Objects as Tools for Talk

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Abstract

This paper deals with the touching, grasping, moving and handling of relatively small physical objects within spates of talk-in-interaction. We are interested in the organization of such actions and the distribution of the objects amongst interactants in their unfolding activities, specifically in relation to how interactants, analogously, organize and distribute their turns at talk. Unlike previous work, we attend less to objects as referred-to objects or as components of topic development. Instead, our focus is on objects as transactional in the ways in which they support fundamental infrastructure of interaction, namely that turns at talk and objects are taken or possessed in some sense and this is signaled and collaboratively organized by participants.
Introduction

The work informing much of our understanding of sociality in interaction has its foundations in the analysis of turn-taking in talk as presented in Sacks, et al. (1974). This work has entailed the careful delineation of the methods by which turns at talk are distributed within an interaction, the construction of turns of talk, and how they are sequentially organize, all the while making note that turns at talk are to be understood as social actions interactively managed by interlocutors. With the exception of work on embodied resources such as gaze (e.g. Goodwin 1981; Psathas 1990, Rossano, Brown & Levinson 2009) and gesture (e.g. Streeck & Hartge 1992; Olsher 2004; Mondada 2007), the focus has been on the linguistic resources used to produce and coordinate turns at talk.

An interest in the role of the material environment on the unfolding and organization of socially organized practice, including talk, has been pioneered in work by, for example Goodwin (1994; 2000; 2003), Heath & Hindmarsh (2000), Hindmarsh & Heath (2000a,b), Heath & Luff (2000), Hutchins (1995), Nevile (2004a, b; 2009), Streeck (1996; 2009; 2011) and Suchman (1987). Generally speaking, this work has focused on how the material surroundings and objects therein are used to organize mutual attention, for example in deictic reference, and sense-making, for example as topics of talk, in sequentially unfolding practical action. An exception to these two foci is Mondada (2007) where pointing to materials in the surroundings was on occasion dealt with in terms of incipient speakership and to signal current turn completion. Pointing could thus be a member’s method to display that current speaker is understood to be near completion and as a pre-beginning for self-selection of next speaker. Additionally, pointing gestures may be ‘withdrawn’ should speakership not
be achievable.

This chapter follows in this development and deals with the touching, grasping, moving and handling of relatively small physical objects, namely styrofoam forms and a small piece of wood. We are interested in the organization of such actions and the distribution of the objects amongst interactants in their unfolding activities, specifically in relation to how interactants, analogously, organize and distribute their turns at talk. Unlike previous work and consistent with Mondada’s (2007) work mentioned above, we attend less to objects as referred-to objects or as components of topic development. Instead, our focus is more on objects as transactional, in the ways in which they support fundamental infrastructure of interaction, namely that turns at talk and objects are taken or possessed in some sense and this is signaled and collaboratively organized by participants. Whereas investigations of turntaking, as a fundamental element of our sociality, have mostly been concerned with possessing and exchanging turns at talk, we here extend the notion to object possession and exchange and attempt to unravel the co-occurrence of the two in our data.

We noticed, for example that speakers touch or handle objects before or during transition in turns at talk. In this way, our observations are similar to Mondada’s (2007) for pointing. Speakers may grasp an object, take a turn at talk using the object in that turn’s construction - for example as a topic of talk or in gesture - and release the object at the end of their turn at talk. When this happens we are able to track how objects, just as turns at talk, may be exchanged between interactants. Our focus will therefore be on turn transitions for talk and the handling and exchange of objects. Unlike turns at talk however, in exchanging objects we are dealing with the physical touching, grasping and manipulation of mutually available material objects which persist in the environment. Our ambition is to demonstrate
some ways in which the exchange of turns at talk and object possession can be
effected through the mutual elaboration of language and elements in the material
environment.

That objects may change hands is significant. Possession of objects we see,
just as turns at talk, as a fundamental element of our sociality. To track this, our focus
will therefore be on transitions in turns at talk and the handling and exchange of
objects. Unlike turns at talk however, in exchanging objects we are dealing with the
physical touching, grasping and manipulation of mutually available material objects
which persist in the environment. Our basic claim is that this is one way in which
taking turns at talk and object possession can be bound to the material environment,
and vice versa how the material environment can be involved in these aspects of our
sociality.

