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# Emergent focused interactions in public places: A systematic analysis of the multimodal achievement of a common interactional space

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## Abstract

This paper deals with the multimodal and spatial arrangements of the participants within pre-beginning and opening sequences, i.e. sequences taking place before the actual opening of a social interaction and achieving the conditions for an imminent opening. In face-to-face conversations, these sequences are characterized by intense body activities in space, through which participants achieve their social and spatial convergence and conjunction, and initiate a coordinated common entry in the interaction. In this phase, even before beginning to speak, participants achieve the mutual orientation of their bodies and of their gaze. Pre-conditions for social interaction are visibly and publicly assembled in time, within the progressive establishment of a mutual focus of attention and a common interactional space. In public places and between unknown persons, this mutual arrangement is even more important, emerging progressively from the participants' transition from moving to standing, and their transformation from unfocused pedestrians to focused would-be-imminent-co-participants. On the basis of a corpus of video recordings, the paper offers an analysis of a collection of pre-beginnings of itinerary descriptions in public space and systematically describes the identification of the emerging interactional partner, the organization of convergent trajectories in space, the exchange of first mutual glances, and the very first words produced in the encounter. © 2008 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper deals with the organization of mutual trajectories of pedestrians in public space during *pre-beginning and opening sequences*, i.e. sequences taking place before the actual opening of a social interaction and achieving the conditions for an imminent opening. Stopping somebody on the street for whatever reason (asking for a cigarette, for help, for directions, for signing a petition, etc.) is a mundane, everyday, commonplace phenomenon, which is largely experienced by everybody but much less studied as a topic of detailed analysis.

In face-to-face conversations, these sequences are characterized by an intense body activity in space, through which participants achieve their social and spatial convergence and conjunction, in order to initiate a coordinated common entry in the interaction. In this phase, even before beginning to speak, participants achieve the mutual orientation of their bodies and of their gaze: the pre-conditions for social interaction are visibly and publicly assembled in time, within the progressive establishment of a mutual focus of attention and a common interactional space. This particular

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moment, just preceding the exchange of the first words in interaction, shows the importance of the spatial disposition and arrangement of the participants' bodies. When this encounter occurs in public places and between unknown persons, this mutual arrangement of the interactional space is even more important, emerging progressively from the very first contact between participants, their transition from moving to standing, and their transformation from unfocused pedestrians to focused would-be-imminent-co-participants.

A detailed study of this particular moment, at the edge of an imminent encounter, relies on particular features of interactions in public spaces, revealing the importance of spatial and multimodal resources for the emergence of social relationships and for the organization of opening sequences. More particularly, the paper insists both on the emergent temporality of encounters and on the praxeological and sequential achievement of emergent and dynamic interactional spaces. Based on video recordings of itinerary descriptions, it offers a detailed systematic analysis of the coordinated entry of prospective co-participants in the interaction.

### *1.1. Interactions in public places*

The study of behavior in public places has been initiated by the work of Erving Goffman, who describes how co-present persons can either mutually proffer civil inattention, mutually adjusting in an 'unfocused interaction,' or initiate a 'focused interaction,' mutually orienting in a face engagement or an encounter (1963:88–89). Goffman has vividly described this 'coming together' and the transitions from one kind of interaction to another; nevertheless, at his time he could not exploit the potentialities that video recordings make available for a detailed and systematic study of the emergence of social interactions.

Interestingly, the analysis of social interactions — historically undertaken first on audio, then on video data — has favored conversations, institutional talk, and professional interactions that take place mostly in domestic contexts, workplaces or institutional settings characterized by circumscribed spaces, where participants are often standing in a restricted and stable perimeter, engaged in activities such as dinner conversations, meetings, news interviews, or medical consultations. In marked contrast, interactions among strangers in public places are characteristically not planned in advance, take place contingently in open spaces, and involve prospective co-participants dynamically moving in and out of converging and diverging trajectories. The difficulty of recording them, because of their high contingency, accounts for the fact that they have been much less studied — with some exceptions such as Kendon and Ferber (1973) studying, on the basis of film materials, greetings in a garden party, where the articulation between spatial distribution of the future co-participants and sighting, approaching, converging plays a crucial role.

These features make interactions among strangers in public space, such as itinerary requests, particularly interesting. They constitute a "perspicuous setting" (Garfinkel, 2002) for the study of a series of topics dealing with fundamental features of social interaction and of social order; they are encounters that have not been planned, but just happen in the public space; they have a specific *emergent* character which raises more general issues; and they make observable the emergence of social relationships, of joint action, and of interactional space.

### *1.2. The emergence of social relationships*

Encounters in public space make observable the way in which unacquainted people establish a very first contact, the very beginning of a social relationship. This transition from an unfocused to a focused interaction (Goffman, 1961, 1963; Sudnow, 1972) is part and parcel of the transformation from co-present persons to co-participants. Its study allows us to characterize how sociability emerges in real time, moment by moment. In this sense, it allows us to investigate empirically and systematically a fundamental aspect of Simmel's (1908) conception of 'sociation' (*Vergesellschaftung*), namely mutual glances as the first form of reciprocity. In turn, this means recognizing the importance of visible features — mutual identification and recognition through gaze and body movements, postures, orientations — before co-participants engage in talk and as achieving the pre-conditions for talk.

### *1.3. The emergence of the organization of interaction: openings*

The emergent character of encounters in public space highlights specific aspects of the opening sequence. Although opening sequences have been largely and magisterially studied (Schegloff, 1968, 1986), openings of face-to-face encounters are less extensively and systematically described than openings of telephone conversations. Their specific

visual features, the importance of pre-beginning sequences (Schegloff, 1979) taking place *before* the actual opening and achieving its very conditions, and the fundamental role of the body and gestural resources in their organization, mobilized before people engage in talk, can only be sketched on the basis of video data and of a sequential analysis taking into account the complexity of multiple concurrent multimodal practices.

