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PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2020.1826765>

PUBLISHER

Taylor & Francis (Routledge)

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Research on Language and Social Interaction on 18 Nov 2020, available online:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/08351813.2020.1826765>.

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Clift, Rebecca, and Marco Pino. 2020. "Turning the Tables: Objecting to Conduct in Conflict Talk".  
Loughborough University. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/12962357.v1>.

# Turning the tables: Objecting to conduct in conflict talk

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This article is a conversation-analytic study of occasions where a speaker formulates what a recipient is doing as something objectionable, thereby delivering an accusation, e.g. “Why you shouting” or “I dunno why you’re being so aggressive”. We call these lexical formulations of what someone has just done *conduct formulations*. These are: 1) responsive to an ongoing imputation of misconduct or misdemeanor; and 2) produced in response to an upgrade on prior attempts by the recipient to engage the producer of the conduct formulation in aligning with their project. The speaker thereby “turns the tables” on the recipient, challenging the legitimacy of, and thus rendering accountable, their line of action. The response by the recipient involves a downgrade of their prior action, and so proposes resetting the terms of engagement on a more conciliatory basis. Data are in English and Italian.

Reference: Clift, R., & Pino, M. (2020). Turning the tables: Objecting to conduct in conflict talk. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 53(4), 463-480.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08351813.2020.1826765>

## 1. Introduction

It is a truism in Conversation Analysis that “next turn” is where a speaker displays their understanding of what is being done in “prior turn” (Schegloff, 1992) by responding in a

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sequentially relevant way; thus, one responds to a greeting with a greeting, and to a question with an answer, and so on. It is also standardly the case that we only formulate what it is that we are doing in interaction when it is called into question (e.g. the jokey response “is that a threat or a promise?”). This article investigates a phenomenon which embodies an exception to these two normative orientations of responding relevantly, and of not formulating explicitly what has just been done in prior turn: an occasion where a speaker declines to respond in a sequentially relevant way, and instead explicitly formulates what the recipient is doing in prior turn as in some way objectionable and accountable, thereby delivering an accusation. These accusations take various syntactic forms – they may be declarative, interrogative or imperative – but all are produced in the context of hearably antagonistic or conflictual talk (e.g. Dersley and Wootton, 2001; Goodwin, 1983; Hutchby, 1996; Kotthoff, 1993) and contain embedded references to the objectionable conduct, such as “I dunno why you’re being so aggressive”, “Don’t put words in our mouth” and “Why you shouting at me”. The extract below shows a case in point, with the focal phenomenon embodied at line 8. The context is a publisher’s meeting, where Phil has been insisting on being involved in a particular procedure in the production of a book. His directive at lines 5-6 (“JES’ LET ME DO this okay”) structurally prefers compliance (Kent, 2012), but Cath’s response at line 8, prefaced with a pause – a standard harbinger of a dispreferred response – is anything but:

### (1) CT:15:12 “Aggressive”

Clift, Publisher’s meeting; PHI = Phil, CAT = Cath, project co-workers; JUL = Julian, senior editor and meeting chair.

01 PHI: Tch Yeah but hhhhh (1.0) (h)it’s not just a question  
 02 of sh- throwing the:: Advanced Revelation<sup>2</sup> stuff  
 03 at the- at the typesetter it won’t work, you know.  
 04 (3.0)  
 05 PHI: JES’ LET ME DO this okay because otherwise you know don’t- (.)  
 06 don’t do it without (1.5) °my being involved°.  
 07 (1.0)  
 08 CAT: → I ↑dunno why you’re being so aggr↑es[sive about it.  
 09 PHI: [I’M NOT BEing aggressi-  
 10 well I’m being aggressive, (w’l) I’m not being aggressive,  
 11 it’s just that I’ve seen this thing so: often that if you have  
 12 computers- (.) that if you- people are doing things here and  
 13 they’re doing things there, (0.2) .hhh (.) then it won’t wo:rk.=

<sup>2</sup> “Advanced Revelation” (line 2) is a type of software involved in producing the book on which they are working.

We shall return to this exchange later, but our initial observation here is that “I dunno why you’re being so aggressive about it” disattends the substance of the prior turn and focuses instead on an aspect – here, the manner (“being so aggressive”) – of its delivery. It asserts something negative about the recipient’s conduct in the prior turn. For this reason we call the phenomenon embodied in this turn a *conduct formulation*, and it will be our analytic focus in what follows.

There is one common environment for producing an explicit lexical formulation which “notices something” (Schegloff, 2007:87) in the recipient’s conduct, and that is phone-call openings, where “anomalies in the sound of the voice, such as mood, illness, and, most commonly, being awakened” (Schegloff, 1986:124) can engender a pre-apology sequence. But in Extract 1 above it is clear that the sequential environment is altogether different; in the first instance, the conduct formulation is produced in the context of a hearably conflictual exchange; and it is produced not at the initiation of an exchange, but rather in its course. In this latter respect it bears some resemblance to the phenomenon identified by Local and Walker (2008) in which a speaker produces a formulation about a recipient’s stance or affectual state (e.g. “you sound happy”, “don’t sound so depressed”), although, as we shall see, the cases we examine here differ to the extent that the formulations are uniformly negative – as glosses, they select some features and suppress others – are not confined to affectual states, and are not evidentially weak. In this respect these cases also have affinities with what Dersley and Wootton, examining antagonistic sequences, identify as complaints about “deleterious and generic personal deficiencies” (2001: 611), with the exception that they relate, not to enduring personal characteristics, but to some allegedly problematic aspect with the delivery or formulation of the prior turn. As selective glosses, our conduct formulations conform to what Sidnell (2017) calls ‘conduct under a description’. Sidnell examines speakers’ glosses of their own actions in talk and makes the point that ‘participants use action descriptions to exercise accountability in interaction’ (op.cit:324) – that is, it is the descriptions of actions, rather than the actions themselves, to which accountability attaches. Through examining a related phenomenon – that is, descriptions of another’s actions – we here investigate one sequential basis for such descriptions. In other words, *when* is such a display of accountability made possibly relevant, and *what interactional purpose* does it serve?

## **2.     *Methods and data***

In what follows we examine the conduct formulation in the data of both English and Italian. In doing so, we are not making any claim about the preponderance of conduct formulations in these languages *per se*, or seeking to draw comparative conclusions; rather, the findings in this study emerged from observing the same phenomenon across the three datasets we have been working with. The first (from which Extracts 1, 4 and 5 are taken) consists of audio recordings of meetings at a publishing company. The second (Extract 3) comprises recordings of a family recorded continuously across 100 days on 21 cameras, filmed originally for a “fly-on-the-wall” TV series.<sup>3</sup> Datasets 1 and 2 are of British English interaction. The third dataset (Extracts 2, 6 & 7) is in Italian. It consists of 4 audio-recorded and 20 video-recorded facilitated group meetings, amounting to twenty-six hours’ worth of data, in a therapeutic community for people in recovery from drug abuse (called “clients” in what follows). Attendance at these meetings is a mandatory part of the rehabilitation program for clients, and there is regular discussion, with staff, of matters relating to the management of the community. Ethical approval for the collection and publication of the Italian data was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences of the University of Nottingham (E10042014 SoHS INTERACT). Participants provided written informed consent for transcripts to be published. The Italian transcripts in this paper contain three lines: the original Italian, an interlinear gloss, and an idiomatic English translation. The abbreviations used in the interlinear gloss are provided in the Appendix.

