wart SEHR <<nasal> betrunken.>  
and you (guys) were really drunk
- 02 Fra: °h A[::] [CH; ]  
oh
- 03 Haj: [nja ich WEIß nich;=]  
well i don't know
- 04 [so sch]limm WAR\_S einklich  
gar nich.  
it wasn't actually all that bad
- 05 Fra: °h aber da am OSTbahnho[f=]  
but there at ostbahnhof station
- 06 Haj: [(xx) [x] ]
- 07 → Fra: [de]s war schon:  
that be-3-SG-PRT PTCL  
that was quite  
(0.2)
- 08 Haj: da ham wir uns mehr eingeredet als dass wir\_s  
wirklich WÄren;  
we talked ourselves into believing that we were more (drunk) than we actually  
were then

As far as bodily-visual features are concerned, we could not identify any recurrent changes in gaze, facial expression, gesture or posture around or during the suspended assessments, neither on the part of the speakers nor on the part of their co-participants. Yet, one aspect of this rather inconspicuous or unchanging bodily-visual behavior appears to constitute a design feature of suspended assessments in its own right: In nearly all of our cases, the current speakers do not change their gaze direction before, during and often even after the suspended assessments. The same holds for their recipi-

ents, who show no marked bodily-visual reactions to the suspension. This is in stark contrast to the participants' gaze behavior during word searches (Goodwin/Goodwin 1986; Dressel 2020), for instance.

In this regard, it bears mention that the progressivity-halting features of our suspended assessments could also be taken to suggest that we are simply dealing with some kind of self-initiated repair (Schegloff/Jefferson/Sacks 1977). Specifically, it could be maintained that the identified prosodic-phonetic design features ('hanging pitch' at sustained volume, lengthening, pauses) resemble turn-design practices employed in hesitating and in word searches (see, e. g., Lerner 2013; Goodwin/Goodwin 1986). However, the suspended assessments in our collection generally lack other hallmark features of searches (such as *uh(m)s*, other search markers like German *na*, clicks, gaze withdrawals and the so-called 'thinking face'; see Pfeiffer 2017; Wright 2005; Goodwin/Goodwin 1986). Moreover, the sequential analyses suggest that, while in some of our cases the assessments appear to be suspended for reasons that are functionally similar to, or border on, searches (see section 5.1), other interactional concerns may play a more important role when assessments are suspended in the particular manner described in this paper.

## 5 Interactional deployments of suspended assessments

While all of the 29 instances of suspended assessments in our collection share the distinct cluster of turn-design features outlined above,<sup>16</sup> their production appears to be informed by a specifiable range of different, yet recurrent interactional contingencies. In a very general sense, and corroborating findings from prior research, all of our cases are alike in that the assessments in question are somewhat 'problematic'. But this notion can be unpacked further if we pay close attention to the specific sequential environments in which they occur. On the one hand, we find cases in which the suspension appears to be a way of dealing with the fact that there is no single adequate assessing term to complete the assessing TCU-in-progress (see section 5.1). On the other hand, and much more commonly, assessments are suspended if the assessment underway is somehow interactionally inapposite. This inappositeness can either be rooted in the openly disaffiliative (see section 5.2) or unnecessarily insistent character of the assessment-in-progress (see section 5.3), or in its inconsistent relationship to an earlier stance-taking by the same speaker (see section 5.4). It may also pertain to the speaker's lack of (full) entitlement to make the assessment (see section 5.5) as well as to potential sequential and interactional problems deriving from the assessment's contextually inexpedient complaint-implicativeness (see section 5.6). The examples discussed below are representative of these six recurrent uses within our collection. It is important to note, however, that these usage types are not necessarily mutually exclusive and that some of our cases can be seen to oscillate between them. We will therefore abstain from offering formal quantifications (Schegloff 1993).

<sup>16</sup> In the interest of conciseness, we will therefore refrain from reproducing the prosodic-phonetic analyses for each case.

## 5.1 Managing the lack of a single adequate assessing term

To begin with, let us consider a case that is similar to a word search in the sense that the current speaker seems to be lacking a lexical item. In contrast to prototypical word searches, however, the assessing TCU appears to be suspended to deal with the general *unavailability* of a single adequate assessing term rather than with momentary difficulties in *recalling* or *retrieving* a relevant descriptor. This is illustrated by the following extract, which is taken from a dinner-table conversation between Gero (Ger) and a befriended couple, Norbert (Nor) and Zoe (Zoe). The conversation has been revolving around Gero's love life and his secret high-school love Julia. In what follows, Gero launches a telling about Julia and their former math and physics teacher.