#### 1.4. *The emergence of a new interactional space*

Beside the importance of the temporal organization of this progressive multimodal mutual engagement, openings of social interactions in public places invite us to focus on the importance of space for the emergent and dynamic organization of interaction. Walking is a collectively organized social action (Ryave and Schenkein, 1974; Lee and Watson, 1993; Quéré and Brezger, 1992), where “vehicular units” (Goffman, 1963), either consisting of individuals or of parties — whose coordinated gait accountably achieves their “togetherness” (Ryave and Schenkein, 1974) — are mutually intelligible as they move through space, and as they build and monitor recognizable trajectories, anticipating collisions, facilitating navigation, maintaining togetherness, passing and crossing other pedestrians, etc. Thus, initiating an encounter in public space is achieved by transforming two vehicular units into one unique participation framework, which is not only achieved through mutual ratification by gaze and talk (Goodwin and Goodwin, 2004), but also by converging trajectories ending in the establishment of a new interactional space, shaped by the ordered arrangements of the co-participants’ bodies. Kendon (1990) has described the way in which two or more persons converging together build a new space — called an ‘F Formation’ — which is dynamically configured, to which they have equal and direct access and control. The details of these transient and changing ‘interactional spaces’ (Mondada, 2005) are actively and constantly shaped and sustained by the participants’ bodies, glances and gestures during the interaction, and they have a configuring effect on action and are reflexively constrained by it (Goodwin, 2000). Detailed analysis of the sequential organization as it unfolds reveals how interactional space evolves as turn-taking unfolds and as participation frameworks change. The analysis of openings in public encounters demonstrates that they are a perspicuous phenomenon, which reveals the spatial and material dynamic conditions of the imminent conjunction of the prospective co-partners — and can contribute to a revision of the very notion of space, highlighting some of its dynamic and praxeological aspects (see for example Laurier and Philo, 2006).

#### 1.5. *The data*

This paper focuses on the openings of social interactions in which pedestrians ask other passers-by for route directions. Studies of itinerary descriptions (*Wegauskünfte*) have a rich tradition, initiated in linguistics by the work of Klein (1979, 1982), Wunderlich (1976), Wunderlich and Reinelt (1982) (see also Auer, 1979), who were motivated by an interest in the grammar and reference of spatial expressions within actual language use. For this purpose, corpora of audio recordings were assembled by researchers asking for directions in their town. The methodology used for gathering data on spatial expressions, was based on ‘ecological’, ‘semi-experimental’ encounters, initiated by researchers randomly addressing pedestrians walking in the street. This methodology has been replicated by various researchers since then, in various languages (see Barberis, 1994 for French; Haviland, 1996, 2000 for Tzotzil and Guugu Yimithirr). Route directions have also been collected in psychology and cognitive sciences (see for example Allen, 2000; Denis, 1997; Denis et al., 1999; Mark and Gould, 1995; Taylor and Tversky, 1992), within a more experimental framework, where subjects were pre-selected to give instructions in particular settings or where students are asked to give itinerary descriptions either on the campus or in the lab. The objective of these studies focuses on the ways in which spatial knowledge is activated and transformed into adequate cognitive representations and verbal descriptions. Within cognitive and computer sciences, these studies have contributed to the design of navigational aids, guidance systems for vehicles, for pedestrians, as well as for people with impairments, as well as systems able to generate efficient route descriptions in natural language and in a cartographic format, etc. (see, for example, Gaunet and Briffault, 2005; Look et al., 2005). Generally, all these studies have acknowledged the interactional organization of road directions as structured by an initiation, the description, and a closure, but they have been less interested in the opening and the closing of the encounter and more interested in the central, descriptive phase, highlighting the possible articulations between space, language and cognition. Core interactional aspects of route descriptions have been explored within a conversation analytic perspective by Psathas (Psathas and Kozloff, 1976; Psathas, 1986a,b, 1987, 1991 — see also Haddington and Keisanen, 2009).

In this paper, I revisit some of these data with a different purpose, centered on the interactional organization of the encounters and more particularly on their opening. The corpus studied is constituted by social encounters in public places which have been video-recorded in a small French town by two researchers asking directions from passers-by (see Barb  ris and Manes-Gallo, 2007 for a presentation of their corpus and a series of analyses). In order to collect road directions, a series of social interactions are initiated by the researchers who approach at random pedestrians walking on the street and ask them for directions. This peculiar situation produces interactions which are ‘ecologically provoked’, ‘semi-experimental’ itinerary descriptions (for a discussion of their difference with naturalistic data, see Mondada, 2007a; ten Have, 2002; Speer, 2002). They are also naturally occurring fieldwork interactions, indicative of general problems encountered by participants seeking to contact strangers in public spaces, such as the establishment of an incipient social relationship, the opening of a new encounter, and the achievement of reciprocity. Thus, I use a part of this corpus of video-recorded data (12 instances of encounters where directions are been asked) not for the study of space description or representation, but for the study of the very first contact between strangers in public places, building an emergent ‘interactional space’.

#### 1.6. A sequential analysis of the opening phase

Within the tradition of studies of route directions, very little attention has been devoted to the initiation of the interaction with passers-by. This phase is not a mere “ritual”, nor a mere “remedial interchange” (Watson, 2005:207), but the moment where the very conditions for the subsequent encounter are assembled by the participants and which are also consequential for the organization of spatial instructions (Mondada, 2005).

