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## Imperative Directives: Orientations to Accountability

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### ABSTRACT



Our analysis proceeds from the question that if grammar alone is insufficient to identify the action of an imperative (e.g., offering, directing, warning, begging, etc.), how can interlocutors come to recognize the specific action being performed by a given imperative? We argue that imperative directives that occur after the directed action could have first been relevantly performed *explicitly* to direct the actions of the recipient and *tacitly* treat the absence of the action as a failure for which the recipient is accountable. The tacit nature of the accountability orientation enables both parties to focus on restoring progressivity to the directed course of action rather than topicalizing a transgression. Data are from everyday interactions in British and American English.

Imperatives are one of the three major sentence types, together with interrogatives and declaratives (Sadock & Zwicky, 1985). Like other grammatical formats (e.g., interrogatives, see Schegloff, 1984), speakers use imperatives to perform a wide range of actions, including offering, directing, warning, initiating repair, and begging, among others. The multiplicity of actions that imperatives perform leads to a puzzle, one that analysts and participants alike must solve: If an imperative format does not afford a default analysis of its action (e.g., as a request or directive), then how do participants come to recognize the specific action(s) that an imperative performs?

Imperatives are an example of the “one-to-many and many-to-one relationships” between linguistic forms (i.e., practices) and interactional functions (i.e., actions) that Walker (2014) discusses as she cautions conversation analysts against conflating form and function. In this article, we begin to disentangle imperative grammar from (some of) the many actions it is used to perform. We narrow in on a specific interactional contingency that speakers recurrently use imperative actions to manage: directing the actions of others (Craven & Potter, 2010; Goodwin, 2006; Goodwin & Cekaite, 2013; Kent, 2012b)—that is, first pair-parts that make embodied compliance conditionally relevant as a next action (Kent, 2012a). Within this class of imperative directives, we observe two basic types: (a) those that simply direct the actions of others (e.g., “pass the bread, please”) and (b) those that not only prospectively direct the actions of others but also retrospectively treat the recipients as accountable for their current actions or inaction (e.g., “tell me the goddamn story”).

This article examines the interactional resources that participants use to recognize whether an imperative directive simply tells them to do something or also tacitly holds them accountable for failing to have already relevantly performed the action. We argue that the position of the imperative

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directive within a course of action is crucial. Imperative directives that follow the relevance of the directed action not only direct the recipient to act but also find fault in his or her current actions or inaction.

## Background

### *Grammar and action*

With apparent ease and remarkable speed, participants in interaction are able to recognize the action that a turn at talk implements and produce a relevant response. Just how this is done, however, remains elusive. Schegloff (2007) states the problem as follows: “How are the resources of the language, the body, the environment of the interaction, and position in the interaction fashioned into conformations designed to be, and to be recognized by recipients as, particular actions . . . ?” (p. xiv). In general, two solutions to this problem seem possible (Levinson, 2013). First, the form of an action (the linguistic construction of a turn at talk, the physical production of a gesture) may furnish the resources necessary for its recognition. Early philosophical investigations of action adopted this position (e.g., Austin, 1962), and recent empirical studies have suggested that such a solution may be possible (Couper-Kuhlen, 2014). Second, the context in which an action occurs, not only its form, may provide the necessary resources. This has been the dominant position in CA since Sacks’s (1992) insight that answers depend on questions to be recognizable as such. Sequence-initiating actions have also been shown to be sensitive to sequential position, taking different forms in different environments (Curl, 2006; Rossi, 2012, 2014; Wootton, 1997; Zinken & Ogiermann, 2013). In a more recent turn, the specification of context thought relevant for action recognition has been radically extended beyond the local sequence to include properties of individuals, such as epistemic status (Heritage, 2012), deontic authority (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012), and personal benefit (Clayman & Heritage, 2014).

In the case of directives, it is evident that imperative grammar alone is not sufficient for action recognition. If an imperative can just as well express a wish as give a command (e.g., “give me a ten” as one rolls dice), then clearly more than imperative grammar is necessary. Moreover, as Mandelbaum (2014) has shown, participants can use directives to implement multiple actions simultaneously, adding a further dimension to the problem of action recognition. For example, when discussing a mother’s directive to her son to “cut that (up)/(out),” Schegloff (1989) noted in passing that it “is not just an injunction or instruction, or request. In setting out an alternative way of eating, it can do a complaint about his prior behaviour” (p. 149).

### *Accountability*

Drew (1998, p. 297) notes that actions can be “built to manifest transgressions by others of normative standards of conduct.” Calling an interlocutor to account for his behavior can be used to highlight and police normative social standards. Researchers have described a broad range of practices through which one interlocutor can hold another accountable for nonnormative or transgressive conduct: unanswerable polar interrogatives (Heinemann, 2008), *wh*-questions (Bolden & Robinson, 2011; Koshik, 2005), characterizing something as absent or a failure (Schegloff, 1988), negative assessments about the recipient’s behavior (Hepburn & Potter, 2011), extreme-case formulations (Edwards, 2000), and formulating behavior as dispositional (Edwards, 1995) or collusive (Potter & Edwards, 1990). Stances toward the accountability of conduct can be signalled through related actions such as “accusing, criticising, blaming, challenging, advising, and so on” (Robinson, 2016, p. 31).

