



Tools of Engagement: Selecting a Next Speaker in Australian Aboriginal Multiparty Conversations

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ABSTRACT

Building on earlier Conversation Analytic work on turn-taking and response mobilization, we use video-recorded multiparty conversations to consider in detail how Australian Aboriginal participants in conversation select a next speaker in turns that are grammatically designed as questions. We focus in particular on the role of a range of embodied behaviors, such as gaze direction, body orientation, and pointing, to select—or avoid selecting—a next speaker. We use data from four remote Aboriginal communities to also explore the claims from ethnographic research that Aboriginal conversations typically occur in nonfocused participation frames. Data are in Murrinhpatha, Garrwa, Gija, and Jaru with English translations.

Comparative approaches to Conversation Analysis (CA; e.g., Sidnell, 2009) have confirmed that many of the basic mechanisms of interaction, including turn-taking and sequence organization, appear to be universal across human societies. This work has also revealed ways in which cultural variation may have an impact on how participation is achieved, thereby enabling researchers to revisit claims about cultural norms of social interaction made in earlier ethnographic work. For example, Sidnell (2001) investigated conversation in Guyana, addressing claims by Reisman (1974) about apparently atypical patterns of overlap and interruption in Antiguan Creole. Sidnell found that to the contrary, in the similar Guyanese community, speakers did orient to the rules for systematic turn-taking originally described in Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). Similarly, Bilmes (1996), in his study of Muang conversations in northern Thailand, found that once he had learned the basics of the language, he was able to recognize conversational practices, such as how to respond to unexpected or ambiguous conversational turns or how to interpret a nonliteral utterance as making a nonexplicit point. Bilmes noted that these were “immediately transparent to a non-native” (p. 176). Bilmes did add, however, that as an “outsider” lacking cultural competence, to understand some of the references in the conversations he needed to ask his Muang informants about the fuller cultural context.

While these two studies show how CA microanalysis can reveal commonalities in conversational practices between speakers from very different cultures, Tanaka (2000) has shown how CA can be used to explain differences. In her study of Japanese conversation, she shows how the basic SOV word order of Japanese, with turn-final predicates, as well as a range of utterance final particles, means that recipients’ recognition of what an utterance is being designed to achieve is delayed until near the end of the utterance, in contrast to a language like English, where the action projected by an utterance is regularly apparent early on. This has implications for how turn-taking is organized, although the basic turn-taking mechanisms described for other languages still underlie these differences.

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Studies such as these show that detailed empirical investigation is needed to establish which facets of conversation may be culturally variable and to what degree they may vary. Since Sidnell's work, a number of studies have shown the value of comparing conversational interaction across languages (Dingemanse, Blythe, & Dirksmeyer, 2014; Dingemanse & Floyd, 2014; Dingemanse et al., 2015; Enfield et al., 2013; Enfield, Stivers, & Levinson, 2010; Floyd, Manrique, Rossi, & Torreira, 2016; Floyd et al., *in press*; Fox et al., 2013; Stivers et al., 2009). Having documented specific practices (e.g., questions and answers, repairs, recruitments) within specific cultures, a valid comparison can be made across cultures because the corpora have been recorded, sampled, and transcribed in similar ways (Dingemanse et al., 2015; Enfield et al., 2010; Floyd, Rossi, & Enfield, *in press*).

In the spirit of this work, we investigate the degree to which cultural variation impacts upon participation management within informal, multiparty conversation. We particularly consider the linguistic and embodied practices involved in next-speaker selection in four Australian Aboriginal communities. Our starting point is a set of related claims based on participant observation that have become well established in the description of Aboriginal conversational style (e.g., Eades, 1982, 2000, 2007, 2013; Evans & Wilkins, 2000; Walsh, 1991, 1994, 1997). In this work it has been suggested that Aboriginal conversationalists have a high tolerance for nonfocused participation frames, and people are not obliged to promptly speak at a next Transition Relevance Place.

Walsh (1991, 1994, 1997) has summarized this pattern as involving a more "broadcast" rather than recipient-directed style, contrasting it with what he refers to as "Anglo White Middle Class" Australian ways of speaking. He suggests that "control" is by the hearer, who may opt into an ongoing interaction or not. Walsh characterizes Aboriginal talk as "communal": "Talk [...] need not be directed to a particular individual" (1997, p. 8), and "there need not be any direct response" (1991, p. 3). Features attributed to this conversational style include that people need not face each other; eye contact is not essential; "long" periods of silence need not be avoided; and there is little compulsion to answer questions.¹

In typological work on Aboriginal languages, Evans and Wilkins (2000) took up Walsh's observations about eye contact to develop their account for why Aboriginal cultures tend to metaphorically associate knowledge with hearing rather than seeing, stating:

A preferred seating pattern among friends is side by side (or even back to back) and people will only be 'face to face' if there is a significant distance between them or they are separated by something like a fire, and even then, the gaze will typically not be directed towards an interlocutor for any significant length of time. (p. 582)

Along with Walsh (1991), these authors have been cited in Rossano, Brown, and Levinson (2009, p. 192) as providing an example of culture-specific patterns of gaze behavior in interaction.