The *opening* of an encounter between two or more unacquainted, unknown persons in public space, initiated by one party coming alongside another and asking him for an itinerary description, is organized by the methodical response of the participants to a series of practical problems which constitute the *pre-beginning* (Schegloff, 1979; or the pre-opening, cf. Mondada, in press-a) of the interaction. In the corpus studied here, the initiative is taken by two persons asking for the itinerary, confronted by the task of selecting the future addressees and organizing the coordinated entry of all co-participants in the interaction. A series of problems organize the sequential unfolding of this pre-beginning and opening:

- the *identification of the other as a relevant future interactional partner*, who is supposed to belong to an adequate and to have the adequate competences for answering to the itinerary request (cf. Schegloff, 1972 on categorial online analysis performed by members and embedded in their place formulations);
- the *organization of the convergence and conjunction with the imminent interlocutor*, through the organization of *glances* to him and of *trajectories* in space of mobile not-yet-co-participants;
- the *constitution of a common interactional space* where the participants no longer constitute two distinct mobile vehicular units but engage in one unique stabilized participation framework;
- the *transformation of the initial interactional space into a new configuration*, adjusted to the task at hand, namely the itinerary description: the interactional space is reoriented towards the target pointed at and the relevant landmarks structuring the description. The participation framework and the local categories change too, being now focused on the person who knows, who takes the initiative, who is entitled to instruct the itinerary seeker.

The paper explores these practical problems and the methodical solutions implemented by the participants in order to accomplish the situated conditions for the encounter and the orderly conjunction of the participants.

I begin with an exemplary analysis of the establishment of a new encounter, and show the various sequences constituting the pre-beginning and the opening of the interaction. The sequence organization is then systematically explored, step by step, through the analysis of a collection of cases, examining the coordination of the initiators of the encounter and their common orientation towards relevant categorizations of the approached pedestrians, the organization of the approach and the establishment of a mutual gaze, the formulation of the reason for the approach and the transition from walking to standing, progressively constituting a stabilized interactional space in which the itinerary instructions will be given. In this systematic analysis, multimodal resources, as well as the spatial disposition and dynamic arrangement of the bodies play a central role for the emergent sequential organization of the encounter. In the conclusion, I explore the temporality of emergent, progressive, dynamic processes and the fundamental importance of spatial dimension for the establishment of the interactional order.

## 2. A first excerpt

I undertake a single case analysis of the beginning of an interaction in a public place in order to expose a range of questions that I systematically deal with later in this paper. Its verbal transcript shows the apparent simplicity of the exchange:

(1) (itin1)

- 1 E *excusez-moi madame, je cherche l'église saint-roch*  
*sorry madam, I'm looking for the church of saint Roch*  
 2 (0.6)  
 3 L *euh: (.) elle est là.*  
*ehm: (.) it's here.*

E addresses L, asking her how to reach a touristic landmark. The first turn is constituted by an initial TCU in the form of an apology, and then by a second one, formulating the request. Within the former, the apology occupies the turn-initial position and the address comes in second position. Beginning with an apology could be seen, in Goffmanian terms, as a way of performing facework and minimizing the threats of the other's face. But beginning with an apology can also be analyzed, within a Sacksian perspective, as integrating and responding to a series of structural constraints on turn continuation: the "apology" works in fact as an attention-getting device; it immediately projects the kind of activity on which the interaction will be focused, reflexively making this interaction accountable and enabling the interlocutor to understand and to expect what will be the next action. As noted by Schegloff (1979:33–34), at the very beginning of the conversation,

if some talk is undertaken, the first turn regularly displays (by each party for the other) understandings of the outcome of the pre-beginning phase. The types of turn employed begin to constitute a conversation of some type, and are selected, at least partially, by reference to determinations made in the pre-beginning, among them the identification made there. For example, a greeting, e.g. "Hi," in first turn can display a claim of recognition by its speaker of its recipient, and can make reciprocal recognition relevant, if it has not already occurred nearly simultaneously. An "excuse me" in first turn can display an identification of its recipient by its speaker as a "stranger" (as well as displaying, for example, that something other than a full or casual conversation is being initially projected, but rather a single sequence, very likely of a "service" type).

In the excerpt studied, "excusez-moi madame" (line 1) projects a second TCU, making explicit the kind of service requested. This second TCU projects the conditional relevance for a response: after a slight pause, L answers by indicating an object in the environment.

The analysis of these turns at talk focuses our attention of the projections going on in these very first seconds of interaction. But it ignores the conditions which have allowed the production of this first sequence. Access to video makes these conditions available and inspectable, and a multimodal transcript opens up the possibility of their detailed reconstruction, as we see in Excerpt 2.

(2) (itin1) (=multimodal transcript of Excerpt 1)

- 1 E # *exc\*usez-moi mada\*me#?*  
*excuse me madam?*  
 >>walks----->>  
 L >>looks fr\*looks below---\*looks at E, and cont. walking-->  
 fig #1 #2 #3





2 E je cher\*che + l'é#glise saint-#ro\*\*ch\*#  
 I am looking for the church of saint Roch  
 fig #4 #5 #6  
 -----\*stops, initiates body torque+changes feet-->>  
 1 \*holds her bag-->>  
 1 ---->\*stops and turns to E\*



L and E twisting progressively and turning one to the other

3 Δ(0.6) #Δ  
 fig #7  
 com Δboth are face to face and exchange mutual glancesΔ



achievement and stabilization of a face to face interactional space

4 I \* euh: \* (.) e\*lle est #là.\*  
 ehm: (.) it's there.  
 \*turns head\*.....\*points-----\*  
 fig #8



This excerpt shows the multimodal and embodied way in which the opening of this interaction is organized. E and L are walking straight, one in front of the other, along parallel and independent trajectories. As L looks straight in front of her, E addresses her (Fig. 1) with “excusez-moi madame,”. L lowers her head (Fig. 2), and then gazes to E (Fig. 3), although she does not speak yet. Both participants are still walking, and E formulates the reason for the contact (“je cherche l’église saint-roch” at line 2). Interestingly, at the beginning of this second TCU, L holds her bag. This gesture could seem anecdotal, but it can display a possible (negative) categorization that L makes of E, of her reasons to come alongside and of her future possible (unwished-for) activities. At that point, the interaction is still undetermined from a categorical perspective and L seems to orient to the possible categorization of E as a robber, a huckster or a scalper. E slows down and is the first to stop as she initiates a body torque (Schegloff, 1998): her body was projected forwards and is now redirected towards L. On her side, L stops soon afterwards (as E pronounces “roch”) and turns also towards E (Figs. 4–6). Thus, two movements are combined here: the stop and the body torque, allowing participants to wind down and to reorient their trajectories in such a way that they rearrange themselves in a face-to-face disposition. This is achieved during the pause, i.e.

during this lapse, both persons, who are now co-participants to the same interaction, stabilize their positions in a face-to-face orientation (their bodies remain stable on both feet and they exchange glances) (see Fig. 7). It is only afterwards that L turns again, first with her head and then with all her body, in order to point to an object in space, while answering the question.

