

## The Embodied and Negotiated Production of Assessments in Instructed Actions

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Based on video recordings of instructions produced by a car dealer for a customer who has just bought a car, this article deals with assessments produced in professional interactions in which participants' attention is focused on a copresent object that is pointed at, described, or explained. It contributes to the study of the systematic organization of assessments, relying on their sequential positions and on the multimodal actions manipulating the assessable object, as well as on the identities of the assessors, their epistemic stances, and their relations to the assessable. The sequential organization of assessments has been previously described in two sequential environments: At the end of extended sequences, they work as closing-implicative resources. In the context of sequences of assessments, the first is preferentially upgraded by the second. The corpus studied here shows alternative formats, sensitive to the context and the activity. Participants orient to the interactional metrics of assessments, by expecting but not always producing them as the stronger type of response to extended descriptions of copresent objects. They also orient to this interactional metric in sequences of assessments, not only when they produce second upgraded ones but also when they produce downgraded seconds. The data reveal a peculiar format, consisting of a first positive assessment, upgraded by a second, which is then downgraded by the first speaker in third position. This format, as well as the possibility of downgrading assessments in second position, shows that in certain activities the production of assessments can be risky, i.e., vulnerable to a downgrade in the next position. The article reveals practices that not only corroborate the bright side of assessing practices well described in the literature, showing that they display shared experiences, alignment, and affiliation, but also their dark side, showing that assessments can also express disaffiliation, contending authorities, resistance, claims of autonomous epistemic access, and distinct rights to assess.

Positive assessments are often expected in professional interactions in which participants' attention is focused on a copresent object that is exhibited, pointed at, or explained for one of the par-

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ties, who is discovering it. These settings are particularly relevant for the study of the systematic organization of assessments, which relies on the sequential positions at which they are produced within the activity and the multimodal actions manipulating the assessable object, as well as the identities of the assessors, their epistemic stances, and their relations to the assessable.

This article deals with positive assessments proffered within instructions produced by a car dealer for a customer who has just bought a car and will be driving it home. This particular context and activity constitutes a perspicuous setting for the study of a variety of sequential environments where assessments are expected and produced. It reveals some features of assessments in commercial and instructional contexts and invites us to take into consideration the embodied production of assessments and attention to assessables in interactions. The assessable items are not only referentially introduced within the instructions but also looked at and manipulated by both participants, involving the entire body in the appraisal of the object as a condition for the production of the assessments.

Existing literature has demonstrated that the production of assessments is formatted in systematic ways: Their study has revealed key sequential principles such as preference organization (Pomerantz, 1984) and has explored their systematic organization in specific sequential positions (Pomerantz, 1984; Heritage, 1998; Heritage & Raymond, 2005). On the basis of video-recorded data, this article details the sequential distribution of assessments in car demonstrations given in a garage. The study confirms sequential formats already identified within the current literature but reveals new issues, related to other sequential dynamics than preference organization, to the flexible adjustment and negotiation of epistemic positions, and to the multimodal aspects of the management of assessments.

With the exception of Goodwin and Goodwin's work (1987, 1992), literature on assessments has not taken into consideration the multimodal resources and practices contributing to assessing sequences—such as grammar, prosody, gesture, gaze, body postures, and facial expressions. Goodwin and Goodwin (1987, 1992) have focused mainly on glances and on head/facial expressions, showing how they display assessing actions. Taking into consideration gaze, gestures, embodied actions, and artifact manipulations, I show that multimodality concerns both the resources mobilized for assessing and the focalization of participants' attention on copresent assessed objects (see also Fasulo & Monzoni, this issue on this latter point). This has several consequences, both for the ways in which assessable items are brought into a common focus of attention as well as for the way in which sequentiality is analyzed: Concurrent actions have their own temporality and may constrain and even shape the sequential organization of talk.

Although assessments can be found in a variety of sequential environments and situated activities, the existing literature dealing with their systematic organization has studied them mainly in everyday settings and telephone calls. Literature on the production of assessments in institutional and professional settings remains scarce—with the exception of Jones (2001) for doctor–patient consultations; Clayman and Reisner (1998) on assessments of candidate stories presented by journalists for newspaper front pages; Clark, Drew, and Pinch (2003) on salesman/prospect interactions; Pillet-Shore (2003) on parent–teacher conferences; and Maynard (2003) on bad news delivered in medical contexts. As I will show in this article, professional settings allow us to explore further issues relevant both for the organization of sequentiality in asymmetric interactions and for the particular distribution of access to knowledge and epistemic rights. I will deal with displays of knowledge and expertise as well as with situated identities as they are achieved through interaction, not only through verbal resources but also in an embodied manner, by reflexively shaping the sequential formats of assessing and responsive turns.

## DATA AND FOCUS OF ANALYSIS

The study presented here is based on a corpus of social interactions video recorded during field-work at a garage in a French town during 2002. Routinely, when a customer buys a car, and before its release, the dealer systematically shows him/her the technical features of the vehicle. This demonstration can be relatively short if the customer already knows the model or it can be more extended if this is not the case. As a new owner, the customer will drive his/her car home after the demonstration.

The corpus is constituted by seven naturally occurring demonstrations, lasting between 6 and 36 min, in which the same dealer explains the technical features of one particular car model to seven different customers who have just bought a car of that model. The activity involves two parties: the instructed party, which can be constituted by the driver alone but may also include any persons accompanying him/her, and the instructor. During the session, the instructed person sits in the driver's seat and the instructor begins by standing outside the door on the driver's side. As the demonstration develops further, the instructor sits down in the passenger seat next to the driver.

Each demonstration was recorded by two cameras, one on top of the dashboard of the car and the other one on the backseat. Video recordings allow us to capture and transcribe gaze and head orientation as well as gestures: Collecting data on multimodal details allows us to take into consideration the particular activities participants are involved in. The participants' bodies are arranged side by side, with their attention focused on the steering wheel, the dashboard, the buttons, and any other technical devices in front of them as they are explaining, describing, and referring to these objects. This side-by-side disposition, with the attention focused on something other than the coparticipants (vs. face-to-face conversation) is typical of activities dealing with artifacts.

This video-recorded corpus constitutes a perspicuous setting where various issues related to assessments are observable. The article deals with two sequential environments. The first [informing + assessment] shows that assessments structure the activity by displaying that the explanation is completed and thus by closing it and initiating the transition toward the next described item. The turn format and the assessment's position within the ongoing explanation display the epistemic stance of the recipient and the processes of comprehension, agreement, and even discovery of the described object. The second environment [first assessment + second assessment] often emerges from the former, built on the final assessment, which is followed by a second assessment. Given the importance of evaluations in that context, one could expect to find paired assessments recurrently in the same environment, as they seem typical of commercial settings (see Clark et. al, 2003). However, sequences of assessments exhibiting the preferred format described by Pomerantz (1984) [first assessment + upgraded second assessment] are quite rare in the data. This invites us to explore other possible formats: First assessments are generally produced by the car owner and aligned with by the dealer, more often in the form of a repetition than an upgrade. The dealer can produce first assessments, but rarely does: While he is strongly oriented toward the production of an assessment by the owner, the latter can disalign with and resist these expectations. Consequently the dealer favors "safer" formats, not occasioning downgradings, and practices for "fishing" assessments. The sequence [first assessment + upgraded second assessment], although normatively strongly oriented to preference organization, is often *not* realized in a preferred format. This article explores these various possibilities, which reveal complex articulations between sequentiality, epistemic competences, and categorial positions.

## ASSESSMENTS RESPONDING TO LONG MULTIUNIT TURNS

Multiunit turns achieving the action of informing, reporting, announcing, or describing an event form one of the sequential contexts for responding with an assessment (Pomerantz, 1975). They constitute the last, and more intense, response to the previous action of informing. The car demonstrations I analyze here are a perspicuous setting where these assessments can be observed among a range of other response types, and where the alternative tasks and positions characteristic of these resources are clearly displayed. Analysis shows that the dealer orients to the production of assessments as displaying the complete and adequate character of the explanation from the customer's point of view; moreover, the fact that most of these assessments are *ah*-prefaced shows that they close an episode of talk and action in which a new experience, a discovery, or a process of learning has taken place, producing a new epistemic stance. In both cases, the completed character of the instruction and the change of state resulting from it are displayed in a terminal position, and register the outcomes of the embodied achievement of the instruction and the instructed action. Multimodal resources and practices are crucial for the collective identification, focus of attention, and even manipulation of a copresent assessable, central for the instructing action.

## Closing Implicative Assessments by the Customer

The recipient of the car dealer's instruction often produces assessments at a point that is dealt with as a possible point of completion of the description, treated as satisfactory and good enough by the recipient. The production of the assessment can orient to the completedness of the instruction as well as provoke it, curtailing its expansion.