Extract 4: QUEREINSTEIGER (IDS, DGD, FOLK\_E\_00293, 50:29–51:03 min)

- 01 Ger: (unser) (.) wir hatten (.) (der war) (.) damals  
(our) we had (he was) back then
- 02 Zoe: hm;
- 03 Ger: (wir\_m) s:\_is (ne) sehr (lustige geschicht die)  
mir n bisschen ANGST macht;  
(we) this is a very funny story that also frightens me a little
- 04 (0.2)
- 05 Ger: °hh ((click)) wir hatten damals n LEHrer, (0.2)  
back then we had a teacher
- 06 der war (sch) QUEREinsteiger;=  
he was a career changer
- 07 =der war (0.5) doktor der phySIK, (0.2)  
he held a doctorate in physics
- 08 in der induSTRIE,  
(and worked) in an industrial firm
- 09 (0.6)
- 10 Ger: die firma:  
the company
- 11 wurd halt entLAS[sen, ]  
well (he) was dismissed
- 12 Nor: [was H]EISST in der  
industrie;  
what do you mean in an industrial firm
- 13 Ger: ((click)) ah (d)er war (im/in der) induSTRIE;  
uh he held a corporate position
- 14 Nor: <<with full mouth> achSO;>  
oh okay
- 15 Ger: un wie wi  
and when w(e)
- 16 un hat dann: °h quereinsteiger LEHrer gemacht;  
and then (he) changed his career and became a teacher



- 17 phy[SIK und math]e;  
physics and math
- 18 Nor: [hm\_hm, ]  
19 (0.7)
- 20 Ger: in: (1.0)  
in  
21 (un) wie wir genau in die ELFte kamen,  
(and) when we just started eleventh (grade)  
22 kam der bei uns an die SCHule;=  
he came to our school
- 23 Zoe: [~hm, ]
- 24 → Ger: [=und der war halt s]o (n)  
and DEM-SG-M-NOM be-3-SG-PRT PTCL PTCL a  
↑`bIsschen °h (.)  
little  
and well he was a little  
| \_\_\_\_\_ |  
| |  
Ger slightly turns his head and looks away from Zoe  
Zoe looks down, Nor focuses on the fondue pot
- 25 du hast halt gemerkt des is\_n PHYsiker- (0.2)  
well you could clearly tell that he is a physicist
- 26 und (0.2) (dass eben/dass ihm) die pä[dagogischen ]  
and (that due to that/that he lacked) the pedagogical
- 27 Nor: [so\_n stephan]  
a stephan
- 28 Ger: ? (.) (eher/er) ja: so weißt du sehr sehr  
LIEbevoll,  
(kind of/he) yes well you know very very affectionate
- 29 s:\_fachlich sehr (.) kompetENT,  
very competent in terms of his domain of expertise
- 30 (3.0)
- 31 Ger: aber\_s: ? ?  
but it  
32 der konnt halt (.) des net (.) mit KINdern;=  
well he was not really able to (deal) with children  
33 =des hat er net jehABT;  
he did not have that (type of skill)

After restarting several times and framing his story as both funny and scary (line 03), Gero introduces the story's protagonist, the aforementioned teacher (line 05). He categorizes him as a 'career changer' (*quereinsteiger*, line 06) and goes on to explain that he had a doctoral degree in physics and used to work for an industrial firm before he lost his job there (lines 07–11). Following an insert sequence initiated by Norbert's request for clarification (lines 12–14), Gero concludes his report of how the protagonist's career path

brought him to their school (lines 15–22). In line 24, in partial overlap with Zoe's continuer (line 23), Gero then begins to assess the teacher but suspends the incipient assessment prior to the provision of the relevantly due assessing term. Instead, he provides a possible paraphrase of the assessment by categorizing the teacher as *n physiker* (line 25) and projectably commenting on his pedagogical skills (line 26). At this point, however, Norbert interrupts him by offering a candidate gloss (e.g., Jefferson 1985; Depermann 2011) for what Gero might have been trying to convey (*so\_n stephan*, line 27). In providing this ad-hoc categorical reference to a mutual acquaintance, Norbert orients to Gero's trouble in finding a concise, conventionally established assessing term to characterize the teacher, while treating his suspended assessment as sufficiently understood and paving the way for Gero to continue his telling. Yet, Gero seems reluctant to embrace Norbert's candidate gloss as a perfect match: After producing a qualified acceptance in line 28, he continues with yet another elaborate description of the teacher as a very caring and professionally qualified person (lines 28–29) who was just not good with children (lines 32–33).

Although the above case and other cases like it in our collection bear some resemblance to word searches, they differ from them in that speakers typically do not suspend the assessment-in-progress due to problems in retrieving or recalling an adequate assessing term, but rather because there appears to be no succinct way of expressing what they mean to say. As can be seen in the present case, the suspended assessment is neither designed like nor treated as a request for completion or other-repair (Goodwin/Goodwin 1986, pp. 54–57). Gero's subsequent attempts at paraphrasing the complex notions involved in assessing the teacher provide further evidence that the suspension is employed to deal with a general inability to express the assessment in a concise way rather than to retrieve a currently unavailable assessing term.

## 5.2 Avoiding open disaffiliation

Current speakers may also suspend the ongoing production of assessing TCUs that projectably go against a stance previously taken by (one of) their co-participants, so as to avoid open disaffiliation (Stivers 2008). In fact, this represents the most common usage pattern in our collection, and it is illustrated by the following extract from a conversation between two friends. Jörgen (Jör) is in the process of recounting the storyline of 'Angry White Pyjamas', a book he is currently reading, to Fabiola (Fab).