This short excerpt shows the unfolding realization of a series of conditions that are fulfilled for the opening to take place. In a nutshell, we can identify three steps in the sequential organization of the pre-beginning and opening:

1. Mutual orientation is progressively established during the emergence of an imminent interaction, displayed by a modification of the initiator's trajectory and by her gaze on the prospective co-participant. The latter progressively adjusts to this initiative.
2. Mutual orientation is achieved through the establishment of a common focus of attention, creating an interactional space, shaped by the bodies of both persons, becoming now co-participants to a joint action. The initiator formulates the object of the interaction even before both stop walking. It seems that there is a preference for the production as soon as possible of the reason for the encounter, which dissipates possible doubts about the categorization of the participant initiating it and of the activity itself. Moreover, the stop is not performed abruptly, and the trajectory of the body movement continues as it is projected by their gait. Thus, their gait slows down progressively, as the reason for the encounter is progressively uttered. A finely tuned coordination and synchronization is achieved by participants between the time when they are walking and the time of the first utterance.
3. Once the interactional space is stabilized, it immediately undergoes a change, adapted to the activity participants engage in just after the opening. The itinerary description implies a new arrangement of the bodies which are not positioned face-to-face but side-by-side, favoring the common orientation of both participants to the first landmark concerned by the spatial instruction.

### 3. Pre-beginnings

Before the itinerary requesters orient to and address their future co-participant(s), a preliminary phase is observable: during this phase, the members of the pair initiating the approach coordinate themselves, select a possible candidate and organize their spatial approach. This coordination takes place in a multimodal way through audible identifications and negotiations of the categorization of the selected person, as well as through exchanges of glances between both initiators, alternating with glances to their common focus of attention, the pedestrian and possible future co-participant.

This preliminary phase has been identified in the literature as a *pre-beginning* (Schegloff, 1979:27; Whalen and Zimmerman, 1987:180sv; and Zimmerman, 1992:432–434). It is a phase preceding the *opening*, in which the participants initiate a mutual identification thanks to their reciprocal visual accessibility. Although this mutual visibility is not possible in telephone calls — where co-participants are not co-present and they are not visible (contrary to videoconferences, cf. Mondada, 2007b) — Whalen and Zimmerman have included a variety of actions as relevant to calls' pre-beginnings, such as researching or choosing the telephone number, composing it, preparing the message to be delivered to the called institution (cf. Mondada, 2008). These preliminary and preparatory activities rest upon various expectations concerning the category of the called person/institution, as well as the type of activity that will take place in the call. Thus, pre-beginnings are a sequential environment where future participants display their expectations concerning activities, identities and categorizations involved in the imminent interaction, and begin to align with their projected relevances.

In itinerary requests, pre-beginnings exhibit the orientation towards the future co-participant, who is identified and recognized in a categorical — and not a personal — way, as a competent member able to deliver an itinerary description (Mondada, 2002). This categorization is achieved through an online and situated analysis of the location, the activity, and the participants (Schegloff, 1972), which is based on the immediate visibility of categorial incumbencies 'at a glance' (Jayyusi, 1984:86), allowing to identify the relevant categories and to recognize not only their epistemic dimension but also their moral one — concerning the rights and obligations to perform the adequate next action (Watson, 2005:209).

Two sets of practices are observable in this sequential environment in the following excerpts: the explicit categorization of the passer-by, his identity and category-bound supposed competences; the use of a pre-beginning particle, “oui”, achieving the mutual coordination of the requesters.

### 3.1. Categorizations of the possible future co-participant

Pre-beginnings in itinerary requests often take the form of various descriptions of the possible future co-participant, displaying the search for a visibly relevant category, before the initiation of an encounter relying on the supposed competences of this category.

(3) (itin2 - 0.19.22)

```
1 F -> °(celui-ci)°
        °(this one)°
2 E      ah oui d'accord celui-
        oh yes okay this-
3        (2.4)
```

(4) (itin7 - 1.12.32)

```
1 F -> avec là: les enfants là.
        with the: the kids there.
2        (2.8)
```

(5) (itin12 - 2.29.54)

```
1 E      ((looks in front, looks at F, looks behind her))
2 E -> ceux-là?
        these there?
3        (0.3)
4 F -> oui.. j'sais pas s'ils sont de montpellier, on va leur demander
        yes.. I don't know if they're from Montpellier, we're going to ask them
```

In the first and the third case, the person is designated with a demonstrative (Excerpt 3: “(°celui-ci)°” line 1, “celui-” line 2; Excerpt 5: “ceux-là” line 2). This deictic form is mutually intelligible thanks to the exchange of glances between the participants (cf. Excerpt 5, line 1) and to their common bodily orientation, achieved through their aligned walking and their similar bodily posture.

In Excerpts 4 and 5, membership categories are used: a couple walking with a stroller is identified through their children (Excerpt 4, 1); for another couple, local membership is questioned (Excerpt 5, 4). This sequence enables E and F

- to establish a common orientation,
- to question the relevance of their ongoing categorial decision,
- to project a concerted action.

In this context, membership categorization is central, since the search for a passer-by able to deliver the itinerary consists of the visual inspection of the public space, and a search for a person whose categorization is relevant for the imminent activity. Giving directions is a category-bound activity (Sacks, 1972a), relying on the local knowledge of the requested object. Membership is not always visibly displayed, but the work of choosing a future co-participant involves inspecting visible features of co-present persons in the environment and guessing their relevant category for the coming joint action (see Sacks, 1972b on the work of the police inspecting visible features of person categorizations in the public space; see also Sacks, 1992 about the ‘MIR Membership Categorization Device’ — where M stands for ‘Membership,’ I for ‘Inference rich,’ and R for ‘Representativeness’ — for the categorial basis of the production of inferences).