Excerpt 1 is transcribed by taking into consideration both the verbal resources mobilized by the car dealer and the gazes and gestures produced by the participants (the body positions and gazes of the customer—Diane—are transcribed in a separate line, temporally delimited and related to talk by symbols, here \*, that signal the multimodal actions' boundaries). Likewise, screen shots are precisely temporally located within the transcript (by the symbol #).<sup>1</sup>

We join the action as the dealer starts to point to the electric windows.

Excerpt 1 (288/5.04)

- |   |             |   |
|---|-------------|---|
| 1 | <b>Dea:</b> | <b>I*CI; (.) on part sur la gauche avec QUATre vi*t'</b>  |
|   |             | HERE, (.) we start on the left with FOUr windows          |
|   | dia         | *.....bends progressively over the button— *              |
| 2 |             | <b># électriques (.) auto*matiques. donc les quat', #</b> |
|   |             | electric (.) automatic. so all four,                      |
|   | dia         | *looks to her right—>                                     |
|   | fig         | # Figure 1 Figure 2 #                                     |
|   | eve         | lwindows go down—>  |
| 3 |             | <b>(0.5)</b>  |
| 4 | <b>Dea:</b> | <b>mon*:tent, et de[scendent]* automa°tiquement°</b>      |
|   |             | go up, and down automa°tically°                           |
|   | dia         | —>*looks to her left——*                                   |

<sup>1</sup>Transcript conventions are fully explicated at the end of the article. For a discussion see Mondada (2007a).



FIGURE 1 QUAtre vit' # électriques (lines 1–2).



FIGURE 2 donc les quat', # (line 2).

5 Dia: → [supe:r.] \*  
[great.]

In this excerpt, the dealer explains a feature of the vehicle, the electric windows. His description begins with a deictic (*ICI*:, “here”), received by Diane bending over the button that activates the windows, continues with a first descriptive turn-constructive unit (TCU) (see Schegloff, 1996), in the middle of which he activates the windows (line 2) and Diane turns her head and gazes at the window moving down to her right. A second descriptive TCU is received, as Diane looks back to her left, by her assessment (*supe:r*). It projects, and indeed preempts, the imminent completion of the explanation (5) and accelerates it, as observable in the fact that the dealer lowers his voice and finishes immediately after the assessment. This first sequence is constituted by an informing—which is both embodied in its production, implying the manipulation of the item, and in

its reception, visible in the shifting bodily position of the addressee—responded to by an assessment, which marks its closing.

In Excerpt 2, the dealer, after having mentioned the automatic windows, explains to another customer, Marie, an extra feature, the possibility of locking the windows in the rear, for the sake of children's security:

Excerpt 2 (322-4.28 / p5, e11, ic1 pur7)

- 1 Dea: **pour les enfants, vous avez justement**  
for the kids, you got precisely
- 2 **la condamnation des vitres à l'arrière°**,  
the closing of the windows behi°nd°
- 3 (0.3)
- 4 Mar: → **o\*uais,\***  
yeah,  
\*nods\*
- 5 (0.3)
- 6 Dea: **donc ça pour les**  
so this in order to
- 7 **con[damner pour éviter qu'i jouent,]**  
close them for avoid them playing,
- 8 Mar: → **[donc ça c'est super,** ] ou[ais  
[so this is great, ye[ah
- 9 Dea: **[ouais exac[tement.**  
[yeah exactly.
- 10 Mar: **[mh**
- 11 (0.4)

The dealer's description is first formulated in a synthetic nominal way (2), which is acknowledged, after a short lapse (3), by a "yeah" and a nod (4). This seems not to be enough for the dealer, who adds a new TCU (6). Marie claims the floor before the completion of the TCU to produce an assessment which is prefaced by *donc* (8), the same connective used by the dealer at the beginning of his expansion (6). In this way, Marie exhibits not only her comprehension and agreement (4) but also the completed character of the description for her. By prefacing the assessment with *donc*, thus recycling the same material used by the dealer (6), Marie coproduces the conclusion, competing with him in closing the explanation. Thus, the car owner manages both to coinstantiate a closing (with *donc*) and to produce an assessment in second position, claiming in this way her autonomy and her independent epistemic stance in assessing the referent.

### Ah-Prefaced Assessments Closing a Sequence of Embodied Instructions

Predominantly, assessments produced in final position at the end of explanations are prefaced by the French change-of-state token *ah* (corresponding to the English *oh* following informings [Heritage, 1984]). This compound form [*ah* + assessment] reveals central features of the sequential environment in which copresent objects are assessed: Participants identify the assessable not only through verbal practices dealing with the introduction and the development of referents, but also through embodied



conducts such as pointing to the referent, bending over it, establishing a common focus of attention, or manipulating the object. When the explanation is dealt with as completed by the participants, assessments are proffered, displaying the previous practices as establishing the very praxeological and contextual conditions for assessing; when they are *ah*-prefaced it displays that these practices produce a new understanding, a discovery, registered by the change-of-state token. Moreover, the production of assessments itself is embodied, through a change of body arrangement and body posture, and through head movements and facial expressions indexing the new epistemic stance.

In Excerpt 3, the dealer is listing various radio functions; in line 3 he focuses Marie's attention on the automatic regulation of the sound:

Excerpt 3 (9.00)

- 1 **Dea:** >le fadeur devant derri\*ère, la \* bala\*n:ce,< \*  
 >the fade function in front and in the rear, the balance,<  
 mar \*nods—\* \*nods—\*
- 2 (0.4)
- 3 **Dea:** et <l'auto+matique volume>.  
 and <the auto+matic sound regulation>.  
 +looks at Mar—>
- 4 (0.5)
- 5 **Dea:** vous connaissez, c:'est °en [gro:s°  
 do you know, that:'s °rou [ghly:°
- 6 **Mar:** [c'est quoi ça?+  
 [what's that?  
 dea —>+
- 7 **Dea:** .h eh ben c'est vous écoutez un peu fort la musique  
 .h well that's you listen a bit loudly to the music
- 8 sur l'autoroute, vous arrivez à un péa:ge, le son va  
 on the highway, you arrive at a toll, the sound will
- 9 **Dea:** redescendre auto[matiquement à chaque feu.  
 go back down auto [matically at every traffic light
- 10 **Mar:** → [ah c'est super ça.  
 [oh it's great that.

The way in which the various referents are formulated shows the practical distinctions made by the dealer between items that are taken for granted, evident, and known in advance and items that may be new and unknown for the customer. For instance, the first two items are uttered rather fast (1), whereas the last one is produced more slowly (3), with particular stress on the second vowel and while gazing toward the recipient (3). Both parties orient to the epistemic features of the explanation. The dealer does so by foregrounding items that may require explanations, and Marie receives the items in a way that displays that she is differentiating them from one another. Whereas the first two items are responded to by quick nods (1), she remains immobile during and after the production of the last item, not producing any facial or vocal response during the pause (3). At that point, the dealer explicitly orients to the possibility that the referent may be unknown to the customer (with *vous connaissez* [5]), provoking Marie's question (6), which occasions an extended explanation of the item. In the explanation (7–9), the dealer shows a constant orientation toward the knowledge of his recipient, as well as aligning the emerging description to her state of knowl-

edge and to her previous displays of ignorance. This occasions a change of state token (*ah*) and an assessment in overlap, anticipating and precipitating the conclusion of the description. *Ah* displays a change of state of the knowledge of the customer, which is the basis for an assessment of the newly learned item. Within the course of the activity, the assessment does the job of selecting out the salient more elaborate and newsworthy features of the car, differentiating them from other, more common and already known characteristics. The response form [*ah* + assessment] has a terminal character, closing or even curtailing the ongoing topic (see Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987).

Within the sequence, constituted by an ongoing instruction, repaired by a request for information (6), responded to by the information (7–9) and closed by *ah* and an assessment, the participants display an orientation toward the car owner's epistemic position (as knowing already or not, thus as informed or uninformed or even as expert or novice) and the changes they undergo during the instruction (from “I don't know” to “now I know”). This dynamic epistemic position is not only dependent on the ongoing talk but more generally on the explanation as an embodied instruction, through which the dealer shows how to manipulate the technical aspects of the car, gesticulates, and points to them. Thus, changes of epistemic states are embodied in the course of the activity and oriented to as such by coparticipants.