This characterization of conversational talk as lacking designated recipients and obligations on recipients to respond is at variance with what Conversation Analysts have identified as basic, universal mechanisms of turn-taking. CA assumes that talk is generally directed toward intended recipients, rather than broadcast for no one in particular, and in such cases turn-taking Rule 1a states that the selected speaker is obliged to speak next (Sacks et al., 1974). Further, certain kinds of initiating actions produced by speakers make relevant particular preferred responses (e.g., a question obliges the recipient to respond, preferably with an answer) (Schegloff, 2007; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

The disjunction between ethnographic claims about Aboriginal conversational style and the foundational findings on turn-taking in CA was noted in Mushin and Gardner's examination of turn-taking in conversations in the Australian language Garrwa (Gardner, 2010; Gardner & Mushin, 2015; Mushin & Gardner, 2009, 2011). They show that Garrwa speakers do generally orient to the turn-taking rules set out in Sacks et al. (1974) and indeed that sometimes troubles do arise in next-speaker selection. However, Mushin and Gardner (2009) also show that conversations in Garrwa can feature lengthy interturn silences that are neither oriented to as lapses nor as problematic. Gardner

¹There are real-world consequences for the general acceptance of these observations, as they have formed the basis for guidelines to cross-cultural communication written for non-indigenous health workers, legal workers, and school teachers (e.g., Eades, 1992; Hughes & Andrews, 1988; Keefe, 1992; Lowel, 2001; Morgan, 2006).

and Mushin (2015) attribute these longer gaps to what they call “extended transition spaces” and consider whether this is a feature of Aboriginal culture or whether it could be the result of unhurried talk more generally. Similarly, Gardner (2010) finds that nonresponses to some kinds of next-speaker selection in the same corpus of conversations do not result in explicit displays of trouble.

Gardner and Mushin’s work to date has focused on the timing of turns in one Aboriginal language community. In this article we expand on this earlier work through a comparison of video-recorded multiparty conversations in four different Australian Aboriginal languages. Our focus here is on exploring to what extent Aboriginal interactants adhere to the conversational norms assumed in the ethnographic work cited earlier, considering in particular the embodied resources used by participants to select a next speaker and how to account for sequences that appear to be unfocused and broadcast in the ways that Walsh describes.

Our corpus consists of 24 video-recorded informal multiparty conversations from Aboriginal communities across Northern and North Western Australia, where four different traditional languages are spoken: Murrinhpatha,² Garrwa, Gija, and Jaru, in addition to local creole varieties and Aboriginal English (see Figure 1).³ The recordings were made to document conversational use of these highly endangered languages. Participants normally assisted in the transcription of their own conversations, allowing them to veto passages from recordings they considered unsuitable for publication. All data have been collected with the fully informed consent of all participants, in accordance with ethics protocols granted by the following institutions: the University of Queensland, the University of Sydney, the University of Melbourne, the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, and Macquarie University. Garrwa and Murrinhpatha conversationalists have been anonymized (with pseudonyms), whereas the names of Gija and Jaru participants have been retained (as per the wishes expressed on their consent forms). The analysis we present here is based on 4 hours of transcribed Murrinhpatha, approximately 90 minutes of transcribed Garrwa, and



Figure 1. A map of northern Australia showing the locations of the four languages.

²Although Walsh worked widely, documenting a number of Australian languages, he is best known for work on the Murrinhpatha language. It is thus fitting that we investigate his model in conversation conducted in the same language he was observing.

³The languages we have investigated for this study are both typologically diverse in the Australian context and also represent different states of endangerment. Murrinhpatha is spoken by all generations in the community of Wadeye where most of our video recordings took place; Garrwa and Gija are spoken in daily life only by the oldest generation in their communities, with younger generations speaking local varieties of Kriol; Jaru is still spoken by several elders in Halls Creek and by most adults in Yaruman (Ringer’s Soak).

50 minutes of transcribed Gija conversation. The Jaru corpus, the most recently recorded in our sample, has 12 minutes transcribed.

We employ multimodal analyses of multiparty conversation as a means for considering the mechanisms for engaging next speakers in interaction. Starting from the ethnographic observations detailed earlier, we direct our attention to the claims that in Aboriginal conversation contributions need not be recipient directed; participants need not orient to each other bodily and need not make eye contact. We focus on sequences where current speakers appear to select another to talk and in particular, on action sequences initiated with interrogatively cued (content or polar) questions.