In distinction to many of the studies mentioned above concerning objects, the
elements of the material environment with which we are dealing are very tangible and
manipulable, all the more so because of the particular activities in which they were
casted. They are to serve as resources in industrial design activities either as iconic
props or-as something ‘inscrutable’. We are dealing then with just a few artifacts from
within an environment and, in comparison to say a switch in an airplane cockpit, with
objects whose purpose and function are quite malleable by design. The activities and
the objects being somewhat esoteric may suggest our findings will be less general,
however we would argue for the value in such an exploratory investigation of the
activities being ‘perspicuous’ (Garfinkel, 2002) for precisely the ways objects figure
within them. What may be lacking in generality of the settings is compensated by the
salience of the issue of interest, i.e. objects.
Data

Our data are drawn from video material recorded at the SPIRE Centre for Participatory Innovation and comprise industrial participatory design workshops and an analogous design education activity. These activities are generally set up so that designers, as well as other stakeholders, may explore possibilities for future products, services, and experiences. For this paper we use transcribed data extracted from two settings. Setting 1 was a design activity extending over several hours in which a variety of stakeholders were to discuss new ways to control a backhoe digger. In Setting 2, groups of industrial design students were given obscure objects and asked to discuss, for about 15 minutes, what the objects might be.

Setting 1: The re-design of a backhoe loader

Two designers, JES (Jesper) and CAT (Catherine) (not in the picture), and three users, NIL (Nils), KRI (Kristian) and KNU (Knud), work together to modify a prototype for controlling the digging functions of a backhoe loader. The picture shows them in a makeshift cabin. Knud is in the cabin itself behind the driver’s work area, while the three others are standing outside the cabin. The language of the workshop is Danish.

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2 The Sønderborg Participatory Innovation Research Centre at the University of Southern Denmark researches how to involve users in the development of new products. Amongst the employees are engineers, anthropologists, ethnomethodologists/conversation analysts, designers, marketing researchers, consultants and actors from a Forum Theatre Group.
During the previous activities in the workshop, the participants had chosen several objects and established them as props (Landgrebe & Wagner, submitted) to represent parts of the driving controls of the backhoe. Participants use these objects to display visually for each other the placement and operation of the control system they are envisaging. Picture 1 shows Jesper keeping his hand on a blue cylindrically shaped styrofoam object (BLUE) that has at this point in time come to represent a joystick. Knud is reaching for a taller cylindrically shaped object (RED) which represents another joystick. A third object used we will refer to is the cardboard slider (BOARD) which Knud is touching with his left hand.

Setting 2: The case of the massage stick

In setting 2, a particular object, in this case a wooden massage stick, has been given to the students and they are to come up with a designation of what it might be. Typically this meant identifying the object with a name, e.g. ’a massage stick’, or a defining paraphrase, e.g. ’a stick used for massaging’. Reference to the object itself through
gesture or pointing was used in lieu of such a symbolic representation. In picture 2 are, from right to left, RIT (Rita), MET (Mette), GAB (Gabriel), and KAR (Karoline). The person in the back looking on was not part of the group conducting the activity. Mette is holding the stick which the activity concerns.

Picture 2: The massage stick

The two settings differ in certain respects: Setting 1 is a design workshop where an abundance of materials are available for the participants. They may grasp, manipulate, modify, or abandon a collection of objects or a single object throughout their ‘construction’ of the backhoe controls. In Setting 2, there is one single object available and the activity is centered around talk about the object. Apart from the number of objects then, there are differences between the activities in the two settings (design activities vs. speculation about the object). All these differences have consequences for the ways in which objects are used and dealt with. In the remainder of the paper, we will refer to these consequences in discussing the possession and exchange of material objects in relation to beginnings in turns at talk.
Analysis

Participation framework and communal objects

We begin with a general description of the two settings which bears on their overall material ecology. In doing this, we hope to establish how the material environment, in terms of the objects under investigation and the bodies of interlocutors, makes available a particular physical underpinning for interaction which, in its turn, allows for particular forms of social action.

In both settings, participants are positioned surrounding a particular object or set of objects, such that not only can they see them, but also physically touch, grasp and move them. Because of this, physical orientation to an object which is co-attended to by participants enables it as a communal object, in the sense of being an actual or potential interactional resource for sense-making as well as enabling particular ‘participation frameworks’ (Goodwin 2000:1492) through mutual bodily orientation. Additionally, for our objects, participants are physically able to touch and handle the objects singularly which may bring to bear not only availability of the objects, but also outright possession of them. As mentioned above, our objects persist in the environment and may change hands.