I will explore this embodied dimension of the epistemic stance by the recipient of the instruction with the following multimodal transcripts. In Excerpt 4, the dealer has just explained the air conditioning and now tells the customer that it can also defog the front windshield and the lateral rear windows:

Excerpt 4 (13.13)

- |    |             |  |
|----|-------------|--|
| 1  | <b>Dea:</b> | <b>ici:, pare-brise à l'avant,</b><br>here:, the front windshield,   |
| 2  |             | <b>(0.7)</b>   |
| 3  |             | <b>*e+t vos deux rétro+viseurs*. (.) c'est^ (.) #</b><br>and your two rear windows. (.) that's (.)<br>+looks at Mar——+<br><br>mar<br>fig<br>*.....*bends over, looks attentively—><br># Figure 3 |
| 4  |             | <b>la troisième posi+tion.+</b><br>the third position.<br><br>+looks+  |
| 5  |             | <b>(0.4)</b>   |
| 6  | <b>Mar:</b> | <b>c'est qu[oi?</b><br>what's t[hat?   |
| 7  | <b>Dea:</b> | <b>[ça:,</b><br>[this:,  |
| 8  |             | <b>(0.3)</b>   |
| 9  |             | <b>quand vous aurez de la buée sur le pare-brise</b><br>when you will have mist on the windshield  |
| 10 | <b>Mar:</b> | <b>oui:</b><br>yes:  |
| 11 | <b>Dea:</b> | <b>en trente secondes, vous mettez cette position</b><br>in thirty seconds, you activate this position   |
| 12 |             | <b>(mouillé ou pluie)[ou pas</b><br>(wet or rain) [or not  |



- 13 Mar: [à l'avant?\*  
[in the front?  
—>\*
- 14 Dea: \*à l'ava \*nt.  
in the front.  
mar \*nods——\*
- 15 \*(0.6)  
mar \*stands up and raises her head—>
- 16 Dea: c'est [celui-ci, et les deux rétr]\*os.  
that's [this one, and the two rear windows.
- 17 Mar: → [ah c'est gé#nial ça]  
[oh that's brilliant that]  
fig # Figure 4  
mar —>\*
- 18 (0.5)
- 19 Mar: d'accord.  
okay.



FIGURE 3 c'est (.) # (line 3).



FIGURE 4 [ah c'est gé#nial ça] (line 17).

The salesman attracts the customer's gaze to the candidate assessable (see Haddington, 2006), and the latter displays her attention bodily<sup>2</sup> both during the explanation and the display of her change of state of knowledge at the end of the description, indexed with *ah*. The sustained gaze at the referent, establishing a common focus of attention, and the subsequent change of state ground the production of the assessment, proffered once the customer has become a now-informed speaker, i.e., has undertaken a change in her epistemic status.

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In this excerpt, Marie looks at the rear window as the dealer introduces it (1) and maintains her gaze on the item until she proffers her assessment (1–7). The dealer’s demonstrative manipulations of the referent are fitted with his descriptive turn and end just before its completion (see Mondada, 2007b). The speaker’s gestures and the recipient’s attention are finely articulated, within a sequence terminated by the assessment that overlaps the dealer’s conclusion. The explanation is received by the recipient in a detailed coordinated way, in which the dealer’s manipulations and the recipient’s gaze are mutually adjusted and reflexively shape the emergent description.

Recipients can deploy a range of resources displaying their ongoing understanding and change of epistemic stance: This orderly distribution<sup>3</sup> remains a local achievement by the coparticipants, and the selection of resources by the recipient displays both different participation possibilities<sup>4</sup> and her epistemic and evaluative positions. This is particularly clear in Excerpt 6, where two recipients, a father and son, produce different response tokens during the dealer’s demonstration of the steering wheel, in so doing displaying different epistemic stances:

Excerpt 6 (Luc 5.23)

- 1 **Dea:**        **ici, \*◊Δ on a # l’réglage du Δvolant.**  
                   here,   we have the steering wheel adjustment.  
          fat                \*bends over and looks at the button—>  
          eri                ◊bends over and looks at the button—>  
          mot                Δlooks at Dealer——Δ  
          fig                # Figure 5
- 2                (0.7)
- 3 **Fat:**        °ouais[#°,  
                   °yeah [ :°,
- 4 **Dea:**        [#ici donc◊, on peut descendre et mon:ter,  
                   [here then, you can go up and dow:n,  
          eri                —>◊  
          fig                # Figure 6
- 5                (0.3)
- 6 **Dea:**        [pour le volant, (.) et tirer \* vers soi aussi l’volant.  
                   [for the wheel, (.) and also pull the wheel toward yourself.  
          fat                —> \*
- 7 **Fat:**        [ouais,  
                   [yeah,
- 8                (0.1) \*(0.3)\*  
          fat                \*pulls the wheel\*
- 9 **Fat:**        d’accor\*d.  
                   okay.  
                               \*bends down on his left—>
- 10 **Dea:**        >°donc y a plusieurs [( )°<]

<sup>3</sup>See Schegloff (1982), Goodwin (1986), and Jefferson (1978, 1983, 1984) on the specific sequential positions of tokens like “mhm,” “yeah,” and assessments. See also Heritage and Sefi (1992) for another context where this distribution indexes different knowledge positionings.

<sup>4</sup>“The participation possibilities provided by assessments enable participants to negotiate both the status of a proposed assessable, and the way in which the talk containing it will be attended to” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987, p. 45).

- >°so there are various [( )°<]
- 11 Fat: [oké.  
[okay.
- 12 Fat: et Δlà on [le rebloque  
and there you [lock it  
mot Δbends down looking where Father is looking—>
- 13 Eri: → [ah, # c'est chouette le vo[laΔnt.  
[oh, it's neat the steering wheel.  
eri Δ...looks at Mother—>  
fig # Figure 7
- 14 Dea: [re\*bloquezΔ, ici.  
[lock again, here.  
fat —>\*  
mot —>Δ
- 15 Fat: [d'accord.  
[okay.
- 16 Eri: ⇨ [y avait pasΔ ça, dans# la Δ [fordΔ  
[there wasn't this, in the [ford  
—>Δturns to MothΔ,,,,,,Δ  
fig # Figure 8
- 17 Fat: ⇨ [mais sI:, y avait Δça:.  
[but yES:, there was this:.  
mot Δsmiles—>

The members of the family display different forms of participation and different epistemic stances toward the dealer's instructions. The father is sitting in the driver's seat, and manipulates the steering wheel; the mother and the younger son, Eric, are looking at him. The transcript shows their visible and publicly displayed attention, while they bend over the item described by the dealer, together (1) but with different degrees of attention (the mother is the first to withdraw her attention followed by Eric, while the father is continuously manipulating the wheel). The father responds to the emerging description with resources such as *ouais* first (3, 7) and then *d'accord* (9), by which he exhibits his agreement, displaying that the explanation is sufficient. The dealer concludes the explanation (10), received with



FIGURE 5 ici on a # l'réglage du volant (line 1).



FIGURE 6 ici donc (line 4).



FIGURE 7 ah, # c'est chouette (line 13).



FIGURE 8 [y avait pas ça, dans # la [ford (line 16).

an *oké* (11). The last manipulation is in fact accomplished and described by the father (12), effectively preempting the dealer's explanation (14). The father's contribution (12) and the final *d'accord* (15) display a stance toward the object as known: He neither produces a change-of-state token nor an assessment and assumes the position of an informed user.

In contrast, Eric turns to his mother and produces the compound form [*ah* + assessment] (13), which works not only as a change-of-state token but also as an appreciation marker. His assessment is not responded to by the parents and it is further expanded by an account (16) in which the present car is compared with the previous one. This time, the father responds (17): His epistemic position is again displayed by a rebuttal of this account (17), and rejects the veiled criticism of the son's comparison.

In this case, different epistemic stances are occasioned by the explanation of a particular feature of the car: These two epistemic positions are expressed and confronted about the same object, one dealing with it as well known and taken for granted and the other as newsworthy and assessable—making contrastively observable the different resources participants mobilize to display them.

The systematic distribution of linguistic, vocal, and multimodal resources shows that the dynamic process through which a change of state of knowledge is emergent is observable, documentable, and visible, firstly for the participants, and secondly for the analysts. In this sense, cognitive processes are not just a pure mental phenomenon but are embodied, not only indexed but actively established, displayed, and exhibited by participants.

This is particularly visible in a further elaboration of the compound form [*ah* + assessment], which can take the form [*ah* + *d'accord* + assessment]. The ordered distribution of these resources shows that participants actually distinguish between various epistemic experiences occurring during the explanation, subsequently expressing understanding, agreement, and discovery. In the Excerpt 7, Marie responds to the display on the dashboard of the fuel consumption with *Ah d'accord. c'est super ça*:

Excerpt 7 (p. 8, 516, 7.04)

- 1 **Dea:** .h+h ici. (0.4)+ les positions ici c'est, + (0.4)+  
 .hh here. (0.4) the positions here concern, (0.4)  
 +.....+points-----+,,,,,,+  
 2 **la consommation, c'est-à-dire qu'en gros on va sa\*voir**  
 fuel consumption, that is roughly that you will know  
 mar \*...->  
 3 **qu'est-ce qu'il vous re\*ste comme kilomètres à faire**  
 how many kilometers you can still drive  
 mar ->\*pushes button-->  
 4 **pour ne pas tomber en panne √d'essence.=**  
 before running out of fuel.=  
 mar √eyebrow flash-->  
 5 **Mar:** → =[Ah d'accord. ]c'est√ [super\* ça,  
 =oh okay. that's [great, that,  
 [head shake]  
 -->√  
 -->\*

As the dealer points to different icons on the dashboard (1), Marie not only looks at them but actively manipulates a button (2–5), causing one of the icons to light up. Her action and its effects are manifested by a range of multimodal resources (see the facial expressions described by Goodwin &



Goodwin, 1987, and Ruusuvuori & Peräkylä, 2009/this issue): At the end of the dealer's turn, she produces an eyebrow flash (4), then while she says *ah d'accord* (5) she does a demonstrative head shake, eventually producing the final assessment (*c'est super ça*, [5]). The sequential distribution of these resources shows distinctive displays of various processes taking place in an emergent way: Her new understanding is displayed through *ah*, her alignment with the description by the agreement token *d'accord*, and finally their evaluation with an assessment. Various cognitive activities and knowledge shifts are here sequentially and multimodally displayed.