Recognizing how and when speakers hold each other accountable for failing to perform an expected action is a subtle and delicate matter that is not always performed overtly in interaction. For example, *oh*-prefaced responses to inquiries indicate that, “from the perspective of the answerer, a question is problematic in terms of its relevance, presuppositions, or context” (Heritage, 1998, p. 291). It doesn’t take much to add in a hint of accountability to an utterance. As Robinson (2016)

notes, “changing the ‘mix’ of practices (including both their composition and position) can subtly or dramatically change the nature of the action” (p. 19). We investigate how imperative directives (actions designed to get someone to do something) can also be heard as tacitly holding recipients accountable for delaying the progressivity of the directed action.

### ***Projectability and progressivity***

In interaction, actions (whether produced through language or the body) can produce recognizable, normative structures that develop over time. At the level of turn taking, Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) described how participants monitor each other’s talk for how it progresses toward possible completion points that would indicate a relevant place for speaker transition. At the level of adjacency pairs, Schegloff (2007) described how particular kinds of initiating actions make relevant type-fitted responsive actions. Pairs of actions can be strung together into complex sequences of sequences (Schegloff, 2007), which themselves can form recognizable activities (Heritage & Sorjonen, 1994; Levinson, 1992), all of which occur within the overall structural organization of the interaction (Robinson, 2013; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). At each level of structure, the progressive realization of an action allows for the projection of what is yet to come (Lerner & Raymond, 2008).

The structure of a course of action, be it the telling of a story or the preparation of a meal, sets up normative expectations about how participants will behave and what form their contributions will take. In many cases, “the recognizability of completion (i.e., what it will take to materially complete a project) and the projectability of that completion from the outset of the activity” can provide an accountable and easily monitored frame of projectable relevance to structure participation in the activity (Lerner, 1995, p. 129). Thus, courses of action that have been initiated but have not yet come to completion remain relevant and consequential for the interaction until they have reached a recognizable conclusion.

Interlocutors are morally responsible for recognizing, understanding, and adhering to relevance rules (including the normative progressivity of courses of action). Nonperformance of a relevant action is an accountable and sanctionable matter (Garfinkel, 1963, 1967), particularly for courses of action to which both parties have displayed a prior commitment (cf., Rossi, 2012). The smooth and timely progression through a course of action to its eventual completion can be monitored on the basis of the projectable relevance of the constituent elements. As Schegloff (2007, p. 15) states, “moving from some element to a hearably next one with nothing intervening is the embodiment of, and the measure of, progressivity.” Once a course of action has been initiated, participants can orient to the relevance of its completion (Lerner, 1998; Lerner & Raymond, 2008), such that if it stalls or fails to progress, participants may use practices designed to reinstate progressivity. Importantly, as Lerner and Raymond have shown, progressivity and projectability operate not only on courses of action implemented through talk but also those implemented through embodied actions.

### **Data and methods**

The analysis draws on a broad collection of over 690 grammatical imperatives systematically identified in 46 video recorded interactions between speakers of English in the United Kingdom and United States across a variety of noninstitutional settings. Approximately nine hours of data are of adult interactions, and approximately five hours involve children and adults. All names appearing in transcripts are pseudonyms, and informed consent was gained for all recordings.

Consistent with conversation analysis, it is possible to begin an analysis with either practices or actions. In contrast to previous studies of directives, which have taken the social action as their point of departure (e.g., Kent, 2012b), our methodological approach mirrors that of Schegloff (1997, p.

506), who began with a series of practices for initiating repair and proceeded to “examine occasions in which they are deployed to quite different effect.” By starting with grammatical imperatives rather than the social action of admonishing or directing, we aim to address Mondada’s (2011, p. 19) observation that “studies focusing on directives produced by using imperative verbs are scarce, and their situated use in specific social actions remains understudied” (but see Rossi, 2012; Zinken & Ogiermann, 2013).

The analysis presented focuses only on cases in which an imperative performed the action of a directive—to make observable compliance (as opposed to nonobservable compliance, e.g., “imagine”) relevant immediately in next position (Kent, 2012a). In restricting our focus to imperative directives, we have excluded the following types of imperatives from our analysis:

- Deferred action requests (e.g., “tell me how it goes”; Lindström, 1997);
- Cognitive-state imperatives (e.g., “imagine this is the building I live in”);
- Affective-state imperatives (e.g., “be confident”);
- Turn-initial particles (e.g., “look,” “see”);
- First-person imperatives (e.g., “let’s X,” “let me X”);
- Prohibitives or grammatically negative imperatives (e.g., “don’t whisper”).

### Imperatives that precede the relevance of the directed action

The imperative directives in our collection formulate actions for recipients to perform in next position. In many cases, the action the imperative directs the recipient to perform (i.e., the directed action) has no relevance prior to the production of the imperative. The imperative itself initiates a course of action and establishes the relevance of the directed action. In this position, an imperative directive simply directs the recipient to perform a newly relevant action. In Extract 1, Wesley issues the imperative directive to Mum for her to “pass the bread (please)” (line 7).