In public space, “strangers” are not anonymous people, but persons seen as belonging to a category visibly displayed and often bound to an activity. Categories can be associated with one another within a standardized pair. For example, a “beggar” can be identified by his body posture, occupation of space and conduct, although he can refuse the corresponding action proposed by a “donor” (Hinnenkamp, 1989); a “blind person” can be identified as such by bystanders offering help, and can refuse it (Relieu, 1994); in a similar way, a person can be identified as a “woman” by



“men” gazing and whistling (Brooks Gardner, 1980), although she can refuse the actions bounded to that category and prefer to be seen as an “ordinary” “passer-by”. In public space, individuals organize their categorical availability and accountability by adopting specific postures or engaging in specific conducts; they can also renegotiate their membership when others identify them in a particular way and align with it, organizing their approach and conduct accordingly. Itinerary descriptions make these practical reasonings and their embodied implementation in conduct observable and available for analysis.

In Excerpt 5 above, we can observe the categorical work done by E and F looking at a couple passing by in order to guess if “they are from Montpellier”: regional identity is scrutinized on the basis of visual appearance. In this case, the question is asked when looking at a man wearing a colorful and eccentric sweater: F seems to orient to these visible features as a possible basis for inferring that the man is not a “local”, but for example a “tourist”. This latter category would preclude the formulation of the itinerary request.

Therefore, in a pre-beginning position, the categorical scrutiny of persons constitutes the basis of the decision to walk toward them and to talk to them. This categorical decision is embedded in a particular temporality, which is not only emergent but also urgent. The decision is taken on the fly, while all parties are walking and while they are still in their mutual visual (most often frontal) space. The decision has to be taken before the person has disappeared from the visual field. In this sense, E and F deal with a series of practical problems — of identifying a person in the public space, categorizing her as relevant for the future activity, organizing their coordinated walk towards her, and making recognizable, assessable and acceptable their proposal of a common action — in a very short time.

### 3.2. “ouih”: coordinating the walk towards the passer-by

A central feature of this decision-taking phase is the coordination between both itinerary requesters. In the corpus, a recurrent form manifests the achievement of their alignment relatively to the next action: turn-initial “ouih” or “ouais” produced as an isolated form in a pre-beginning position.

(6) (itin11 - 2.24.19)

1 F °ouais,°  
°yeah,°  
2 (0.3)

(7) (itin6 - MTP 01.05.20)

1 E ouih  
yesh  
2 (#1.#3#)  
fig #1 #2#3





In both excerpts, E and F coordinate their walk to the chosen pedestrian with “°ouais°” (Excerpt 6) or “oui<sup>h</sup>” (Excerpt 7).

Excerpt 7 shows in detail the way in which the walk towards the passer-by is organized immediately after the “oui<sup>h</sup>”: the particle is uttered when E and F are still standing on the right centre of the street (Fig. 1). Immediately after “oui<sup>h</sup>”, during the pause, both women begin to walk (Fig. 2) and to converge with an approaching man (Fig. 3). This “oui<sup>h</sup>” exhibits an identification by the speaker of the person being pointed at: it responds to a previous action, which is not verbally implemented as in the deictics and categorizations studied above (Section 3.1), but which is probably achieved by glances or by body orientations (this aspect is difficult to assess with accuracy with the kind of video data I have at hand).

These turns in a pre-beginning position are exchanged between both women before the future encounter is initiated. They are not heard by the passer-by and he does not orient to them; they take place before the passer-by even notices the presence of the two women: and neither gaze nor glances are exchanged at this point.

Once this pre-beginning phase is completed, both women converge towards the selected passer-by and the interaction is launched.

#### 4. The organization of the convergence of the bodies and the establishment of a mutual gaze: “euh:::” in pre-initial position

The approach of the passer-by and the opening of the interaction is a dynamic movement realized in space as well as in the multimodal body, through language and gestural postures. If we observe the very first vocal resource mobilized in this environment, we notice that various openings begin with a stretched “euh” positioned in a pre-initial position. This *turn pre-beginning or turn pre-initial position* (Schegloff, 1996:92, cf. Mondada, *in press-b*), is constituted by elements projecting the onset of talk, i.e. the beginning of the next turn, although not really belonging to that turn, and not constituting a proper turn (or TCU) beginning. Schegloff (1996:93) mentions various actions taking place at this position, such as turning the head towards the future co-participant, initiating a gesture (cf. Streeck and Hartge, 1992; Mondada, 2007c), smiling, producing in-breath or uttering “uh(m)”: these multimodal resources achieve a specific interactional job, projecting and launching the next action, although not yet constituting the first TCU of the initiated turn.

In the corpus, “euh:::” is recurrently uttered in that position, in an audible way for the recipient.

(8) (itin9 - 2.06.04)

```

1 F -> euh pardon madame, excusez-moi, (.) l'église saint-roch
      ehm sorry madam, excuse me, (.) the church of saint Roch
2      s'il vous plaît. vous connaissez
      please. do you know {it}
3 M      [ouih
          {yesh}

```

(9) (itin10 - 2.11.18)

1 F -> euh::: pardon mesdames, (.) l'église saint-roch  
 ehm::: excuse me ladies, (.) the church of saint Roch  
 2 D ah

(10) (itin11 - 2.24.19) (=continuation of Excerpt 6)

1 F °ouais,°  
 °yeah,°  
 2 (0.3)  
 3 F -> euh °euh:::° pardon monsieur?  
 ehm °ehm:::° sorry sir?

(11) (itin12 - 2.29.54) (=continuation of Excerpt 5)

1 E ceux-là,  
 these there,  
 2 (0.3)  
 3 F oui:: j'sais pas s'ils sont de montpellier, on va leur demander  
 yes:, I don't know if they're from Montpellier, we're going ask them  
 4 (0.4)  
 5 F -> eu[h:::  
 eh[m:::  
 6 E [( ) l'église saint-roch  
 [( ) the church of saint Roch

In three cases (Excerpts 8–10) “euh” prefaces “pardon”, before the actual request. When “pardon” is absent, “euh” is standing alone (Excerpt 11), but the turn is collaboratively produced with another speaker (lines 5–6). “Euh” is generally lengthened (Excerpt 9–11): in the only case where it takes a shorter form (Excerpt 8), it is followed by “pardon madame, excusez-moi”, i.e. by an expansion of the verbal resources inserted before the actual request. These vocal and temporal features of “euh” show that in a pre-initial position, this resource has a double effect: it enables the speaker to self-select and to take the turn, and it delays the initiation of the first TCU.