## Summary

In sum, analyses of this first environment show how customers' assessments are produced at the end of an extended demonstration: Assessments close an embodied and verbal activity of instruction, which guides recipients' attention toward the referent and engage him/her in a sort of learning process. Completion of this process is exhibited by the customer's assessment, which is expected and even pursued and invited by the dealer's extended and extendable explanation (this point will be further developed below), adjusting to the range of possible response tokens, including the presence or withholding of assessments, their temporal and sequential position, overlapping or delayed, and their display of an emerging epistemic stance.

In the cases analyzed in this section, assessments terminate, and even curtail, the preceding topic or sequence; they constitute a specific receipt token offered to an extended multiunit turn. However, they are not followed by a second assessment—the speaker producing the explanation orients to them as displaying an understanding, a shift of knowledge of the coparticipant, i.e., orienting to the activity as an instructional activity and to its outcome, a new grasping of the described objects. In this activity, the dealer is the teller, the informer, the knowledgeable person, and even the expert; the receiver of the explanation displays her current and transformed states of knowledge, which are the basis for the production of the assessment (see Heritage & Sefi, 1992, for similar observations in a different context, relative to the interaction between parents and health visitors).

Beside this first sequential environment where assessments are massively produced, there is a second environment where they are proffered, in the form of a sequence of assessments, which can be either initiated by the car owner or, more rarely, by the dealer.

## CAR OWNER'S INITIATED ASSESSMENT SEQUENCES

Car demonstrations can occasion paired assessments, where a first projects and is followed by a second. I now turn to the latter sequential environment, to highlight the assessments' particular distribution and the issues related to them. In this context, epistemic positions, claims of independent stance, rights to assess, resistance to the dealer's sequential trajectories, and invitations to assess the referents' features are observable.

These stances cast light not only on the epistemic statuses of the participants (as knowing vs. not knowing or expert vs. novice) but also on their relevant identities and membership categories—as customer, car owner, or even new owner.

Assessments produced in this context contrast with what Clark et al. (2003) observe in commercial settings: They show that sellers align to prospects in a variety of ways, including the sys-

tematic production of second assessments aligned with firsts produced by their clients. In contrast, in our data the dealer does not always respond to assessments with second assessments and even more rarely initiates first assessments. This distribution can be related to the fact that the activity analyzed here is not centrally a commercial one: The dealer does not engage in selling the car but in demonstrating it; his recipient is already the owner of the assessed object, and the assessable is also a possessable (Sacks, 1992; Garfinkel & Wieder, 1992, p.185). Assessments do not work as in commercial settings, where they are aimed at convincing the customer to buy the object, but work in a more delicate way, within the establishment of a long-term relationship, and at the service of other actions, such as elaborating the participants' identities in relation with the car, recognizing expertise, celebrating a good purchase, etc. This shows the sensitivity of assessments to categorization practices and to local definitions of the context, and may bring assessments closer to compliments, which are sensitive to reverse preference polarities (Bilmes, 1988; Golato, 2005). The distribution of sequential formats appears to be sensitive to the specific activities, context, and categories achieved by the participants within the interaction.

In what follows, I explore these various sequential formats, analyzing second assessments upgraded and repeated by the dealer. Their distribution and organization reveals that, for the dealer, producing second assessments as well as firsts is potentially risky (see Clark et al., 2003, p.11): Upgraded seconds as well as first assessments are routinely followed by downgraded assessments in third or second position.

### Second Assessments Upgraded by Dealer

Preferred sequence organization, in which the customer initiates a first positive assessment, followed by an upgraded second assessment by the dealer, is observable, although relatively rare in the corpus (see Lindström & Heinemann, 2009/this issue).

*Upgrading in second position.* Second assessments preferentially upgrade firsts (Pomerantz, 1984). Excerpt 8 shows an instance of this sequence format—although the first assessment is produced with some delay after the explanation, and the second is just intensified and not lexically upgraded. The dealer is explaining the automatic regulation of the radio sound to the customer, Guy:

Excerpt 8 (p5- 6.20 / ic8)

- |   |             |   |
|---|-------------|---|
| 1 | <b>Dea:</b> | <b>la correction du volume, (0.5) automa++tique.</b><br>the regulation of the volume, (0.5) automatic.<br><div style="text-align: right;">++looks at Guy—&gt;</div> |
| 2 |             | (0.3)   |
| 3 | <b>Dea:</b> | <b>c't-à-dire qu'en gros, ben quand vous allez ralentir,</b><br>this means that roughly, well when you will slow down,  |
| 4 |             | +(0.3)+ (0.6)<br>+.....+hand goes up and down —>  |
| 5 | <b>Dea:</b> | <b>le son redescend+ra.</b><br>the sound will come down.<br><div style="text-align: right;">—&gt; +</div>   |
| 6 |             | (0.4)   |
| 7 | <b>Dea:</b> | <b>à chaque fois [qu'vous al-, (.) voilà. ]</b>   |

- each time [you will- (.) that's it.]
- 8 Guy: → [ah ça c'est bien ça ]  
[oh that it's good that ]
- 9 Dea: ⇨ ça c'est++ très bien quand vous arrivez à un péage,  
that's very good when you arrive at a toll,  
—>++
- 10 vous arrivez [à:  
you arrive [at:
- 11 Guy: [( )]

Introducing the automatic regulation of the volume (1), the dealer looks at Guy, both displaying that the item is newsworthy—and maybe worth an assessment—and checking if he knows this particular function. In the absence of a response (2), he continues with an explanation. At the end of his compound TCU, constituted by two parts (3, 5) and achieved through a gesture, still in the absence of any response (6), the dealer adds a new TCU, expanding the initial turn (7). At that point, Guy introduces an *ah*-prefaced first assessment (8), which displays both his grasping of the description and his positive evaluation. The dealer abandons his own explanation, as shown by the suspended turn line 7, and produces a second upgraded assessment (*ça c'est très bien ça* [8], *ça c'est très bien* [9]). The dealer orients toward the absence of a response line 6; as soon as an assessment is produced, he upgrades it, recycling the same lexical material, just adding the intensifier *très* and an account that can be seen as a pursuit of the curtailed explanation line 7. This continuation is a way, for the dealer, to claim epistemic primary rights to speak about the car, even in a context where he produces an assessment in second position (see Heritage & Raymond, 2005).

*Downgrading second upgrades in third position.* In the previous excerpt, the dealer produces an upgraded second assessment by recycling and intensifying the same materials used in the first: Guy's first *ça c'est bien ça* (8) is upgraded in second with *ça c'est très bien* (9). This technique allows the dealer to display alignment with the previous turn—which is what he may wish for to maintain his rapport with the customer (see Clark et al., 2003).

While the second assessment is generally considered as completing the sequence, the data show that a third turn can extend it: Second assessments are vulnerable to a downgrading response by the first speaker in third position. This happens in Excerpt 9, where the same sequence as in the previous one is implemented, although followed by a third turn. The demonstration refers here to the device for defogging the windows:

Excerpt 9 (p14 - 22.10, ic9)

- 1 (0.3)
- 2 Guy: [(où c'est qu'c'est,  
[where is it,
- 3 Dea: [ça c'est quand vous avez de la buée sur l'pare-brise,  
[this is for when you have mist on your windscreen,
- 4 Guy: c'est le: [désembuage, c'e[st ça?  
that's the: [demister, isn [t it?
- 5 Dea: [celui-là, [DEsembuage, (.) ET sur les rétros.  
[this one, [demister, (.) AND on the rear windows.
- 6 (0.6)

- 7 Guy: \*ah, sur les rétros\* [en ( )  
oh, on the rear windows [in ( )  
\*.....\*looks at lateral rear window\*
- 8 Dea: [a:::h ouais. c'est [vrai \*me:nt]  
[o:::h yeah. that's [really]
- 9 Guy: → [ah \*c'est bien ça. ]  
[oh that's good this.]
- 10 Dea: ⇨ ça c'est très [très bien,]  
that's very [very good,
- 11 Guy: → [c'est bien parce qu je le point noir c'était  
[that's good becaus je the black spot has been
- 12 toujours les ré [tros. ex[térieurs [ouais  
always the ex [terior rear windows [yeah
- 13 Dea: [h [toujours, [toujours  
[h [always, [always