### Extract 5.1: AIKIDO FÜR DIE MÄNNER (LoE\_VG\_05, 20:23–20:54 min)

- 01 Jör: und irgendwann beschließen sie dann  
wir machen jetzt aikido.  
and at some point they decide let's do aikido from now on
- 02 ja, =  
yes
- 03 =°h (.) u:nd  
and  
| \_\_\_\_\_ |  
|  
Fab rolls her eyes

- 04 mo: [ME:NT; ]  
wait a second
- 05 Fab: [ °hh ] <<:-)> was JEder ma:cht=->  
which is done by everyone
- 06 (-)
- 07 Jör: ††`NE:[IN; ]  
no
- 08 Fab: [aikid]o  
aikido
- 09 (-)
- 10 Fab: [ja o]KAY;  
yeah okay
- 11 Jör: [(xxx)]
- 12 Fab: sie ma[chen aiKIdo; ]  
they do aikido
- 13 Jör: [wer macht denn:]  
who actually does  
wer macht von deinen leuten aiKIdo;=  
who out of your group (of friends) does aikido
- 14 =also von UNS-  
that is who out of us
- 15 Fab: OSkar macht aikido=-  
oskar does aikido
- 16 → =<<all> aikIdo is für mIch immer so  
aikido be-3-SG-PRS for i-ACC always PTCL  
-der>\_°hh  
the-SG-M-NOM  
for me aikido has always been like this
- 17 es gib:t qi gong und tai CHI'1:?  
there are qi gong and tai chi
- 18 <<:-)> für die '2FRAU:en?>  
for the women  
| \_\_\_\_\_ |  
|  
Jör and Fab establish eye contact



Images 1 and 2: Jör and Fab establish eye contact



19 <<:-)> und dann kommt aikido für die MÄNner-><sup>3</sup>=  
and then there is aikido for the guys

Jör and Fab establish a lasting exchange of smiles



Images 2 and 3: Jör and Fab establish a lasting exchange of smiles

20 =<<:-)> die eigentlich nich viel MÄchen wollen;=>  
who don't really want to do that much

At the beginning of extract 5.1, Jörgen states that the protagonists of ‘Angry White Pyjamas’ are doing aikido. This leads Fabiola to display her dislike of aikido – first visually (see her eyeroll in line 03) and then verbally (see the negatively valenced categorization of aikido as a mainstream sport in line 05). Jörgen rejects Fabiola’s negative assessment of aikido, slightly affronted, with a prosodically marked (Selting 1994) negative response token (line 07) and, while she already orients back to the story (lines 10 and 12), asks her to substantiate her claim that everybody does aikido (line 13). In response to Jörgen’s challenging question, Fabiola names only one aikidoka friend (line 15) and then continues by accounting for her negative stance towards aikido: In line 16, she launches an assessing TCU which is set up to offer another negatively valenced, albeit slightly subjectivized (see *für mich*) categorization of the sport. But instead of assessing aikido negatively once again in a context in which Jörgen has already refused to go along, Fabiola suspends the assessment just before the production of the categorical noun (e.g., *Luschensport*, ‘sport for sissies’) and opts to feel her way more cautiously: In an incremental production, she presents different martial arts on a cline from least to most demanding, lists aikido right next to the allegedly least demanding forms and, in a jocular tone (note her smile voice), portrays male aikidokas as unwilling to do much (lines 17–20). Notably, she only brings her negative assessment of aikido and its practitioners to completion after establishing mutual gaze with Jörgen (see images 1 and 2) and engaging him in a lasting exchange of smiles (see images 2 and 3), i.e., in a context in which her move does not come across quite as disaffiliative as before. By suspending the assessing TCU in line 16, Fabiola thus manages to avoid outright disaffiliation with her co-participant’s stance.

As mentioned above, the suspension of potentially disaffiliative assessments recurs quite regularly in our collection. Typically, the speakers of the suspended assessment subsequently end up backing down from their projected stance to a certain degree or abandon the activity of stance-taking altogether. In the above case, the activity of stance-taking is continued, however, and the co-participants are maintaining their contrary stances. As we will show in the next section, this is another context that may occasion the production of suspended assessments.

### 5.3 Avoiding unnecessary insisting

Less regularly, we find the suspension of assessments which might come off as doing ‘unnecessary insisting’ on a stance and/or course of action, in that they can be perceived as redundant in their local sequential contexts. An instance of this can be found in the continuation of extract 5.1 (see section 5.2). Recall that Fabiola (Fab) has just taken a negative stance towards aikido for a second time after Jörgen (Jör), who rejected her first negative assessment of the sport, showed non-verbal signs of incipient affiliation.