Goodwin has more generally called what we are referring to 'contextual configurations', understood as a ‘locally relevant array of semiotic fields that participants demonstrably orient to’ (Goodwin 2000: 1490). By making note of the physical surround of the activities, we are thus portraying objects as potential resources for such semiotic fields. A key question for us in this regard is: Given the
objects’ persistence in the environment and their manipulability, how do they become involved in sensemaking when they are handled, specifically what can we say about them with regard to the exchange of turns at talk and object possession? In the following we will discuss instances in our data where communal objects are used as resources to foreshadow another speaker’s bid for the next turn at talk and as items that can be exchanged in their own right.

*The use of material objects to prepare a turn beginning*

We noticed that participants often touch and take objects at the end of another participant’s turn or in the turn transition space, In Excerpt (1), Knud, Kristian and Nils have been discussing Kristian’s suggestion to make the joysticks for the backhoe digger removable so the driver can take them out of the cabin and stand beside the tractor while controlling the digging activity.

![Image](image.png)

**Picture 3: Excerpt (1), end of line 4, sige ‘say’**
Kristian acknowledges in line 1 Knud's agreement to a previous utterance (not shown here) and both Nils and Kristian nod (line 2). With Knud's restated agreement (line 3 `det tror han har ret i` ‘I think he is right about this’) produced with falling intonation, the turn approaches its ending and the topic seems to reach possible closing. Knud’s formulation in line 3 is and might be heard as a sequence closing.

Until the end of line 3, Jesper and Knud have eye contact. At the very end of Knud's turn in line 3, i.e. in a position that Jefferson (1983) refers to as "terminal onset," Jesper lowers his gaze and moves his hand to BLUE. Terminal onset is a
position in which a next turn at talk can start early without being treated as an overlap. Terminal onset, however, can make it difficult for current speaker to keep his or her turn at talk.

Knud likewise lowers his gaze and monitors Jesper’ hand which is moving towards BLUE. Having his gaze fixed on Jesper’s hand movement, Knud rushes into an account which through the conjunction *fordi* ‘because’ is packaged as an extension of his previous turn at talk. Knud’s action shares features with what Walker & Local (2004) have described as an abrupt-join:

In doing an abrupt-join, speakers work to secure for themselves more talk beyond the transition relevance of possible TCU [turn constructional unit, DD&JW] completion, without having given prior indication that they were in the process of constructing a long multi-unit turn (ibid:1399).

At the beginning of the account proper in line 5, Knud moves his gaze from Jesper's hand to his own hands. In overlap with Knud’s emerging account, Jesper picks BLUE off the board and moves it to the table before him. After having done this, he rests his hand on top of BLUE (c.f. picture 1 and 8) until Knud changes the topic. Then he let it go (not shown here).

We see in Excerpt (1) closely coordinated verbal and embodied activity in possible transition space between turns at talk. Jesper moves his hand towards BLUE just before a possible point of completion of Knud’s turn. We argue that in this sequential environment, Knud’s rush into formulating an account is occasioned by Jesper’s movement towards BLUE. In other words, Jesper’s activity, being placed in the sequential environment of the end of a turn at talk, is treated by Knud as projecting upcoming talk. Knud’s rushed start – before Jesper himself starts on a turn at talk – secures his right to speak. We note as well that simultaneously with Jesper
lifting BLUE towards himself, Knud engages in rapid hand weaving indicating that Knud monitors Jesper’s bodily activities after having started to talk.

Between Excerpt (1) and (2) nearly 3 minutes elapse. Following Excerpt (1), another topic was brought up by Knud and Jesper put BLUE back on the table (c.f Excerpt 5, line 4). 2 minutes later, the new topic approaches closing and Jesper moves his hand again towards BLUE while Knud again rushes into a turn extension (not shown here). When Except (2) starts, Jesper had picked up BLUE a second time and holds it at about chest level in his left hand, his right hand on the BOARD in front of Knud who is looking at him as shown in picture (4):

Picture 4: Excerpt (2), end of line 1, eller’ ‘or’
Excerpt (2) (Influence 20, 10.15 into the tape)

01 KNU: hh Å så ha man lår eller andet (0.3) and so has one then one or another and then one has something JES holds Blue in l.hand and has r. hand on BOARD

02 NIL: [muh]

03 KNU: "eh-" + hh + k horns/agtige noget/ hvor du havde de hoir/ cow horn kind something where you have these here like cow horns where you have those JES nods once +JES' r. hand lets go of slider

