

# Offering an Interpretation of Prior Talk in Everyday Interaction: A Semantic Map Approach

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## ABSTRACT

Sometimes in interaction, a speaker articulates an overt interpretation of prior talk. Such moments have been studied as involving the repair of a problem with the other's talk or as formulating an understanding of the matter at hand. Stepping back from the established notions of formulations and repair, we examine the variety of actions speakers do with the practice of offering an interpretation, and the order within this domain. Results show half a dozen usage types of interpretations in mundane interaction. These form a largely continuous territory of action, with recognizably distinct usage types as well as cases falling between these (proto)typical uses. We locate order in the domain of interpretations using the method of semantic maps and show that, contrary to earlier assumptions in the literature, interpretations that formulate an understanding of the matter at hand are actually quite pervasive in ordinary talk. These findings contribute to research on action formation and advance our understanding of understanding in interaction. Data are video- and audio-recordings of mundane social interaction in the German language from a variety of settings.

## Introduction

Interpretation is integral to our understanding of the world, of others and ourselves. This might be particularly so where human action, experience and intention are concerned (e.g., Gadamer, 1989; Mead, 1934). Interpretation can be a private process. However, social interaction builds on making (some of) our interpretations public. For example, if you ask me the time, and I tell you the time, my understanding of your question, as having asked the time, has come into the open: It has become available for public scrutiny. Social interaction thus builds on making understanding a public event (Garfinkel, 1967; Moerman & Sacks, 1988; Sacks et al., 1974; Taylor, 1985).

Although public, most of our interpretations in social situations remain tacit, embodied in the practical actions, constituted through talk and other conduct, that move social interaction along, step by step – as when I respond in a relevant manner to your question about the time. Occasionally, however, speakers overtly articulate an interpretation and offer it for another person's ratification. Such overt offers of an interpretation of prior talk are the topic of the present report. Examples (1) and (2) provide first illustrative examples. Both are from a telephone conversation between two friends, Finja and Evelyn.

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## Extract 1: FOLK\_TELE\_02\_A01\_2248185

- 01     **FIN:**     **Ja: ach dann schreib ich einf(h)ach noch mal. h**  
                   *yes well then I'll just write once more*
- 02                   (0.8)
- 03     **FIN:**     °**Denk ich,° h**  
                   *I think*
- 04                   (0.7)
- 05 -> **EVE:**    **Ihm jetzt.**  
                   *he.DAT now*  
                   *(to) him now*
- 06                   (0.6)
- 07     **FIN:**     **Hm hm,**  
                   *hm\_hm*
- 08                   (0.5)
- 09     **EVE:**     °**Nja\_°**  
                   *nyeah*
- 10                   (0.2)

## Extract 2: FOLK\_TELE\_02\_A01\_3627660

- 01     **FIN:**     **Ja der meldet sich au(h)ch n(h)ich ↑m(h)ehr, m(h)einte Holger**  
                   *yes he's also not getting in touch anymore, Holger said*
- 02                   #.hi:h# [.h(i)h::
- 03 -> **EVE:**                [**fJetzt schon abgeschreckt.f**  
                               *now already scare\_off.PTCP*  
                               *already scared off at this point*
- 04                   (0.2)
- 05     **FIN:**     **.hih fJa: wahr>scheinlich<f=>↓Aber der< is halt nich in**  
                   *yes probably. But he is just not in*
- 06                   **der gruppe, deswegen °keine a:hnung.°=.h vielleicht hat**  
                   *the group, that's why, no idea .h maybe*
- 07                   **Holger ihm auch abgesagt**  
                   *Holger also told him it's cancelled*

Both cases involve Evelyn offering an interpretation at the arrowed lines. Each interpretation operates back on what Finja has just told Evelyn, and creates a moment in which Finja can ratify or reject the interpretation on offer. However, the two cases also differ from one another in a number of ways – differences that we will have more to say about below. Interpretations such as the above come in a range of guises and fulfill a range of functions in everyday discourse; and it is this range of forms and functions of everyday interpretations that the present paper seeks to address. We pursue two goals: The first goal is to explore the range of functions that interpretations fulfill in everyday life and to identify some of the linguistic structures involved in designing an interpretation to accomplish

a particular function; the second goal is to go beyond a mere listing of functions by locating order within this domain of social action. To achieve this second goal, we use the method of semantic maps. We propose that semantic maps can advance the study of how linguistic resources contribute to action formation, a field of study that has attracted substantial interest from interactional linguists and other researchers of spoken discourse (for general discussions, e.g., Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Deppermann, 2021).

The essence of a semantic map is the following: Functions are arranged and rearranged in a conceptual space in such a way that all functions covered by a linguistic structure are adjacent to one another. At some point in the analysis, adding a next linguistic structure does not necessitate another rearrangement of the functions on the map. As an outcome of this jigsaw activity, we receive a visualization of the relationships between different functions. Semantic maps are used in linguistic typology to discover universal patterns of form-meaning relationships within the diversity of language structures (e.g., Georgakopoulos & Polis, 2018; Haspelmath, 2003; Van der Auwera et al., 2006). As a corollary, the development of a semantic map yields hypotheses about universal relationships holding among meanings or uses within a conceptual domain. Semantic maps have been widely used to study patterns of grammatical structure, and also occasionally to study patterns of lexical structure (François, 2008). The present work is the first to apply the method of semantic maps to explicate relationships within a domain of discursive actions. What we will propose is a “classic” semantic map that builds on prior descriptive analysis (Georgakopoulos & Polis, 2018, p. 19).<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, we begin by presenting a qualitative analysis of the range of functions of interpretations in social interaction that we observed in our data. But first, we situate our study in the extant literature on actions that involve offering an interpretation of prior talk.

### **Interpretation, repair, and formulations**

Interpretations such as the example in Extract (1) have been studied extensively as a speaker’s method for initiating “repair” on another’s talk (e.g., Dingemanse et al., 2014; Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015; Kitzinger, 2013; Schegloff et al., 1977), that is, for rectifying a possible problem in speaking, hearing, or understanding.<sup>2</sup> Repair addresses the “trouble problem” (Schegloff, 2007, p. xiv): Sometimes in interaction, a trouble in hearing or understanding what the other said can prevent the conversation from moving forward. In Extract (1), Evelyn needs to have the referents right before she can provide an appropriate uptake of Finja’s announcement. Evelyn tackles this problem by offering her interpretation of who might be meant (line 05). Such interpretations are often referred to as “candidate understandings” in the literature (Antaki, 2012; Heritage, 1984, p. 319; Kendrick, 2015). After Finja’s confirmation of this candidate, Evelyn can provide an appropriate response to Finja’s announcement (at line 13).

Speakers have a range of methods for initiating repair on another’s talk, which differ in what they convey about the nature of the understanding problem (e.g., for German, Egbert, 2009). For example, items such as *huh?* or *pardon?* suggest that the speaker may not have understood any of the prior talk. Targeted repair requests such as *who?* show that the speaker understood enough to think that the troublesome portion of talk contained a person reference. In contrast, candidate understandings such as *ihm* (‘(to) him’) convey that the speaker might have heard and understood everything correctly but wants to make sure by checking the understanding. Across languages, between one-third and half of all initiations of repair on another’s talk in informal, everyday interactions are performed by offering a possible understanding for confirmation (see the contributions introduced by Dingemanse & Enfield, 2015). This frequent selection of candidate understandings to initiate repair might be a sign of social solidarity: In candidate understandings, the person who has the potential understanding problem takes over most of the work to ensure shared understanding (Clark & Schaefer, 1987;

Dingemanse et al., 2015).<sup>3</sup> Rather than requesting that the prior speaker solve the problem (with *huh?* or *who?*, for example), candidate understandings offer an interpretation that, if it is correct, the prior speaker only needs to confirm.