Extract 5.2: AIKIDO FÜR DIE MÄNNER (LoE\_VG\_05, 20:23–20:54 min)

- 19 Fab: <<:-)> und dann kommt aikido für die MÄNner->=  
and then there is aikido for the guys
- 20 =<<:-)> die eigentlich nich viel MACHen wollen;>=  
who don't really want to do that much
- 21 → =<<:-)> †<sup>4</sup>also die <sup>-Eigentli:ch<sup>5</sup></sup> (0.4)<sup>\*6</sup>  
*PTCL who-PL-NOM actually*  
that is the ones who actually

|\_\_\_\_\_||  
|  
Jör sits up and pokes his head forward slightly;  
he maintains mutual gaze with Fab, holding a  
frozen smile



Images 4–6: Jör sits up and pokes his head forward slightly, holding a frozen smile while maintaining mutual gaze with Fab

- 22 Fab: °h <<f> †aber ich (tw/(xxx)) [(glaube schon)]  
but i ( ) actually (do think)  
|\_||\_\_\_\_\_||  
|  
Fab's smile fades away Fab averts her gaze
- 23 Jör: [des kommt ]  
drauf an in welchem DO[jo du bist; °h ]  
it depends on the dojo in which you are (training)
- 24 Fab: [ja::-=ich glaub schon]on dass  
es auch KRASS is;=  
yes i actually believe that it is pretty challenging





- 03 Bir:  $\sim$ h[m:::,]  
hm
- 04 Hei: [°hh ] die sind da nicht drauf ANgewiesen;  
it's not like they depend on it
- 05 (-)
- 06 Hei: muss (noch/auch) meine BAHNcard unbedingt kündigen;  
(i) (also) really have to cancel my discount railcard
- 07 seh ich auch nicht mehr EIN-  
i don't see the sense of (paying for) that anymore
- 08 die sind ja so TEUer;  
after all they are so expensive
- 09 (0.9) ((Bir nods her head slightly))
- 10 Hei: fahr ich lieber auch mit der MITfahrgelegenheit  
s nächste \*mal-  
so i'd rather also go for carpooling next time
- 11 Bir: [ja;]  
yes  
Hei narrows her eyes
- 12 → Hei: <<f, len> wo\*<sup>8</sup>bei [zUg] fahren Is  
PTCL train travel-INF BE-3-SG-PRS  
~schon:\*<sup>9</sup>> (0.1)  
PTCL  
on the other hand taking the train is actually
- and sways her head slightly



Images 7–9: Hei narrows her eyes and sways her head slightly

- 13 Han: [ $\sim$ hm, ]  
|\_\_\_\_\_|  
|  
Han nods her head
- 14 Hei: [ °h ] 'ich hab das ja jetzt gemerkt für  
montachA[bend wie gesagt==]  
like i said i've just recently had that experience for monday evenings

- 15 Han: [is schon COoler;=] [ne, ]  
it's a bit cooler (than carpooling) isn't it
- 16 Hei: [=weil ich] ja  
auch dienstags morgens Uni hab und so;=  
since i have to attend uni on tuesday mornings and everything
- 17 =und dann wollt ich am montagabend nach HAUse==  
and i wanted to (go) home on monday evening
- 18 =°h hab ich ECHT gedacht;=  
i actually thought
- 19 =boah;=bevor ich mir jetzt ne mitfahrgelegenheit  
suche und irgendwann hier EINtru:del,  
jeez rather than trying to find a ride and getting here at any which time
- 20 (0.5)
- 21 mich echt zwei stunden in\_n ZUCH gesetzt==  
(i) took the train for like two hours
- 22 =war schon sehr ANgene:hm,  
(it) really was quite comfortable

In extract 6, Heike first goes on record with a negative stance towards the German railway company, stating that they are expensive (line 08) and that she will likely opt for a different means of travel, namely carpooling, in the future (line 10). Notably, this does not get any affiliative uptake from Heike's co-participants: While Hanna merely looks at her, Birte offers a non-committal head nod (line 09) and a slightly delayed acknowledgement token (*ja*, line 11). In line 12, Heike then launches to assess traveling by train more generally. This assessment is contextualized as concessive both on the lexical (see the connector *wobei* and the modal particle *schon*) and the bodily-visual level (see her narrowed eyes and head sway, images 7–9). It is thus projectably of positive valence. This also becomes evident in Hanna's treatment of Heike's TCU-in-progress as a positive assessment: She now affiliates with Heike by producing an agreement token (*hm*, line 13), nodding knowingly and offering an approving second assessment (line 15).<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, however, Heike has already suspended her assessing TCU and, instead of openly backpedaling from her previous stance, continued by outlining the benefits of traveling by train with reference to her last travel experience with the German railway company. By assessing this specific past trip as pleasant (see the past tense on the copula verb in line 22) rather than offering a generic positive assessment of train journeys (see the present tense on the copula verb in line 12), Heike ultimately circumvents outright self-contradiction while still getting Hanna on board to affiliate.

While in this case the backpedaling seems to be triggered by a lack of affiliation from the co-participants, this aspect is not constitutive for the suspension of potentially self-contradictory assessments as such. Accordingly, this usage type also includes instances in

<sup>17</sup> Note that Hanna's contribution is neither delivered nor designed as a candidate completion: It is delayed rather than produced in close temporal proximity, and it is formatted as an independent clause with a question tag rather than as a try-marked syntactic continuation of the suspended assessment.

which a current speaker takes a self-contradictory stance without having been faced with disaffiliation.