#### Extract 1 (Virginia 11:42)

```

01 PRU: He got knee walkin' drunk. at thuh wu-
02 MOM: At the [wedding.
03 PRU: [rehearsal.<I mean at thuh: wedding reception.
04 (0.4)
05 MOM: ['u h h h h h h h h ] ((through mouth))
06 PRU: [t!A:N:' gomebody pushed 'im] in the pool.
07 WES: *Pass the* bread, +[(please.)
08 PRU: [An' he thought it was so much fu:n,
    wes *points--*
    pru +reaches for bread basket-->
09 th't he went hack n'- an'+ got up on thuh diving board,
    pru -->+passes it to Wes-->>
10 an' started divin' in; ehhhh! huh!
```

Note that there is no prior indication that Wesley might be seeking to have the bread passed to him. As an action, Prudence passing him the bread is only made relevant once Wesley has issued the directive. Consequently, the directed action was not projectable until the directive has been issued.

Although imperative directives can initiate courses of action, as happens here, they more commonly occur within courses of action that have already been set in motion (Mondada, 2014a; Rossi, 2012; Wootton, 1997; Zinken & Ogiermann, 2013). We have found that speakers can use imperative directives to progress from one “step” of a course of action to a next (cf. Schegloff, 2007). The next step in a course of action may be projectable (i.e., it will need to happen at some point), but the immediate relevance of the directed action (i.e., position in which it should occur) is nonetheless still contingent upon the directive.

In Extract 2, Dad is demonstrating visual convergence to his two daughters. The crucial part of the demonstration is the moment when they switch their focus from Mum’s nose (which is distant) to the pen (which is nearby).

## Extract 2 (FF06 17:20)

01 DAD: alright? if you look at mu:mmy's no::se,  
 02 (0.5)  
 03 DAD: an' I: put this pen in front of your face,  
 04 >don't look at the pe:n  
 05 (0.5)  
 06 DAD: °do:n't look at th'pe:n°  
 07 (0.2)  
 08 DAD: °but° you can see this pe:n's here ca:n't you  
 09 (0.3)  
 10 DAD: °'ut° you ca:n't fo:cus on it.  
 11 (0.5)  
 12 DAIS: uh(h)uhhm  
 13 (.)  
 14 DAD: **now concentrate on the pe:n.**  
 15 (1.1)  
 16 DAD: you can see: mummy behi:nd (.) but you're not  
 17 fo:cusing on her.

Although the nature of the experiment makes it projectable that Daisy will need to look at the pen at some point, the exact moment at which that action becomes relevant is contingent upon (and established by) Dad's imperative directive "now concentrate on the pen." (line 14). Before the directive is issued, Daisy is not remiss in not having already looked at the pen, as Dad's previous prohibitives make apparent (lines 4 and 6).

In both cases the relevance of the directed action follows the production of the imperative. This holds for imperative directives that initiate courses of action as well as those that prospectively manage in-progress courses of action. There is no evidence in the interaction that the imperative directives find fault with the recipients' actions or inactions or hold them accountable for some failure to have performed a projectably relevant action.

### Imperatives that follow the relevance of the directed action

In contrast, imperatives that are issued after the directed action has already become projectable and relevant within the interaction not only *explicitly* direct the recipient to perform the action and thereby enforce its production, but they also *tacitly* treat the recipient as accountable for not having already done so. We might gloss these as accountability oriented imperative directives. In this section, we illustrate the core phenomenon with two initial cases and then consider how responses to imperative directives in this position provide evidence for the analysis.

#### Two initial specimens of the phenomenon

Across the collection, imperative directives that follow the relevance of the directed action generally differ along two dimensions: how the directed action becomes relevant in the interaction and how overtly the participants orient to the recipient's accountability for the prior performance of the action. The two initial specimens in this section indicate the diversity that we observe in the collection.

Extract 3 comes from a game of Monopoly between two friends. After they set up the board, Luke produces a story preface (Sacks, 1974), projecting the relevance of a storytelling (line 2). However, rather than produce a response that would allow the story to progress, Rick blocks the telling, proposing that they first establish the rules of the game (lines 3–5).

## Extract 3a (Monopoly Boys 02:57)

01 RIC: Alright [uhm  
 02 LUK: [So I got ah story to tell you:..  
 03 RIC: Ah well le:t's go:: le's jus' get the ru:les.  
 04 LUK: Ohkay=  
 05 RIC: =°outta the way first.°

After about five minutes of gameplay, Luke reinitiates the storytelling, now using a gloss of the story's climax: "So: I almost killed someone today".

### Extract 3b (Monopoly Boys 07:45)

06 LUK: So: I almost killed someone today.  
 07 (0.2)  
 08 RIC: .tch Are you se:rious?  
 09 LUK: Yah.  
 10 (1.1)  
 11 RIC: Wit' your ba:re hands?  
 12 (0.2)  
 13 LUK: No:, With a tennis ba:ll.  
 14 (0.3)  
 15 RIC: mhhmph-  
 16 (0.7)  
 17 LUK: mmtch Se:rhious(h)l[hy hhuh  
 18 RIC: [Alright +exphla:in th(h)at  
 luk +.....-->  
 19 +(0.2)+  
 luk -->+picks up dice+  
 20 LUK: Alri:ght +well  
 +shakes dice-->  
 21 (0.8)+(0.6)+  
 luk -->+rolls dice+  
 22 (0.6)  
 23 LUK: after my: (0.4) BO:::om communi: (.) ches::t

After a series of other-initiations of repair (lines 8–17), with which Rick displays his ritualized disbelief (Heritage, 1984; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2006), Luke's second attempt to launch the story secures a go-ahead response at line 18 ("exphla:in th(h)at"), making the telling of the story the sequentially relevant next action.<sup>1</sup> However, rather than tell the story, Luke picks up the dice and rolls, taking his next turn in the game and deferring the story (lines 19–23). Four more story initiations occur over the next three minutes (not shown), yet each fails to produce the story as the participants repeatedly prioritize the progressivity of the game over the storytelling sequence. The final initiation appears in Extract 3c.