04 KNU: "eh"/ /proportional*//funktioner pÅ/ proportional functions on proportional functions added on JES moves r. hands to BLUE JES grips blue with r. hand JES releases l. hand JES raises BLUE with r. hand

Picture 5: Excerpt (2), line 5, nu ‘now’

05 JES: =hvis det /nu var/ if it now was /

06 (0.7) (0.2) / JES shakes blue three /

07 KNU?: /khh kmm:/ /

08 JES: *var den her. was this one JES releases r. hand, shakes BLUE twice with l. hand
In lines 1-4 of Excerpt (2), Knud’s talk is again approaching a possible closing. In line 3, Jesper lets go of the cardboard slider with his right hand and keeps the hand in a semi-raised position. When the end of Knud’s turn is imminent, Jesper shifts BLUE to his right hand and raises it high into the visual space of all participants (picture 5). The moment Knud has finished, Jesper starts speaking. The first sound of his turn at talk in line 05 latches to the last element of Knud’s talk.

The two extracts which we have shown here have demonstrated two central features of the role of objects in the taking of turns at talk. Firstly, reaching for an object in a position where a projected ending in the turn at talk is approaching may be understood by the participants as pre-beginnings to talk and as claims for the floor. Secondly, material objects can sustain a claim for the turn over several turns at talk (Keisanen & Rauniomaa 2012: 333).

Pre-beginnings are “elements which project the onset of talk, or the beginning of a (next) TCU or a turn, but are not yet proper recognizable beginnings” (Schegloff 1996:92). Earlier research has shown that pre-beginnings can be accomplished by verbal cues (Schegloff 1996) and embodied activities such as pointing (Mondada 2007), audible in-breath (Mortensen 2009), and the use of objects (Keisanen & Rauniomaa 2012). Our data also show that the description of the basic practices of early starts in turn taking (as described on the basis of audio recordings by Jefferson 1983a, b, 1986 and Schegloff 1996) are validated by embodied data.

Material objects can proffer a claim for a turn over a period of time. As already mentioned, almost 3 minutes elapse between the extracts. Jesper had several contributions to a new topic which was developing after Excerpt (1). By again picking up BLUE in topic closing environment (not shown here), and pushing it into the joint visual space of the participants, he demonstrates that material objects come in handy.
to indicate a claim for a turn at talk over several possible points of transition. A material object is less bound to the interactional flow than a gesture or a verbal element. An object’s materiality holds even if an attempt to take the next turn at talk has been abandoned for a while, what Keisanen & Raunio 2003 call “the sustained relevance of material objects.” The object can easily be flashed or even be kept in plain view of the participants to indicate that the holder of the object maintains a claim for the next turn at talk which he or she may begin at an appropriate moment.

In Excerpt (2), the object was put into play by Jesper from what we may call its ‘neutral’ position in the common space. In the following excerpt from the massage stick setting, an object is similarly in its neutral position and contact with it is made where turns at talk can be exchanged. A distinction we will elaborate on below is, however, in this setting there is only one object in play, the massage stick itself.

At the beginning of Excerpt (3), Gabriel has been speculating about the object while scrutinizing it. In line 1, he deposits the stick on the table. Previous to Gabriel’s extended turn at talk, Mette has also had an extend turn talking about the stick. If the participants decide to follow this ‘right-to-left’ pattern, Karoline would be the next speaker. Note that it is Karoline, who overlaps Gabriel’s line 2 with a receipt token.
Excerpt (3) (massage stick)

01 GAB: *I start to wonder (0.4) [how] that could *work   *puts stick down on table
02 KAR: \}[yeah.]
03 (0.7)
04 GAB: \}[and]
05 KAR: *[and]  
* KAR stretches out r. hand towards stick, stops movement half way and withdraws hand
06 KAR: >/and another question/ *is<  
|-----------------|  
\ KAR leans back, lowers head, looks at stick  * moves r. hand and grabs stick  
|-----------------|  
07 KAR: /is this/ */u:;m:;:;h:;:;/ sawed off thing.  
|__|  
\ picks up stick with r. hand  *grabs with left hand  
|__|  
\ releases r. hand lifts it up, turns it twice in the air in full display of the others, holds it  
07 KAR: or is it /connected/ to some other things  
|____________|  
\ KAR brings r. hand up touches stick shortly, lowers r. hand, showing an extension of the stick
08 MET: yea