### 5.5 Managing a lack of (full) entitlement to assess

In a couple of instances in the collection, we also found that current speakers may suspend an ongoing TCU in order to avoid producing an assessment that they are not (fully) entitled to make – for instance because another co-participant is more entitled to make it or because providing the assessment would effectively entail speaking on somebody else's behalf. Extract 7, taken from a rehearsal session of a university theatre group,<sup>18</sup> is a case in point. The group is in the process of reading different scenes from their next play and has just finished going through a couple of scenes in which Bjarne (Bja) and Justus (Jus) play the central characters: Klaus and the *Nachtwächter* ('nightwatchman'), respectively. At the beginning of the excerpt, Mila (Mil), one of the directors, introduces the structure she envisages for the remainder of the rehearsal session: Readings of scenes should alternate with phases of discussion (lines 01–09). In particular, she proposes to focus on how the actors interpret their own characters' relationships to the others, so that afterwards, the results of that discussion can be brought to bear on subsequent readings of the relevant scenes (lines 10–11).

Extract 7: KLAUS UND NACHTWÄCHTER (IDS, DGD, FOLK\_E\_00330, 24:28–25:11 min)

- 01 Mil: °hh ich würde jetzt (0.2)  
now i would
- 02 ((clears throat)) also ich würd\_s (immer) SO machen,=  
well (from now on) i would do it like this
- 03 =wir LEsen die einmal,  
we read them (the scenes) once
- 04 (0.2)
- 05 Mil: ((click)) und dann ähm: (0.3) [SPREchen ] wir
- 06 Jus: [((clears throat))]  
Mil: nochmal drüber,=  
and then uhm we talk about it once again
- 07 =vielleicht auch über: (.) °h (beZIEHungen)-=  
maybe even about relationships
- 08 =was ihr euch auch VORgestellt habt,  
what you had in mind
- 09 wie ihr zu den ANderen personen zum beispiel jetzt in  
dieser szene steht,  
for instance what your stance is toward the other people in this scene

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted here that the group seems to be organized in a fairly non-hierarchical way. While the two directors appear to be responsible for the allocation of turns, the interaction between the participants remains rather informal throughout the recording.



- 10 °h und dann würd ich\_s auf jeden fall NOCH mal lesen-  
and then i would definitely read it another time
- 11 (0.3) un: vielleicht die ähm: (1.0) die erGEBnisse da  
reinarbeiten.  
and maybe the uhm implement the results into it
- 12 (0.8)
- 13 Mil: JA;  
right
- 14 (0.5)
- 15 Mil: äh KLAUS und NACHTwächter?  
uh klaus and nightwatchman
- 16 (0.2) ((Mil looks at Jus, Jus looks at his bottle))
- 17 Mil: was meint ihr zu eurem verHÄLTnis,  
what are your thoughts on your relationship  
| \_\_\_\_\_ |  
|  
Mil looks at Jus, Jus plays with the label of his bottle
- 18 Bja: ((bumps fists together, ca. 3[.0 sec.] )  
| \_\_\_\_\_ |  
|  
Jus looks up at Bja, Bja and Mil direct their gaze at Jus
- 19 → Jus: [ja halt schOn: ]  
PTCL PTCL PTCL  
(0.3) well (it's) actually quite
- 20 Raf: [<<laughing> ja halt SCHON;>]  
well (it's) actually quite
- 21 Jus: [ also wir sind wir si][nd halt ]  
well we are we are just
- 22 Ama: [<<:-)> heiß u]nd  
INnig;>  
close and intimate
- 23 Jus: <<:-)> also: (0.2) ja heiß und INnig;=ne:->  
well yeah close and intimate right
- 24 (also:: ö:hm)  
(well uhm)
- 25 (1.2)
- 26 Jus: ja der klaus:\_is halt so der die verkörperung von dem  
was so SCHIEF läuft in krähwinkel für mich;  
well klaus is like the embodiment of everything going wrong in krähwinkel for me
- 27 (0.2)
- 28 Bja: der nachtwächter ist die verkörperung von dem was so  
schief läuft in kräh[winkel für <<laughing>  
MICH;>\_(laughs)]  
the nightwatchman is the embodiment of everything going wrong in krähwinkel  
for me

In lines 15 and 17, Mila requests Justus and Bjarne to assess their characters' relationship to each other. Notably, she addresses both actors verbally at the beginning of her request (*klaus und nachtwächter*, line 15), but only directs her gaze at Justus (lines 16–17), thus clearly selecting him as next speaker or first to respond. Indeed, Bjarne can be seen to orient to this: Even though he immediately starts bumping his fists together, thereby clearly displaying an ability to provide a – projectably negative – assessment, he leaves the floor to Justus. In contrast to Bjarne, Justus displays his reluctance to respond first: As Mila addresses him with his character's name and directs her gaze at him, he quickly looks down at his beer bottle and begins to pick at its label (lines 16–17). It is only after Justus looks up at Bjarne to see his embodied conduct, and after Mila and Bjarne both return their gaze to him, reinforcing Mila's previous speaker selection (line 18), that Justus ultimately begins to produce the requested assessment (line 19). Yet, he suspends his assessing TCU prior to producing what would likely have been a negatively valenced adjective phrase. So while his turn-so-far does create a general sense of an upcoming negative assessment (one that is in accordance with Bjarne's embodied conduct), Justus does not provide a full-fledged response which would entail claiming access to Bjarne's interpretation and speaking on his behalf.