These features are functional to the actions achieved at that position: this turn pre-beginning is the very first word being addressed to the new co-participant. “Euh” works here as a *summons* (cf. Schegloff, 1968: summons of telephone calls are performed by the telephone ringing; in face to face, summons can be accomplished in a variety of ways, which have been less studied). Notwithstanding, and contrary to telephone calls, in itinerary requests this summons is not followed by a transition-relevance place (TRP) projecting a second pair part for the summons' response; here it does not receive any verbal response (receiving instead a visual response, see below). “Euh” projects a future action in an audible way, hearable by the putative recipient, signaling that (s)he is being addressed and that an action is coming - although not yet initiating it. This functional work done by “euh” is achieved by its formal and temporal characteristics: “euh” is a vocal (vs a verbal) resource, not conveying any meaning, not opening any syntactical Gestalt; moreover, it is a vocal form which can be easily stretched for quite a long time (contrary to other vocal resources, like an in-breath or smack, less extendable and differently audible).

The temporality of the production of “euh:::” is finely-tuned with the temporality of E and F walking towards the passer-by and attracting her attention: “euh” is produced when they are approaching and are not yet close by, i.e. at a crucial moment when E and F emerge as would-be interlocutors and the passer-by becomes a possible co-participant. During this approach, mutual gaze is established: in Excerpt 9, passers-by glance at E and F at the end of the “euh”, whereas in Excerpts 10 and 11 the passers-by glance is directed on E and F precisely during the “euh”. The temporally finely tuned production of this form is oriented to the establishment of the first mutual glance between all participants.

In order to better sketch this temporality, I will analyze more closely Excerpt 9 above.

(12) (itin10 - 2.11.18) (=multimodal transcript of Excerpt 9)

1 D,C ((walk chatting # together))  
fig #1



2 F <#euh#::: # (0.9)> pardon mesdames, # (.) l'église saint-roch  
< ehm::: (0.9)> sorry ladies, (.) the church of saint Roch  
fig #2 #3 #4 #5

3 D +ah+  
+stops+



2. C looks in front of her



3. C turns her head



4. C and D look at E



5. C and D look at F

In this fragment, a couple of passers-by, C and D, are walking, talking together. Thus, they are already engaged in a joint activity when E and F approach them.

F's "euh:::" lasts 0.9 s and goes on as E and F approach the couple. E and F do not walk together, but at a short distance from one another E arrives closer to C and D before F, and stops, while F comes closer, producing the "euh:::", then adding "pardon mesdames,". In the middle of "euh:::", C turns her head towards E, and looks at her at the end of the "euh". Both women first look at E, closer to them, then at F. They look at F at the end of "pardon mesdames,". We can thus observe that the timely production of "euh" is finely articulated both to E's and F's movements and positions in space and to C's and D's glances at them.

The passers-by recognition of the initiation of a possible interaction — materialized by their gaze on E and F — can happen earlier or later on, depending on the complexity of the emerging and dynamic spatial configuration. In Excerpt 12, we have a delayed recognition, since C and D are immersed in their own conversation and E's and F's approach implies a suspension and then a change in their participation framework.

The following excerpt (in Excerpt 13) presents another case of delayed recognition.

(13) (itin11 - 2.24.19) (=Excerpt 10 continued)

1 E #°ouais°#  
°yeah°  
fig #1 #2



2 p (0.\*3)\*  
°quick glance at E and F°  
3 F #euh°euh:::° # pardon monsieur#,  
ehm°ehm:::° sorry sir,  
fig #3 #4 #5  
p °looks at F-->



4 P oui:  
yes:

After their mutual coordination through “°ouais,°” (see above, Excerpts 6 and 7), E and F walk towards P. They approach him together, but laterally (Fig. 2) instead of frontally as in Excerpt 12. When they come closer, changing their trajectories, P quickly glances to them (line 2) and, at the beginning of the “euh:::”, changes his own trajectory, turning to the right instead of continuing straight ahead, avoiding E’s and F’s new orientation. Thus, the trajectory of their walk has a clear projective potential, which is used both by E and F to organize their convergence with P and by him to manage their shunning (Fig. 4). This configuration clearly shows that in public space trajectories are organized in order to avoid collisions and to permit the co-ordinated locomotive activities of flow files (Watson, 2005), relying on lateral glances, unfocused interaction, and civil inattention (Goffman, 1963; Sudnow, 1972). In Excerpt 13, P’s first movement is organized in a divergent way, unaligned with the convergent movement of E and F; this movement is then progressively reframed, as P continues to walk, glancing at F only on “monsieur”, without stopping. Thus, his recognition is quite late, and the length of “euh:::” is adjusted to this delayed temporality.

Whereas in Excerpts 12 and 13 the recognition is late, it can also be achieved quite early, as in the following case.