### Extract 3c (Monopoly Boys 11:27)

24 +(0.5)+  
 luk +sets empty can down+  
 25 LUK: alri(h)ght.  
 26 +(0.3)+  
 luk +picks up unopened can+  
 27 RIC: alright.=tell me the goddamn sto(h)ry.  
 28 LUK: o[kay  
 29 RIC: [before you roll. be[cause if you can't y-  
 30 LUK: [before I roll.  
 31 (0.2)  
 32 RIC: we can't tell a story as (we're) playing

At a lapse in the conversation and between turns in the game, Luke puts down an empty can of beer, picks up a new one, and produces "alright" as a "change of activity token" (Gardner, 2007). This indicates his preparedness for the next, possibly game-related action. The pauses on lines 24 and 26 are opportunities in which Luke could, but does not, resume the telling. It is in this interactional environment that Rick issues the imperative directive: "tell me the goddamn sto(h)ry" (line 27).

<sup>1</sup>We note that "exphla:in th(h)at" is not only a go-ahead response but is also an imperative directive. Although the directed action is projectable at this point in the interaction, the moment at which it becomes relevant is contingent upon the directive itself, as a go-ahead. The directive is therefore analogous to that in Extract 2.

The relevance of the directed action precedes the directive itself. The multiple attempts to launch the story have established the relevance of its telling such that its absence has become noticeable and its production enforceable, as evidenced by the directive. The increment “before you roll” (line 30) makes explicit that the story should be told before Luke takes his next turn in the game. It treats Luke’s involvement in the game as the cause of the delay, holding him accountable for the inaction. Moreover, Rick’s account initially attributes responsibility to Luke explicitly (“because if you can’t y-”) before a subsequent self-repair (from “you” to “we”) collectivizes the blame (see Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007). The design of the imperative itself orients to the recipient’s accountability for the production of the directed action. The insertion of the expletive “goddamn” displays the speaker’s frustration and upgrades the directive, constructing it as a subsequent and perhaps final attempt to elicit the story.

In Extract 3, the orientation to the recipient’s accountability for prior nonperformance of the directed action is explicit. Across the collection, however, explicit references to accountability are the exception. Instead, orientations to accountability typically occurred more tacitly, as though smuggled beneath an explicit imperative directive that targets getting the recipient to perform the directed action. Extract 4 comes from the beginning of a family mealtime after the food has been served but before the participants have begun to eat. When asked how to say “let’s enjoy” in French, 7-year-old Emily responds “bon appetit,” an expression that normally marks the commencement of a meal. Rather than begin to eat, however, Emily begins to repeat “bon appetit” in a lyrical tone, the third of which appears on line 1.

#### Extract 4 (FA802 01:27)

```
01 EMY: bon [appertee
02 MUM:      [mm hmm
03      (0.9)
04 DAD: mm:
05      (0.8)
06 EMY: u:m (0.2) °jus' me?°
07      +(0.5)
08 EMY: °bon+ [app+é]tit°
09 MUM:      [ea:t ]
10      +(0.2)
11 EMY: [°bon+ [app+é]tit°
12 MUM:      [Ea:t.]
```

emy +leans twd Mum with her nearest palm upwards-->  
emy +leans twd Dad with her nearest palm upwards-->  
-->+, , , , , +picks up cutlery-->>

The structure of the activity in which the participants are engaged (a family mealtime) provides for the relevance of specific actions, eating being foremost among them. The expression “bon appetit” marks the transition from serving to eating, but Emily transforms this transitional action into an activity in its own right—singing “bon appetit” and thereby delays the meal. In this interactional environment, the absence of the relevant next action—beginning to eat—is evidentially noticeable to Mum, who interrupts Emily’s fourth verse of “bon appetit” with the imperative directive “ea:t” (line 9). The directive enforces the relevance of the directed action, treats Emily’s actions as sanctionable, and on that basis tacitly holds her accountable for the delay. After Emily continues her playful performance (lines 10–11), Mum reissues her directive, which eventually elicits the relevant action as Emily picks up her cutlery and begins to eat (line 11).

In comparison to Extract 3, the orientation to the recipient’s accountability for the performance of the previously relevant directed action is less explicit in Extract 4. The prosodic stress with which Mum says “ea:t” is the only turn design feature present to index accountability. Prosodic stress can invite a recipient to search for what it locates as the other part of a pair (Schegloff, 1998). In this case, the stress on “ea:t” potentially locates Emily’s current actions as the other member of the set, selects the directed action as the relevant and appropriate behavior, and thereby treats her current actions as



inappropriate and not currently relevant. In this way, the prosodically stressed imperative not only explicitly directs the recipient to perform the directed action, enforcing the relevance of its production, but it also finds fault in her current actions and tacitly orients to her accountability for the prior nonperformance of the directed action.