In the present case, suspending the assessment-in-progress allows Justus to deal with two concurrent interactional relevancies: While he has clearly been selected to speak next, he is not (fully) entitled to carry out the action made relevant by Mila's request for assessment. Note that by using plural forms (*meint ihr, eurem*) in designing her request, Mila effectively asked for a collective assessment of the relationship between both characters.<sup>19</sup> In order to provide an adequate response, the next speaker would thus have to take both actors' interpretations into account. In light of these contingencies, Justus opts to resist the agenda of Mila's request (Stivers/Hayashi 2010) by leaving his assessment of their characters' relationship to each other unfinished. Instead, he sets out to describe their relationship (line 21), but is interrupted by another student's jocular candidate completion of his suspended TCU (line 22), which he takes up, reissuing it as a non-serious, co-authored response in line 23 (note the smile voice). It is only in line 26, then, that Justus eventually launches a response that is designed to be recognizably serious. Notably, he provides only his own, subjective interpretation of his character's feelings towards Klaus, without making any reference to Bjarne's possible take on the matter.

While the case presented above may be particular in that the suspended assessment is actually made relevant as a second pair part to a request for an assessment in combination with local issues of next-speaker selection, other suspended assessments of this sort are no less concerned with issues of entitlement to assess.

<sup>19</sup> That the participants understand this as the point of the request is nicely displayed by Bjarne's embodied conduct. Instead of punching his palm, which would serve well to indicate his character's attitude towards the *Nachtwächter*, he bumps his fists against each other – one fist for each character, iconically symbolizing an antagonistic relationship toward each other rather than a one-sided stance.

## 5.6 Managing potentially inapposite complaint-implicative assessments

Finally, there are a number of cases in our collection in which the suspended TCUs clearly project negative assessments of third parties or their doings and are therefore hearable as implicating and/or prefiguring complaints (Schegloff 1988, 2005; Drew 1998). Certain interactional and contextual circumstances may, however, render such complaint-implicative assessments inapposite, and suspending them serves as a viable practice for dealing with their potential inappositeness.

To illustrate the rather complex interactional and contextual contingencies that may inform the production of such suspended complaint-implicative assessments, let us return to the fragment which led to our initial noticing of the phenomenon (see section 1). In this particular case, two assessing TCUs that recognizably work towards a complaint appear to be problematic because they occur as part of a larger telling in which a relationship between the assessable and one of the co-participants has been established. Just prior to the excerpt, which is now reproduced at full length, Hajo (Haj) recited a song by a German pop-rock band which features a character who goes by the same name as, and behaves in ways similar to, his seatmate Franz (Fra). Hajo has then commented on the funny coincidence that the same band also has a song about a character who shares his name. In what follows, Carina (Car) comes up with a relevant 'second story' (Sacks 1995, I, pp. 764–772, *et passim*) to Hajo's remark.

## Extract 8.1: PARTY MIT TUTOR (LoE\_VG\_03, 36:40–38:07 min)

- 01 Car: was hatte ich denn (grad gestern) mit HAjo:-  
what was that thing I had (just yesterday) with hajo
- 02 (0.4)
- 03 Haj: hm,
- 04 (2.2)
- 05 Car: SCHEIße;  
shit
- 06 (0.2)
- 07 Haj: hm,
- 08 Car: °h nee ich hatte gestern OUCH irgendso\_n: lustiges  
wortspiel;  
no yesterday there was another one of these funny puns
- 09 (0.3)
- 10 Haj: <<with full mouth> (achSO:/aHA;)>  
(i see / oh)
- 11 <<with full mouth> mit HAjo,>  
with hajo
- 12 Car: ACH;  
oh right
- 13 (0.7) ((Car snaps her fingers, then pats her thigh))



- 14 Car: jemand den ich au gestern auf der PARTy getroffen  
hab,  
someone i also met at the party yesterday
- 15 → den ich einglich nIch `so: (0.2)  
who-SG-M-ACC i actually not PTCL  
whom i actually don't
- 16 |naJA-  
well
- 17 °h (der) (.) war schon von anfang an beim (.) beim  
RAdio dabei,  
he was already involved in in the radio (thing) from the very start
- 18 ((click)) und der: war halt schon\_n ÄLteres semester,  
and well he was already somewhat older than us
- 19 Haj: [hm\_hm,]
- 20 → Car: [ °h ] und war halt so\_n bis;sel: (0.2)  
and be-3-SG-PRT PTCL PTCL a little  
and well (he) was a little
- 21 (|also er) hat dafür GELD gekriegt,=  
(well he) got paid
- 22 =dass er uns die TECHnik erklärt;=  
for explaining the equipment to us
- 23 =im RAdiostudio (.) so.  
in the radio studio so