Our collection includes 1 conduct formulation from dataset 1, 16 from dataset 2, and 12 from dataset 3 (total = 29 conduct formulations). The instances cited here are representative of the cases in the collection as a whole.

### **3. *Conduct formulations and accountability***

In the following, from our Italian data, we see another occasion where a conduct formulation is used to call a speaker to account. Here, during a facilitated group meeting, Morena, a support worker, has raised the issue of the persistent lateness of a client, Samuele, who is present. She has been met by resistance from Lidia, one of the other clients, and proposes in lines 21-23 that the clients may not, in fact, be bothered by this. As Morena comes to the hearable end of her turn, Lidia pounces with a conduct formulation, prefaced by a highly agentive turn-initial term of address (Clayman, 2013): “Mory, non mettere in

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<sup>3</sup> We thank Dragonfly Productions for permission to use the data from this series.

bocca parole che nessuno ha mai detto” / “Mory, don’t put words in our mouths that no-one’s ever said” (lines 24-25).<sup>4</sup>

## (2) IntV1 5:30 “Don’t put words in our mouths”

Morena, a support worker (S-MOR), and two clients, Lidia (C-LID) and Samuele (C-SAM), speak in this extract. Another support worker and another client are present.

- 14 C-LID: Dieci <sup>↑</sup>mesi [che è qua dentro,]  
 ten months that be-3S here inside  
*Ten <sup>↑</sup>months since he’s been here,*
- 15 S-MOR: [Nessuno ha mai pen]sato di pen- >cioè<  
 nobody have-3S ever think-PSTP of think-INF I.mean  
*Has anyone ever thought about thi- >I mean<*
- 16 >perché devono sempre es-< >cioè<  
 why must-3P always be-INF I.mean  
*>why does it always have to be-< >I mean<*
- 17 adesso non perché voglio scaricare. .hh  
 now not because want-1S dump-INF  
*now it’s not because I want to dump ((this on you)). .hh*
- 18 <sup>↑</sup>Però può anche essere (.) perché- (.) cioè (.)  
 but can-3S also be-INF because I.mean  
*<sup>↑</sup>But it can also be (.) because- (.) I mean (.)*
- 19 a [ voi forse non vi- ]  
 to 2P.A perhaps not 2P.D  
*to you perhaps this does not-*
- 20 C-LID: [(Forse che viene tardi?)]  
 perhaps that come-3S late  
*(Perhaps he ((just)) turns up late?)*
- 21 S-MOR: No. >Forse a voi non< vi rode allora >questa cosa<  
 no maybe to 2P.A not 2P.D annoy-3S then this thing  
*No. Maybe this stuff doesn’t annoy you then*
- 22 non vi da fastidio >per esempio questa  
 not 2P.D give-3S annoyance for example this  
*for example this stuff doesn’t bother*
- 23 co[sa.<  
 thing  
 you.<
- 24 C-LID:→ [Mory non:: di- non <mettere> in <bocca>  
 NAME-DIM not say-IMP not put-IMP.2S in mouth  
 Mory don’t sa- don’t <put> words in ((our))
- 25 → parole che ne[ssuno ha mai [detto.[.h =  
 words that nobody have.3S never say-PSTP  
 <mouths> that no-one has ever said. .h
- 26 S-MOR: [<sup>↑</sup>No [chied[o.>  
 no ask-1S  
<sup>↑</sup>No <I’m asking.>
- 27 C-LID: =.h Per[c- no- ALLORA CHI-]  
 why/because no then ask-IMP.2S  
 =.h Bec- no- THEN AS-

<sup>4</sup> Morena is Lidia’s keyworker. In our data, Lidia is the only group member who uses the diminutive “Mory” – an index of familiarity – to address Morena.

28 S-MOR:                   [>Chiedo.< Forse non vi ↑dà-]  
                               ask-1S       maybe   not 2S.A give-3S  
                               >I'm asking.< Maybe it does not ↑bo-

29 C-LID:   ALLORA CHI↑EDI [no.  
                               then       ask-IMP.2S no  
                               THEN ↑ASK right.

30 S-MOR:                   [>E infa' ho       detto< "forse".  
                               And indeed have-1S say-PSTP maybe  
                               >And indeed I said< "maybe".

Morena's lines 21-23, "Forse a voi non vi rode allora questa cosa, non vi dà fastidio per esempio questa cosa" / "Maybe this stuff doesn't annoy you then, for example, this stuff doesn't bother you", ascribes a position to the clients, which projects a confirming or disconfirming response; however, the response produced is in the form of an immediate, indeed, overlapped, directive reproof ("Non" / "Don't") in which is embedded a conduct formulation ("mettere in bocca parole" / "put words in our mouths"). In both Extracts 1 and 2 we thus see the conduct formulation as a generic phenomenon: formulations by one party of a recipient's sanctionable conduct in the prior turn. Despite being formatted differently – the instance in Extract 1 is a declarative in which is embedded a question, and that in Extract 2 a directive – the conduct formulation is heard by the recipient as an accusation, and responded to as such, because of the unvarnished, epistemically authoritative negative assertion about the recipient's conduct.

Formulating conduct as "aggressive" in Extract 1 and "putting words in our mouth" in Extract 2 proposes it to be in some way reprehensible, and thus accountable. In each case the conduct formulation supplants the structurally preferred response – in Extract 1 to the directive "JES' let me do: this" and in Extract 2 to the assertion "Forse a voi non vi rode allora questa cosa" / "Maybe this stuff doesn't annoy you then". And, in each case, in prompting responses that engage with the accusations, it serves to redirect the trajectory of the talk. In both cases, an immediate denial is produced early and in interjacent overlap (Jefferson, 1986: 158). Thus the initial, immediate response to the conduct formulation engages with the accusation it embodies.

The selective nature of the conduct formulations – "being aggressive", "putting words in [our] mouths" – shows the extent to which they are designed for local interactional purposes, and grounded in sanctions and common-sense understandings about acceptable conduct; in their direct attributions of particular negative behaviors, they bring this accountability to the surface of the talk. Of course, as Drew points out, "conduct is not intrinsically or automatically to be regarded as a violation, a transgression, or as reprehensible: it is constituted as such through reasoning about events and behavior" (1998: 312), and indeed we can see that in Extract 1 Phil's response to the conduct formulation (lines 9-13) – the launch of a denial, then a concession, then

a denial plus an account – captures an ambivalence in his stance towards it, although his subsequent account is a claim to authority on epistemic grounds.