(14) (itin12 - 2.29.54) (=detailed transcript of Excerpt 11)

0 ((E and F walk)) #  
fig #fig 1



1

1 E ((looks straight in front of her))  
2 E ((looks at F#))  
fig #fig2  
3 E ((looks straight in front of her))



2 E looks at F

4 E ceux-là?  
these one?  
5 (0.3)  
6 F oui: j'sais pas \*s'ils sont de montpellier, on va #leur demander\*  
yes: I don't know if they're from Montpellier, we're going to ask them  
f,e \*change their trajectories and go towards P and M\*  
fig #fig.3



3

```

7      (0.3) * # (0.1)*
      p,m      *.....*
      fig      #fig4
8      F      *#eu[h::#
      p,m      *turn their head towards F and E-->
      fig      #fig5 #fig6
9      E      [( ) l'église saint-ro*ch*
      p,m      [( ) the church of saint Ro*ch*
      >>walk----->*stop*

```



E initiates the coordination sequence with F, both verbally and visually — E turning towards F and glancing at her (Fig. 2). This coordination concerns the approach of M and P since both couples walk frontally towards one another (Fig. 1).

Just after F's "oui" (line 6), both women change their trajectory and zero in on M and P. This movement, visibly altering their initial trajectory — which was frontal but parallel to M and P — is noticed by M and P: they turn their heads towards E and F during the pause (7, Fig. 3), gazing at them during the production of "euh:::". E's request, overlapping F's "euh", is sensitive to the timing of this gaze, since it is produced as soon as mutual gaze is established. This excerpt shows an important feature of "unfocused interaction" and "civil inattention". The passers-by notice other persons moving in public space around them and adjust their trajectories accordingly; they also notice changes in the trajectories that converge towards them instead of remaining parallel, and they respond to the projective features of these trajectories.

The last excerpts show that organization of the convergence of two walking trajectories in public space is not a straightforward matter and relies on intense interactive work done by the incipient co-participants. This work is accomplished through the visibility of their body positions in space, the recognizability of their trajectories, their mutual orientations and glances, and the formatting of the very first turn. Persons asking their way are confronted with the practical problem of organizing the convergence of their trajectory with others in an accountable way, displaying the initiative they are taking for opening up a new encounter. A way to solve that problem is to perform an approach which is maximally visible and exploits the properties of the visual field of the street. For this reason, itinerary seekers never initiate the encounter when they are behind their future interlocutor (I have no such case in my corpus); the majority of itinerary requests are launched with passers-by coming frontally to the itinerary seekers — with a few cases in which the approach is organized laterally. The organization of frontal trajectories maximizes mutual visibility and mutual gaze, and thus allows a possible early recognition; lateral trajectories are generally characterized by a delayed recognition. These complex coordination dynamics demonstrate that walking is a collective, coordinated, finely organized activity (Ryave and Schenkein, 1974; Quéré and Brezger, 1992; Lee and Watson, 1993) and that talk is reflexively adjusted to it (Relieu, 1999).

## 5. The reason for the approach: stopping walking and stabilizing interactional space

At the end of the turn pre-beginning, the convergence of participants' trajectories and the establishment of a mutual gaze is achieved. But at this point, the participant's spatial configuration is still dynamic, since they are still walking. A last opportunity to avoid the incipient encounter is offered, instead of the opportunity to stop and to engage in the interaction. The transition from walking to standing seems to be the condition for the opening of the interaction. For instance, when stopping, walkers become co-participants; they suspend their walking along independent trajectories and create a new common interactional space.

Thus, it is important to analyze the sequential organization of this step when the walk is systematically stopped after a mutual gaze has been established and a reason for the approach has been given. In this sense, the stabilization of a

The following excerpts (Excerpts 15–19) present a collection of positions in which recipients stop walking.

```

6 F      *eu[h:::
          eh[m:::
p,m      *turn their head tow. F and E-->
7 E      (( ) l'égglise saint-ro*ch*
          (( ) the church of saint Roch
p,m      ->
          >>walk-----*stop*
8          (0.9)

```

4 P       oui:  
          yes:  
5 E       l'É[glise] saint-**\*roch?\***  
          the [church of saint Roch?  
6 F       [euh:]°:~::~~::~**\*~::~~::~\***  
          [ehm:]°:~::~~::~~::~° ]  
p ->     >>walks -----**\*stops\***  
7       \*(0.4)  
p       \*holds his guitar on the Rh then on the Lh, freeing his Lh -->>

```

1 F      avec là: les enfants là.  

         with the: the kids there.  

2         (2.8)  

3 E      excusez-moi:, l'église saint-roch s'il vous *plaît.  

         excuse me:, the church of saint Roch please.  

m,p ->  >>walk-----*stop-->  

4 M      l'église* #saint-roch?  

         the church of saint Roch?  

         -->*  

fig      #1

```



stabilization of both parties in a face to face space

## (18) (itin2)

4 E \*pardon monsieur, l'église# saint-roch s'il vous plaît+  
 excuse me sir, the church of saint Roch please  
 \*stops and twists her body to the back  
 p >>continues to walk---->+  
 fig #5  
 5 +(0.3)#+ (0.2) +(0.2)  
 p -> +stops+ +turns to S-->>  
 fig #6



mutual gaze whereas  
 bodies are still walking



stabilization of the  
 face to face

## (19) (itin10)

2 F <euh:: (0.9)> pardon mesdames, (.) l'église saint-roch  
 <ehm:: (0.9)>excuse me ladies, (.) the church of saint Roch  
 3 D +ah+  
 -> +stops+

In all these excerpts, we can notice that the accosted passer-by systematically stops at the end of the turn delivering the reason for the approach. Generally, this reason is produced in a single TCU and the stop is realized within the time of this TCU's production: either on the last syllables of "saint ro\*ch" (Excerpts 15, 7, cf. Excerpts 1, 2), or on the proper name ("saint \*roch\*" Excerpt 16, 5). If it happens later, E's turn can be expanded, as in Excerpt 17, where the passer-by stops at the end of "s'il vous \*plaît". The latest stops are realized immediately after, during the pause following the reason (Excerpt 18) or on the change-of-state token "ah" (Excerpt 19).