Extracts 3 and 4 use imperatives to explicitly direct the actions of the recipient. We argue they also (to varying degrees) tacitly treat the absence of the action as a noticeable failure for which the recipient is being held accountable. In the remainder of this section we will address how recipients orient to the prior relevance of the directed action and their accountability for failing to have performed it when it first became relevant. We also consider the limits of this phenomenon by exploring cases where a tacit orientation to accountability rests solely on the sequential position of the imperative directive without additional turn design indicators. A concomitant consideration throughout will be the different grounds on which an action comes to be treated as both relevant (and noticeably absent) within the interaction.

### ***Orientations to accountability in next position***

The preferred response to an imperative directive is immediate embodied compliance (Kent, 2012a). An imperative is built to prioritize the swift performance of the directed action over any accounts, apologies, or other displays of contrition. The preference organization for directive sequences thus does not promote the kind of responses that would explicitly orient to the imperative as holding the recipient accountable for their inaction. As a consequence, when a recipient is faced with an explicit imperative to perform a directed action and a tacit implication that they are accountable for failing to have performed a relevant action, additional work is required in order to orient to both elements of the utterance. In most cases it is not in the recipient's interest to explicitly topicalize their potential complicity when the imperative speaker has given them the means to skirt around it by responding solely to the explicit directive.

Previous research has shown that by doing something other than straight compliance, recipients can moderate or transform their compliance into some other action (e.g., to appear to be acting independently of the authority of the directive speaker without directly resisting the directive action (cf., Kent, 2012b on incipient compliance). Our data contained examples of recipients doing additional work to evidence an orientation to their accountability for failing to perform the directed action when it first became relevant.

In Extract 5, upon finishing a biscuit, Jessica stands on her chair and reaches toward the plate of biscuits in the center of the table. She is sanctioned for this behavior through Dad's imperative directive that she should "sit an' ask" (line 8). In response, Jessica sits down abruptly (line 9) and then hunches her body position in a display of contrition (lines 11) before transitioning into a new activity (looking at Mum through the holes in her biscuit; line 12).

#### Extract 5 (FA03\_10:26)

```

01 Mum: nha a bit crufnchy?
02      (0.6)+(0.1)+(1.2)+
      jes      +nods +moves in chair, wiggles+
03 Dad: °r° they ni:ce
04      (0.1)+(1.6)
      jes      +stands up on chair, reaches out-->
05 Emy: [°I like them too°
06 Mum: [I thi:nk you liked them la:st [time we had them
07 Dad:      [((cough cough))
08 Dad: ERR +>scu:-->#se me.< si:t +an' a::sk.
      jes      -->+picks up biscuit--> +sits down-->
      fig      #fig.1a
09      (0.2)+(0.2)+
      jes      -->+thump+
10      +(0.9)+
      jes      +brings biscuit to face+
11      +(2.1)+
      jes      +shrinks body, hides behind biscuit, gazes at mum-->>
12 Jes: #°mm° uh some shee uh (0.2) in ere
13      (("I can see you in there"))
      fig      #fig.1b

```



FIGURE 1a



FIGURE 1b

Within the overall structural organization of dining activities, normative behavior is to request an out-of-reach item from a fellow diner who can reach (e.g., “pass the bread (please)” in Extract 1). Such a request became noticeably absent when Jessica began unilaterally reaching for her biscuit. Her behavior was observably not commensurate with normative mealtime behavior for obtaining additional food items. Dad’s imperative selects the directed action (“si:t an’ a:sk”) as the (noticeably absent) relevant action. His imperative directive holds Jessica accountable for not previously treating “getting a biscuit” as a collaborative endeavor by soliciting assistance from someone who could reach the plate.

Jessica spent quite some time maneuvering herself to reach the biscuits (lines 2–8; see Figure 1a). In contrast, following Dad’s imperative directive, her return to a seated position is so rapid she lands with an audible thump (line 9). Once seated, she hides her face with the biscuit (line 10) and contracts her body into a tight ball (line 11; see Figure 1b). While in this shrinking posture, she transitions hiding into a playful activity of looking at her mother through the holes in the biscuit. Here Jessica works to do more than straightforward compliance (sitting down). Her additional shrinking gesture seems to hide away from the tacit orientation within the imperative that she had done something wrong—missing the relevant opportunity to ask for the biscuit while sitting correctly at the table. It perhaps also orients to the fact that she retained the biscuit when sitting and so did not comply with the “and ask” part of Dad’s imperative directive. We might describe this additional embodied work as a display of *contrite compliance*. Thus, Jessica’s response to Dad’s imperative reveals her orientation to (and acceptance of) her accountability for failing to have performed the normatively relevant behavior for gaining out-of-reach items at the table.

When a recipient withholds embodied compliance and instead responds verbally to an imperative, it typically indexes resistance to performing the directed action (Craven & Potter, 2010; Mondada, 2011). Accounts for noncompliance can provide evidence that participants orient to being held accountable for not having already performed the action that the imperative retrospectively directs them to perform. In Extract 6 four friends are playing a card game that is known to Amy and Dan but is new to Briana and Charlie.