The cases we examine here follow a similar sequential pattern. Initially a party (A) attributes to another party (B) some inappropriate conduct. In Extract 1, Phil's exhortation that his colleagues involve him in coordinating the software on a project builds on an implicit accusation that his colleagues are capable of doing sloppy work (lines 1-2, 'throwing the Advanced Revelation stuff...at the typesetter'); in Extract 2 Morena accuses the clients of not caring about a problem that affects the running of the therapeutic community. In such cases, by attributing to B some allegedly inappropriate conduct, A casts judgement on B. Pino (2018) shows that, in these kinds of sequence, B can challenge A's stance on the basis that A has committed some transgression in the past, which effectively undermines their right to cast judgment on B in the present situation. In the cases we examine here, speaker B uses a different resource to undermine the legitimacy of A's course of action: to draw attention to a transgression that A has committed just now, in the ongoing interaction. This charge, embodied in the conduct formulation, holds B responsible not only for having committed a wrongdoing, but also for remedying that wrong.

In the following sections, we track the production of the conduct formulation by examining its sequential origins before proceeding to consider its interactional warrants, and then its sequential implications. In doing so, we are also illuminating the means by which accountability is made relevant and invoked as a resource in interaction.

#### ***4. The sequential origins and interactional implications of a conduct formulation***

In the first instance, it is instructive, in exploring the origins of a conflictual exchange, to examine one such sequence from its beginning. The following case shows the very initiation of the sequence in which a conduct formulation occurs. Simon has been told by his wife, Jane, upstairs in their bedroom, that their nineteen-year-old daughter Emily has been spotted in a picture on Facebook wearing a jumper of hers (by implication, without her permission). Simon undertakes to confront Emily about this, and walks with Jane into the living room where Emily is sitting, summoning her (line 1) as he enters the room:

(3) CF1:6:13 "Shouting"

SIM = Simon; EMI = Emily.



01 SIM: Emily:.  
 02 (1.0)  
 03 SIM: .hhh <YOU'VE BEEN SEEN,> (.) <WEARING YOUR MUM'S CLOTHES,>  
 04 [(1.0) <ON FACEBOOK.>  
 05 EMI: [*(studiously avoids gazing at Simon; picks up her mobile phone*  
 06 *and glances at the TV, then down at the phone she is holding.*  
 07 *She suspends the phone, gazing at it in a "hold", till 1.17)*  
 08 (0.2)  
 09 SIM: Yes?  
 10 (1.0)  
 11 SIM: Yeah?  
 12 (0.7)  
 13 SIM: You're clearly wearing your Mum's clothes, aren't you.  
 14 (1.0)  
 15 SIM: Em.  
 16 [(1.0)  
 17 EMI: [*(turns eye gaze from phone to Simon)*  
 18 SIM: [Em!  
 19 SIM: [*(lifts arms out to side in a palm up configuration)*  
 20 SIM: Come [on.]  
 21 EMI:→ [Why] you shouting at me.  
 22 SIM: W'l- u- let's just have a conversation...

Simon levels an accusation against Emily in the form of a factual report: "You've been seen wearing your mum's clothes on Facebook" (lines 3-4), formulating and indexing his epistemic access to her problematic conduct. Admonishing Emily in this manner is a dispreferred action (Hepburn, 2019) that is primarily retrospective in orientation: attempting to get her to accept culpability for some wrongdoing that she has been knowingly engaged in.

Simon only manages to secure Emily's attention at the seventh attempt (line 18) – the previous six having been met with a display of studied disattention (see Goffman, 1963 on "civil inattention") from Emily. She responds to the initial summons and accusation from Simon by picking up her mobile phone to look at (lines 5-17). Simon pursues Emily's response at lines 9 and 11, to no avail. Now it is standardly the case that, in repeatedly pursuing a response (either because a response is absent, as in this case, or because a response has been produced, but is not what is being sought), speakers intensify the strength of their pursuits (Pomerantz, 1984; Schegloff et al., 1977; Stivers & Rossano, 2010), and at this point Simon evidentially upgrades the accusation, with a tag question designed to mobilize a response (line 13): "You're clearly wearing your Mum's clothes, aren't you". When this upgraded accusation also fails to get a response, he subsequently escalates his attempts to summon Emily – gesturally, with a palm-up gesture (Clift, 2020), with the prosodically more emphatic summons ("Em!"), and lexically ("Come on!"). It is at this point that, having hitherto withheld any response, Emily meets Simon's gaze and produces a conduct formulation. Her "Why you shouting at me" (line 21) comes at a point

where what is relevant is a response to Simon's pursuits of a response: initially to his unmitigated accusation, and subsequently to his revived summons.

It was noted earlier that the conduct formulation bears some resemblance to the explicit lexical formulations of stance and affect identified by Local and Walker (2008). Through sequential organization, participant orientation and phonetic detail, Local and Walker establish that such formulations as "happy", "depressed" or "surprised" are an interactional resource for getting the co-participant to talk about their state and are not necessarily straightforward indicators of the locus of "affect phonetics"; in other words, there is no regular and systematic correspondence between phonetic detail and the expression of speaker states (2008:740). This would appear to be supported by the current case: Emily's formulation that Simon is "shouting" is not borne out phonetically – as the transcript shows – by any significantly raised volume in Simon's delivery. But Emily's formulation is responsive to Simon's intensified attempts to solicit a response ("shouting" being the amplification of how one standardly engages in interaction, such as, by, say, "talking"). This intensified pursuit provides a warrant for Emily to level the accusation at Simon.

The conduct formulation is another resource that enables Emily to avoid responding to either Simon's accusation or his summons. However, this resource is different from the studied disattention she has employed before, by drawing attention to a misdemeanor that Simon has allegedly committed just now. Note further that the design of the turn, by dint of the prepositional phrase "shouting *at me*", formulates Simon's conduct as an incoherent haranguing, because directed at a target and, in drawing attention to the manner of what is said, implicitly deflects attention away from what is said. In a context where Simon has displayed heightened moral authority – to hold Emily accountable for a misdemeanor – Emily's conduct formulation holds Simon accountable for having himself committed a sanctionable act. In the first instance, as a description of a just-prior action – as was the description of Phil as 'being aggressive' in Extract 1 – her description of him as 'shouting' makes his prior conduct implicitly accountable. However, the precise formulation of the turn, with its 'Why'-question preface, renders that accountability explicit. As Sacks notes, 'what one does with "Why?" is to propose about some action that it is an "accountable action"'. That is to say, 'Why?' is a way of asking for an account' (1992: 4). And, in soliciting an account, one upgrades one's claim to authority (Heritage, 2005). Bolden and Robinson's study of *why*-interrogatives as account solicitations show that such constructions embody a stance that the event to be accounted for 'does not accord with common sense and thus

is inappropriate or unwarranted, [so displaying] a challenging stance towards the accountable event and responsible agent(s)' (2011:94).<sup>5</sup> While Emily's conduct formulation is not a standalone 'why' like those studied by Bolden and Robinson, as a *why*-prefaced interrogative it clearly displays a challenging stance, underscored in this case by its placement in the course of Simon's prior turn. Robinson and Bolden (2010) show that when such account solicitations are produced 'early' in this manner (i.e. contiguous to accountable action), they are often produced in environments of ongoing disputes, and are 'one way to aggravate the challenging stance they display and thus to enhance their status as disagreements and/or criticisms' (2010:523).