As a means for initiating repair, candidate understandings work to secure or restore a speaker's proper grasp of another's prior talk. Of course, in our social encounters, we strive to understand not only the other person's individual utterances. According to philosophical hermeneutics (and the phenomenological tradition it builds on), we only puzzle about what another might have meant by what they said in those rare moments when intersubjectivity breaks down. In most cases, our interpretations are directed at the "thing" itself, the matter at hand (e.g., Dreyfus, 1991; Grondin, 2006). Participants' main concern in a stretch of social interaction is arguably not to analyze adjacently prior talk, but to accomplish "interactional projects" (e.g., Bangerter & Clark, 2003) and to jointly develop an understanding of whatever it is that they are doing together.

The interpretation in Extract (2) is a case in point. Here, Evelyn does not check her proper grasp of any of the elements in Finja's turn, but offers a possible explanation for, and thereby develops a specific aspect of, the state of affairs Finja has just reported. Note that in Finja's response, she does not "confirm" the interpretation, as she did with *hm\_hm* in Extract 1 (line 07). Her *ja wahrscheinlich* in Extract (2) ("yes probably," line 05) "ratifies" Evelyn's interpretation as having offered a plausible account of the situation. Whereas the interpretation in Extract (1) works to ascertain a shared understanding of Finja's turn, the interpretation in Extract (2) contributes to developing a possible understanding of the matter.

Researchers of social interaction have examined interpretations that target the matter at hand, or the event constituted by the interaction, under the label "formulations." The origins of work on formulations in interaction lie in the ethnomethodological concern with how participants provide for the sense and account-ability, that is, the mutual intelligibility, of what they are doing. Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) noted that one thing participants can do is to gloss or "formulate" their activities in their turns-at-talk. It has been recognized from the start that formulations can have a number of discourse functions. As Garfinkel and Sacks state:

A member may treat some part of the conversation as an occasion to *describe* that conversation, to *explain* it, or *characterize* it, or *explicate*, or *translate*, or *summarize*, or *furnish the gist* of it, or *take note of its accordance with rules*, or *remark on its departure from rules*. (Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970, p. 350; our emphases)<sup>4</sup>

Although formulations cover a wide range of conversational phenomena, most work has followed Heritage and Watson (1979, 1980) in narrowing the focus of attention to a particular type of sequence: the "formulation-decision sequence." Work in that tradition studies formulations that offer an interpretation of prior talk for "reflexive consultation" (Heritage & Watson, 1980, p. 252). Formulations that initiate a formulation-decision sequence put the other person in a position to decide whether or not the formulation offers an acceptable understanding of the talk so far.

Researchers have discovered a number of things that speakers can do with formulations, such as offering the gist or upshot of prior talk (Heritage & Watson, 1980), articulating inferable-but-unsaid aspects of the matter at hand (Bolden, 2010), or condensing a description into a categorization (Deppermann, 2011). Most studies of formulations have examined social interaction in institutional settings (but see Bolden, 2010; Kupetz, 2013; other studies may include individual cases from informal interaction). There are good reasons for this: Formulations play an important role in various forms of institutional talk, where they facilitate the accomplishment of institution-specific goals (Drew & Heritage, 1992). In radio call-in shows and news interviews, for example, formulations are a method that interviewers or hosts can use to re-cast what an interviewee or caller has said in more extreme terms to invite further debate (e.g., Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Heritage, 1985). In psychotherapy, therapists draw on formulations of what a patient has said for various therapeutic goals (e.g., Antaki, 2008; Weiste & Peräkylä, 2013).

Data from everyday social life, in contrast, have played hardly any role in the study of formulations. In fact, it has been suggested that formulations might be more or less absent from everyday social interaction (Drew, 2003). Of course, what one finds depends on what one looks for (in relation to formulations, see, Lynch, 2019, p. 195). Thus, it might be the predominant focus on institutional interaction that has led researchers to the conclusion that a formulation (proto-) typically takes the shape “(So) *what you mean/are saying is . . .*, or something resembling that” (Drew, 2003, p. 296). Formulations in that form are indeed rare in informal settings (Steensig & Larsen, 2008). However, examples such as Extract (2) raise the question of whether interpretations that do the work of formulations (i.e., that (re-)formulate what was said or inferably present in prior talk to develop a joint understanding of a matter) may not simply take on other guises in mundane interaction.

To explore this issue, we propose to take a step back from the established notions of repair and formulations, and instead to focus on “offering an interpretation” as a generic practice in everyday social interaction. Our results show the following: First, there are about half a dozen distinct ways of acting with turns that offer interpretations in everyday life. Second, these usage types do not simply represent discrete categories. A semantic map analysis reveals how these different uses relate to one another. It allows us to show that the identifiably distinct usage types form an orderly pragmatic territory of actions. Third, within this territory, interpretations that formulate an understanding of the matter at hand are far from uncommon in everyday social interaction – instead, and contrary to what has been suggested in the extant literature, they emerge as pervasive and routine in ordinary talk.

## Materials and methods

This study began with an extended period of qualitative analysis. Initially, a range of individual instances in which a speaker offered an interpretation of a prior speaker’s talk were analyzed on a case-by-case basis, using conversation analytic methods (Schegloff, 1987, 1996). These single case analyses focused on how details of turn design in context make interpretations recognizable as pursuing particular discursive actions. They also led to a better understanding of the generic, context-free features of interpretations, as summarized here.

## Operating back

Interpretations offer content furnished by the speaker of the interpretation turn that recognizably addresses the substance or action of the prior speaker’s turn. Consider Extract 1, in which the interpretation *ihm* (‘to him’) is designed to be recognizable as complementing the prior turn with additional information. This rules out turns that address prior talk but do not offer any self-authored content, such as repetitions of the prior turn (e.g., Robinson & Kevoe-Feldman, 2010) or newsmarks (such as *really?* or German *echt*; Gubina & Betz, 2021; Raymond & Stivers, 2016). Interpretations are also distinct from turns that articulate noticings of another person’s physical or affectual states, such as *you sound sleepy* or *you look terrified* (Local & Walker, 2008). Although such noticings articulate a self-authored interpretation of aspects of a co-participant’s conduct, they are either based on visual cues or have their source in a prior turn’s delivery, but do not address its content or its action. Similarly, assessments such as *that’s bad*, while offering a self-authored take on what transpired through the preceding talk, do not interpretively engage the prior turn’s substance.

An interpretation, as the term is used here, does not place any demands on the content of these turns. An interpretation turn does not have to be in any obvious way effortful or insightful; what it articulates is not necessarily uncertain or speculative, as everyday connotations of the term might suggest. Neither does an interpretation need to allude to particular kinds of experience, as in some psycho-analytical uses of the term (e.g., Peräkylä, 2004; Vehviläinen, 2003). Interpretations can fulfill all these criteria, but they need not do so.