#### Extract 6 (LSIA Pizza and Games 18:04)

```

01      *(2.8)*
    amy *searches cards, puts one down*
02 Amy: Ga:soline.
03      +(2.2)+
    bri +gazes at own cards, motionless+
04 Amy: [Draw a card.]
05 Bri: [O:h you jus'] gave you:rsel'f *ga+soline?
           +.....-->
           *.....-->
06 Amy: *+Yeah.*+
           ->*points to Bri*
    bri ->+reaches for cards+
07 Bri: [Okay.
08 Amy: [+Draw a ca:rd.+
    bri +thumbs card stack+
09 Bri: +!I goddit+ I gawddit!
           +takes card+

```

On line 2 Amy plays and names her card (“Ga:soline”), which completes her turn in the game and passes responsibility for progressing the game to the next player, Briana. Within the structure of the game, the next action that Briana should accountably perform is to draw a card from the deck at the center of the table. Briana does not begin her turn immediately but freezes and frowns slightly at her cards (line 3). After 2.2 seconds, Amy directs her to “Draw a card” (line 4). The imperative occurs *after* the directed action first became relevant. It directs Briana to perform an action she could, and should, have already done. In this sequential context the imperative can be heard not only as directing Briana to begin her turn but also as holding her accountable for her failure to have already done so.

Amy’s first imperative directive overlaps with the start of Briana’s exclamation of comprehension of the meaning of the gasoline card (line 5). Briana’s *oh*-prefaced turn marks the moment of her public acknowledgment of having registered the change in her understanding (Heritage, 1998). Her exclamation provides an account for not having already drawn a card on the grounds that she required additional time to comprehend Amy’s previous within-game action. By making her delayed comprehension publicly available, Briana orients to the fact that not starting her turn immediately was an accountable matter (cf., Robinson, 2016). Her account rests on the invocation of her identity as a “good student” who is more concerned about learning (and understanding) the game than simply going through the motions without thought. She constructs the sense that it is not that she was inattentive and “missed” the opportunity to draw her card, rather that she prioritized a full understanding of the implications of the previous card over swift gameplay. Accountability orientations in imperative directives that target noticeable absences can be resisted by characterizing the absence as warranted in service to a desirable social action (in this case being an engaged student of the game).

Amy only minimally confirms Briana’s explanation (“yeah”) and then repeats her imperative directive, this time accompanied by a pointing gesture (lines 6–8). The second version reinstates and even enhances the sense that Briana is accountable for failing to progress the game by starting her turn in a timely manner. It rejects Briana’s effort to understand the game as a viable account for delaying drawing a card and continues to hold her accountable.

Briana pushes back against the second imperative directive with her prosodically exaggerated “↑I goddit I gawddit↑” (line 9). This claims prior awareness that drawing a card was the next relevant action. Stivers (2004, p. 260) suggests that multiple sayings treat the prior speaker as having “persisted unnecessarily in the prior course of action” (in this case issuing the repeated imperative) and indicates that they should desist. By the second imperative directive, Briana has already begun preparations to take a card (line 5); she has shifted her grip on her cards to free her arm and started reaching for a new card (line 6). Briana’s response (line 9) resists the necessity of the imperative on the grounds that she was already aware of its relevance as a next action and was already engaged in the directed action so had not missed the opportunity to perform it.

Extracts 5 and 6 demonstrate some (but by no means all) of the ways recipients might orient to their accountability for failing to progress a projectably relevant course of action: They can accept their accountability and display contrition (Extract 5), attempt to provide a legitimate account (Extract 6, line 5), or reject the implication that they have done something for which they should be held accountable at all (Extract 6, line 8). In each case the recipients acknowledge the tacit accountability-orientation of the imperative directive.

### **Sources of relevance for the direction action**

Potentially any missed opportunity to perform an interactionally relevant action is an accountable matter in interaction (Garfinkel, 1963, 1967). Although the specific contingencies that lead to the directed action becoming relevant vary in the previous examples, the accountability-oriented imperative directives have each been made relevant within normative social organizations in interaction. The relevance of telling the story was sequentially generated following its initiation and

subsequent go ahead (Extract 3). The incantation of “bon appetit” at the dinner table marked the beginning of the meal and made relevant its consumption (Extract 4). Sitting and asking became a relevant next action within the normative rituals of mealtime etiquette when Jessica sought to procure an out-of-reach biscuit (Extract 5). Drawing a card became a relevant next action within the overall structural organization of the game once Amy played her card (Extract 6). In each case, an accountability-oriented imperative indexed the speaker’s stance toward the projectable relevance of the directed action and the recipient’s accountability for the inaction.

### Turn design and sequential position

Orientations to accountability can be made more explicit through turn design features. Across the collection we regularly observed the use of prosody (e.g., “Ea:t” in Extract 3 and “ERR >scu:se me.< si:t an’ a:sk.” in Extract 5), profanity (e.g., “goddamn” in Extract 4), and propriety- and promptness-oriented adverbs (e.g., “Cover your self up properly,” “Eat nicely, please”). Although accountability-oriented turn design features are often present, this is not always the case. The timing of the imperative relative to the point at which the directed action first becomes relevant can be sufficient to convey an orientation to the recipient’s accountability for the inaction. Extract 7 extends Extract 6 to include an additional imperative directive with almost identical turn design features to “draw a card” (“play a mile” on line 12).