The article is structured as follows: In the next section we set our analysis within its methodological frame by introducing the “tools of engagement” to be considered. In the following section we examine three types of trajectories: first, where the selection of next speakers appears to be unproblematic; second, where problems emerge; and third, where it appears that no particular speaker has been selected.

Tools of engagement

There are two key dimensions to successfully eliciting another person’s participation for imminent action: person selection and action ascription. When it is clear who is being selected and what that person is being selected to do, next-speaker selection proceeds in a reasonably straightforward manner. Both verbal and nonverbal signals can be used to manipulate the situation so that a selected speaker takes the floor to respond. We call these verbal and nonverbal resources “tools of engagement.”

In earlier turn-taking research, verbal tools were prioritized, presumably because most of the original data used to develop the turn-taking rules outlined in Sacks et al. (1974) were audio-recorded telephone conversations where nonverbal cues were not available. However, by focusing only on the verbal, we miss out on a whole set of other practices and resources that contribute to turn-taking in face-to-face encounters.

A number of such “tools of engagement” have been well substantiated. For example, Lerner (2003) applied multimodal analyses of video-recorded multiparty conversation in American English, specifically examining next-speaker selection. He noted that within a question, a second-person pronoun (*you*) will *indicate* that someone is being addressed to take the next turn. Which person is designated to take that turn is either conveyed explicitly (via eye gaze or address terms, etc.) or else tacitly though implicature: The current speaker pragmatically indexes an individual’s superior knowledge of the events or matters being discussed, relative to the co-present others’ knowledge.

More recently, Stivers and Rossano (2010) identified four design features of initiating turns that increase the likelihood of a response, based on analysis of a range of action sequences including both canonical questions and answers and sequences in which the conditional relevance of the second pair-part is more doubtful, such as first and second assessments. These are listed in Table 1. They include two that relate to the grammatical construction of the turn and two that overlap with those mentioned by Lerner.

This work mostly focused on dyadic interactions; however, next-speaker selection is more complex in multiparty interaction. Would-be respondents must decide whether an initiating turn:

- selects *for* a next speaker to respond,
- selects *which* next speaker should respond,
- selects *how* the next speaker should respond.

Table 1. Stivers and Rossano’s Response Mobilizing Features.

1	Interrogative lexico-morphosyntax (word order, question words/particles/affixes)
2	Prosody that is associated in that language with interrogativity
3	Epistemic skewing toward the recipient
4	Speaker gaze toward the recipient

It is only in multiparty conversation that current speakers are presented with choices to make about who (if anyone) to select as next speaker. In this context, we can see that the four design features identified by Stivers and Rossano blend two distinct issues: inducing a response (*for* a next speaker) and selecting a specific new speaker (*which* next speaker). Features 1 and 2 in Table 1 are concerned with the linguistic construction of initial turns—specifically how strongly formulated they are as questions, requests, or offers, etc. (i.e., as designed to elicit information or physical action). Features 3 and 4 are predominantly concerned with *who* is being selected to provide the elicited response, as are other features not covered in their schema.

Since the earlier ethnographic work on Aboriginal conversational behavior downplays the role of gaze direction for next-speaker selection, we particularly focus on the fourth of Stivers and Rossano's response mobilizing features—the contribution of gaze as well as other aspects of the orientation of head and body to establishing participation frameworks, in the context of particular types of seating configurations.

Eye gaze has long been held to play a role in regulating turn transitions in face-to-face conversation (Goodwin, 1980, 1981; Kendon, 1967), especially with regard to speakers' withdrawal and redeployment of recipient-directed gaze. However, whereas gaze by speaker toward an addressee near transition-relevance places was initially thought to yield the floor, the function of such gaze behavior is now thought to depend on sequence types (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2002; Rossano, 2013). Much of the gaze research in human-human interaction consists of psychological studies conducted under laboratory conditions; most recently these combine conversation analytic and statistical methods and utilize eye-tracking glasses. Thus Holler and Kendrick (2015) investigate speaker-directed gaze in self-selection by unaddressed recipients, while Kendrick and Holler (2017) find that gaze by responders toward questioners is involved in signaling whether the forthcoming response is preferred or dispreferred.