The conduct formulation here highlights an incongruence between Simon's project – accusing Emily of morally inappropriate behavior – and the means by which he is implementing that project: by 'shouting' at her. Emily mobilizes common sense understandings about how accusers should conduct themselves: Broadly, that in accusing someone of some misconduct, one should not oneself engage in some form of misconduct, such as "shouting". Emily tacitly invokes and reflexively exploits such considerations. In doing so, she transforms herself from accused to accuser, turning the tables on Simon, in a direct challenge to his moral authority.<sup>6</sup>

In Simon's response we see an orientation to this particular form of challenge. His proposal to "just have a conversation" (line 22) whilst not denying Emily's allegation, constitutes a considerable downgrade in the force of his earlier attempts to engage Emily in talk about her misbehaviour. In its downgrade, Simon's response conforms to what Koshik (2017) observes in her examination of responses to Wh-questions that implement challenges. Koshik notes that: 'recipients of challenges can also respond with answers that back down slightly from their original, challenged turn, while continuing to reject the challenge' (2017:98). Simon does not explicitly reject the challenge, nor does he provide the account solicited by Emily's question, but rather drops the more confrontational overtones of his earlier accusations and summonses, and makes a more conciliatory proposal, whilst at the same time pursuing a focus on Emily's misbehaviour. Having "a

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<sup>5</sup> In similar vein, Potter and Hepburn (2020), in work focused on family mealtime interactions, focus on what they call 'shaming interrogatives' in that they both draw attention to problem behavior, and put the recipient in a position of providing an account for it – often where no account is possible that doesn't incriminate the recipient in some way.

<sup>6</sup> There are affinities here with some of the antagonistic sequences examined by Dersley and Wootton (2000:401) in which the complainees resists aligning as a complainees and instead assumes the role of (counter) complainer.

conversation”, with its implications of a reasoned bilateral exchange of views, is also a far more benign characterisation of the activity at hand – and one that is less vulnerable to sanction, and so less accountable, compared to his earlier unilateral exhortations, which Emily is thus able to characterize as “shouting”. In this way, Simon displays an orientation to, and concurrently pushes back against, the resource Emily has mobilized.

Extract 3 thus shows how the conduct formulation is mobilized as a resource in response to admonishment, at the point at which efforts to secure engagement are upgraded. In the cases we have seen so far, it is produced in the course of a prior turn, in interjacent overlap, and glosses what the recipient is doing in that prior turn in such a way as to challenge the authority of the admonishment and shift the terms of engagement. It is a diversionary practice, and the target of the conduct formulation subsequently either accounts for their conduct or reformulates their project in more conciliatory terms.

## 5. *The conduct formulation as a systematic practice*

If we now return to the exchanges from which Extracts 1 and 2 were drawn, we can see that a conduct formulation is similarly produced by a speaker to shift the terms of engagement. We have seen how, in Extract 3, the producer of the conduct formulation is being admonished for past behaviour. However, in the extracts that follow, we see that the producer of the conduct formulation is initially the target of a negative – and so challenging – imputation with respect to some future course of action. In Extract 4 below, which is taken from earlier in the meeting from which Extract 1 is taken, Phil has been insisting for some minutes at the project meeting that he be centrally involved in co-ordinating the software on a project:

### (4) CT:15:11 “Fall apart”

Clift, Publisher’s meeting; PHI = Phil, CAT = Cath, project co-workers; JUL = Julian, senior editor and meeting chair.

01 PHI: [It’s VEry important that I’m involved in this [because honestly=  
02 JUL: [Sure.  
03 PHI: =I mean I’ve (1.0) I’ve done a l(h)ot o’ this stuff before, an’ if  
04 you go off an’ get it slightly wrong (0.2) it’s gonna fall apart.  
05 (0.2)  
06 PHI: Seriously,  
07 (0.6)  
08 JUL: I don’t think there’s any danger ev- of: it being e- done without  
09 you knowing, Phil .hh [uh::m  
10 PHI: [It’s not (.) without my knowing, I’ve got

11 to know the detail of it so that it meshes in with what we're  
12 doing, we're trying to build a whole operation [here  
13 JUL: [Sure

Unlike Simon in Extract 3, Phil does not accuse his co-participants of a past misdemeanor, but his insistence displays a suspicion that his colleagues might not involve him (e.g. at lines 3-4: “if you go off”) with potentially disastrous consequences (line 4: “fall apart”). Therefore, Phil’s exhortation is directed to a potential misdemeanor: heading off misconduct, as opposed to fixing its consequences. And, unlike the other cases we have seen, Phil’s exhortation is initially not met with resistance but, rather, with alignment from his boss Julian (‘Sure’, line 2). However, Phil’s account for why his involvement is necessary, with its implicit accusation that his colleagues are at risk of doing sloppy work (lines 3-4) is met by silence from both Julian and his project co-worker Cath (line 5), and then as he upgrades (“Seriously”, line 6), Julian produces a turn that does not address the implicit accusation, but which is designed to reassure: ‘I don’t think there’s any danger...of it being done...without you knowing, Phil’. This formulation – ‘without you knowing’ – does not, however, promise the involvement that Phil has insisted on in line 1, and is duly rejected by Phil in lines 10-11, and he continues for some minutes to make the case for his direct involvement. Extract 5 below, some minutes later, starts a few lines before the extract presented earlier as Extract 1. Cath reports a proposal that, at a particular point in the production of the book they are working on (lines 1-3), colleagues will use a particular type of software (‘Advanced Revelation’):

(5) CT:15:12 "Aggressive"

01 CAT: .h well the: (0.2) the proposal at the moment which David's made is  
02 tha:t u:m (.) the people w:orking on the book will use Advanced  
03 Revelation: (.) (around a time convenient to that).  
04 (2.0)  
05 PHI: Yeah that's fi:ne. (0.5) [But you need to output to the: (.)  
06 CAT: [°Right°.  
07 PHI: =laser printer, and then I'll control [it.  
08 JUL: [Sure. .hh tch well I mean  
09 David understood we were using this:: system: without being (°--°)  
10 (2.0)  
11 PHI: Tch Yeah but hhhhhh (1.0) (h)it's not just a question  
12 of sh- throwing the:: Advanced Revelation<sup>7</sup> stuff  
13 at the- at the tyesetter it won't work, you know.  
14 (3.0)  
15 PHI: JES' LET ME DO: this okay because otherwise you know don't- (.)  
16 don't do it without (1.5) °my being involved°.