As the dealer explains the device that clears mist from the windows (3), Guy introduces its technical name (4) with a confirmation request. In his answer, the dealer repeats the term and continues his previous description, by focusing on the fact that the demister's action concerns not only the windscreen but also the lateral rear windows (5). This element is picked up as news by Guy in an *ah*-prefaced turn (7), immediately followed by the dealer's turn in overlap, producing a confirming stretched *a:::h ouais* and projecting a positive assessment to come with the adverbial intensifier and the prosodic stress on it (*c'est vraie:nt* [8]), which is not uttered. Instead, in overlap, Guy produces an assessment (*ah c'est bien ça* [9]), registering that this is something new he has discovered. So, the position for a first assessment is concurrently recognized by both participants, one projecting a positive assessment without producing it and the other realizing it.<sup>5</sup> In the subsequent turn, the dealer produces a second assessment (*ça c'est très très bien*, [10], without

<sup>5</sup>See Goodwin & Goodwin (1987) on concurrent assessments, produced in overlap and within a detailed and finely tuned coordination between coparticipants. In our corpus, coproduced assessments are not very common, but here is an instance:

(p13 - 20.34)

- 1 Dea: c'que je pense, c'qui marche pas, c'est  
what I think, what does not work, it's
- 2 +qui doit marcher:: (1.4)+ [pas par à coup,; un- [un peu &  
which has to work:: (1.4) [not occasionally,; a- [a bit&  
+points—————+
- 3 Guy: [oui mais là il est un peu alé- [un peu &&  
[yes but there it's a bit unpre- [a bit &&
- 4 Dea: &[alétoi:re hein:,] un peu aléatoire il: un coup i marche, un coup &  
&[unpredicable isn't it,] a bit unpredictable a first time it works, then&
- 5 Guy: &&[alétoire (hein, c'est ca)]  
&&(unpredictable (isn't it, that's it))
- 6 Dea: &i marche pas, mais alors ((continues))  
&it doesn't, but then

*un peu aléatoire* is initiated by Guy (3) but then repeated and completed almost by Guy and dealer together.

*ah*-indexing a previously known object), which is upgraded by the repetition of the intensifier “très” (cf. Excerpt 8).

But at this point, the sequence is *not* treated as closed, and in third position Guy produces a subsequent assessment, reasserting his previous positive form, downgrading the dealer’s upgrade. This assessment is followed by an account (11): Both the third assessment and this account display some level of expertise. In the next position (13), the dealer chooses to align not with the assessment but with the account, by recycling the double repetition of the temporal extreme formulation used by Guy (12). As in the previous case (Excerpt 8), the account following the assessment is a way to exhibit expertise and epistemic authority.

This case shows that even a minimal upgrade produced by recycling the same assessment material with the addition of an intensifier—which could be considered as a safe way of aligning with the recipient—is vulnerable to a downgrading response by the first speaker. Thus, the fact that the sequence may not be closed after the second assessment, and the possibility of downgrading it in a third position, represents a risk for the assessment upgrader. This risk is made particularly explicit in Excerpt 10, when Rémy enters the car:

Excerpt 10 (3.05)

- rem >—opens the door and enters the car—>  
**1 Rem:** **ah ben elle est toute neu:ve, ça sent l’neuf,**  
 oh nice it is quite new:, that smells new,  
**2 Dea:** **mMM:, ça sent bon:, \*+ mmm,**  
 mMM:, that smells good, mmm,  
 rem —>+  
 dea +.... sits in the car—>  
**3 Rem:** **AH: j’ai pas dit qu’ça tressait bon,**  
 OH: I haven’t said that it was smelling good,  
**4 j’ai dit qu’†ça fessait+ l’neuf† Ha† Hh**  
 I said that it smelled new Ha Hh  
 dea —>+  
 dea †looks at Rem, smiling—†  
**5 Dea:** **cette p’tite odeur d’plastique, mélangée: au tissu,**  
 this bit of plastic odor, mixed: with textile,  
**6 c’est sym[pa.**  
 it’s nice.  
**7 Rem:** **[voi:là. .houais h**  
 [it: is. .yeah h

Immediately as he enters the car, the customer, Rémy, produces a first assessment about the car smelling “new” (1). The dealer produces a second assessment, which is upgraded by an initial and final embodied vocal assessment (*mMM: mmm*), framing the recycling of the previous syntactical construction (*ça sent l’neuf* [1], *ça sent bon*: [2]), replacing the lexical assessing form, and highlighting it prosodically. This upgrading interprets “new” in the particular scale of good versus bad smell. But Rémy explicitly rejects (3–4) this interpretation, and reasserts his first assessment, laughing. We can observe that a second assessment can be dealt with by the coparticipant as assessing at a different level and as not properly fitted to the first. The dealer aligns with the third turn (3–4) both by

joining the laughter and by ironically redoing an assessment (5). He does it in a totally different form, developing the description of the plastic smell (5) and ending with another assessment (6). Here again, the formulation of the assessable, which is particularly detailed in the dealer's reappraisal and backing away, exhibits issues of personal access and perception of the referent.

A common way of downgrading previous assessments includes smiles, laughter, and teasing. Moreover, downgradings appear to be less related to preference organization of assessments than to the organization of compliments and avoidance of self-praise (Bilmes, 1988; Golato, 2005). As in the previous excerpt, this is particularly visible at a particular sequential moment, at the beginning of the activity, when both participants enter the car (Excerpt 11):

Excerpt 11 (p6)

- 1 Dea: → \*alors, (0.4) dans une jolie voiture claire comme ça, \*  
so, (0.4) in a nice bright car like this,  
\*sitting in the car \_\_\_\_\_\*
- 2 Dia: ⇨ oui c'est [salissant hein ((sm[all laughter])  
yes it's [easily dirty isn't it ((sm[all laughter])
- 3 Dea: [( )]
- 4 Dea: [ah, j'ai Rien dit.]  
[oh, I haven't said ANYthing.]

The dealer produces a positive assessment of Diane's car, and she reciprocates with an agreement followed by a negative assessment, opposing to the esthetical interpretation of the bright color of the car a practical perspective, seeing it as becoming easily dirty. In this contrast, Diane is not only rebutting the dealer's assessment, but she is claiming a different identity, of car user, of car owner, worried by practical matters such as cleaning it. We may note that in both Excerpts 14 and 15 the new owner comments on features tied to the car's newness that are likely to be transformed over time during ownership. By doing that, they manifest their change of category from buyer to owner and from new owner to ordinary user of the car, stepping into the role of proprietors of these objects.

## Second Assessments Repeated by Dealer

The production of assessments by the dealer orients to the vulnerability of his assessments. This is displayed in the fact that he very seldom proffers assessment in the first position and that he tends to select safe formats for his assessments. In second position, the potential risk represented by the vulnerability of a second upgraded assessment may be the reason for his production of low-intensity assessments, as well as a significant number of second assessments that are a repeat of the customer's firsts (see the double arrow in the transcripts below). Here is a series of occurrences of these repeats (Excerpts 12–14):

Excerpt 12 (p6 - 6.18 / ic6)

- 1 Dea: ici, +(0.3) + pour ranger vos: \*+lunett+es\* de soleil, +(0.2) +  
here for putting away your: sun glasses, (0.2)  
+opens+ +opens+ +opens totally+



- dia \*.....\*looks—>  
 2 **Dia:** → **ah ouais, ça c'est pr[atique**  
 oh yeah, that's pr[actical  
 3 **Dea:** ⇒ **[ici. c'est prati+que.\*+**  
 [here. that's practical.  
 dia —> \*  
 dea +closes+

Excerpt 13 (p4- 5.15 / e5, ic7)

- 1 **Dea:** **et plus loin, (.) le lavage de la vitre arrière.**  
 and further. (.) the cleaning of the windscreen behind.  
 2 **(.) si je tournais plus loin.**  
 (.) if you would turn further.  
 3 **Guy:** → **ouais classique quoi.**  
 yeah classic PART.  
 4 **Dea:** ⇒ **classi:que. exactement.**  
 classi:c. exactly.  
 5 **(0.6)**

Excerpt 14

- 1 **Dea:** **[souvent bon vous avez les- .h les kits mains li:bres,**  
 [often well you have the- .h the hands free telephone kit,  
 2 **avec le télépho:ne, les fils qui pen:dent, faut s'**  
 with the télépho:ne, the wires that han:g down, you've to  
 3 **penchE:r, le son: [;, les micro:s, .h**  
 bE:nt, the soun: [:d, the micro:phones, .h  
 4 **Guy:** → **[là c'est propre quoi**  
 [there(=with this one) it's clean PART  
 5 **Guy:** ⇒ **[c'est propre.] [°c'est ( )°]**  
 [it's clean.] [°it's ( )°]  
 6 **Dea:** ⇒ **[c- voi:là.] c'est exactement le m[ot qu'cherch]ais,**  
 [it- that's it.] it's exactly the w[ord I was look]ing for,  
 7 **c'est propre.**  
 it's clean.  
 8 **(0.3)**

Repeats concern the entire assessment clause and favor the format [copula + adjective]. Moreover, they generally deal with mild evaluations (such as “practical,” “classic,” or “clean”) of assessables that are not marked as exceptional or as totally newsworthy. Repeats concern essentially the syntactical and lexical form; second assessments can exploit prosody in order to do the upgrading (as the dealer’s “classic” [Excerpt 13, line 3] [see Ogden, 2006]). Another technique for upgrading repeats consists of stating the appropriateness of that particular assessment: This is explicitly done in Excerpt 14, where the dealer prefaces his repeat with “it’s exactly the word I was looking for” (6), which claims a parallel search of the same lexical item. The fact that “exactly” does constitute a frequent agreement token at the end of the sequence is related to this prac-

tice: It claims that the first is the better, more suited, more precise—and unique—assessment format that can be found. Thus, categorizing a first as a *mot juste* can be an alternative technique to upgrading in second position. This technique can even block upgrading.