There have been few naturalistic studies of gaze in multiparty conversation. Rossano et al. (2009) investigated variation in gaze behavior across three different cultures (Italians, Tzeltal Mayans, and Yéli Dnye speakers from Rossel Island) in dyadic conversation. Despite vast differences in the amount of mutual gaze overall (especially between Tzeltal and Yéli Dnye speakers), for each group the likelihood of there being gaze by the current speaker to the addressee across question-and-answer pairs was substantially higher than vice versa. In multiparty interaction Goodwin (1979) and Lerner (2003) attributed a function of speaker gaze to indicating which party is being addressed. Thus gaze by the producer of a question containing the recipient indicator *you* will designate the gazed-at recipient as the selected next speaker (Lerner, 2003, p. 182).

Another important consideration for how gaze may be utilized for speaker selection is the positioning of participants with respect to each other. Kendon (1990, pp. 209–237) describes a fluid arrangement of participants that he calls an *F-formation*, which he takes to be a formation that “facilitates the maintenance of a common focus of attention” (p. 211). An individual's “transactional segment” is “the space into which he looks and speaks, into which he reaches to handle objects” (p. 211). It encompasses the arc projected 30° either side of the sagittal plane (see Figure 2). While participants often turn their necks or twist their bodies to gaze beyond their transactional segments, they soon reorient themselves as before. When the transactional segments of conversational participants overlap, we get an F-formation (see Figure 3). This is the formation characteristic of focused encounters (Goffman, 1963). F-formations are the arrangements most conducive to achieving mutual eye gaze.

Participants vary in the level of commitment they display toward their F-formation in the way they face each other and in the activities they are engaged in while conversing (Mihas, 2017; Schefflen, 1972). While F-formations may pertain to individuals who are seated or standing, in the interactions we consider, most participants are in fact seated, either on the ground or on chairs. Seating arrangements are less fluidly adjusted to the localized contingencies of talk than are the positions of standing participants. Seating arrangements, as well as the presence of external factors that compete with participants for the focus of attention, can determine which tools of engagement participants are able to use.

The claim in ethnographic work that Aboriginal people needn't face each other when conversing is tantamount to saying that they need not maintain an F-formation. We therefore consider the extent to

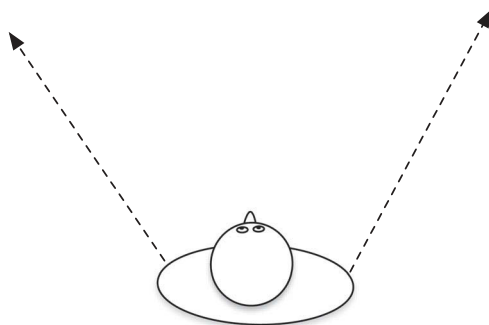


Figure 2. A participant's transactional segment.

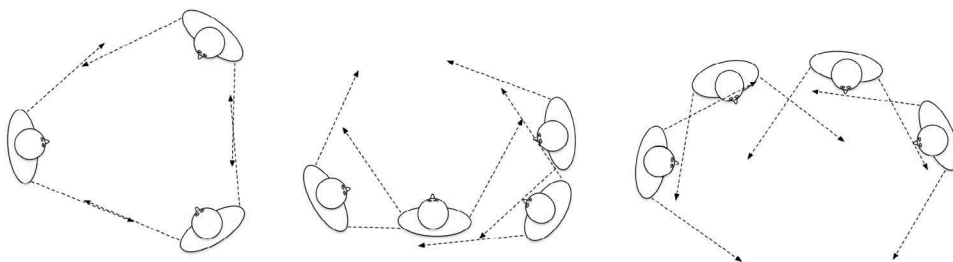


Figure 3. From left to right, a classic F-formation, an L-Shaped F-formation, and a semicircular F-formation.

which participants maintain F-formations during conversations. [Figure 4](#) shows the seating configurations from the 24 video recordings of multiparty conversations that comprise our corpus. In the communities we examine, people often sit outside on the ground in groups. They do not necessarily face each other and are frequently oriented to other phenomena such as fires; passing people, vehicles, or animals; or aspects of the natural environment.

While in this graphic only 10 pairs of participants face each other directly, we do see that there are reasonable F-formations in all but eight of the 24 scenes: C, G, H, K, R, S, V, and W. So while it is clearly true that participants aren't compelled to directly face each other when conversing, it is also clear that participants generally do orient themselves so they can easily return each other's gaze. Importantly, the 33% of arrangements that are not F-formations complicate the use of eye gaze as a tool of engagement.