Picture 6: Excerpt (3), line 6, sawed off

At line 3 the object is free of anyone’s hands during a 0.7 second pause. It is as it were, up for grabs for the next speaker. When Karoline starts speaking in line 4, she is overlapped by Gabriel as she is moving her right hand toward the object. She stops the movement and brings her hand back to a resting position on the table at the end of
the overlap. In line 5 she recycles the beginning of her turn at talk clear of the overlap, leans back and looks at the object. At the end of the first phrase and another question is which relates to Gabriel’s talk in line 1, she grabs the object and brings it up in the joint visual space of the participants and displays it. She then uses the object in the construction of her turn at talk. She formulates a question as to whether there is some missing, sawed off, part of the stick, designating this by indicating a possible extension of the object.

Karoline does not pursue her turn at talk until she is clear of the overlap. She does not go so far as Jesper in Excerpt (1), who grabbed the blue object and uses it as a pre-beginning in an initially unsuccessful bid for the turn at talk. Karoline stops her movement towards the stick when her initial vocalization is overlapped by Gabriel and does not reach for and take the stick until she is clear of the overlap and has produced a first portion of her turn at talk (line 5). So for Karoline, grabbing the stick and keeping it until she is able to take a full turn at talk does not seem to be an option as it was for Jesper, who kept the blue object and bid his time through several opportunities to take a turn at talk.

We may conclude from these excerpts that reaching for or possessing a communal object may work indexically as a pre-beginning though not just for a turn at talk, but for some ‘larger’ project, for example a turn at talk involving a topic shift. That there is only one object in the massage stick setting, however, calls for a different set of relevancies with regards to possession of the object and affecting an exchange of turns at talk. In this setting, possession of the object was almost always co-terminus with extended turns at talk to the extent that one may, loosely, speak of a rule ‘possess the stick to take a turn at talk’. The stick was a scarce resource and always in play. Whereas in all extracts thus far, possession of the object proceeds
developing an extended turn at talk, for Karoline possession of the stick and getting an extended turn at talk seemingly must happen more or less simultaneously. And to accomplish this, Karoline vocalizes as she reaches for the object. She uses then resources from two semiotic fields, the field of material objects and the field of vocal language. If one gains possession of an object, i.e. gets a turn with holding the object but not the turn at talk, as in Jesper’s case, the object may signify a continual relevance of the pre-beginning for talk until a proper beginning of talk can ensue. If gaining possession of the object is potentially problematic, more work must be done. In our case here with Karoline, she must vocalize and restart her turn before gaining possession of the object and room for an extended turn at talk.

We have then a complex semiotic interplay between the material world, i.e. the objects and their economy demonstrated here by their number, and sociality, here the taking of turns at talk and the possessing and exchange of an object. In both cases getting hold of an object indicates possession of it which in its turn indicates a turn at talk by the possessor is underway or may be forthcoming. Additionally, in both our cases, when the turn at talk ensues, the object may be relevant both as a topic of talk and as an important semiotic resource for constructing the turn. The objects are, however, part of a local economy of objects. In a constrained ‘object economy’, e.g. there is one and only one object, then the turn at talk and possession of the object are co-terminus and this is marked semiotically in two semiotic fields 1) a material field, i.e. having the object, and 2) vocal language. Jesper’s possession of the object without speaking, in contrast, worked in one semiotic field alone, the object indicated the possibility of an ensuing turn at talk by him.
Competing for a turn at talk with objects

In Excerpt (3), we witnessed a form of competition for the one ‘free’ object. Here we look at how multiple objects are reached for, held and manipulated in the competition for a turn at talk by both current and incipient next speaker. In these cases, the object are not touched in pre-beginning positions of talk but simultaneously with the start of the turn at talk or slightly later. The sequential position of the move to the object is clearly different in these cases. We will discuss two instances in which participants interrupt a current speaker and while starting to speak, reach out for objects. In the first instance (Excerpt 4), the incoming speaker succeeds in taking the turn at talk, in Excerpt (5), the incoming speaker abandons his intrusion into the talking space of the other speaker.