### DEALER'S INITIATED ASSESSMENT SEQUENCES

The dealer's initiated assessment sequences are clearly less frequent than the customer's first assessments: Since the dealer's assessments are vulnerable to be downgraded in the next turn and thus constitute a risky sequential environment for the dealer if the recipient does not affiliate,<sup>6</sup> the dealer prefers safer techniques that favor the production of assessments by his coparticipant. The rare first assessments proffered by the dealer are thus an interesting position to study for exploring practices of resisting, countering, or disaligning with assessments, as well as practices for fishing for assessments. In the next sections, I will focus on turns following first assessment, in which the customer can either upgrade it or downgrade it. If the customer produces only minimal responses, the dealer engages in practices fishing for positive assessments.

#### Second Upgraded Assessments by Customer

After the dealer's first assessment, the customer may produce an upgraded second, as in Excerpt 15. Thomas is buying the same model as his older car; in this case, the dealer's explanation is reduced to the recognition that the features and the technologies are almost identical in both cars:

Excerpt 15 (2:24)

- |   |        |   |  |
|---|--------|---|--|
| 1 | Dea:   | <b>c'que je dis aux::</b><br>that's what I tell to::  |  |
| 2 |        | <b>(0.5)</b>  |  |
| 3 | Tho:   | <b>[oké</b><br>[okay  |  |
| 4 | Dea:   | <b>[aux autres personnes, c'est qu'là:, bon ce: une personne</b><br>[to the other people, that there, well this: a driver |  |
| 5 |        | <b>qui a eu la même voi [ture,</b><br>who bought the same ca[r  |  |
| 6 | Tho:   | <b>[OUais:, (.) c'est: eu [h::</b><br>[YEAh:, (.) that's: eh [m::   |  |
| 7 | Dea: → | <b>[y a pas grand chose:,</b><br>[there's not much:,  |  |
| 8 | →      | <b>y a Rien qu'a changé.</b> [y a vraiment rien.<br>there's NOThing that changed. [there's really nothing.                |  |
| 9 | Tho: ⇨ | <b>[y a rien rien.</b><br>[there's nothing nothing.   |  |

<sup>6</sup>Risks involved in assessment sequences in professional activities are mentioned by Clark, Drew, and Pinch (2003, p. 11) as well as by Clayman and Reisner (1998, p. 194). The latter speak of risky levels of confrontation and commitment involved in highly positive assessments and show that this favors mildly favorable assessments, which allow greater flexibility in subsequent negotiations.

The dealer reports what he routinely tells people buying the same kind of car (4–5) and Thomas in overlap not only agrees but collaboratively completes and projects a possible assessment (with *c'est: euh::* [6]). The dealer proffers the assessment, although choosing another syntactical construction to introduce it (*y a* and not *c'est* 7–8): He produces three upgraded assessments subsequently, without any pause but in distinct prosodic units. The fact that the cars are identical is dealt with in a negative form, by stating the absence of change. Nevertheless, Thomas aligns with the assessing turn and produces an upgrade in the form of a duplication of *rien* (9): This form of intensification (which is not just a reduplication orienting to the overlap) constitutes an ultimate solution for producing an upgrading of a format that has already been upgraded several times (see Pomerantz, 1984 about the problem of upgrading already upgraded forms).

Although this preferential format of assessment sequence is observable in the data, it remains very rare: In most of the cases second assessments by customers are either downgraded or absent.

### Second Downgraded Assessment by Customer

The dealer's first assessments run the risk of being downgraded in second position—in a similar way as seconds can be downgraded in third position. Here follows an occurrence of such downgrading, at the end of an extended demonstration of a sophisticated device including a GPS and a cell phone (Excerpt 16):

#### Excerpt 16

- 1 Dea: [c'est une installa]tion qui vaut,  
[it's an installa]tion which is worth,  
2 Guy: [(c'est) ( )]  
[(it's) ( )]  
3 Dea: → .h et c'est b:ête d'avoir un af tek avec  
.h and it's stu:pid to have a ((trademark's name)) with  
4 un télépho:n [e, (.) et de [l'pas l']utiliser,  
a telepho:n [e, (.) and not [to us]e it,  
5 Guy: [.hhhh [HHHHH(oui)]  
[.hhhh [HHHHH(yes)]  
6 ⇒ ça fait un peu con ouais, [parce que là: euh  
that is a bit idiotic yeah, [because there: ehm]  
7 Dea: ⇒ [ça fait un peu con,  
[that seems a bit idiotic,

The dealer is highlighting various optional services integrated within the technological device. His critique of an eventual underexploitation of the system is introduced by an assessment, *c'est b:ête* (3), emphatically pronounced and projecting the negative description of possible misuses. Guy aligns early on—at the end of the first part of a compound TCU—with a noticeable aspiration (5) and then with a expired agreement token (5), prefacing a negative assessment *ça fait un peu con ouais* (6). Although aligning and agreeing with the dealer's description, Guy's assessment exhibits features that downgrade the second assessment in subtle ways: Although *con* can be considered as a lexical upgrade of *bête*, shifting from a more formal to an informal, even vulgar style, it is prosodically downgraded, since *b:ête* was pronounced in a very marked way. Moreover, whereas

the dealer was using an assertive format (*c'est*), Guy is using another construction (*ça fait*, literally “that makes,” glossable as “that appears”), which is epistemically downgraded. This is further lowered by the modifier *un peu*. Thus, in second position, Guy manages both to agree with the dealer and downgrade his assessment. The dealer immediately aligns with him, repeating the second assessment in third position (7), thus abandoning his initial stance.

The dealer's assessments are risky in various positions: The dealer's firsts can be responded to by the customer's dispreferred seconds; and even the dealer's positive seconds run the risk of being downgraded by the customer in third position. By resisting the dealer's invitation to participate in assessing sequences, the customer exhibits an autonomous stance, which can also be displayed by the production of accounts and elaborations about the assessed object. These claims for epistemic primacy question the categorial divide between dealer and customer, expert and novice, and index the ongoing shift from customer to owner, related to a shift in the peculiar rights and obligations to assess.

### Dealer's First Assessments in a Context of Minimal/No Responses From the Customer

The vulnerability of the dealer's assessments—which run the risk of being downgraded by the car's new owner—is displayed by the fact that he rarely produces first assessments and that he engages much more in turns that strongly project and invite the customer's positive assessments. One technique consists of producing descriptions that highlight in a particular manner a selection of newsworthy, particular, expensive, remarkable items, thus projecting the appropriateness of a positive response in the form of an assessment. Nevertheless, in contexts where these practices do not succeed in getting the recipient to produce an assessment, proffering a first assessment can be an alternative technique for projecting the normative expectation of a second. These possibilities are ordered: The first technique—producing evaluative turns without producing assessments, thereby inviting to assess (cf. the environments preceding the customer's assessments analyzed before)—is safer than the second—producing first assessments, thereby projecting a possible slot for second assessments. Moreover, the second technique is often used when the first has been repeatedly used without success, in contexts of persistent minimal or no responses from the customer.