In the following sections our discussion focuses on the resources that speakers have drawn on (or not) in producing an initiating action and whether or not responses appear to be implicated. We focus on action sequences initiated with an interrogatively cued question⁴ because questions and answers make for canonical adjacency pairs, and questions have the morphosyntax most likely to mobilize a response (Stivers & Rossano, 2010). We expect that if the patterns of participation engagement differ from those described elsewhere, then this would evidence different conversational norms being at work in these Aboriginal communities. In the third section we examine cases in which next-speaker allocation transpires straightforwardly, while in the fourth section we consider sequences where speaker selection requires a second attempt to secure a response, thus indicating some trouble with the initial turn allocation. In the fifth section we turn to examples where

⁴The interrogative formats we consider are "content questions" (which correspond to "Wh-questions" in English) and polar (yes/no) questions.

interrogative turns were neither responded to nor oriented to by participants as being sequentially implicative of a response.⁵

Unproblematic next-speaker selection

In each language we find unproblematic cases where next-speaker selection is handled through the production of an overt question, responded to promptly by the selected next speaker, and with the response indicating that the recipient has understood that turn as requiring an answer. In the three cases presented in this section, participants are sitting in F-formations, making gaze available as a resource. We attend to the grammatical and prosodic design of the turn and to the use of vocative expressions and gaze in designating a selected next speaker. In these successful transitions, certain tools deal predominantly with *how* recipients ought to respond, while others deal with *who* should respond.

In Extract (1) from Murrinhpatha, the three participants—Karen, Jenny, and Nelly—are sitting in an F-formation, and the question-producer uses a personal name and recipient-directed gaze to target her addressee.

(1) Murrinhpatha: Museum (20090707JBvid04_650540_659370). Scene B⁶

1 Nelly Da minu nganikutnuka nyindamatha.
 da mi -nu ngani -kut -nu -ka nyini
 NC:PL/T NC:VEG-DAT 1SG.S.4be.FUT-collect-FUT-TOP ANAPH
 damatha
 INTS
 At the shop, I'll get food with it ((money)).

2 (1.1)

3 Karen Q→ thangkumi [panikutnu Jenny;]
 thangkumi pani -kut -nu Jenny
 what_VEG? 1NS.INCL.S.4be.FUT-collect-FUT ?name
 What sort of food are we going to get, Jenny?
 [Figure 5]

4 (.)

5 Jen Sweet;
 {Something} sweet.

6 (0.4)

7 Karen <Awu:, (0.4) mi lawam::,>
 awu mi lawam
 no NC:VEG bread
 No, flour/bread.

At line 3 Karen looks to her daughter Jenny and asks what sort of food they will get, adding her daughter's name and at the same time angling her head to gaze at her recipient (Figure 5). Jenny meets the gaze and promptly answers the question at line 5, suggesting they purchase something sweet. The turn transition proceeds without a hitch.

Just prior to Extract (2) from Jaru, Barbara had recounted a story about a white man who got lost in the bush. In the extract, Judy uses gaze toward her targeted recipient both to designate her as the next speaker

⁵While we have examples in our corpus from all four languages for all of ways of engaging that we discuss here, we have limited our discussion to only a few examples in the interest of space.

⁶For each extract, the relevant seating arrangement is depicted as one of the “scenes” in Figure 4.



Figure 5. Line 3 of Extract (1): “Jenny what sort of food are we going to get?”

and to resolve overlap, which is relevant because at precisely this point the conversation undergoes a brief schism (Egbert, 1997).⁷

(2) Jaru: *Where from that whitefella?* (20160614JB_Q8_01_419265_430608). Scene T

1 Claire One [last [year-
 One/once last year-

2 Naida [< No[:. no.>

3 Judy Q→ [↑Wanyjingarna↑ nyila gardiya.]
 wanyji-ngarna nyila gardiya
 where-dweller that whitefella
 Where's that whitefella from?
 [Figure 6]

4 (.)

5 Claire [°Jangu gayini yanani mula][nggawu kangaroo garra]=
 jangu gayini yanani-i mula-nggawu kangaroo garra
 ANAPH north go-PST.IMPV PROX-ALL kangaroo PURP
 He came here to the north in order to

6 Barb [(0.9)][nyaa nga Coopers' Store]
 nyawa nga Coopers' Store
 PROX 3SG Coopers' Store
 This one {from} Coopers' Store.

In line 3, Judy turns to Barbara (Figure 6) and asks her (in overlap with both Claire [line 1] and Naida [line 2])⁸ where the man was from (*Wanyjingarna nyila gardiya*). Barbara answers by naming the shop in the nearby town where he works.

Judy's elevated head-twist toward Barbara (Figure 6) telegraphs both her question (line 3) and her eye gaze as being specifically directed to Barbara, who, having just told the story, knows the most about the events and who was involved. The question word *wanyjingarna* (“where from”) is audibly higher in pitch than Claire and Naida's overlapping talk. This has the effect of drawing Barbara's gaze (Figure 6) such that,

⁷In this extract we will concentrate on the exchange between Barbara and Judy. To facilitate the transcript's readability, we've grayed out Claire and Naida's exchange.