## Retro-sequentiality

Although interpretations operate back on a prior turn, they are not sequentially implicated by that prior turn (see, Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, on sequential implicativeness). Sequentially speaking, interpretations initiate retro-sequences: They retroactively locate a prior turn as their source, while exhibiting response relevance themselves and initiating a sequence in their own right (Schegloff, 2007, pp. 217–219; Küttner, 2020). Consequently, they are never first pair-parts of a base adjacency pair but launch other sequence types, most often insertion or post-expansion sequences (Schegloff, 2007). This point should be fairly transparent with repair-like interpretations as the one in Extract 1, but it is equally true for interpretations such as the one in Extract 2. Evelyn’s interpretation *Jetzt schon abgeschreckt* (‘already scared off at this point,’ line 3) was not sequentially implicated by Finja’s prior turn, but it retroactively locates that turn as its source and presents itself as an “outcome” of that source (i.e., it constitutes Finja’s turn as the *interpretandum*), mainly through what Auer (2014, 2015) has called “structural latency” and its recognizability as a common-sense causal inference for the state of affairs Finja has just described. Simultaneously, Evelyn’s turn launches a sequence in its own right and (minimally) makes ratification of its adequacy (as an *interpretans*) relevant next, which is precisely how the practice of offering an interpretation invites a “reflexive consultation” of prior talk (Heritage & Watson, 1980, p. 252).

Interpretations as they are studied here are always addressed to prior turns or turn-constructional units (TCUs) that have reached a point of possible completion. This approach rules out collaborative completions. Although these certainly embody an interpretation of the co-participant’s talk, they also serve to progress the current TCU to possible completion, which is something participants do in rather specific environments (Lerner, 1991, 1996, 2004).

## Response

By offering content that interprets the prior speaker’s talk, the interpretation speaker creates a situation in which the other can confirm/ratify or disconfirm/reject that interpretation as (in-)adequate. This differentiates the interpretation turns considered here from meta-pragmatic characterizations of the co-participant’s conduct that are involved in bringing off other actions (e.g., reproaches such as *stop criticizing me*; Sidnell, 2017). The latter also articulate an interpretation of prior talk, but do not create a response space for (dis)confirmation or ratification/rejection.

These generic features delimit interpretations as a generic social practice. On this basis, a collection of instances of interpretation turns was compiled in a second step. Rather than searching for particular forms or features of turn-design (such as turn-initial *so* or German *also*), we watched/listened through individual audio- and video recordings of informal interaction covering a wide range of daily activities, searching for interpretations that met these criteria. The data are from two corpora: the FOLK corpus of spoken German<sup>5</sup> and the German part of the Parallel European Corpus of Informal Interaction (PECII; Rossi et al., 2018). From these corpora, recordings were selected that covered a diverse range of daily activities in informal settings. The selected recordings capture social events characterized by talk (e.g., friends chatting at a table or on a car ride) as well as social events characterized by goal-directed joint work (e.g., doing repair work in a bathroom, or renovating a room). Each recording was annotated exhaustively using ELAN (ELAN (Version 6.0), 2020), until 10 instances were found. After the tenth instance, the examination of that recording was terminated and a next recording was examined to ensure variability of speakers and activity types in the sample. This procedure has been used in previous studies to gain an overview of practices within a domain of action (e.g., Dingemans & Enfield, 2015; Floyd et al., 2020). In this manner, we searched through 10 hours of recordings and identified 170 cases of interpretations. These cases were then systematically examined using conversation analytic (e.g., Clift, 2016; Sidnell, 2010) and interactional linguistic (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018) methods. Transcripts follow conversation-analytic conventions (Jefferson, 2004), with free English translations and, when useful, morphological glosses of the interpretation turns. Analytically relevant embodied conduct has been transcribed using Mondada’s (2014) conventions.

A note on the use of numbers in this article is in order. In what follows, we will differentiate various uses of interpretations – some *explicate* prior talk, whereas others *elaborate* prior talk, for example. Such functional types can be difficult to quantify because many interpretations can be taken by participants in this way *or* in that, or to be doing both one *and* the other. In fact, our findings suggest that we should think of the uses of interpretations as a continuum, not as a set of discrete categories. Nevertheless, to strengthen our confidence in the functional categories we identified, we evaluated the reliability of coding them into categories. Both authors independently coded a randomly assembled subset of 20 cases. Inter-rater agreement as assessed using Cohen's  $\kappa$  in this exercise was “substantial,”  $\kappa = .66$  (Landis & Koch, 1977). Importantly, in all but one case of interrater disagreement, the raters selected what turned out in the analysis to be adjacent categories in the continuum of interpretations. This is reflected in the weighted kappa,  $\kappa = .84$  (Cohen, 1968), a value often interpreted as “almost perfect” agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). In sum, this exercise confirms that the six categories of interpretations that we identified are recognizably distinct, while also reflecting substantial continuities between “neighboring” functions. Ultimately, all 170 cases in the collection were examined by both authors, and disagreements in the analysis of individual cases were resolved in discussions. To offer a sense of how the interpretation turns in our collection are distributed across the different usage types, we provide rough indications as to their frequency (e.g., “about 30 interpretations summarize prior talk”).

## Results: interpretations in action

The development of a semantic map involves two main phases: The identification of the nodes of the map, and the ordering of these nodes on the map. Accordingly, we begin with a short summary of six distinct functions of interpretations in everyday discourse that we have found in our data – the nodes on the map. These distinct functions were identified through analyses of features of turn design and context. Most of them are familiar from earlier studies of particular kinds of repair or formulation. In the second part, we introduce the map and provide further evidence for the claim that continuities exist between the individual nodes.

### *Interpretations that challenge the prior speaker's action*

One gross distinction for participants is between interpretations that contribute to the course of action within which they emerge, and ones that *challenge* that course of action. Consider candidate understandings (such as Extract 1). Although these halt the progression of the activity underway, they are offered to make such progression possible, and they thereby contribute to the ongoing activity. Some interpretations, however, *challenge* the action or content of the co-participant's prior talk, and this challenge can lead to conflict, disagreement, attempts at reconciliation, or an abandonment of the activity as a whole. As we might expect on the grounds of the cooperative nature of human interaction, most interpretations are offered and taken as contributions to the ongoing course of action. Only about 14 cases in our collection (8%) are challenges of a prior turn's content or its action. We begin with one such case.

In Extract (3), a group of friends are cooking a meal. Daphne has tasted the food and assesses it as *voll gut* (‘tastes really well,’ line 02). Elara takes this up with an elongated *ja::?* (‘yes’ or ‘really,’ line 04) with final rising intonation; a newsmark that might display a degree of surprise. Clio repeats this *ja*, mimicking Elara's prosody (Couper-Kuhlen, 1996), and then unpacks what she takes Elara to have conveyed: *hätt ich gar nich gedacht* (‘I wouldn't have thought that at all,’ lines 06–07). With this mimicking other-enactment, Clio problematizes the surprise display she heard in Elara's newsmark and challenges it as inappropriate. In next position, Elara rejects the problematic stance attributed to her and justifies her surprise display (line 8). Note the smile voice, represented with the symbol “£,” in both Clio's challenge and Elara's defense, and the following laughter – common design features of interpretations that challenge prior talk.

## Extract 3: FOLK\_KOCH\_03\_A01\_2402052

- 01 CLI: [und<sub>i</sub> ]  
So?
- 02 DAP: [schmeckt] voll gut.  
tastes really well
- 03 CLI: >j<sub>a</sub>, < °se[hr gut. °]  
yeah, very good
- 04 ELA: [ ja::? ]  
yeah?/really?
- 05 DAP: ja schmeckt [ (auf jeden ) ]  
yeah tastes (at any )
- 06 -> CLI: [f↑e JA::: ] HÄTT ICH GAR NICH  
Yes have.AUX.SBJV I PTCL not  
Yea:::h? I would not have
- 07 -> GE↑DACHT!f=  
think.PTCP  
thought that at all
- 08 ELA: =[fNE:IN weil man ja-] [weil man ja nich ↑wü:↓:]rzt.f  
No because you're- because you're not seasoning
- 09 CLI: =[h(e)h(e) .hih ] [haha .hih .hih ]
- 10 ELA: >Außer halt safran.  
except PTCL saffron

Here then, an interpretation is used not to contribute to the action it operates on, but to challenge it. Much more commonly, however, speakers offer interpretations that contribute to the ongoing course of action in one way or another.