<sup>7</sup> “Advanced Revelation” (line 2) is a type of software involved in producing the book on which they are working.

17 (1.0)  
 18 CAT:→ I ↑dunno why you're being so aggr↑es[sive about it.  
 19 PHI: [I'M NOT BEing aggressi-  
 20 well I'm being aggressive, (w'l) I'm not being aggressive,  
 21 it's just that I've seen this thing so: often that if you have  
 22 computers- (.) that if you- people are doing things here and  
 23 they're doing things there, (0.2) .hhh (.) then it won't wo:rk.=  
 24 CAT: =W'l that's pre[cisely what we're a:[ll trying a↑void, nobody's=  
 25 JUL: [Mm. [S↑ure.  
 26 CAT: =arguing about [(that).  
 27 JUL: [[Yeah.

The prior context makes it possible to see that Cath's "I dunno why you're being so aggressive about it" (line 18) is produced in a similar sequential environment to Extract 3. But where Extract 3 is an exchange motivated by an explicit accusation against the speaker, here, where the participants are all ostensibly working together on the same team, the accusation is far more implicit. Even so, it comes in the context of a series of entreaties by Phil. From line 1 in Extract 4: "It's very important that I'm involved in this" to line 7 in Extract 5: "I'll control it" and his rejection (lines 11-13) of attempts to reassure by Julian, Phil attributes to his colleagues potentially slapdash work ('throwing the Advanced Revelation stuff...at the typesetter', lines 12-13). This is grounded in the epistemic authority of his own expertise and experience (lines 12-13: 'it won't work'): an imputation which, while not a direct accusation, is accusatory in its implications. This gets no uptake from either colleague, as evidenced by the three second pause at line 14, whereupon Phil escalates his plea into the most authoritative form possible: the imperative directive, with its final particle designed to mobilize response: "JES' let me do: this okay...". It is in response to this escalation that Cath, after a second's pause, produces the conduct formulation with the accusatory term "aggressive", implying unwarranted provocation. As in Extract 3, in taking issue with the manner in which the turn is delivered, it challenges its legitimacy. In the context of a workplace meeting – an institution where what Parsons (1951) called "affective neutrality" is standardly upheld – such a display of hostility is arguably all the more sanctionable. By using the conduct formulation, Cath frustrates Phil's course of action. Compared to the overt account solicitation, 'Why you shouting' in Extract 3, the account solicitation here is oblique, the 'why'-prefaced question embedded in a declarative statement, 'I dunno why...'. Phil's initial response – produced in overlap with the end of Cath's turn – is to launch a denial. But before he completes this denial, he abandons this TCU to back down completely in a concession that he is indeed being aggressive (lines 19-20), only subsequently once again to deny the accusation, before finally again conceding by means of the formulation "it's just that...", and providing the account for his manner that

Cath's conduct formulation has implicitly solicited. In doing so, Phil repudiates the exact (and by implication, extreme) form of the accusation ("aggressive"), while not abandoning its basic rationale in what amounts to a partial backdown. As a response to a conduct formulation, Phil's turn thus embodies a number of possible orientations: to denial (as in Extract 2), then to its polar opposite, outright concession, and, then a position mid-way between the two: as in Extract 3, a partial concession that does not grant the recipient the exact terms of her accusation, but holds fast to his warrant for behaving as he has. In appealing to having "seen this thing so often" (line 21), he grounds his prior conduct, and the presumptuous nature of his claim, in a display of epistemic authority. In his single turn, Phil thus displays the spectrum of possible responses from agreement to disagreement, repairing out of the first, and then the second, as he seeks to provide a rationale for his conduct. In doing so, he displays an orientation to the interactional bind involved in responding to a conduct formulation. That is, to deny that one is behaving as the conduct formulation claims is to risk undermining the warrantability of one's original case. So Phil's concession at line 20 ("Well, I'm being aggressive") in the course of his response forms part of a turn designed to provide a warrant for his current course of action. In this light, his ultimate display of accountability ("it's just that...") constitutes a downgrading of his authority – and Cath's responsive assertion, with its extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) that they are "all trying to avoid" the very problem he is adumbrating, and that "nobody's arguing about that" (lines 24 and 26) constitutes its own counter-challenge.

When considered in its more extended sequential context, the exchange presented earlier as Extract 2 displays similar characteristics. Morena seeks to enroll the help of the clients in suggesting they should confront Samuele, a client, about his persistent lateness (data not shown); as the organization has a therapeutic community ethos and methodology (Pearce & Pickard, 2013), the clients are expected to take responsibility for maintaining and nurturing its social and relational environment. In the extract below, Lidia contests this by arguing that she has no way of influencing Samuele's behaviour; she might ask him to arrive on time, but he might equally persist in arriving late.

#### (6) IntV1 5:30 "Don't put words in our mouths"

Morena, a support worker (S-MOR), and two clients, Lidia (C-LID) and Samuele (C-SAM), speak in this extract. Another support worker and another client are present.

01 S-MOR: Proviamo a pensare a qualcos'altro qua ↑dentro  
 try-IMP.1P to think-INF of something=else here inside  
*Let's try and think of something else in here*

02 per esempio che lo possa aiuTAre.  
 for example that 3S.A can-SBJ.3S help-INF  
*for example that can help him.*

03 S-MOR: Perché arrivi prima.  
 so.that arrive-SBJ.3S earlier  
*So that he arrives earlier.*

04 (0.3)

05 S-MOR: O: un qualcosa che gli faccia capire. "Cavoli  
 or a something that 3S.D make-SBJ.3S understand-INF cabbage  
*Or something that makes him understand. "Blimey*

06 io vengo qua a'e otto e mezzo, >tu vieni qua  
 1S.N come-1S here at=the eight and half 2S.N come-2S here  
*I get here at half past eight, >you come here*

07 a' nove e un ↑quarto.< [Ma ↑chi sei tu?"  
 at nine and a quarter but who be-2S 2S.N  
*at quarter past ↑nine.< But ↑who are you?"*

08 C-LID: [Ma è qua da da: da: da quanto-  
 but be-3S here from from from from how.much  
*But he's been here since since since since how-*

09 da [quanto tempo ↑sei qua.=  
 from how.much time be-2S here  
*how long have you ↑been here.=*

10 S-MOR: [E cosa vuol ↑di:re.  
 and what want-3S say-INF  
*And what is that supposed to ↑mean.*

11 C-LID: =Sei ↑mesi. (.) E pensi (che i sel-) [.h  
 six months and think-2S (that )  
*=Six ↑months. (.) And do you think (that ) .h*

12 C-SAM: [Dieci.  
 ten  
*Ten.*

13 (.)