Excerpt (4) (Influence 20, 8:11 into the tape)

01 KNU: jeg tro på man skal *frihøre det fra /det her/
  I believe on one should release this from this one
  I believe one should release it from this one
  *KNU touches cardboard slider
     + KNU moves gaze to JBS and NIL
     / _______/  
        KNU picks up slider, 
                              holds it close to his chest

02 KNU: *dret dret det har jeg* xx
       this this this have I
       this one I have

03 NIL: ja

04
Picture 7: Excerpt (4), line 6 system ‘system’
Excerpt (4) occurs about half a minute after Excerpt (1). Before its start Knud has developed the idea to make the controls independent of the workspace in the cabin so that the digger can be operated from outside the cabin. In a variation of an earlier formulation, he airs in line 1 and 2 again his idea to remove the controls from the cabin. He demonstrates this by lifting the BOARD from the work area and holding it close to his chest (picture 7). He does not receive much uptake apart from Nils’ minimal response in line 3 and after a gap, Knud starts speaking again. Well into his
turn at talk, just after Knud has removed his gaze, Nils clears his throat, speaks, and at the same time reaches out for and grips the red and blue object. Knud raises his head very high so he seems to look under his glasses and looks first at Jesper, than at Nils. Nils' turn at talk is constructed in such a way that hele systemet ‘the whole system’ is topicalized as he reaches out for the objects. The rest of the turn at talk is produced while Nils lifts up the objects and rhythmically shakes them. In line 9, Knud minimally acknowledges Nils’ intrusion, changes his gaze back to the workspace, lowers the BOARD and proceeds with his own topic. When Knud has regained the floor, Nils puts down the objects and slowly releases them before he withdraws his hands.

Before and during the micropause in line 8, Nils and Knud are facing each other, each of them holding a different object. They compete visibly for the turn: Nils shakes the joysticks several times while Knud holds the BOARD up before his chest. When Knud goes back to his argument in line 10, both lower their objects. But Knud keeps the BOARD in his hand while Nils slowly puts the joysticks back on the table and releases them. Here – as in many other instances in our data – leaving the floor is accompanied by object release.

In Excerpt (5) Nils does not wait for transition in the talk either but starts speaking in the middle of Knud’s turn at talk. Knud removes RED from the workplace in line 1 and places it directly before Nils. In overlap with Knud’s movement Nils pulls his hands out of his pockets and moves them towards RED (picture 8) while starting to speak (line 2). Nils’ action and talk is precision-timed with respect to the control of the object but not with respect to Knud’s ongoing talk. So when Knud proceeds with his turn at talk, raising his voice, Nils stops talking and moves his hand back.
Excerpt (5) (Influency 20, 7:39 into the tape)

01 KNU: /det var oss/ /det var oss som jeg siger så/ it was as well it was as I said
02 KNU: /________/ KNU moves hand twards red object
03 KNU moves red object from the board
04 NIL: /men men + xxx samme/ bit but xxx same
05 /________/ +NIL stops movements of hands and withdraw before touching RED
06 KNU: hvis du laver den om der if you make it PART there
07 KNU: hvis du laver den om der if you change it there

Excerpt (4) and (5) show an incoming speaker interrupting a current speaker. The interruption is in both instances launched verbally and by getting hold of an object. In Excerpt (4), both speakers have their individual objects which they bring into the
visual space of all participants. The competition is solved verbally by current speaker bracketing off the intrusion into his turn. In Excerpt (5), both speakers compete for an object and the incoming speaker seems to take current speaker’s relinquishing the object as a signal to start to talk. In the next section we will in detail investigate several speakers’ competition for a single object.

*Competing for an object with a turn at talk*

At the beginning of Excerpt (6), which in time precedes Excerpt (3), Mette is giving an evaluation of the stick which she is holding with both hands (see Picture 9). We will look at how the possession of an object can be in ‘overlap’ between two participants and the relation of this to exchange of a turn at talk. That possession of an object can be in overlap, in the sense of being physically touched by two participants simultaneously, suggests competition for the object. We maintain that just as turns at talk may be in overlap and competitive, so too may possession of an object. Below we look at an example of object possession overlap where taking a turn at talk is unproblematic. We explore the semiotic interplay of objects and vocal language at such junctures. We have noted above that once participants gain possession of an object and a turn at talk, the object may be a resource in the development of their talk and that this use of objects is not a focus of our investigation, however such phenomena are of some relevance in the exchange of turns at talk and objects and therefore attended to below.