#### Extract 7 (LSIA Pizza and Games 18:04)

08 Amy: [Draw a ca:rd.  
 09 Bri: ↑I goddit I gawddit↑  
 10 Cha: tch huh huh huh  
 11 (0.5)+(0.2)+  
 bri +adds card to hand+  
 12 Dan: Play a mile.  
 13 (0.6)  
 14 Bri: +Al’ight.+  
 +selects card from hand+

After Briana has drawn a new card she inspects it alongside her existing hand of cards. While she is inspecting her cards in a display of deciding which one to play, Dan uses an imperative formulation to direct her to “play a mile” (line 12). Although grammatically and prosodically similar to “draw a card” (line 8), the action is different. “Play a mile” selects a “mile” card as the relevant type of card to play from all of the possible alternatives. Unlike “draw a card,” which treated Briana as remiss in not already having done so, “Play a mile” seeks to expedite the card selection process that Briana was visibly engaged in. No such card selection activity was required prior to drawing a card from the face-down stack, nor was the playing of a “mile” card specifically relevant before the imperative directive. As such it is an affiliative action designed to assist Briana with the action she is currently performing rather than treat her as accountable for having failed to complete an already relevant action.

We can use Briana’s response as evidence of her understanding of the imperative directive. Her initial verbal response (“Al’ight” on line 14) acknowledges Dan’s choice of card type before she moves to play the card. Importantly, “al’ight” does not claim prior epistemic access to the need to play a mile or otherwise imply that Briana was aware of the relevance of playing a mile prior to the imperative directive being issued (Heritage, 2012). It treats Dan’s imperative directive as an affiliative action designed to resolve the problem she was experiencing in choosing which card to play.

“Play a mile,” while grammatically comparable to “Draw a card,” has a very different orientation regarding Briana’s accountability for the directed action. It does not direct an already relevant action that the recipient could and should have performed. Instead it specifies *which* of a range of newly relevant actions should be performed now that they have become relevant. Despite the similar turn design features of the two imperative directives, Extract 7 demonstrates that participants are sensitive to the subtle timings of the relevance of actions relative to the imperatives that direct them and any

additional accountability work that is conveyed by imperatives that occur after the recipient has failed to perform an already relevant next action. This is an issue we consider in more detail in the next section.

### Imperatives that coincide with the relevance of directed action

Whether an imperative holds the recipient accountable for a failure to perform a relevant action or simply directs them to perform a newly relevant action pivots, as we have seen, on its timing in relation to the moment at which the directed action becomes projectably relevant within the interaction. This tipping point is best illustrated with an example of an imperative timed to coincide precisely with the moment the directed action becomes relevant. In Extract 8, Rick and Luke are choosing which game pieces to use. Luke has the game pieces in front of him but has not yet selected one. After Rick chooses to play as the car (line 1), Luke continues to fiddle with the remaining pieces (lines 3–6).

#### Extract 8 (Monopoly Boys 02:02)

```
01 RIC: +I'll be the uhm- (0.4) the car (I guess)
      luk +moves pieces around on board-->
02      (1.2)
03 RIC: do you want me to the bank or we'll just- you know
04      we'll just leave it over here
05 LUK: mm
06      (0.2)*(0.8)*
      ric *slides box near board*
07 RIC: alright just (pick a pick a pick a)
08 LUK: +oka:y yeah.
      -->+.....-->
09      (0.3)
10 LUK: +I'll [be] th[e-]
11 RIC: [y-] [yo]u're being +the #cup.
      luk +grasps pieces--> -->+lifts pieces-->
      fig #fig.2a
12 RIC: *put that# *on *[this *thing
13 LUK: [the cup
      ric *.....*taps*,,,,,*
      fig #fig.2b
14      +(0.3)+(0.2)
      luk -->+drops pieces in box+
```



FIGURE 2a



FIGURE 2b

When Rick presses Luke to decide, using an imperative directive that orients to Luke's accountability (line 7), Luke begins to scoop up the game pieces, leaving one behind, which Rick then registers as the one he has selected (line 11; see Figure 2a). As Luke begins to lift his hand from the board and move it toward the box, Rick directs him to “put that on this thing” (line 12) and quickly taps a spot in the box (see Figure 2b). This directive does not initiate a new course of action (cf., “pass the bread (please)” in Extract 1), nor does it direct the recipient to perform a relevant action that has been displaced or withheld (cf., “eat” in Extract 3). It indicates where Luke should place the pieces at

exactly the moment in which they begin their journey, thus expediting the completion of the action. Crucially, when Rick issues the directive, Luke could not have been expected to have already put the pieces in the box. Timed to coincide with the relevance of the directed action, the directive thus does not find fault in the other's actions or inactions but is rather an affiliative action designed to expedite an in-progress course of action.