14 C-LID: Dieci ↑mesi [che è qua dentro,]  
 ten months that be-3S here inside  
*Ten ↑months since he's been here,*

15 S-MOR: [Nessuno ha mai pen]sato di pen- >cioè<  
 nobody have-3S ever think-PSTP of think-INF I.mean  
*Has anyone ever thought about thi- >I mean<*

16 >perché devono sempre es-< >cioè<  
 why must-3P always be-INF I.mean  
*>why does it always have to be-< >I mean<*

17 adesso non perché voglio scaricare. .hh  
 now not because want-1S dump-INF  
*now it's not because I want to dump ((this on you)). .hh*

18 ↑Però può anche essere (.) perché- (.) cioè (.)  
 but can-3S also be-INF because I.mean  
*↑But it can also be (.) because- (.) I mean (.)*

19 a [ voi forse non vi- ]  
 to 2P.A perhaps not 2P.D  
*to you perhaps this does not-*



20 C-LID: [(Forse che viene tardi?)]  
perhaps that come-3S late  
*(Perhaps he ((just)) turns up late?)*

21 S-MOR: No. >Forse a voi non< vi rode allora >questa cosa<  
no maybe to 2P.A not 2P.D annoy-3S then this thing  
*No. Maybe this stuff doesn't annoy you then*

22 non vi dà fastidio >per esempio questa  
not 2P.D give-3S annoyance for example this  
*for example this stuff doesn't bother*

23 co[sa.<  
thing  
you.<

24 C-LID:→ [Mory non:: di- non <mettere> in <bocca>  
NAME-DIM not say-IMP not put-IMP.2S in mouth  
Mory don't sa- don't <put> words in ((our))

25 → parole che ne[ssuno ha mai [detto].[h =  
words that nobody have.3S never say-PSTP  
<mouths> that no-one has ever said. .h

26 S-MOR: [↑No [ <chied[o.>  
no ask-1S  
↑No <I'm asking.>

Morena's suggestion that the group try and think about something that could "aiutare" / "help" Samuele (lines 1-2) gets no response at the first opportunity, or even, after Morena produces an increment at line 3, at the second (line 4). Morena then builds a continuation of her prior turn by proposing an alternative way of tackling the problem: "O un qualcosa che gli faccia capire" / "Or something that makes him understand" (line 5). As Morena animates her response to Samuele's persistent lateness (lines 5-7), Lidia responds with a question regarding how long Samuele has been at the community (lines 8-9), implying that he has been there for so long that he is unlikely to change his behaviour. It is clearly not an aligning or affiliative response that collaborates with Morena's project, and is launched before the end of her turn, in overlap. Morena in turn launches a challenge in overlap ("E cosa vuol dire" / "And what is that supposed to mean", line 10). As Lidia reiterates "Dieci mesi che è qua dentro" / "Ten months since he's been here" (line 14), Morena intersects her turn at "Dieci mesi" / "Ten months" with an extended turn of her own, and one which displays some trouble in its formulation (lines 15-19). She abandons two turn beginnings, both containing extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1986) at lines 15-16 which are hearably confrontational. "Nessuno ha mai pensato di pen-" / "Has anyone ever thought about thi-" (line 15) implies that the clients have neglected this issue; "Perché devono sempre es-" / "Why does it always have to be-" (line 16) appears to be projecting "the staff", who sort out the problems, a projectable complaint. She then settles for pre-empting a possible objection, designed in the first instance to reassure the clients ("non perché voglio

scaricare”/ “not because I want to dump ((this on you))”, line 17) but then, in a move that escalates the terms of engagement, speculates presumptuously about their own stance (“>Forse a voi non< vi rode allora >questa cosa<” / “maybe this stuff doesn’t annoy you”) and then in a further escalation, provides another attribution along similar lines (“non vi dà fastidio per esempio questa cosa”/ “for example this stuff doesn’t bother you”, lines 22-23). It is to this escalated, morally charged attribution – and implied accusation that the clients are uninterested or disengaged – that Lidia responds with her conduct formulation: “Mory...non mettere in bocca parole che nessuno ha mai detto” / “Mory don’t put words in our mouths that no-one has ever said” (lines 24-25).

Once again, the conduct formulation is produced by a party, Lidia, who has already resisted aligning with another’s project – Morena’s exhortations that the clients become more involved in the management of the center – and finds themselves the target of an escalated move. It serves to turn Morena, who is hearably on the offensive when she imputes disengagement to the clients, into the offender by asserting that she has misattributed a position to the clients. Just as being “aggressive” (Extract 1) or “shouting” (Extract 3) undermines the accuser’s own case and thus the legitimacy of their action, so too does misrepresenting the speaker’s position – with the implication that the case against the speaker is thereby undermined, or at least compromised. However, while the previous extracts (3 and 5) show the initiator of an accusation meeting with considerable initial resistance in the form of silence for some turns before any response is produced, in this case the resistance takes different forms. There is indeed initial silent resistance from Lidia (at line 4) but subsequently the talk takes a more confrontational turn, in the competitive overlap (e.g. lines 7 & 8, 9 & 10, 14 & 15, 19 & 20, 23 & 24) and in the formulation of the turns (e.g. lines 14 and 20 displaying a certain resignation at the situation). Morena rejects the conduct formulation (line 26) and proceeds to claim that she was merely “asking” about the clients’ position. Such a reformulation from an attribution to a question represents a backdown to an epistemically weaker position.

The more overtly confrontational, and thus explicitly challenging environment found in Extract 6 is similarly a characteristic of Extract 7 below. In this exchange between clients at another therapeutic community, Guido initiates what is hearably an accusation against Denis (lines 1-4) through a proposal, only ultimately to become the target of an accusation himself (lines 24-25). This sequence is embedded within a charged exchange in which several group members have been trying to persuade Denis to stop hanging his clothes in his room, in breach of the rules. Denis has been justifying his actions by

complaining that clothes have been known to vanish from the communal areas (data not shown). Guido's turn at lines 1-4 is directly responsive to that complaint.

### (7) IntL3 4:15 "Going back"

Two clients, Guido (GUI) and Denis (DEN), speak in this extract. Thirteen other clients, three support workers and one volunteer are present.