From the outset, Carina's story is framed as revolving around another funny 'wordplay' involving Hajo's name (lines 1 and 8, see the co-categorization with *ooch irgendso\_n lustiges wortspiel*). This framing, especially in light of Hajo's preceding remark, to which Carina's story is responsive, allows Hajo to monitor the projected story for possible similarities between him and the story's protagonist. As Carina moves into the telling (lines 14–23), she first introduces the protagonist of her story, her former tutor, using non-recognitional person references and descriptions (lines 14 and 17–18, Sacks/Schegloff 1979; Schegloff 1996). With the use of the generic reference form *jemand* ('someone', line 14), this introduction is carefully crafted so as to not give away the protagonist's name (Whitehead/Lerner 2020, pp. 54f.), which further contributes to prefiguring the nature of the story's point: That there is some form of namesake relationship between Hajo and the protagonist. As part of that introduction, Carina then launches two projectably negative assessments of her former tutor (lines 15 and 20), both of which she suspends, however, continuing with factual descriptions instead (lines 17–18 and 21–23). Carina's suspended assessments are complaint-implicative in that they are clearly hearable as conveying her critical stance towards the protagonist. At this point in her story, however, segueing into a complaint is potentially problematic, given that Hajo is likely to monitor the story for possible associations between him and his projected namesake. Conceivably, Carina is aware of this possibility and suspends the two assessments prior

to their completion so as to avoid going fully on-record with negative assessments of Hajo's namesake, which Hajo could end up taking unfavorably. Although she subsequently does move into a complaint about her tutor (data not shown), this complaint is primarily constructed around his condescending teaching style rather than his personality and is retroactively framed as a mere aside when she resumes her actual story and progresses it to its projected climax.

Extract 8.2: PARTY MIT TUTOR (LoE\_VG\_03, 36:40–38:07 min)

58 Car: °h und den hab ich gestern da AUCH getroffen,=  
and i met him there yesterday as well

59 =un\_dann (.) is mir EINGefallen<sup>10</sup>;  
and then i remembered

Car snaps her fingers and keeps her index finger raised

Car flashes her eyebrows and smiles

60 =der heißt <<len> hajo (.) KLEIne;>  
his name is hajo kleine

Car keeps her index finger raised



Image 10: Car keeps her index finger raised

61 ((laughs)) [((laughs))]

Car starts lowering her index finger from upright position

62 Haj: [ <sup>11</sup>E:HRli ] [ch; ]  
 really  
 |—————|  
 |

Haj leans towards Car, raises his eyebrows and widens his eyes



*Image 11:* Haj leans towards Car, raises his eyebrows and widens his eyes

63 Car: [ J ] [A:;= ]  
 yes

64 Haj: [ ((laughs)) ]  
 [ ((incomprehensible, ca. 0.9 sec.)) ] [ ((laughs)) ]

65 Car: [=un\_dann war das so: ]  
 and then it was like

66 [ °h ]  
 kleine KLEIne;  
 kleine kleine

67 mensch (is er) <<snaps her fingers> der> KLEIne,  
 goodness (is he/he is) kleine

68 °h und ICH so,=  
 and i was like

69 =oh wir wohnen in der KLEInestraße,=  
 oh we live in kleinestraße

70 Haj: [ ((laughs)) ]

71 Car: [=und dann <<laughing> HAjo:,> ]  
 that and hajo

72 Haj: ((laughs)) [ ((laughs)) ]

73 Car: [ <<:-)> hajo KLEIne;> ]  
 hajo kleine

74 Haj: OH oh;

75 Car: °hh JA;  
 yes

As it turns out, the protagonist of Carina's story is called *hajo kleine* (line 60) and thus coincidentally not only stands in a namesake relationship to her housemate's first name (*hajo*) but also to their common address (*kleinestraße*, see line 69). Carina contextualizes this point as the story's climax through a range of vocal and embodied re-



sources. These include a noticeable decrease in tempo, another finger-snap, which transitions into a held raised index finger, an eyebrow flash and a smile during the delivery of the protagonist's name (see image 10), which subsequently escalates into laughter. The story's point is initially received as both surprising and amusing: While Franz simply smiles at Carina, Hajo, who is the primary recipient of her telling, first produces a news-mark (*ehrlich*, line 62) while leaning towards her with raised eyebrows and widened eyes (see image 11), and then joins in with her laughter (line 64). As is common for climaxes in amusing stories (Selting 2017), it is dwelt on for a little more (lines 65–71), before it begins to phase out in lines 73–75. Following this initial reception of Carina's story, Hajo, however, returns to her earlier criticism of the story's protagonist.

Extract 8.3: PARTY MIT TUTOR (LoE\_VG\_03, 36:40–38:07 min)

76 Car: [(gut) ]  
(well)

77 Hajo: [s natü]rlich blöd dass du: äh: (.) ihn nicht so: (.)  
MAGST;  
it's a real shame that you uh don't like him that much

78 (0.5)

79 Hajo: beziehungsweise [se (.) (er so:)]  
or rather (that he is this)

80 Car: [°h später wurde es BES]ser;=  
it got better at some point

81 =also (.) das äh KOMische is halt,  
well the uh strange thing is that

82 umso mehr wir KONNTen,  
the more things we learned

83 umso besser wurde das verHÄLTnis;  
the better our relationship got

In lines 77 and 79, Hajo expresses his regret at Carina's dislike of his namesake or the fact that he left such a bad impression, respectively.<sup>20</sup> With this, he holds Carina accountable for the negative stance she conveyed towards her story's protagonist earlier, now that a clear association between Hajo and the tutor has been established by virtue of their identical first names. This shows that Carina's initial assessments of the tutor in lines 15 and 20 remain interactionally relevant and accountably in-play despite their suspension. The further development of the sequence can also be seen to support our earlier claim that, in suspending the potentially problematic assessments, Carina displays an early sensitivity and thus orients to the possibility of such an outcome.