### Interpretations in the maintenance of intersubjective understanding

One major way in which interpretations can contribute to the ongoing course of action is by *clarifying* the meaning of the preceding turn or the reference of some vague, ambiguous, or missing element in it. About 51 cases in our collection are of this kind (30%). Such cases constitute clear examples of repair initiations. They target a (possible) problem in understanding the prior turn that impedes the further progression of the ongoing sequence or activity. Inasmuch as they solicit confirmation or manage to engender a disconfirming correction (Sacks, 1992, pp. 21–25), they work to secure and/or restore their speakers' proper grasp of the co-participant's prior talk, so that the halted sequence or activity can continue to progress toward possible completion. We already saw an example of such an interpretation in Extract (1). Another one can be seen in Extract (4), taken from a conversation between three young adults who are on a car trip to an amusement park. Lydia mentions the fact that residents living near two other amusement parks that she knows "get" a season ticket (lines 03–05). At line 08, Cosima initiates repair with an interpretation in sub-clausal format: *geschenkt oder was* (,for free or what').

## Extract 4: PECII\_DE\_Car\_20160924\_11516070

- 01 COS: [( )]
- 02 LYD: [Ich frag mich ob die hier auch so ne karte kriegen  
*I wonder whether here they also get such a ticket*
- 03 weil (.) (ähm/am) Holiday Park und so:  
*because (.) (uhm/at) Holiday Park and such*
- 04 kriegse ja als .h >und in in< äh dings (0.5)  
*you get PTCL as- .h and in in uh whatchamacallit (0.5)*
- 05 Europa Park kriegste ja ne jahreskarte.=  
*Europa Park you get PTCL an annual season ticket*
- 06 MAR: =°Ja.°  
*yes*
- 07 (.)
- 08 -> COS: Geschenkt oder was.  
*donate.PTCP or what*  
*for free or what*
- 09 (0.2)
- 10 LYD: Ja.  
*yes*
- 11 (0.3)
- 12 COS: Echt?  
*really*
- 13 LYD: Ja,=wenn du da wohnst.  
*yes when you live there*
- 14 (0.6)
- 15 MAR: Musst nur (d)ein ausweis vorzeigen dass du  
*you only have to show your ID that you*
- 16 da wo:hnst °un:° (0.5)  
*live there and (0.5)*
- 17 COS: Is ja lustig.  
*how funny*

Cosima's repair initiation (*geschenkt oder was*, 'for free or what') treats the predicate of Lydia's turn (*kriegste*, 'you get') as unclear and proposes a candidate solution by offering a clarifying interpretation of the precise manner in which people would "get" season tickets. Lydia's confirmation is followed by a sequence expansion before Cosima eventually provides a second pair-part which closes the overarching sequence (line 17).

Transparent and familiar as the foregoing may seem from the extant literature on repair, there are other ways in which the practice of offering an interpretation can figure in the maintenance of intersubjective understanding. In addition to offering clarifying interpretations that seek to ascertain an adequate grasp of a co-participant's prior talk, speakers can also offer interpretations that serve to *demonstrate* that they *have reached* an adequate understanding of what their co-participant means. This notion goes back to a distinction first introduced by Sacks (1992), who sought to differentiate more clearly between next turns that simply claim understanding of the prior (e.g., token uptakes such as *okay* or *I see*) and those that actually demonstrate it (e.g., by way of offering a self-authored interpretation of what the prior turn entails or implicates). He illustrated this difference with the following invented example:

[Sacks 1992, Vol 2, p. 141]

- 01 A: Where are you staying?  
 02 B: Pacific Palisades.  
 03 -> A: Oh at the west side of town.

Although in actual social interaction, speakers overwhelmingly display their (sufficient) understanding of a prior turn by simply moving on with a relevant next action, thus neither claiming, nor demonstrating their understanding (Heritage, 2007), such demonstrations are not at all rare occurrences. In about 28 cases (16%) in our collection, speakers formulate an interpretation of a prior turn to demonstrate their understanding of what their co-participant is talking about. Extract (5) provides a live example from our collection. Here, two students, Anna and Nathalie, are discussing regional festivities that might be worth attending. Whereas Nathalie has only recently moved to the region for her studies, Anna has been a resident of the area for some time already and is familiar with its events and attractions. At lines 08–09, Nathalie turns the discussion to an annual fair she has been recommended and that she is intent on visiting.

Extract 5: FOLK\_E\_00225\_SE\_01\_TF\_01\_DF\_01\_c842

- 01 (0.4)  
 02 ANN: Hommingen heißt des glaub ich, und da gab\_s en  
*Hommingen it was called I believe and there's an*  
 03 ↑Mandelblütenfest. .h Weil die anscheinend mandelbäume  
*almond blossom festival .h because apparently they have almond*  
 04 haben un die ↑blühen jetzt,  
*trees and they're in bloom now*  
 05 NAT: A[ha,  
*Oh*  
 06 ANN: [.hh Und des ging auch so en wochenende glaub ich, un des  
*And that also lasted for about a weekend I believe and it*  
 07 wär ↑auch cool gewesen.  
*would have been cool, too.*  
 08 NAT: St↑immt. (0.2) .h Ich will auf jeden fall auf en W:  
*True (0.2) .h I definitely want (to go) to the W-*  
 09 Wein\*markt oder Woindmarkt [wie auch immer. ]  
*Wein\*market or Woindmarket whatever*  
*ann \*nods, smiling throughout*  
 10 -> ANN: [Nach Krassolzheim;]  
*to Krassolzheim*

- 11 NAT: **Genau.** (.) Des hat- [Des is mir empfo:hlen worden.  
*Exactly* (.) *That has- It has been recommended to me*
- 12 ANN: [Des\_s coo:l.  
*That is cool*

Anna responds to this announcement with a sub-clausal interpretation: She formulates the town where the fair takes place as the destination of Nathalie's planned journey, thereby demonstrating that she knows exactly what Nathalie is talking about (note that by being syntactically formatted as a prepositional phrase, this interpretation is built as a continuation of Nathalie's turn at the point at which it is provided). That Anna is not clarifying but demonstrating her understanding here is further underscored by the fact that she already claims recognition of the referenced event by nodding and beginning to engage in a sustained "knowing" smile upon the first mention of its name (line 09) (see, Mondada, 2011). Anna can thus be heard and seen to lay a strong claim to the correctness of her interpretation, so strong in fact that it appears to be beyond any doubt. Accordingly, Nathalie's responsive *genau* ('Exactly,' line 11) comes off as ratifying or endorsing its adequacy rather than establishing its correctness (Betz, 2014; Küttner, 2016; Oloff, 2017). Sometimes, such demonstrations of understanding are occasioned by, and responsive to, difficulties in formulating encountered by the co-participant (note that Nathalie makes several tries at getting the name of the fair right). In such environments, going beyond a generic display or claim of understanding by offering an interpretation can constitute a means to (re-)assure the "struggling" co-participant that their talk was in fact comprehensible. At other times, interpretations demonstrating understanding are volunteered and not recognizably responsive to any signs of trouble in formulating in the prior speaker's turn. Such demonstrations of understanding may fail to attract any response at all. In sum, compared with clarifying interpretations, interpretations that are offered to demonstrate understanding are issued with a stance of maximum ("beyond-any-doubt") certainty as to their correctness. This point is reflected in a feature of their prosodic design.<sup>6</sup> Whereas clarifying interpretations can be performed with either rising or falling intonation, in ways that systematically index their speaker's differential take on the presumed likelihood of the correctness of the offered candidate (Couper-Kuhlen, 2012; cf., Heritage & Raymond, 2021), the demonstration of interpretations is invariably performed using final falling intonation, which serves to further contextualize the epistemic stance of utmost certainty with which they are uttered.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, they generally exert less response relevance than clarifying interpretations (Stivers & Rossano, 2010). Moreover, if they are met with responses, these are hearable as ratifying acknowledgments or agreements rather than confirmations.