- 01 GUI: Eh ho cape'. Cominciamo a toccar le cose  
PRT have-1S understand-PSTP start-IMP.1P to touch-INF the things  
*Right I get that. Let's start not touching*
- 02 che (r) anche di non degli altri.  
that also of not of=the others  
*other people's things.*
- 03 E vedrai che forse anche  
and see-FUT.2S that perhaps also  
*And you'll see that perhaps*
- 04 le tue non [verranno toccate.]  
the yours not come-FUT.3P touch-PSTP  
*your things won't get touched either.*
- 05 DEN: [Eh cos'è di]mmi dimmi  
PRT what=be-3S tell-IMP.2S=1S.D tell-IMP.2S=1S.D  
*Right tell me tell me*
- 06 le co[se che t'ho toccato.  
the things that 2S.D=have-1S touch-PSTP  
*what things of yours I've touched.*
- 07 GUI: [↑No:..  
no  
↑No:..
- 08 DEN: Tirale fuori.  
pull-IMP.2S=3P.A out  
*Just say it.*
- 09 [Dato che stiam parlando siamo in Parola, falle saltar fuori, eh.]  
given that stay-3P talk-GER be-3P in NAME make-IMP.2S jump-INF out PRT  
*Since we are talking we are in the Word<sup>8</sup>, just say it, okay.*
- 10 GUI: [Non devo tirarle fuori. È- è capi-tato che]  
not must-1S pull-INF=3P.A out be-3S be-3S happen-PSTP that  
*I don't have to say it. It so happens that we are*
- 11 si parla che [se uno è così affezionato alle sue cose:.,  
IM talk-3S that if one be-3S so attached to=the his/her things  
*saying that if one is so attached to their things,*
- 12 DEN: [Eh?  
PRT  
*Right?/Huh?*
- 13 DEN: Eh.  
PRT  
*Right.*
- 14 GUI: Se cerchiamo un po' tutti compreso io:, allora vedrai  
if seek-1P a bit all included 1S.N so see-FUT.2S  
*If we all make a bit of an effort including me, then you'll see*
- 15 che [non succede niente.]  
that not happen.3S nothing

<sup>8</sup> This is how the participants refer to the group meeting. They do so without religious connotations.

*that nothing will happen.*

- 16 DEN: [Perché? A te ho in]dossato un paio di braghe  
why to 2S.A have-1S wear-PSTP a pair of trousers  
*Why? I wore a pair of your trousers*
- 17 e [t'ho indossato una maglietta] cioè.  
and 2S.D=have-1S wear-PSTP one T-shirt I.mean  
*and I wore one of your T-shirts I mean.*
- 18 GUI: [E va beh son tue no? ]  
and PRT PRT be-3P yours no  
*Alright they're yours, right?*
- 19 (0.2)
- 20 GUI: (O no.) Son tue.  
or no be-3P yours  
*(Or not.) Are they yours.*
- 21 DEN: Eh ma io almeno-  
PRT but 1S.N at.least  
*Right but at least I-*
- 22 GUI: Ne [ho due io sai che >di pantaloncino=  
PTV have-1S two 1S.N know-2S that of shorts  
*I've got two you know that >I have only one pair=*
- 23 DEN: [ ( ma)  
but  
( but)
- 24 GUI: =ho solamente uno ed era quello che hai preso tu.<  
have-1S only one and be-IPF.3S that which have-2S take-PSTP 2S.N  
*=of shorts and it was the ones you took.<*
- 25 DEN:→ Guarda che stai tornando indietro ancora da quando  
look-IMP.2S that stay-2S return-GER back again from when  
*Look you are going back to when*
- 26 → sono entrato di que[lle braghe lì ( )].  
be-1S enter-PSTP of those trousers there  
*I first got here those trousers ( ).*
- 27 GUI: [E ho capito però da]to che  
and have-1S understand-PSTP but given that  
*And I get that but since*
- 28 tu[: [t-  
2S.N 2S.N  
you y-
- 29 DEN: [Che poi quelle bra[ghe le hai acquistate  
that then those trousers 3P.A have-2S buy-PSTP  
*And also those trousers you got them*
- 30 qua dentro. Neanche fossero tue Gui[do?  
here inside neither be-SBJ-IPF.3P yours NAME  
*here. As though they were yours Guido?*
- 31 GUI: [Eh ma son tue.  
PRT but be-3P yours  
*Right but are they yours.*
- 32 (0.3)
- 33 DEN: Eh?  
PRT  
*Huh?*
- 34 (0.2)
- 35 GUI: Sono [tue.  
be-3P yours  
*Are they yours.*

36 DEN:           [NO: .  
                      no  
                      NO: .

It is clear that the exchange is confrontational from the outset. Instead of complying with Guido's proposal at lines 1-4, Denis resists it, intercepting the end of it to respond to the accusation it hearably delivers: that Denis himself has been appropriating the property of others. Denis urges Guido to provide evidence (lines 5-6 and 8), which Guido resists in favour of a conciliatory restatement of the proposal (lines 14-15), whereupon Denis, at lines 16-17 admits that he has worn a pair of Guido's trousers. At this – and as he continues his turn with the admission that he has also worn a tee-shirt of Guido's – Guido starts up with a challenging question – “E va beh son tue, no?” / “Alright they're yours, right?” (line 18). In view of Denis's earlier admission, this question serves simply to invite a confirmation (Heinemann, 2008), as is Guido's pursuit in line 20 – “(O no.) Son tue.” / “(Or not.) Are they yours.”, plainly labouring the point. As Denis begins to respond at line 21 with what is projectably some mitigation for his action, Guido launches a highly disattentive turn at lines 22 and 24 which ends with an unmitigated accusation: “di pantaloncino ho solamente uno ed era quello che hai preso tu.” / “I have only one pair of shorts and it was the ones you took”. It is to this upgraded accusation and escalated move, then, that Denis responds, not to the charge being leveled at him, but with an accusation of his own in the form of a conduct formulation: “Guarda che stai tornando indietro ancora da quando sono entrato...” / “Look you're going back to when I first got here...” (lines 25-26). Sidnell's (2007) observation that *look*- and *listen*-prefacing in responsive utterances “intercede” and “redirect” lines of action initiated by a prior turn is apposite here, where turn-initial “Guarda” / “Look”, launches a redirection. As in Extract 6, the conduct formulation is produced in such a way as to challenge the legitimacy of what is being said: “going back to when I first got here” does not engage with the here-and-now situation, and is thus proposed as unreasonable and thus unwarranted, just as “putting words in our mouths” accuses the recipient of misrepresenting the speaker. Like the other accusations we have seen, the conduct formulation is produced at a point where the charge sheet against the speaker is being significantly upgraded.

In our other cases, the target of a conduct formulation backs down, either by providing a downgraded formulation of his or her course of action, or ultimately by providing an account for it. Here, Guido at lines 27-28 initially concedes Denis's position, but then launches what is hearably about to be a contrastive accusation aimed at Denis

(“però dato che tu...” / “but since you...”), which is, in the event, intercepted by Denis in interjacent overlap. Just as Phil in Extract 5 partially concedes the accusation leveled at him and stands his ground, Guido in a similar fashion, concedes, mobilizing his own attribution of fault. In all the cases examined here, we thus see that a conduct formulation serves to challenge a line of action but does not altogether subvert it.