In this section, I focus on the latter, observable in Excerpt 17, where the dealer is explaining how automatic lights work:

Excerpt 17 (p4/e8 2.41+3.06-)

- |   |               |  |
|---|---------------|--|
| 1 | <b>Dea:</b>   | <b>vous voyez au milieu?</b><br>do you see in the middle?  |
| 2 |               | <b>(0.3)</b>   |
| 3 | <b>Dea:</b>   | <b>central, (.) [é: [clairage automa<sup>o</sup>tique actif<sup>o</sup>.</b><br>central, (.) [au [tomatic lights <sup>o</sup> activated <sup>o</sup> . |
| 4 | <b>Mar:</b> ↳ | <b>[d'accord.</b><br>[okay.  |
| 5 | <b>Dea:</b>   | <b>.hh c'est-à-dire que tout à l'heure vous</b><br>.hh that is to say that in a moment you   |
| 6 |               | <b>allez <sup>o</sup>partir, (0.3) avec les feux<sup>o</sup>.</b>  |

- will °leave, (0.3) with your lights°.
- 7 (0.7)
- 8 Dea: **tsk le fait de démarrer l'véhicule:, elle- (0.3)**  
tsk the fact that you start the car:, they- (0.3)
- 9 **l'véhicule allumera les feux.**  
the vehicle will turn on the lights.
- 10 (0.4)
- 11 Dea: **vous sortirez, (.) deux mètres après l'gara:ge,**  
you'll exit, (.) two metres after the gara:ge,
- 12 **(.) i s'éteignent.**  
(.) they will turn off.
- 13 Mar: ↳ **d'accord o[ké**  
okay o[kay
- 14 Dea: **[donc c'est l'automati[sme.**  
[so that's the automati [c device.
- 15 Mar: **[donc ça on l'laisse,**  
[so we leave this,
- 16 **[après, une fois qu'c'est mis, c'est mis,**  
[after, once it is turned on, it is on,
- 17 Dea: **[ah on le lais[se, (.) ah v-, (.) ah-,**  
[oh we lea[ve it, (.) oh y-, (.) oh-,
- 18 (0.2)
- 19 Dea: **c't'à-dire qu'c'est mis, mais vous pouvez l'enlever.=**  
that is it is on, but you can turn it off.=
- 20 Mar: ↳ **=d'acco[rd,**  
=ok[ay,
- 21 Dea: **[donc j'veus l'ai mis aujour[d'hui,**  
[so I have put it on tod[ay
- 22 Mar: **[en appuyant là?**  
[by pushing there?
- 23 Dea: **exactement. (.) i suffit de rappuyer dessus, allez-y, (.)**  
exactly. (.) it is enough to push it again, let's go, (.)
- 24 **maintenez la touche, restez d'ssus hein.**  
continue to push, stay on it dont't you.
- 25 (0.3)
- 26 Dea: **au bip sono°r[e°,**  
when it bee°p[s°,
- 27 eve: **[beep**
- 28 Dea: **vous êtes en gris.**  
your medium lights are on.
- 29 (0.3)
- 30 Mar: ↳ **°d'ac[cord°**  
°ok[ay°
- 31 Dea: **[rappuyez dessus maintenant,**  
[push again now,
- 32 (2.3)
- 33 eve: **beep**
- 34 Dea: → **voilà. (.) donc c'est simple.**  
that's it. (.) so it's simple.

- 35 (0.4)  
 36 Dea: °c'[est l'cycle°  
 °th[at's the cycle°  
 37 Mar: ↳ [°°d'accord°°  
 [°°okay°°  
 38 (0.4)  
 39 Dea: → c'est bie:n, c'est ts- c'est u- c'est: une  
 that's goo:d, that's ts- that's a- that's: a  
 40 → particularité de cette voiture, c'est bien, ça >vous  
 peculiarity of this car, that's good, this >you  
 41 avez plus à vous soucier des phares< si vous  
 don't have to worry anymore about the lights< if you  
 42 prenez, (0.4) les tunne:ls, tout ça:, (0.2)  
 take, (0.4) tunne:ls, everything:, (0.2)  
 43 → c'est [c'est génial,] [parce que vous rent']ez d'DANs,  
 that's[that's brilliant] [because you ente]r inSIDE,  
 44 Mar: ⇨ [d'accord] [c'est super]  
 [okay] [that's great]  
 45 Mar: m[m,  
 46 Dea: [c'est allumé, vous s- vous avez pas à vous soucier,  
 [it's on, you w-you have not any more to worry,  
 47 Mar: d'accord.  
 okay.

Because of space limitations, I will not go into detail through this episode and just notice that Marie, besides asking a few questions (15–16, 22), produces a series of *d'accord* (see the simple arrows, 4, 13, 20, 30, 37) as the only response to the dealer's description. Agreements precede assessments in the gradual scale of marked responses (cf. Excerpt 7). The closing of the explanation is initiated by the dealer in line 34, with a terminal marker, *voilà*, and with a conclusive assessment (*donc c'est simple*). A silence follows, with no response from Marie (35), and the dealer produces, in a lower voice, an additional TCU (36), thereby offering a new opportunity for her to respond. In overlap she produces again a lower *d'accord* (37) and a new gap follows. The dealer initiates a multiunit turn where a first positive assessment (*c'est bie:n*, [39]) is followed by an account focused on the car, then by a second assessment, repeating the first (40), followed by an account focused on the customer's possible uses, upgraded by a third (*c'est génial*, 43<sup>7</sup>), overlapped by a new *d'accord* (44). It is only at this point that Marie shows responsiveness toward the last assessment, producing a slightly downgraded one, *c'est super* (44). As soon as she has produced it, the dealer completes his ongoing TCU and closes the episode.<sup>8</sup>

The dealer's orientation to Marie's pauses as no responses, and to *d'accord* as a not satisfactory and not strong enough receipt, as well as his careful use of first assessments in a multiunit turn providing for several accounts and minimizing the risk of a first pair-part constituted by a unique assessing TCU exhibit a practice of fishing for assessments.

<sup>7</sup>In French, *génial* can be translated as *brilliant*, *terrific*, *fantastic*; it is very different from the English *genial*.

<sup>8</sup>Analyzing patients' practices for inviting doctors to produce an assessment, Jones (2001) gives examples of the extension of the punchline as a technique for inviting to assess, and documents participants' difficulties of finding stronger pursuits of a climax.



Nevertheless, this practice does not always succeed in getting the recipient to produce her own positive assessment, as in Excerpt 18:

Excerpt 18 (10.30)

- >—music is audible from the CD player—>
- 1 (1.0)
- 2 Dea: → voy +ez, vous avez pu voir qu'on a un bon son,  
look, you have seen that we've got a good sound,  
+looks at Mar————>
- 3 ↳ \*(0.5)\*  
mar \*nods\*
- 4 Dea: \*°en plus +\* hein°,  
°moreover don't we°,  
——> +  
mar \*nods——\*
- 5 Mar: ↳ °d'a[ccord°  
°o[kay°
- 6 Dea: → [°mieux que la radio.°  
[°better than the radio.°
- 7 ↳ (0.5)
- 8 ((Dea introduces next item))

Marie is manipulating the volume of the CD player, which can be controlled from the steering wheel. The dealer turns toward her and produces an assessment, introduced by a reference to what she can experience at that precise moment (2). During the pause, she nods (3) and he goes on with an expansion of the previous TCU, finishing with *hein*, a tag particle that solicits a response. Marie nods again during the expansion and produces then a minimal mumbled *d'accord* (5). The dealer produces a new expansion, in the form of a delayed completion, of the previous TCUs (6) occasioning a new slot for an assessment, which is not produced by Marie (7). In the next position, the dealer abandons and introduces the next topic. Here, his attempts to invite Marie to produce an assessment are visible in the turn-expansions (Ford, Fox, & Thompson, 2002) orienting to silences as missing assessments (Jones, 2001).<sup>9</sup>

Whereas in Excerpt 18 the owner produces a few, although minimal, receipt tokens, in Excerpt 19, more dramatically, Guy ignores the dealer's attempts altogether:

Excerpt 19

- 1 Dea: essayez ce soir. en roulant: si vous avez un coup de fil,  
try this evening. while driving: if you have a call (to make),
- 2 vous verrez [que,  
you'll see [that,
- 3 Guy: [j'pa- j'passerai un coup d'fil à:

<sup>9</sup>We see very clearly that nods are not assessments; nods are not to be confused with assessment head shakes (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987).

- [I'll ca- I will call                      PREP
- 4 Dea: → **c'est j-** [c'est TRès TREs bien, bon  
it's- [it's VErY VErY good, PART
- 5 Guy: [°à ma femme°  
[°PREP my wife°
- 6 Dea: **on l'a essayé plusieurs fois- à plusieurs personnes**  
we have tried it many times- with many people
- 7 **qu'ont pris la même voiture qu'la votre,**  
who have taken the same car as yours,
- 8 ↳ (0.6)
- 9 Dea: → **.h c'est vraiment bien hein. je trouve qu'c'est::**  
.h it's really good PART, I think that it's::
- 10 ↳ (0.8)
- 11 Guy: ↳ °ou[ais°  
°ye[ah°

The dealer has been explaining at length the use of the GPS to Guy and proposes that he tests it on his way home (1). He goes on projecting the satisfactory result of the test, in the form of an assessment (4) prefaced by a reference to his future experience (using the verb *voir*, cf. above excerpt 18, line 2). This is overlapped by Guy, responding to the first part of the turn, and ignoring the second. The dealer launches a new preface, relating the experience of several people (6), leading to a conclusive assessment (9), followed by *hein* and an incomplete personal assertion. Guy responds minimally after a longer gap (10) with a mumbled *ouais* (11), and withholds telling his side. The action goes on with Excerpt 16, where an assessment is finally produced, in a downgraded way.