### ***Interpretations in developing joint appreciations of experience***

We turn next to interpretations that most closely resemble "formulation-decision" sequences. The cases we examine here are concerned not so much with ensuring a proper grasp of what a previous speaker meant to say in their prior turn – the type of intersubjectivity maintenance work discussed in the previous section. Instead, these interpretations try out a possible understanding of the matter that has occupied prior talk, leading to the interactive development of a shared sense and joint appreciation of the present circumstances, actions, and events (see also Extract 2 in the Introduction).

We begin with interpretations that, broadly speaking, summarize a stretch of conversation. Such *summaries* comprise about 28 cases in our collection (16%). Consider Extract (6) from a recording of four adults playing a board game. It is Anna's turn, and she can make several moves in a row, when two of her co-players, Oskar and Torsten, begin to question the moves she makes (lines 07, 14, 16). The goal of the game is to move one's own meeples into the "home base." As evident from Oskar's loaded question in line 07 (Heritage, 2002), Anna's moves are publicly recognizable as not pursuing that goal. Her response reveals that she is instead intent on capturing one of Oskar's meeples (lines 13, 17). At line 19, Torsten offers an interpretation that formulates Anna's game strategy as "going on a hunt."

**Extract 6:** PECII\_DE\_Game1\_20150913\_11434001

- 01    **Ann:**    **so:.=↑sechs und ↑sechs und ↑sechs und;**  
                   *right, six and six and six and*
- 02                    **(3.4) ((throws a six))**
- 03    **Tor:**    **aha;**
- 04                    **(4.8) ((Anna throws again, another six))**
- 05    **Car:**    **\*.H: [hehe**  
                   *\*Anna moves her meeples*
- 06    **Tor:**            **[f::**
- 07    **Osk:**    **willst du nicht in dein häuschen?=  
                   *don't you want (to go) in your home base?***
- 08    **Ann:**    **=ne:::: was- willst du mir noch hinterher kommen,  
                   *no, what- do you want to catch up with me?***
- 09    **Osk:**    **(och m[a:nn)**  
                   *(oh man/that's mean)*
- 10    **Ann:**            **[da kommt ihr beide doch nicht hin wo ich  
                           *you two can't reach me there where I***
- 11                    **jetzt stehe**  
                   *now stand*
- 12                    **(1.0)**
- 13    **Ann:**    **\*ich möchte in deine richt[ung**  
                   *\*moves onto Torsten's starting spot*  
                   *I want to go in your direction*
- 14    **Tor:**                            **#[is das denn schlau**  
   *but is that smart?*  
   **#points to his starting spot**
- 15    **Ann:**    **is mir doch eg[al**



strategy as “going on a hunt.” He produces this interpretation with a smile, a common feature of summarizing interpretations in our collection (see also the smile voice in Extract 2). Anna’s response, an emphatic *j(h)A* with a big nod (line 21), embraces this interpretation as a valid and apt characterization of her game play.

In broadcast interviews, gist or upshot formulations have been shown to be primarily designed for the overhearing audience (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Heritage, 1985). Something similar can be observed here. Offering the shorthand gloss *jagd machen* (‘go on a hunt’) for Anna’s motives is arguably not aimed at rendering them (more) comprehensible so much as it is furnishing a playful characterization of these motives and making it publicly available for the entire group. Note that when Anna confirms this interpretation, Torsten giggles and turns his gaze to Carolin (line 22), thereby engaging the one player who was not involved in the prior discussion. Moreover, in extending her confirming turn, Anna subsequently incorporates the term *jagd* (‘hunt’) into her own formulation of her game strategy (line 23). And when, a moment later, the tables turn and Torsten captures the meeple with which Anna was on the “hunt,” Oskar uses the term to characterize this move in the same way (*dafür macht Torsten jetzt Jagd*, ‘but now Torsten is on the hunt,’ line 28).

What we see here is a common characteristic of *summarizing interpretations* in everyday talk. They do not in the first instance work to maintain (i.e., ascertain or restore) mutual understanding of the preceding turn; instead, they typically offer a perspective on the matter at hand that transforms and regularly goes *beyond* what the first speaker has authored (e.g., by forwarding a certain conceptualization of events). If accepted (as happens here), summarizing interpretations can then become the basis for further talk and have longer repercussions on the trajectory of the interaction – and possibly shape how an event will be memorized for potential later re-tellings (see Bartlett’s, 1932/1997, schema theory of remembering; Sacks, 1992, Vol 1, pp. 764–783). Likewise, the ever-so-slight transformations performed with summarizing interpretations can serve as a resource for topic development or as an avenue into stepwise topic transitions in the ongoing interaction (Jefferson, 1984; Sacks, 1992, Vol. 2, pp. 291–303).<sup>8</sup> In this respect, summarizing interpretations are quite unlike interpretations offered to maintain mutual understanding, which typically occupy only a single, minimal adjacency pair sequence and – in the case of clarifying interpretations – halt the progressivity of the ongoing sequence rather than driving it forward.

The interpretations we turn to next are less concerned with summarily characterizing or re-describing earlier talk. Instead, they offer new content that *elaborates* what the prior speaker has said, proposing as-yet unmentioned events or circumstances as part of the matter at hand. About 30 cases in our collection are of this type (18%). Extract (7) exemplifies this type of interpretation, in a format that has been described as “articulating the unsaid” (Bolden, 2010). The example is from an interaction between three participants, two of whom (Annabell and Melissa) are medical nurses. Annabell has just announced that she is expected to provide her patients with “facial care” twice during her work shift. This announcement triggers an inquiry from Saskia, who is not a nurse, regarding what the provision of “facial care” involves (line 01). When Annabell initially responds by simply listing the targeted body parts for the provision of facial care (line 02), Saskia reissues the question in a slightly more generic format (*[und] was MACHT man da*, ‘(and) what does one do there,’ lines 04 and 06), treating the prior answer as insufficient and clarifying that she is seeking a more detailed description of the specific actions that providing “facial care” entails. At this point, Melissa chimes in with a complaint (data not shown), which momentarily derails the sequential trajectory projected by Saskia’s question. Following this complaint, Saskia reissues her question once more, this time asking more specifically for a description of “how nose care is done” (line 09). It is in the context of Annabell’s response that Saskia offers an elaborative interpretation.

## Extract 7: FOLK\_E\_00228\_SE\_01\_V\_01\_DF\_01\_5518849

01 SAS: was macht ihr da;  
*what do you do there?*

02 ANN: °h augen mund na:se.  
*eyes, mouth, nose*

03 (2.4)

04 SAS: und was macht man da,  
*and what does one do there?*

05 ANN: hm?  
*huh?*

06 SAS: was macht man da,  
*what does one do there?*

((Roughly 21 seconds of talk omitted in which the third participant, MEL, chimes in with a complaint. The complaint revolves around her being expected to know how to execute eye and nose care even though she does not normally do that on a daily basis. This complaint comes to a close in lines 07-08 & 10-11.))