⁸Lines 1, 2, and 3 represent an almost simultaneous start that results in the schism.



Figure 6. Line 5 of Extract (2). “Where’s that whitefella from?”

after 0.9 seconds, she answers the question.⁹ Thus, the prosodic marking, the elevated head twist, and recipient-directed gaze all, despite the schism, resolve the overlap and secure the reciprocity of the selected next speaker, once mutual gaze is attained.

Extract (3) from Garrwa is also unproblematic, but the manner of person selection is tacit, rather than explicit, through epistemic skewing.

(3) Garrwa: Nayibi:Office Conversation:RR_Office_Revised_161025:774. Scene S.

- 01 Kate ↑Yanka ng’;= ↑wajba ya↑linkany’,=
 Yanka ngana wajba yali-nkanyi
 how 1SG.ACC give 3PL?-DAT
 Can {you} give me {the book},
- 02 =burruburruny’;= janga najba.
 burruburru-nyi ja=nga najba
 book?-DAT FUT=1SG.NOM see
 I {want} to see {it}.
- 03 (1.3)
- 04 Kate ↑Najba ↓jangayu,= ↑jungku nan:,= burruburru (0.5)
 Najba ja=ngayu jungku nanda burruburru
 see FUT=1SG.NOM sit that book
 I’m going to sit and read the book,
- 05 ngala ngada*rrijba yany:ba:.*hhh
 ngala ngadarrijba yanyba
 connector ?? talk
 while {you keep on} talk{ing}.
- 06 (1.1) ((Daphne passes book to Kate. Crashing sound.))
- 07 Hilda -A::[:h
- 08 Kate Q→ [He:y:;=wanya ninji;=*burradabayi.*
 Hey wanya ninji burradaba=yi
 Hey what 2SG.NOM drop=PST
 Hey, what did you drop?
 [Figure 7
- 09 (0.3)
- 10 Daph Nayibi.
 Knife
 Knife

⁹Barbara’s answer at line 8 is not unusually delayed. Speculatively, she may have held back her reply long enough to ascertain that Claire’s softly spoken explanation at line 5 is not a response to Barbara’s question (which it isn’t because it belongs to an altogether parallel sequence).



Figure 7. Line 8 of Extract (3): “Hey, what did you drop?”

The three Garrwa women—Hilda, Daphne, and Kate—are sitting around a school office. In the video, Hilda is obscured by Kate (Figure 7). At line 1 Kate asks Daphne to pass her a schoolbook, accounting for her request initially at line 2 (“I want to see it”) and then more fully at lines 4 and 5 (“I’m going to sit and read the book, while (you) keep on talking”).¹⁰ Daphne reaches behind to pull the book off the shelf and passes it to Kate (line 6). At this moment something crashes to the ground underneath the table. Upon hearing the noise, Kate asks (without gazing at either Daphne or Hilda, Figure 7) what she had dropped (*Hey, wanya ninji burradabayi*, line 8). Daphne promptly answers that it was a knife (*Nayibi*, line 10). Although the second-person pronoun *ninji* is a recipient indicator (Lerner, 2003, p. 182), because Kate’s gaze was directed neither at Daphne nor Hilda, her question at line 8 lacks an explicit recipient designator. Despite this, Daphne answers the question because she is epistemically advantaged in that she can see what fell while the others cannot.

In these three extracts next-speaker selection by a current speaker has been operationalized straightforwardly by directing a question toward a specific addressee who is designated using “engagement tools” such as eye gaze, head turns, marked prosody, vocative reference, or implicature based on epistemic asymmetries. In this respect, Sacks et al.’s (1974) Rule 1a (current speaker selects next speaker) is executed straightforwardly, as that rule predicts.

Although the seating arrangements in the three examples differ, the configurations all adhere sufficiently well to an F-formation that mutual eye gaze can be readily secured (when required) without participants twisting beyond the limits of their own transactional segments.¹¹ In the next section we observe that nonadherence to this type of spatial configuration can be detrimental for effecting speaker transitions.

Problematic next-speaker selection

In this section, we examine extracts where attempts by current speakers to allocate a next speaker do not proceed as planned at the first try, so current speakers attempt to effect the desired transition a second time. In so doing, they employ more tools than in their first attempt—particularly those that specify *which* recipient ought to respond. As with the unproblematic cases, we pay attention to features identified as characteristics of Aboriginal conversational style:

¹⁰We are uncertain what *ngadarrija* (line 5) means.

¹¹In Extract (1) we have a classic F-formation, while Extract (2) is a semicircular configuration. Strictly speaking, the configuration in Extract (3) is an exception because Hilda and Kate are seated side by side along the edge of the table, not facing each other. However, because Hilda does not speak in this extract, we maintain that for Kate and Daphne at least, the arrangement is a classic F-formation.

how participants are oriented, whether and how the current speaker directs their talk toward a specific addressee, and whether mutual gaze is established.