We have now seen, across a range of data, the sequential origins and implications of the conduct formulation. It is used by a speaker as a response to an imputation to them of some form of misconduct. It is produced in response to an upgrade on prior attempts by the recipient to engage the speaker in aligning with their project. In producing the conduct formulation, a speaker challenges the legitimacy of a recipient’s course of action, rendering them accountable for that action; it is a diversionary practice that shifts the terms of engagement. In response, the recipient engages with the charge embodied in the conduct formulation by using resources that include denying it, conceding it, accounting for it (and in the case of Extract 1, all three), or by reformulating their prior action in more conciliatory terms. Their responses also lay claim to the basic validity of their ongoing project.

## **6. *Discussion and conclusions***

Our analysis of a specific interactional practice, the conduct formulation, has exposed one means by which an interactant (speaker B), who is the target of an ongoing accusation or implied accusation, may “turn the tables” on a recipient (speaker A) by not addressing the substance of their turn, but instead formulating the means by which they have prosecuted it as somehow objectionable. These challenges clearly emerge in contexts where A is in some way censorious of, or admonishing B, and so by definition, contexts of disaffiliation and dissent. As formulations of another’s prior action, conduct formulations render that ongoing action accountable. They are produced at points where A’s efforts to get B to align with their project are significantly escalated – turns which themselves may be hearable as direct accusations (e.g. ‘Maybe this stuff doesn’t annoy you...’ in Extract 2) but which equally may not (e.g. ‘Come on!’ in Extract 3). Just as A escalates the terms of engagement (e.g. ‘JES’ LET ME DO:: this’, Extract 1, B’s conduct formulation is similarly an escalation (e.g. ‘I don’t know why you’re being so aggressive’) from the other interactional resources hitherto deployed. As responses to escalated moves from A which themselves are responsive to resistance from B, conduct formulations are thus products of the sequential

management of accusations – whether or not these accusations are explicitly formulated as such.

In some cases, speaker A may be displaying an orientation to the institutionalized entitlements associated with particular aspects of social identity. So in Extract 3, a father claims the right to admonish his child for an offense committed against her mother (see, in this connection, Sterponi, 2003; Zinken & Ogiermann, 2011),<sup>9</sup> and in Extract 6 a staff member claims the right to imply lack of engagement by clients. However, in other contexts, we see no such entitlement on display: The interactions take place between peers. In Extract 5, Phil and Cath are co-workers on a project; in Extract 7, Guido and Denis are both clients. Such instances show that the conduct formulation is in principle available to anyone at any time, representing the point at which these displays of entitlement are subverted. While such displays are immediately resisted in various ways, either tacitly (such as Emily's non-responses to Simon in Extract 3) or more overtly (as in Denis's vigorous responses to Guido in Extract 7), it is only with the conduct formulation that B reverses the direction of accountability. In formulating A's conduct as morally sanctionable, B arrests what had hitherto been a line of talk calling him or her to account and pushes back using the most proximal resource available: A's own current conduct. The conduct formulation thus serves to redirect the trajectory of the talk at that point, and to propose resetting the terms of engagement on a more conciliatory basis.

The conduct formulations we have seen are produced in a range of formats. In one case, Extract 3, the conduct formulation 'Why are you shouting at me' explicitly pursues accountability by means of its 'Why' question format. Extract 7, "you are going back to when I first got here" is formulated as a declarative statement. Extract 1, 'I dunno why you're being so aggressive' combines both interrogative and declarative by embedding the question in a statement that, by dint of claiming ignorance over something in the recipient's knowledge domain (Heritage 2012), is hearable as an interrogative. In Extract 2, a speaker embeds the conduct formulation in a directive reproof by means of an imperative: 'Don't put words in our mouths...'. Whatever the format of the conduct formulation, A's response engages with the accusation it embodies. In some cases, this takes the form of disputing the formulation and proposing an alternative formulation (e.g. Extract 6, "No. I'm asking"; Extract 3 "Well, let's just have a conversation") which deletes the complainable element of

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<sup>9</sup> Note in this connection the possessive construction in the design of the accusation: "wearing your Mum's clothes on Facebook", which invokes the general principle of not taking things without permission, as opposed to "wearing Mum's clothes...", which indexes the local relationship of mother, father and daughter.

the conduct (“putting words into our mouths” or “shouting”) while resuming the basic initiative they have taken. Such a hearable downgrade to a more neutral, and less accountable, characterisation of their own conduct is an implicit concession in the particular face of B’s challenge, before the prior line of talk is resumed. However, as we have seen, not all conduct formulations are responded to with denials and reformulations; in Extract 7, indeed, speaker A – Guido – accepts, in overlap, the charge leveled against him before resuming his own project. And in Extract 5 we see embodied the very interactional bind created by the conduct formulation. Phil’s initial denial, then concession, and subsequent re-denial and account shows precisely how a denial risks also disavowing the principle that motivated his course of action and thus denying the warrantability of the initial accusation. So to concede that he is being aggressive is also to hold fast to the warrant for it; and in ultimately showing accountability for his conduct, he concedes to the moral sanction implicit in Cath’s conduct formulation.

We thus see that one interactional implication of the conduct formulation is to provide a check on A’s course of action. It is the means by which B questions the legitimacy of proceeding in this manner by invoking the accountability of that course of action. However, in only one of our cases here (Extract 1), does A’s response explicitly address this and include an account. In the other cases, the accountability of A’s course of action is managed more implicitly, in the form of downgraded reformulations of their project, or conceded, as in Extract 7. In all cases, however, we find that A backs down in some fashion, effectively reducing the intensity of their course of action (with an account in Extracts 1 and 5, reformulation in Extracts 2, 3, and 6, and concession in Extract 7), whilst seeking to forward their ongoing project – thus underlining its basic validity – rather than abandoning it. In backing down, and so proposing to proceed on a more conciliatory basis, speakers show attention to the accountability that the conduct formulation has brought to the surface of the talk: the accountability that underlies all cooperative courses of action.

## **Funding**

Collection of the Italian data was funded by the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European’s Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7=2007-2013) under REA grant agreement no 626893. The contents of this article reflect only the views of the authors and not the views of the European Commission.

## **APPENDIX: Abbreviations**



1 = first person 2 = second person 3 = third person A = accusative D = dative DIM = diminutive EX = existential F = feminine G = genitive GER = gerund FUT = future IM = impersonal	IMP = imperative INF = infinitive IPF = past imperfect M = masculine N = nominative P = plural PRT = particle PSTP = past participle RFL = reflexive S = singular SBJ = subjunctive
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