07 MEL: s wär ja quatsch;  
*it would be nonsense*

08 woher soll man das könn.  
*how would one know how to do that*

09 SAS: ja wie geht [na:senpflege,]  
*yes, how does nose care work*

10 MEL: [ °also i]ch kann s net.  
*well I can't do it*

11 [kann (xxx xxx xxx)° ]  
*can*

12 ANN: [°h (na) viele sin ja] intubie:rt;=ne,=  
*well, many are intubated, right*

13 =die sin ja beatmet,  
*they are on artificial respiration*

14 (.)

15 ANN: °h und die machen ja dann ni[x.=ne, ]  
*and they don't do anything, right*

16 -> SAS: [ >un dann musst du< ]  
*and then must.2SG you  
and then you have to*

17 -> ((makes a slurping noise for 1 sec.))

18 ANN: du musst sie absau:gen =  
*you have to suction clean them*

19 =des ver::schmoddert ja alles;  
*it all snots up*

20 °h manche die kriegen die augen net richtig zu::=  
*some, they can't properly close their eyes*

21 =oder dann ham se ode:me noch in den augen;  
*or then they have edema in the eyes*

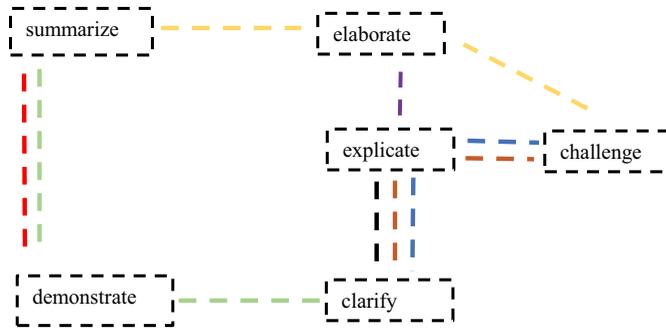


Katharina's reference to *Gerda's Freund . . . der Hannes* ('Gerda's (boy)friend . . . Hannes,' lines 02–03) strongly suggests but does not say in so many words that they are “back together again,” which is precisely the interpretation that Sarah's inquiry advances. Unlike the elaborating interpretations considered earlier, however, this one attends to the inferable piece of information as news and seeks to explore it further. Pragmatically, interpretations like this strongly resemble newsmarks, such as *oh really?* or *did you?* (e.g., Heritage, 1984; Raymond & Stivers, 2016), except that they are less “tokenized” and feature an inferential component. Not uncommonly in our data, they are used to topicalize and further explore information that emerged as “news” to the interpretation speaker but was embedded in talk that was otherwise occupied. Put differently, their “elaborative” potential is specifically directed at focalizing and unpacking information which, in Goffman's (1959) terms, was “given off” rather than having been presented as an informing or a news announcement. We therefore refer to them as *explicating* interpretations. About 19 cases (11%) in our collection are of this kind. A common formal feature of explicating interpretations is that they often feature markers of interrogativity, such as interrogative syntax or final rising intonation, whereas elaborative interpretations in the collection are formatted as declarative clauses. This feature of turn design is of course highly compatible with their “querying” or “exploring” function. At the same time, explicating interpretations also take us back into the vicinity of clarifying interpretations,<sup>11</sup> and we have come full circle in our exploration of the functional territory of interpretations by re-approaching those that work to ensure intersubjective understanding.

### **A semantic map of interpretations**

In the analysis so far, we have illustrated the range of things that speakers can do by offering an interpretation of prior talk in everyday informal interaction. The six types of interpretation that we have found – interpretations that *challenge*, *clarify*, *demonstrate*, *summarize*, *elaborate*, and *explicate* – form a pragmatic terrain within which they constitute recognizable peaks, while continuities (or valleys, to stay within the metaphor) exist between them, such that they should not be thought of as discrete and mutually exclusive categories. We have had occasion to remark on several recurrent features of turn design that contribute to rendering visible what a speaker is trying to accomplish with a given interpretation. For example, sub-clausal syntax is a common feature of interpretations that act as clarifications and demonstrations of understanding. Laughter or smiling are common in challenges, summaries, and elaborations, whereas interrogativity is a common feature of explicating interpretations, for example. However, there is no single element of turn design that appears to be a sufficient signpost to a listener of what is being accomplished with an interpretation. For example, we noted that all *elaborations* in our collection have a clausal format; however, there is no type of interpretation for which we *never* find clausal formats. Other elements that we might consider typical markers of interpretations are uncommon. For example, *also* ('so') and *du meinst* ('you mean') are used as inference markers only in 10 of 170 (6%) and 4 of 170 (2%) cases, respectively. Does that mean that linguistic elements of turn design play no systematic role in the way speakers build action with interpretations? No, it does not. The semantic map in [Figure 1](#) shows that many features of turn design, while not uniquely specifying a particular function, are used in specifiable “neighborhoods” of interpretations. These partially overlapping features of turn-design create linkages between certain functional types of interpretations, while simultaneously discriminating them from others.

This map should be read as follows: The dashed boxes represent the functions we identified. The lines between them represent features of turn design. In our collection, the differently colored features of turn design are attested for the usage types they connect on the map. For example, syntactically interrogative interpretations (brown lines) in our collection either *clarify*, *explicate*, or *challenge*. Interpretations in sub-clausal formats (light green lines) *demonstrate* understanding, *clarify*, or *summarize*, for example. This map helps us to visualize two points: First, the map highlights that there is no recurrent feature of turn design that uniquely characterizes one usage or another. Rather, as one moves from one usage to another, these features varyingly appear and then disappear again, yielding a picture reminiscent of what Wittgenstein (1953, esp. § 65–67) captured in his notion of



**Figure 1.** Semantic map of functions accomplished with interpretations. Yellow: laughter and smiling; light green: sub-clausal turn format; blue: *du meinst* ('you mean'); brown: interrogative syntax; black: turn begins with a method of repair-initiation other than candidate understanding; red: *also* ('so'); purple: designed as upshot with *dann* ('then') or *das heißt* ('that is').

“family resemblances.” Second, the map visualizes both the continuities that hold between adjacent uses, as well as the stronger differences between more remote uses of interpretations in everyday social interaction within the pragmatic landscape that they constitute. In the next section, we consider cases that cannot be clearly categorized into one of the six types of interpretation. As predicted by the semantic map, these cases exist between (or extend across) adjacent functions on the map.

### Continuities across types of interpretation

In this section, we examine cases that cannot be clearly categorized into one of the six types of interpretation discussed so far. These cases provide further evidence for the map proposed in Figure 1. Extract (9) is a case that could equally be considered an interpretation that clarifies or one that demonstrates understanding – underscoring the semantic-pragmatic adjacency of these two functions. Here, August and his daughter Tamara are unhinging the doors of a cupboard in preparation for painting a room.