In Extract (4) from Murrinhpatha, the current speaker (Jenny in line 5) unsuccessfully attempts to select a next speaker while facing a wall, such that her voice is projected away from her target (Nelly). When she turns around and tries again, speaker change proceeds straightforwardly.

(4) Murrinhpatha: Museum (20090707)JBvid04_289010_322450) Scene B

- 01 Karen thanguku benjamin_{nyu};
 thanguku-wa benjamin=yu
 what -EMPH _σname =CL
 What's {up} with Benjamin?
- 02 (0.3)
- 03 Nelly kardu ku^gukwa kardiwirlbirlya::;
 kardu kuguk-wa kardi -wirlbirl =ya
 NC:HUM wait -EMPH 3SG.S.4be.PIMP-stay_awake=CL
 He stays up all night.
- 04 (3.0) ((Jenny walks back into the room))
- 05 Jen Q→ [thanguku benjamin_{min};
 thanguku benjamin
 what _σname
 What's {up} with Benjamin?
 [Figure 8]
- 06 (0.7)
- 07 Karen da ngay ngurdanbundjetjitjngurran da ngarra ngayyu;
 da ngay ngurdan -wun -yetjitj=ngurran
 NC:PL/T 1s 1SG.S.29.NFUT-3PL.DO-teach =1SG.S.6go.NFUT
 da ngarra ngay=yu
 NC:PL/T LOC 1SG =CL
 I teach them at my home.
- 08 (0.7)
- 09 Jen Q→ †thanguku benjamin[_{lyu}; †]
 thanguku benjamin=yu
 what _σname =CL
 What's {up} with Benjamin?
 [Figure 9]
- 10 (0.4)
- 11 Nelly kardu birlbirlngka djegdjek;
 kardu birlbirl-ngka djegdjek
 NC:HUM alert -eye/face play
 He plays around all night.

While Jenny is in the adjacent room, Karen asks Nelly, “What’s up with Benjamin?” (line 1), which is answered by Nelly in line 3. At line 4 Jenny walks back into the room. With her back toward the two women seated on the ground (Figure 8), she places her cup of tea on a bench. She then repeats the question that Karen had just asked (“What’s up with Benjamin?”). As Nelly had just answered the same question from Karen (line 1), we have evidence that Nelly is probably the intended recipient of the question. She does indeed glance at Jenny but fails to speak during the 0.7-second silence in line 6, which could be explained by her having just placed some food in her mouth. After Karen self-selects at line 7 with an unrelated utterance, Jenny pursues a response from Nelly—re-asking the question at line 9 with higher pitch. As she does this, she turns her head toward Nelly, momentarily securing mutual eye gaze (see Figure 9). This time Nelly answers the question at line 11.



Figure 8. Line 5 of Extract (4): “What’s {up} with Benjamin?”

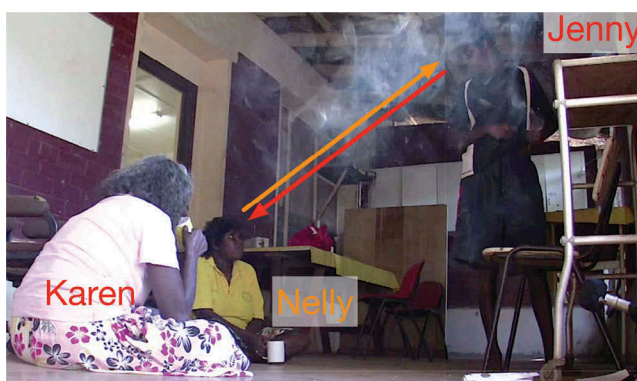


Figure 9. Line 9 of Extract (4): “What’s {up} with Benjamin?”

Jenny’s attempt at line 5 to elicit from Nelly the explanation she had previously given to Karen is an example of what Lerner calls “tacit next speaker selection,” in which the person with the relevant knowledge is tacitly selected through implicature. Note that at this point Jenny has no gaze or bodily orientation toward the recipient—i.e., there is no F-formation—neither is there an explicit recipient designator. Because Jenny’s voice is projected away from the targeted recipient into the wall, her voice is most likely muffled. When three “tools of engagement”—recipient-directed gaze, elevated pitch, and voice projection in the direction of her target—are added to the recast turn at line 9, the pressure to respond is increased and speaker transition is effected (cf. Stivers & Rossano, 2010).

