

Assessment

Term: Assessment

Part of Speech: *noun*

Definition:

Most broadly, an assessment is a type of **social action** by which an interactant expresses an evaluative stance towards someone or something (e.g., an object, an event, an action, an experience, a state of affairs, a place, a circumstance, etc.). The target of an assessment is typically called the ‘assessable’.

Assessing is pervasive and routine in social interaction and so researchers have adopted different strategies in operationalizing assessments in, and for the purposes of, particular studies. Some have made the presence of positively or negatively valenced lexically assessing terms (e.g., adjectives such as *good*, *lovely*, *bad*, *terrible*, evaluative verbs like *I love/hate it*) a decisive criterion (e.g., Sidnell & Enfield 2012: 312; Thompson et al. 2015; Pomerantz 1984). Others have adopted a more inclusive approach, allowing for non-lexical or lexically non-valenced stance displays such as *Oo::h!*, *A::w* or *Oh wow!* and even completely embodied ones to count as assessments (e.g., M. H. Goodwin 1980; C. Goodwin 1986; Goodwin & Goodwin 1987; 1992; see also Goodwin & Cekaite 2018: 26-31; Barth-Weingarten et al., *frthc.*; but cf. Heath 1989, esp. p. 122, fn. 6, as well as Jenkins & Hepburn 2015 on pain cries). Yet others have found it useful to distinguish conceptually between taking a stance and assessing as a social action, especially when dealing with lexically non-valenced stance displays (e.g., Wiggins 2002, 2012; Local & Walker 2008; Kärkkäinen 2012).

Evaluating someone or something can be participants’ primary concern in a stretch of talk, such that assessments can constitute independent **social actions** in and of themselves. In contexts of (presumed) shared experience with, or joint access to, the assessable, first assessments have been said to generally make agreement/disagreement from a co-participant **relevant** next actions and to thereby engender larger **assessment sequences** (Pomerantz 1984; Heritage & Raymond 2005). However, there has been some debate about the **sequential implicativeness** of such first assessments (and whether assessment sequences are indeed generically organized as **adjacency pairs**), with some research suggesting that they can vary considerably in terms of how strongly they attract or mobilize subsequent agreement/disagreement (Stivers & Rossano 2010a, 2010b; cf. Schegloff 2010; Couper-Kuhlen 2010).

With some exceptions (e.g., self-deprecations, criticism), agreeing responses are generally **preferred** over disagreeing ones (Pomerantz 1975, 1984; but see Auer & Uhmman 1982; Kotthoff 1993; Mondada 2009a). Both agreement and disagreement may be accomplished in various ways and through a wide range of practices, which themselves mobilize a diverse set of verbal, vocal and embodied resources (see, e.g., Pomerantz 1984; Thompson et al. 2015: ch. 4; Ogden 2006; M. H. Goodwin 1980, 2007; Schegloff 1987; Mondada 2009a).

Since assessments are (treated as) products of experience and, in their production, embody a claim to such experience/experiential knowledge of the matter being assessed (Pomerantz 1984, pp. 57-58, Goodwin & Goodwin 1987, p. 9), assessment sequences form a rich site for the display, negotiation and management of **epistemic** concerns, such as participants’ differential access, entitlement to and authority over (certain stocks of) knowledge and experience (see, e.g., Heritage 2002, 2013; Heritage & Raymond 2005; Raymond & Heritage 2006; Stivers et al. 2011; see also Hayano 2011, 2016; Edwards & Potter 2017; Wiggins & Potter 2003).

Assessments may also be produced in a range of other contexts. For example, they play a prominent role in the responsive receipt of **news announcements** (e.g., Maynard 2003; Freese & Maynard 1998; Maynard & Freese 2012) and **informings** (e.g., Thompson et al. 2015) or as approving receipts of **proposals** (e.g., Stevanovic 2012; Seuren 2018). Similarly, they may be produced in the context of extended **reportings** and **storytellings**, both as teller’s devices for contextualizing the story’s point and as recipients’ devices for affiliating or disaffiliating with the storyteller (e.g., Jefferson 1978; C. Goodwin 1986; Stivers 2008; Selting 2017).

In accordance with their experiential character, it has been observed that assessments are commonly proffered towards the end of 'topics', sequences and activities, as devices for bringing them to a close (e.g., Antaki et al. 2000; Antaki 2002; Schegloff 2007; Mondada 2009b; Thompson et al. 2015). On the other hand, assessments are also often produced in, and reflexively create, moments of heightened interactional participation and affective involvement (e.g., Goodwin & Goodwin 1987, 1992; C. Goodwin 1986, 2007; Selting 1994; Mondada 2009b).

Finally, assessments may also figure as co-constitutive ingredients in a plethora of other actions and activities, such as complaining (e.g., Drew 1998; Günthner 2000; Dersley & Wootton 2000; Heinemann & Traverso 2009; Selting 2012), gossiping (e.g., Bergmann 1993), shaming/admonishing (Potter & Hepburn 2020), advice-giving (e.g., Shaw et al. 2015), praising/complimenting (Pomerantz 1978; Golato 2002, 2005, 2011; Pillet-Shore 2015) as well as numerous others.

Additional Related Entries:

preference (organization)

epistemics

adjacency pair(s)

conditional relevance

stance

affect

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