**Extract 9:** FOLK\_E\_00217\_SE\_01\_T\_01\_DF\_01\_C150

- 01    **AUG:**    **gut un jetzt un den des gleiche**  
*alright, and now that same at the bottom*
- 02           **da isch no\_ma so ne schraube?**  
*there is again such a screw*
- 03           (0.8)
- 04    **AUG:**    **mehr isch [des gar] net**  
*and that's it already*
- 05    **TAM:**            [hä? ]  
*huh?*
- 06 -> **TAM:**    **welche=ach die da UNten.**  
*which PTCL this.F there down*  
*which, oh that one down there*
- 07    **AUG:**    **ja**  
*yes*
- 08    **TAM:**    [hmhm
- 09    **AUG:**    **[okay ja halt\_s**  
*okay, yes hold it*

After having loosened the first screw on the door, August draws Tamara's attention to another such screw at the bottom (lines 01–02). This reference is intonationally try-marked and therefore makes some form of recognition claim relevant (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979). After a bit of delay (line 03) and in overlap with August's incremental turn extension (line 04), Tamara initiates repair, first with the open class repair initiator *häh?* ('huh,' line 05) and then with the interrogative pronoun *welche* ('which one'). In this context, Tamara then offers an interpretation that targets the reference of *so ne schraube* ('such a screw') in line 02 of August's prior turn: *ach die da UNten* ('oh that one down there,' line 06). In one regard, her interpretation can be analyzed as yet another repair initiation in a complex chain of multiple repair initiations that become increasingly more specific (Svennevig, 2008), and thus as an attempt to *clarify* the meaning of August's talk. In another regard, Tamara's interpretation can be seen to offer a "just-now" realization and thus a resolution of her earlier trouble in locating the screw; an analysis that is supported by her use of the change-of-state token *ach* ('oh') to preface her sub-clausal interpretation (Golato, 2010). On this account, her interpretation would stand as an answer to her question word-initiated repair and *demonstrate* her now-understanding of the reference to the screw in August's prior turn, thereby satisfying the relevance of a recognition display that August's try-marking of the reference had set in motion.

Ultimately, it is impossible to forward a definitive analysis with respect to this issue without simultaneously invoking the analyst's authority and thereby turning them into the arbiter of their data. Moreover, this question seems to miss the mark because for the participants this putative puzzle isn't one to begin with. On both accounts, they manage to work out the reference of *so ne schraube* ('such a screw') in August's turn and can continue to unhinge the door. What we see here is that clarifications and demonstrations of understanding are not categorically distinct, but that continuities exist between them.

We now turn to a case that does not so much extend across two neighboring functions, but that seems to lie in between two neighboring functions, viz. the functions of *summarizing* and of *demonstrating* understanding. Extract (10) is from the same board game interaction as Extract (6). Throughout this game, Torsten's bad luck is a constant source of amusement for the (other) players. After another move in which Torsten has made minimal progress, Oskar alerts his fellow players to Torsten's imminent success, teasingly requesting them to prevent him from accomplishing it (lines 01–02). Carolin giggles in response (line 04), displaying her understanding of Oskar's turn as a further tease. Starting at line 06, Torsten counters this by formulating a humorous faux-rationale for his slow progress, namely that he is being *orderly*: *erst (0.4) einen alleine schön rein und dann (1.0)* ('first, one (meeple) on its own, nicely inside (the home base), and then (1.0),' lines 07–09). At line 10, Carolin chimes in with an interpretation turn that can be understood to formulate the gist of Torsten's preceding description: *einer nach\_m andern* ('one after the other').

**Extract 10:** PECII\_DE\_Game1\_20150913\_11553124

- 01 Osk: **passt mal auf dass TORsten hier nicht**  
*be careful that Torsten doesn't get one*
- 02 **gleich einen reinkricht**  
*home soon*
- 03 (0.5)
- 04 Car: **H:. hu hu .H**
- 05 (0.1)
- 06 Tor: ° (nee) ° **ich mache das Ordentlich**  
*no, I do it in an orderly manner*

- 07            **erst [(0.4) einen alleIne, schön rEin**  
                  *first,                    one on its own, nicely in*
- 08    Osk:                    [uh.:
- 09    Tor:            **und dann (1.0)**  
                  *and then*
- 10 -> Car:            **einer [nachm            ] andern**  
                  *one            after-ART.DAT other.DAT*  
                  *one after the other*
- 11    Tor:                    **[die andern]**  
                  *the others*
- 12    Tor:            **genau**  
                  *exactly*
- 13    Car:            **[hahaha**
- 14    Ann:            **[(alles klar)**  
                  *(yeah right)*
- 15    Tor:            **nich hier son kuddelMUDdel,=**  
                  *not like this kind of jumble*
- 16                    **=alle durcheinANder,**  
                  *all in a mess*
- 17                    **(1.1)**

Carolyn's interpretation transforms Torsten's relatively convoluted description into a concise concept: "one after the other," an idiomatic expression of orderliness. Such "notionalizations" are commonly done in sub-clausal format (Deppermann, 2011), a formal feature they share with demonstrations of understanding. It is certainly apt to say that Carolyn's interpretation demonstrates her understanding of what Torsten is trying to achieve. In fact, we may notice that Torsten initially confirms Carolyn's interpretation with *genau* ('exactly'), a marked interjection that we recurrently find in response to what we called demonstrations of understanding (see Extract 5). However, in the context of playing a board game – an activity that is prone to generate collaborative banter – Carolyn's interpretation is hearable as doing more than simply signaling "I know what you mean." Indeed, Torsten takes this interpretation up as more – or something other – than a "mere" demonstration of understanding. He draws on it to further develop the humorous theme of his "orderly" gameplay by playfully remarking: *nich hier so\_n kuddelmuddel, alle durcheinander* ('not like this mess, all jumbled,' lines 16–17). Thus, although the interpretation is designed such that it can be taken at a level that is "general" across the categories of *demonstrations* and *summaries*, Torsten treats it specifically as an invitation to further banter, a response aligning with the interpretation as having provided a summary characterizing his game-play (Zinken, 2020). What we have here, then, is an interpretation that may be thought of as existing in the region between summarizing and demonstrating understanding on our semantic map, both in turn-constructural and in pragmatic terms.

Extract (11) serves as a final case to illustrate the continuities between some of the functions of interpretations previously identified and to support the geography of functions as proposed on the map in Figure 1. This example appears to lie between *explications* and *clarifications*. Joachim is visiting a shared student accommodation where he is applying to become a new housemate. They are talking to a mutual acquaintance named Ricci on the phone, who is from the same village as Joachim (see line 1), and who, as Sandra casually notes, "was also here" earlier (line 22). Joachim responds to this point with a questioning



## Discussion

This article has examined the range of things speakers do by offering an overt interpretation of another person's talk in informal interaction. Six uses of interpretations were distinguished, testifying to the versatility of this practice. A speaker can offer an interpretation to *challenge* another's action or the content of what they said. Interpretations can serve to *clarify* what a prior speaker meant to say or to *demonstrate* an understanding of what the other is talking about. Interpretations can *summarize* and thereby characterize prior talk, *elaborate* on what the prior speaker conveyed, or focalize and *explicate* information that was inferable from prior talk.

These six usage types do not constitute discrete categories. Instead, we have proposed that they form a pragmatic landscape within which they emerge as recognizable peaks and between which we can observe substantial continuities. Any sharp distinctions in this pragmatic terrain reflect the researcher's concerns rather than the nature of the phenomenon. One prominent distinction in the conversation analytic literature is the one between interpretations that initiate repair and interpretations that formulate prior talk. The present analysis has shown that this distinction can be connected to different uses of interpretations in daily life: Interpretations that *clarify* are prototypical instances of repair initiations, whereas interpretations that *summarize* are prototypical formulations. Simultaneously, by stepping back from the established concepts of repair and formulations, the present analysis has offered new insights. We could show that interpretations that offer a possible understanding of the matter at hand – a function typically associated with “formulations” – are no less prominent in daily life than are interpretations that offer a possible understanding of what the prior speaker meant to say, a function typically associated with repair. They may be qualitatively more varied (*summaries, elaborations, explications, and challenges* all belong to this part of the territory), but their overall frequency and relatively even distribution within our collection does not support the view that such formulation-like interpretations are vanishingly rare in everyday social interaction. What is rare, compared with interaction in institutional settings, is that they are done with explicit meta-communicative frames, such as *(So) what you're saying/you mean is ...* or the like. Interpretations that do the work of formulations in informal settings are typically much more embedded or woven into the “flow” of the ongoing interaction and rarely *marked* as reflexive consultations of the prior talk (although they do require it). They are, in Lynch's (2019) words, done “in and as conversation” (p. 195) and may thus appear as somewhat more opaque or elusive than in, say, psychotherapeutic or interview settings.