## Discussion

Imperatives that are sequentially located after the directed action first becomes relevant in the interaction explicitly direct the actions of the recipient and tacitly hold them accountable for the inaction. Wherever a projectably relevant next action is not performed, there exists the potential for someone to be held accountable. For example, Schegloff (1988, p. 125) states that noticing a negative event (e.g., “you didn't get an ice cream sandwich”) formulates a failure by the recipient and can be mobilized as a vehicle for complaining about the absence of a relevant action. We know that interlocutors are alert to the importance of monitoring the projectable relevance of actions, such that they might contribute to their smooth progression. For example, Kendrick & Drew (2016, p. 2) describe a range of “practised solutions” through which individuals can anticipate and meet unexpressed needs of their coparticipants. Relatedly, Drew and Couper-Kuhlen (2014) note that participants can be held accountable for failing to observe obvious attempts to recruit their help and respond in a timely manner.

We have argued that the sequential position of the imperative directive is crucial, a “top-down” analysis in Levinson's (2013) terms, but we have also identified turn constructional practices that routinely occur in accountability-oriented imperative directives, a “bottom-up” solution. These practices range from relatively explicit (e.g., profanity) to more subtle (e.g., prosodic stress). We suggest, however, that any imperative directive that occurs after the relevance of the directed action has been established is vulnerable to being heard as holding the recipient accountable. In many cases, we find a mutually elaborative harmony between the position and composition of imperative actions (cf., Schegloff, 1995). In this way our results are similar to Curl's (2006) analysis of the congruity between the sequential environment and syntactic design of offers. Yet we have broadened the notion of “sequential position” to encompass positions that emerge not only within sequences of talk but also within practical courses of action. We have shown that even units of talk with the same syntactic design (i.e., imperative grammar) can perform different actions in different positions. Our analysis also contributes to previous research on the relationship between projectability and directives/requests (e.g., Mondada, 2014a; Rossi, 2014), showing how the normative structures of projectable courses of action furnish resources for action formation.

Imperative directives privilege getting the action done over other concerns, including, as we have seen here, soliciting accounts for social transgressions. Imperatives are not overtly designed to elicit an account in the way that account-implicative interrogatives (Bolden & Robinson, 2011), accusations (e.g., Drew, 1978), complaints (e.g., Dersley & Wootton, 2000; Drew, 1998), noticings (Antaki, 1994), or other formats that routinely generate responsive accounts might. Using an imperative formulation signals that the speaker's primary concern is to restore the progressivity of the action rather than to topicalize the recipient's transgression. Nevertheless, our analysis has shown that imperatives located after the relevance of the directed action do treat the recipient as accountable for failing to progress the directed action. When delivered after the directed action first became relevant, imperatives are a tacit and covert way of holding recipients accountable for their transgressions. In this respect they are not unlike the implicit format for correcting (Jefferson, 1987) or pursuing a response (Bolden, Mandelbaum, & Wilkinson, 2012).

One social context in which tacit accountability orientations might facilitate a relevant social action is in the arena of socializing novices into socially normative behaviors. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our game-

playing and family mealtime corpora were replete with such actions. By using an imperative where the explicit focus is on getting the action done, one can avoid forcing recipients into a situation where their ignorance or disobedience is topicalized, while still tacitly indexing a failure. Imperatives that occur after the relevance of the directed action direct the recipient to perform the action, thus progressing the course of action and enabling participation in the overall activity to continue. They explicitly identify the action that should already have been performed, thereby scaffolding the recipient's future performance of socially normative behavior and remedying the (unstated) possibility of the recipient not knowing what action should have been performed. They tacitly treat the recipient as responsible for the transgression without soliciting or making relevant an account for the failure, thus retrospectively enforcing social norms. This provides an opportunity for the recipient to learn normative standards of acceptable behavior from specific moments of transgression of social norms without delaying the progressivity of the course of action during the interaction.

## Conclusion

A normative metric of progressivity underpins the sequential organization of interaction. Imperative directives are a resource available for managing the progressivity of our interlocutors' actions. When things are expected to be done at a particular place in the interaction and they are not done, there is a breach of the normal progressivity of the action. Imperatives can be used to draw attention to moments when a course of action is failing to progress according to normative expectations. Imperatives are one tool for retrospectively marking the breach and enforcing the social norms of progressivity by restoring the forward momentum of the course of action. Thus, accountability-oriented imperative directives are a tool for the *ex post facto* enforcement of social norms.

The timing of the imperative relative to the progressivity of the action is sufficient to indicate whether it straightforwardly directs the actions of the recipient or simultaneously directs and holds then accountable for their prior inaction. The explicitness of the accountability orientation can be enhanced through the inclusion of additional prosodic or lexical markers that index accountability. However, if you tell someone to do an action that they could have and should have already performed, the directive is potentially hearable as admonishing the recipient purely by virtue of its relationship to progressivity.

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## Appendix

### Conventions for multimodal transcription

Embodied actions are transcribed following the conventions developed by Mondada (2014b).

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* *	Gestures and descriptions of embodied actions are delimited between ++ two identical symbols (one symbol per
+ +	participant) and are synchronized with correspondent stretches of talk.
* - - ->	The action described continues across subsequent lines until the same symbol is reached.
- - ->*	
>>	The action described begins before the excerpt's beginning.
- - ->>	The action described continues after the excerpt's end.
. . . . .	Action's preparation.
, , , , ,	Action's retraction.
ali	Participant doing the embodied action is identified when (s)he is not the speaker.
fig#	The exact moment at which a screen shot has been taken is indicated with a specific sign showing its position within turn at talk.

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