In the massage stick setting, the stick is initially held by Mette at the beginning of our recording and the following ensues.
Excerpt (6)

01 MET: *it’s very organic.
MET holds stick, looks at it. Nods several time
02 (0.5)
03 GAB: *and yeah /when I- /
/________/ GAB moves r hand forward
04 GAB: */and when you- when you/ *touch it
/___________________________/ GAB moves hand slowly forward *touches stick

Picture 9: Excerpt (6), line 4, *touch it

05 (0.3)
06 GAB: *it feels /like oh:/ *(0.4)/
/________/ GAB grips the end of stick which points away from MET
/_____/ releases grip
07 GAB: */it feels in your hand/ *good.
/___________________________/ opens hand wide * grips again
08 GAB: so it [looks] /like *its/ *(0.3)/ *something* to be manipulated by hand.*
/_________/ GAB releases grip and withdraws hand from stick.
Keeps open r. hand under the stick which MET still holds
Picture 10: Excerpt (6), line 8, GAB keeps open right hand

09 MET:  \_mm yeah\_ nods

10 KAR:  *i yeash* \\
  \/ KAR raises r. hand, fondles imaginary object  \\
  \/// withdraws hand  \\
  * KAR nods

11 GAB:  =a /human /hand/.
  \/// MET gives stick to GAB, withdraws hand

12 MET:  \_yes:_ it's true
  \_/\_ nods

Picture 11: Excerpt (6), beginning of line 12, it's true
Mette finishes her turn at line 1. Following a 0.5 second pause, Gabriel begins a next turn at talk at line 3 while moving his right hand towards the stick which remains in Mette’s hands. His hand reaches the stick precisely at him uttering touch it (see Picture 9). In his turn at talk he introduces a new topic, speaking of the phenomenal experience of touching the stick. He also proffers, at lines 8-11, a possible function for the stick something to be manipulated by the hand (line 8). In this way then, Gabriel is using the stick in the construction of a turn at talk, however, it is also the case that he touches the stick while Mette is actually holding it, and thereby has possession of it, i.e. it’s her turn at holding the stick. Gabriel eventually removes his hand from the stick, allowing his hand though to remain, with palm open, just under it (See Picture 10). All the while, both of Mette’s hands retain contact with the stick. Additionally, while producing his talk regarding the stick, Gabriel receives alignment from Mette at line 9 and Karoline line 10. At line 12, following possible completion of Gabriel’s turn at talk at line 11 as indicated by syntactic completeness and falling intonation, Mette moves the stick over into Gabriel’s hand. She offers an assessment of Gabriel’s contribution, yes it’s true, retracts and folds her hands together (See
Picture 11. Gabriel continues with his previous talk on the physical properties of the stick.

We see Mette continued possession of the object, despite the work done by Gabriel, as indicating her ‘not being done yet.’ When she finally transfers the object, she withdraws completely from the activity by folding her hands. To take the object back, she would need to unfold her hands again. There is a strong visual contrast of Gabriel having his open palm directly under the object held by Mette, ready to receive and to investigate it further, and Mette’s iconic withdrawal by folding her hands. Gabriel’s open palm allows receiving the object. Mette’s folded hands do not.

Unlike in Excerpts (2)–(3), the object is not in a neutral position here, but in another participant’s (Mette’s) possession. Thus we can also note that, again unlike the previous extracts, the speaker, Gabriel, is not in possession of the object while taking an extended turn at talk. What are we then to make of the previous observation from the massage stick setting that having an extended turn at talk was most often co-terminus with having possession of an object? We propose that the rule ‘possess the stick when taking a turn at talk’ is still in play and that here we witness a transitional space regarding, not talk per se, but object possession and the semiotic field it inhabits. Just as vocal overlap where a current turn holder and a presumptive one are both active in the semiotic space of vocal language, so too here with an object possessor (Mette) and presumptive object possessor (Gabriel). Gabriel and Mette are not, however, physically struggling with each other over possession of the stick, which one might expect as the most straightforward way of resolving object possession overlap. Rather, from the perspective of object possession, we suggest they predominately use talk as an arbiter, i.e. talking about an object effects its exchange. Gabriel silently holding his hand under the stick at line 8 also supports the
exchange of the stick which follows, however, we maintain that his doing so highlights that the semiotic field of objects is in a transitional state. Ultimately, it is the semiotic field of language that arbitrates object possession.