As we have seen, the specific interactional circumstances in which complaint-implicative assessments get introduced may render them potentially inapposite. Suspending

<sup>20</sup> Note how this orients to both of Carina's earlier suspended assessments – one of which was subjectively framed (*den ich einglich nicht so...*), the other of which was objectively framed (*und war halt so\_n bissel...*, see Edwards/Potter 2017) – via format tying (Goodwin 2006).

them can serve as a practice for managing (though not necessarily resolving) their potential inexpedience in their local sequential contexts. Notably, this inexpedience need not result from the social delicacy of complaining as a face-threatening activity as such (after all, Carina *does* go on to voice the complaint in the present case). Instead, the delicacy of producing complaint-implicative assessments may also arise from fundamentally contextual considerations concerning the intricate interplay of the various sequential, moral or social expectations that operate at any given moment in the interaction.

## 6 Summary and conclusions

In this study, we have offered a detailed examination of suspended assessments in German talk-in-interaction. In the first instance, these are constituted by a specific set of turn-constructural operations, in that a current speaker suspends the progressive realization of a (projectably) assessing TCU prior to a point of possible (lexico-syntactic) completion, without, however, using prosodic-phonetic devices that would contextualize the speaker's immediate abortion of the ongoing TCU (as cut-offs would) or their relinquishment of the floor (as trail-offs would). Indeed, the most prominent characteristic of such suspensions is a distinct and relatively stable cluster of prosodic-phonetic design features that audibly make them come off as 'left hanging' (relatively flat overall pitch contours that mostly remain level at the speaker's mid-pitch range, no loudness diminuendo, commonly sound stretches on the pre-suspension elements, subsequent pauses/gaps). In the past, these prosodic-phonetic features have been associated with turn-holding; yet, it appears from our data that they are not necessarily (or at least not exclusively) implicated in the management of turn-taking, which suggests that they can also be deployed to do 'recognizable suspension' (Sacks 1995, II, pp. 429 f.). Moreover, we have shown that participants occasionally pick up on, and thus demonstrably orient to, such suspended assessments (even if they are embedded in longer turns) and treat them as interactionally meaningful, which equips them with a general accountability (see Robinson 2016).

In previous research, the interactional accountability of (various kinds of) suspended or designedly incomplete talk has commonly been linked to aspects such as the social delicacy of the matter being talked about (e. g., Lerner 2013; Imo 2011), or to general considerations revolving around the notion of facework (e. g., Chevalier 2009). Here, we chose a slightly different approach, which enabled us to unpack these generic characterizations a little more. By confining the analysis to suspensions in the context of one particular action type (*viz.*, assessments), it became possible to detail the array of issues speakers recurrently face in the context of this particular action type, and which they manage through their suspension. Our analyses revealed that speakers generally either use the suspension as a practice for circumventing the production of assessments that are interactionally inapposite (e. g., openly disaffiliative with a co-participant's stance, unnecessarily insistent, complaint-implicative in a contextually inexpedient way), or for coping with local contingencies that render the very doing of an assessment problematic for the speaker (e. g., the lack of a single adequate assessing term, a lack of (full) entitlement to assess, its inconsistency with a stance the speaker had taken earlier). These usage patterns shed light on the sorts of issues that participants monitor for and take into consideration when engaging in making assessments (only some of which are adequately



glossed as involving matters pertaining to ‘social delicacy’). Inasmuch as these considerations can evidently prevent speakers from finishing assessments that have been launched, they constitute factors that, for the participants, appear to impose constraints on, or represent limits to, what is ‘appropriately sayable’ at any given moment in an interaction (see also Schegloff 2003; Jefferson 1974, 1985; Jefferson/Sacks/Schegloff 1987). We believe that it is a worthwhile endeavor – especially for those interested in how considerations of ‘face’ figure in the constitution of action(s)-in-interaction – to stake out these limits for other action types as well (e.g., requests, announcements), and to study the range of factors and contingencies that may effectuate the suspension (or various types of abandonment) of the action-in-progress in relation to those other action types. Some of these factors can reasonably be expected to operate more globally in interaction, but others may be specific to certain action types, and knowing more about them, and how participants orient to them, may ultimately enhance our understanding of the various kinds of principles underlying, and thus shaping and informing, action formation (Levinson 2013).

#### Appendix: Notation of bodily-visual conduct (based on GAT 1, Selting et al. 1998)

talk talk talk  
| \_\_\_\_\_ |  
|  
SI nods

Bodily-visual conduct is transcribed in alignment with verbal conduct: The underscores indicate the temporal extension of bodily-visual actions, the vertical bars indicate their starting and end points. The verbal description of bodily-visual actions is set in a different font.

talk talk\*<sup>11</sup> talk

Still frames are numbered and aligned with the verbal transcript using asterisks and the corresponding image numbers.



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