We have proposed that the method of semantic maps, established in typological linguistics, can be adapted to identify order among a range of related discourse functions. Whereas a typological semantic map draws on linguistic items from different languages, we have used diverse forms of linguistic and visible behavior in one language to build our semantic map. We believe that semantic maps have great potential for researchers of action formation, especially those interested in the systematic contribution of linguistic structures to action formation. Showing the “action habitat” of a particular linguistic structure or feature, a semantic map helps us to better understand the contribution of that structure to accomplishing a particular situated meaning.

Our results offer several avenues for further research on formulations and related actions. First, they suggest that – and how – professional practices of formulating are, after all, grounded in skills that develop in daily life. A core function of formulations in psychotherapy, for example, is to transform the client's description into terms that are suitable for therapeutic work. We have seen that such professional notionalizations (Deppermann, 2011) are closely connected to everyday practices of demonstrating understanding and summarizing prior talk. Therapists may also use formulations to exaggerate what a client has said, thereby inducing them to reconsider their stance (Weiste & Peräkylä, 2013). Again, we can observe similarities between this practice and the practice of offering *challenging* interpretations in informal interaction. Comparing these professional practices with their mundane

counterparts could yield new and elucidating insights with respect to the former's unique fittedness to, and their distinct affordances for the accomplishment of, the specific goals of the institution in question (Drew & Heritage, 1992).

Second, we note that some types of interpretations intersect with the organization of topics in interaction in interesting ways. Whereas *summaries*, for example, essentially offer re-descriptions of the preceding talk, the ever-so-slight transformations accomplished with them can serve as avenues into subsequent topic shifts. Similarly, interpretations that *elaborate* prior talk can serve to embellish and further manifest certain topics or subtly steer talk away from them. *Explications*, in contrast, are commonly used to focalize and topicalize news that would otherwise have been buried amidst talk that was occupied with something else. So, although interpretations generally operate on prior talk, they often also progress the talk topically. Their topical potential appears to be reflected in the recipient responses they attract. Although all the interpretations examined here make a *yes/no*-type response possible next, a clear majority received more than that (see Extracts (2)-(3), (6)-(8), (10)). Intriguingly, this is not only true for cases in which an interpretation is rejected and in which some form of continuation may be expectable on those grounds (e.g., Ford, 2001). It also holds for many cases in which the offered interpretation is treated as adequate and subsequent talk more fully embraces it (e.g., Extracts (2), (6)-(7), (10)). In fact, in some cases, a minimal confirmation with “yes” could be heard as declining an opportunity to expand on the offered interpretation and to disattend it as irrelevant or uninteresting. It may well be, then, that some of the interpretations considered here exhibit preference organizational properties that have been documented for topic proffering actions, for which subsequent sequence expansion is the preferred outcome (Schegloff, 2007, p. 169–180; Seuren & Huiskes, 2017). Future research will have to assess this proposal; however, what seems clear at this point is that the interpretations people offer in interaction can be topically consequential beyond the next turn.

Finally, the fact that the interpretations we offer in everyday talk are not exclusively, and not even predominantly, geared toward clarifying the meaning of prior talk raises questions about dominant conceptualizations of meaning and understanding in interaction. Whereas assuring a proper grasp of what the other means with what they say is certainly an important ingredient to mutual understanding, in most cases it does not become an issue for participants (e.g., Dreyfus, 1991; Garfinkel, 1967; Grondin, 2006). Another dimension of understanding in interaction that is much less well understood concerns the issue of how we jointly develop certain appreciations of the “scenes” in which we find ourselves or the activities in which we are engaged together. The various kinds of interpretations participants offer to engage with the matter at hand, to playfully explore and mutually elaborate different facets of it, could constitute a useful entry point for research that aims to elucidate this understudied aspect of sense-making and understanding in interaction.

## Notes

1. In contrast to probabilistic semantic maps that are generated from data using statistical techniques, see, Grossman and Polis (2012).
2. The term repair is commonly understood by reference to two closely linked but analytically separable criteria, a substantial and a procedural one. The substantial criterion locates repair as a set of practices for dealing with troubles of speaking, hearing, or understanding. The procedural criterion foregrounds the fact that practices of repair halt the progressivity of talk. In the context of the present discussion, we place a premium on the substantial criterion.
3. It is for this reason that some authors treat candidate understandings as separate from repair, see, Kurhila (2006) and Heritage and Watson (1980, FN 9, p. 260).
4. A list of functions of formulations that incorporates some terminology from empirical studies since the 1970s is provided in a textbook on Interactional Linguistics:  
 “Formulations are recognizable mainly through their semantic relations to the prior talk; these include *paraphrasing*, *summarizing*, *glossing*; *making prior implicit meanings explicit*; *drawing out the gist or upshot* from prior talk; *making generalizations* and *abstractions*; *drawing intersubjective or unilateral inferences*.” (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 2018, online material F, p. 94, our emphases).
5. Recordings and full transcripts are accessible here: <https://dgd.ids-mannheim.de/>

6. It also goes together with the observation that, unlike clarifying interpretations, interpretations that demonstrate understanding hardly ever get rejected (or “disconfirmed”). They are overwhelmingly either acknowledged, or not responded to at all. In fact, in the single case in which an interpretation turn designed to demonstrate understanding *does* get rejected in our collection, it is first acknowledged and only subsequently “corrected”, thus instantiating a well-documented pattern of [pro-forma agreement + disagreement] (see, Barth-Weingarten, 2003; Szczypek Reed, 2015).
7. The only exception to this generalization occurs when interpretation turns that demonstrate understanding are followed up with tag-questions, which may end in final rises to mobilize response (Stivers & Rossano, 2010). But even in those cases, the interpretation itself (the host-TCU) is invariably done with a falling final pitch contour, which is then transformed into a rise only on the tag-element.
8. Therein (i.e., in their potential for topic development) may, on occasion, lie a particular interactional motivation for speakers to forward such summarizing interpretations in the first place. While they are evidently volunteered and not made sequentially relevant by prior talk (note, for example, the 1.7 seconds of silence preceding Torsten’s interpretation turn in Extract 6), they can be, and often are, sequentially and/or topically implicative beyond the immediately subsequent turn. In fact, merely confirming or ratifying such interpretations with a simple affirmative token response may be tantamount to disattending or even declining an opportunity for jointly further developing the (topical) business under consideration. As we will make clear in the final discussion, this issue awaits further study.
9. With respect to news interviews, this has been referred to as a “roundabout trajectory” of answering (Clayman & Heritage, 2002, pp. 243–244).
10. It bears mention that Saskia does not literally “formulate” (in the sense of “nominate” or “articulate”) the inferred action, but enacts it with a slurping sound object and a gesture that depicts “holding a tube to a mouth”, thus leaving it to Annabell to actually name the action as part of her confirmation (line 18). This delivery may be seen to embody the inferential character of Saskia’s interpretation.
11. See, also Maynard (2013), who notes similar affinities between explicating and repairing prior talk in the use of *I mean*-prefaced utterances.

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