   Gabriel, at a relevant juncture after a pause (Line 2), takes the turn at talk and following this, receives the stick from Mette, upon which time he launches a new such turn. Gabriel’s initial turn at talk is constructed topically in a particular way however - he talks of the physical sensation of touching the stick as he touches it, and in this way seemingly legitimizes his touching the stick not possessed by him. He receives alignment from the others, and Mette in an agreement at line 12, turns the stick over to him. We can say then, that one way of gaining possession of an object is to touch it and talk about it, and once attained, one may possess it and talk even more about it. The breaking of the rule ‘possess the object to take a turn at talk’ is effected by talking about the object in such a way that touching it is warranted and, one may say, even projects eventual possession and a new or continuing turn at talk.

   **Conclusion**

   We began our analysis with the conjecture that the ecology of our two settings, in terms of bodily positions and the phenomenal availability of an object or set of objects, prefigured possible participation frameworks. In relation to turntaking, this has been the case. Coherent with studies of multimodal resources such as gaze and gesture and turntaking, we have shown that reaching for an object near the end of another speaker’s ongoing turn at talk may be understood by the participants as pre-
beginnings to talk and as claims for the floor. Significant for objects, in comparison with other resources, is their materiality. Participating in the two settings meant touching, grasping, moving the objects at hand. And this particular materiality of the objects also afforded their constant availability for such participatory work throughout the interactions, given their relation to the bodily positions of the participants. Unlike speech and gesture, objects can go ‘offline’ and yet easily remain in the phenomenal space to be brought forward into semiotic fields both as potential referents and aids to speech and gesture. Other aspects of this materiality worth noting are the physical properties of the objects and how they were initially staged as relevant within the activities. As noted earlier, the objects were graspable and movable for the participants and were part of, what is for designers, common activities within a design workshop, or educational training therein. As such the objects had easily recognizable affordances for participants as, in setting 1 potential proxies for backhoe controls or, in setting 2, objects whose primary function is to be discovered as an educational activity. Our focus, however, has not been on these uses of the objects per se, but rather in how the physical handling of them is involved in the sequential unfolding of the activities. It is instructive to consider whether one may speak of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ uses of the objects to capture this distinction. To this we would say it is best to keep the objects ‘whole’ as far as possible. They are, first of all. what they come to be, not only through conventional recognizability but also through their very physicality and their handling by participants.

Another consequence of our object’s materiality is that they could be singularly held by participants which, in its turn, makes potentially relevant possession of the objects as a social fact to be dealt with. This is evidenced in Excerpt (3) and (6) from setting two by the necessary coordination by participants between
having the object in one’s hands and taking a turn at talk. In this way, objects differ from resources such as gesture. Mondada (2007) notes:

Whereas verbal and other acoustic resources are vulnerable to overlaps in these early starts, pointing gestures are not and can be produced simultaneously with the terminal segment of the ongoing turn. (Ibid: 208)

This is not the case for our objects as they can be ‘overlapped’ as demonstrated in Excerpt (6). Moreover, as evidenced in Excerpt (5), objects can be very useful in arbitration over a turn at talk in conjunction with verbal overlap.

Possession of an object was most relevant in setting 2 as a consequence of the rather brute fact that there is only one object in play there. Thus we found that speaker change, in Excerpts (3) and (6) from setting 2 also involved the exchange of the one and only object. This was not the case in any of the excerpts from setting 1. That there is but one object in setting 2, can also account for one further observation. The use of the object in the construction of a turn at talk by Gabriel in Excerpt (6) (line 4-8) could also be seen and heard as a bid for the floor. Actions were not so configured in setting 1. Use of the object in turns at talk was carried out after the speaker reasonably had already secured the floor. One may say that the economy of objects in setting 2 vis a vis setting 1 necessitated an expansion of the object’s affordabilities.

The ready flexibility of objects as part of a material semiotic field is also noteworthy. The objects in both settings, when being held, touched or reached for, can be said to index having a turn at talk or a bid for the same. This holds regardless of however the object may be used in constructing a turn at talk where an object’s iconic potential was more at play. This is perhaps most clearly seen in setting two where each speaking participant held the one object at some point during their talk.

Finally, we raise the inevitable question of what including objects into an
analysis adds to our understanding of turn taking. It is clear that objects are semiotically resourceful for claiming a turn at talk. Their semiotic malleability and phenomenal accessibility provide an undeniable richness to talk which we are just beginning to understand. Here, we have mostly tried to test the waters for the resourcefulness of objects in the distribution of turns at talk and have found that for this important task, they are also quite useful.
References


Landgrebe & Wagner, submitted. Props in a planning and design activity.