These cases show both an orientation to the normative expectation that an assessment is due, and an absence of a second pair-part—revealing the practices through which assessment can be (more or less successfully) invited.<sup>10</sup> Producing a first assessment projecting a second can constitute a fishing device, through which the sequence is initiated and the completion is left for the coparticipant. Pomerantz (1980) has described fishing techniques through which participants indirectly offer fragments of information, telling “my side,” inviting recipients to volunteer more completed talk on the event. Haakana (2007) and Golato (2005) explore techniques of “fishing for compliments,” in the form of self-deprecation projecting disagreement, of compliments projecting compliments in return, or even explicit requests for compliments. Here, coparticipants resist the invitation to produce positive assessments and adopt a “perverse passive” (Jefferson, 1983) behavior by giving minimal responses at points where more substantial talk would be appropriate, thus revealing the normative expectations related to assessments.

## CONCLUSIONS

By focusing on a specific, perspicuous setting—car demonstrations by a dealer to a customer who has just acquired a new vehicle—and using video recordings and multimodal transcripts, this arti-

<sup>10</sup>See Goodwin & Goodwin (1987, p. 44) on refusals to produce an assessment and thus to produce the assessable character of the referent.

cle aims at contributing to three dimensions central to the study of assessments: their sequential organization, the epistemic positions they convey, and the membership categories related to them.

The sequential organization of assessments has been previously described in the literature in two sequential environments described here: At the end of extended sequences, they work as closing-implicative resources (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987; Antaki, Houtkoop-Streenstra, & Rapley, 2000, p. 242); in the context of pairs of assessments, they orient to a preferred format where the first assessment is upgraded by the second (Pomerantz, 1984). The corpus studied in this article shows alternative sequential formats, sensitive to the context and the activity. Assessments are distributed in different ways among participants: They are mostly proffered by car owners and seldom by the car dealer, who not only orients to the production of positive assessments by the recipient but also exploits various techniques for inviting or even fishing for them. At the *completion* of the explanation, where the production of an assessment is projected, its absence is managed by expanding the description, by adding new TCUs, thus offering new occasions to produce a range of responses, ranging from “mhm” to “yeah” or “yes” and to assessments. Nods, head shakes, and eyebrow flashes are also among the resources used. In this context, assessments are dealt with by the participants as the stronger type of response to extended descriptions: In this way, participants do exhibit an orientation to the gradual organization and distribution of the response tokens. Participants do orient to this interactional metric also in sequences of assessments, not only when they produce second upgraded assessments but also when they produce downgraded seconds. The data reveal a peculiar format, consisting of a first positive assessment, upgraded by a second, which is then downgraded by the first speaker in third position. This format, as well as the possibility of downgrading assessments in second position, shows that in certain settings and activities—such as the professional interaction between a car dealer and a customer who has just bought a car, studied here—the production of assessments by a party can be risky, being vulnerable to a downgrade in the next position. Various recurrent practices in the corpus orient to this vulnerability, such as the paucity of assessments produced by the dealer in first position, the upgrading of assessments in second position achieved by recycling the same lexical material of the first and by using intensifiers like *très* (“very”), or the repetition of first assessments in the next turn, eventually accounted for as being the *mot juste* and thus as not being upgradable. In this sense, the data analyzed in this article reveal practices that not only corroborate the bright side of assessing practices well described in the literature, showing that assessments display shared experiences, alignment, and affiliation, but also reveal their dark side, showing that assessments can also express disaffiliation, contending authorities, resistance, claims of autonomous epistemic access, and distinct rights to assess.

These negotiations and contentions of the rights and obligations to assess show how epistemic positions and stances are locally achieved within social interaction. Assessing the features of an object in first position supposes an access to the assessable. Even if assessables are copresent objects, the access of the coparticipants has to be actively established. Video data analyzed in this article reveal the intense work done by participants in order to exhibit assessed referents while describing them, as well as to invite and guide the recipient’s gaze onto them: Assessments occur only when these previous activities of localizing, highlighting, and foregrounding the assessable have been achieved, and indeed signal their completion. In this position, the production of assessments depends on various changes of state of the recipient: change of state of knowledge (from uninformed to informed), of attention (focusing the attention on a new item), and of understanding (displaying understanding). These changes are registered by *ah*-prefaced assessments. Thus,

changes of epistemic states are here demonstrable step by step as they unfold through talk and embodied conducts: Changes of attention, perception, and knowledge are dynamic and emergent processes that are revealed by the finely tuned sequential organization of talk, gazes, and gestures. Previous literature has shown that assessments reveal the way in which participants see characters, events, and objects in a particular way, how they interpret and perceive them, how they claim and publicly display an interpretive perspective (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987) and an epistemic position (Heritage, 1998, 2002; Heritage & Raymond, 2005). The corpus analyzed here contributes to this literature by documenting in detailed ways the *changes* of these epistemic states. For example, Heritage notes that “the utterance of oh, of course, may not mark the moment at which ‘new information’ or some other ‘change of state’ was subjectively registered. [...] Notwithstanding, it appears that, in many circumstances, the subjective registration of a change of state and its outward acknowledgement occur at roughly the same moment” (1998, p. 328, n. 2). Multimodal analysis makes it possible to demonstrate in a fine way the various steps of this process of change of states, as well as the subtle ways in which participants negotiate, display, claim, and embody competences and expertises in the assessed domains, revealing differential access, limited or first-hand experience, recent or previous knowledge, submitting them to mutual validation or challenge. These various states of knowledge are collaboratively/competitively achieved, invited, fished for, withdrawn, or exhibited through talk and multimodal conducts in interaction. Multimodal details display central features of the mutual establishment of these states of knowledge, revealing their timed emergence and evolution through talk and action, as well as their embodied nature involving the whole body—gazes, gestures, facial expressions, and bodily postures.

The epistemic stances and their changes along assessment sequences show that they are sensitive to the contexts, activities, and membership categories of their occurrence: Orientation to competences and states of knowledge is often manifested and interpreted by participants as situatedly category-bound (Sacks, 1972). Dealers orient to customers as experts or novices, as not-yet-knowing or already knowing the objects they sell: Other identities than dealer/customer are at play here, such as car expert or just car user, but also as driver-who-already-had-this-model, new car owner, as well as car expert, representative of a car brand, or teacher. These identities are at work in the way in which assessments are expected: The dealer orients as much to the instructional aspects of the explanation—aiming at the understanding of the customer—as to the commercial aspects—aiming at prizing the car. The customer displays first his/her understanding of the instructions and his/her alignment to them—through the expression of changes of state of knowledge, registering his/her transformation from uninformed/novice to informed driver. Once informed, he/she is in the position—s/he acquires the epistemic grounds and the rights—to assess the item. Far from being a decontextualized phenomenon derived from static preexisting roles, knowledge and epistemic asymmetries as well as categorial asymmetries can fluctuate during the course of an interaction.

In this process, the described item may undergo some transformations too, being first an object category-bound with the dealer but becoming then progressively an object category-bound with the driver, its owner. The instruction reveals this progressive appropriation by the customer, now owner, of the newly purchased car. Therefore, evaluative descriptions of the car can be viewed as assessments of a sellable object, or as compliments of a possessable object, hybridizing these practices. Owning a car is here displayed as a process, not limited to buying the car but also related to acquiring it, not limited to understanding it but involving its manipulation and bodily appropriation.

By exploring undescribed sequential formats, multimodal resources in the establishment of the assessable as a common focus of attention and talk and embodied conducts as displaying emergent and changing epistemic positions, related to evolving identities, the article aims at contributing to the study of assessments as a situated, embodied practice, whose sequential organization is deeply embedded in the specificities of situated activities.

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## APPENDIX

### Transcript Conventions

Data were transcribed according to conventions developed by Gail Jefferson and commonly used in Conversation Analysis.

[	overlapping talk
=	latching
(.)	micro pause
(0.6)	timed pause
:	extension of the sound or the syllable it follows
.	stopping fall in tone
,	continuing intonation
?	rising inflection
m <sub>i</sub> ne	emphasis
°uh°	quieter fragment than its surrounding talk
.h	aspiration
h	out breath
((sniff))	described phenomena
< >	delimitation of described phenomena
( )	string of talk for which no audio could be achieved

An indicative translation is provided line per line, in order to help reading the original.



Descriptions of gestures and actions are transcribed according to the following conventions (see Mondada, 2007a):

* *	gestures and actions descriptions are delimited between
+ +	two identical symbols (generally one symbol per participant)
Δ Δ	and are synchronized with correspondent stretches of talk
>	gesture or action described begins before the excerpt's beginning
—>	gesture or action described continues after excerpt's end
*—>	gesture or action described continues across subsequent lines
—>*	until the same symbol is reached
....	gesture's preparation
——	gesture's apex is reached and maintained
,,,,,	gesture's retraction
mar	participant doing gesture is identified when (s)he is not the speaker
eve	relevant event described or transcribed
fig	the exact point where screen shot has been taken is indicated
#	by a specific sign showing its position within turn at talk.