F and E adjust the design of their turn format to the temporality of the passer-by's transition from walking to standing. The reason for the approach is generally formatted in a short TCU, without a verb, focusing on the request's spatial target ("l'église saint-roch"). This short form responds to two different constraints: on the one hand, it orients towards the fact that, once the attention of the passer-by is focused on the would-be interlocutors, it is the reason for the approach which makes this very approach accountable, dissolving other possible interpretations of the ongoing action (such as begging, selling something, hooking, etc.). On the other hand, it orients towards the rhythm of the walk, and it aligns with its slowdown: the timing of the utterance is formatted in such a way that it fits the time of the co-participant's decelerating steps.

The short format matches the delivery, as quickly as possible, of an accountable reason for the transition from an unfocused to a focused interaction. Nevertheless, this format is expandable if the passer-by does not align immediately to the proposed engagement in a new participation framework and interactional space. In this sense, adding "s'il vous plaît" (Excerpt 17) creates extra opportunities for the stop to take place within the boundaries of the TCU. In this case, TCUs are formatted either by adding some material at their beginning in order to delay the reason for the approach and/or by expanding the formulation of the reason: in both cases, they adjust to the temporality of the walk. This flexible format achieves also a sort of 'dynamic defeasability' of the encounter, which can be modified or broken off at any time.

Co-participants can collaborate on the fine tuning of the production of the reason for the encounter with the cessation of their walk. For example, by repeating interrogatively the object of the itinerary request, they give extra time to both participants to adjust their mutual stop and to convert their trajectories into a new interactional space. Excerpt 17 (line 4) contains one occurrence of this repetition, as does the following excerpt (Excerpt 20).

(20) (itin8 - 2.03.54)

```

1 E      vous savez où est l'église saint-roch?
          do you know where the church of saint Roch is?
2      *(0.5)
  P      *slows down --->
3 P      l'église saint-roch?*
          the church of saint Roch?
          --> and stops progressively*
```

These expansions show an orientation to the fact that the progressive transition from walking, to slowing down, stopping and arranging a new spatial configuration with a face-to-face alignment of the bodies, takes time. It does not only concern the trajectory and speed of the lower body, but also the position of the upper body: the latter is characterized by various torsions, body torques (Schegloff, 1998), twisted postures displaying a double orientation, to the walking direction and to the new spatial configuration emerging with a new participation framework. The realignment of these twisted bodies generally takes place during the pause following the reason for the approach: the bodies progressively reach a disposition facing the new co-participant and stabilize it (namely through the transition from a dynamic position to a standing position, where the body firmly rests on both feet fixed on the floor). The stability of this position can be increased by putting the hands on the flank (see M in Excerpt 17, Fig. 1).

## 6. The reorganization of the interactional space

Once the walk has stopped, and the interactional space is achieved and stabilized, participants engage in the production of the answer to the request. This answer involves a new change in the interactional space. For example, as we saw in the excerpt in Excerpt 1, the first configuration is achieved when participants stop and arrange their bodies in a face-to-face position during the formulation of the request; the second configuration is achieved as a preliminary to the delivery of the answer, as participants rearrange their bodies, turning in the direction of the first landmark. Whereas the former is initiated by the itinerary requester, the latter is actively organized by the itinerary producer, who adjusts not only her own body but also the bodies of her co-participants in a suitable position for the spatial description (see Mondada, 2005 for a systematic description of this phase).

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the systematic accomplishment of the opening of an interaction between strangers in a public space, focusing on the first few seconds of the encounter. The preliminary phase as well as the opening phase of the encounter is achieved by participants methodically mobilizing a range of multimodal resources: walking trajectories, body positions, body postures, unilateral glances, mutual gaze, vocal and verbal materials designing turn pre-beginnings, beginnings and completions. These resources are sequentially ordered in time, in a finely tuned coordination of walk, gaze and talk:

- The pre-beginning phase achieves the coordination within the party approaching a possible candidate for the delivery of the itinerary, relying on exchanged glances, on joint categorization work, and on the coordination of the joint walking trajectory.
- The identification phase is achieved by the establishment of the very first contact through a first mutual gaze between both parties during a pre-initial “euh” prefacing the coming first TCU and adjusting its stretched temporality to the emergence of this reciprocal perception and to the organization of the convergence of the ongoing mobile trajectories.
- The “anchor position” phase is achieved with the transition from walking to standing, creating a new interactional space, stabilizing it, adopting a face-to-face arrangement during the reason for the approach, delivered as soon as a mutual gaze is secured, in a TCU adjusted to the temporality of the slowing down of both parties' gait.

The grammatical organization of the first turns is aligned with the dynamic movements of their bodies in space: the turn pre-beginning is sensitive to the timing of the first gaze, and turn completion is sensitive to the arresting of their walk. These adjustments show the crucial importance of bodily movements and space within talk organization. Both



are temporally coordinated, sequentially organized and rely on projectability. Their study contributes to the exploration of the emergent character of the interactional order and of the finely tuned temporal organization of multimodal resources. It also contributes to the acknowledgment of the importance of both mobile and stable spaces for the organization of social interaction. In turn, an interactional perspective on space contributes to the demonstration that space is not a pre-existent, fixed, given material reality; it is instead a dynamic, flexible, adjustable realm that is locally and praxeologically configured by the action of the participants.

## 8. Transcript conventions

Data have been transcribed according to conventions developed by Gail Jefferson.

An indicative translation is provided line per line.

Multimodal details have been transcribed according to the following conventions:

* *	delimitate a speaker's gestures and actions descriptions.
+ +	delimitate another speaker's gestures and actions descriptions.
*-->	gesture or action described continue across subsequent lines.
*-->>	gesture or action described continue until and after excerpt's end.
--->*	gesture or action described continue until the same symbol is reached.
>>--	gesture or action described begins before the excerpt's beginning.
....	gesture's preparation.
----	gesture's apex is reached and maintained.
.....	gesture's retraction.
e	participant doing gesture is identified in the margin when (s)he is not the speaker.
fig	the exact point where screen shot (Figures) has been taken is indicated,
#	with a specific sign showing its position within turn at talk.

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