The efficacy of gaze for next-speaker selection hinges on the recipient detecting the gaze being directed toward them (Goodwin, 1979, 1980; Lerner, 2003). In Extract (5) from Gija, three participants are seated side by side in an approximately linear arrangement, thus not in an F-formation. In this extract gaze selection is seemingly compromised by the seating arrangement.

(5) Gija. 20150617JB_video_03_54065_64475 Scene V

1 Eileen Q→ [Gabuwa jarrag yarrirnkili.]
 gabuwa jarrag yarrirn=kili
 what speak 1NS.INCL.S.SAY/DO.FUT=PL
What are we going to talk about?
 [Figure 10]

2 (1.4)

3 Eileen Q→ [†Gabuwa† yarrirn:kili.]
 gabuwa yarrirn=kili
 what 1NS.INCL.S.SAY/DO.FUT=PL
What are we going to talk about?
 [Figure 11]

4 (0.8)

5 Phyllis [Aa gabuwa yarrirnkili.]
 Aa gabuwa yarrirn=kili
 HES what 1NS.INCL.S.SAY/DO.FUT=PL
Uh, what are we going to talk about?
 [Figure 12]

6 (1.5)

7 Rusty Warnawarnarram ba- balngarri wanamandeyarri.
 warna-warnarram bal-ngarri wanamande=yarri
 RDP-long_ago tell-REL 3SG.SAY/DO.NFUT=1NS.INCL.IO
About what they used to te- tell us a long time ago.

At line 1 of Extract (5) Eileen turns her head toward Phyllis (Figure 10) and asks a question, *Gabuwa jarrag yarrirnkili?* (“What are we going to talk about?”). Phyllis is seated next to Eileen, with her head bowed down, looking at something in her hands. She does not appear to be attending to Eileen. Rusty is looking toward the two women and can see that Eileen’s gaze is not directed toward him. When Phyllis fails to respond after 1.4 seconds, Eileen—still gazing at Phyllis—pursues a response at line 3 by asking essentially the same question (*Gabuwa yarrirnkili* [“What are we going to talk about?”]), although at a somewhat higher pitch. Once again she cranes her neck in Phyllis’s direction (Figure 11). By not meeting Eileen’s gaze, Phyllis does not (apparently) detect that Eileen’s questions are being directed toward her specifically to answer. Thus, at line 5 Phyllis glances up and re-presents the question as a problem for the group to solve (Figure 12), rather than as one that she herself has been selected to answer. Rusty can see that Phyllis’s gaze is not selecting anyone and eventually he provides the answer (line 7) to her question. The lack of F-formation between Eileen and Phyllis has compromised the multimodal message delivered through the question.

Eileen’s questions are delivered multimodally, specifically for Phyllis. Yet Phyllis is effectively blinded to the visuo-corporal components of these moves. The problem this creates is in recognizing the action being delivered by Eileen’s turns: Is the action a targeted question requiring a response from a selected recipient or an open question for anyone to answer? Arguably, when Phyllis does



Figure 10. Line 1 of Extract (5): “What are we going to talk about?”



Figure 11. Line 3 of Extract (5): “What are we going to talk about?”



Figure 12. Line 5 of Extract (5): “Uh, what are we going to talk about?”

commence speaking at line 5, it is through self-selecting to re-ask Eileen’s question, rather than as a speaker that has been allocated the floor.¹²

In Extract (6) four Jaru women have been looking over their right shoulders, waving and calling out to an infant off-screen. At the beginning of the extract, the four women turn back to face each other, reestablishing the focused interactional frame made possible by their (L-shaped) F-formation.

(6) Jaru: Where’s Mike? (20160614JB_Q8_01_478290_487943) Scene T

01 Naida	[((turns back to face others))]	
02 Barb	[((turns back to face others)) --->]	
03 Claire	↑Nyanya nga, (0.3)	[Yalunggu jurlug ba]ringgu.
	nyanya nga	yalu-nggu jurlug bari-nggu
	see.PST 3SG.	DIST-ERG be fat-ERG
	Did he see, (0.3) that fatty?	
04 Barb	Q→	[W a n y j I] [la [Mike.]
		wanyji-la Mike
		where-LOC ♂name
		Where's Mike?
	--> [Figure 13 left]	[Figure 13 right]

¹²That is, when Phyllis commences speaking, she does so by enacting the second of the Sacks et al. ordered turn-taking rules (1b), rather than the prior rule (1a) (1974, p. 704).

- 05 (0.6)
 06 Naida Mhm::;
Mhm::;
 07 (.)
 08 Judy Minyan.
No. ((shakes head))
 09 (0.9)
 10 Barb Q→ [Nyanggala Mike] [wanyjila.]
 nyangga-la Mike wanyji-la
 look-3SG.DAT Mike where-LOC
What about Mike, where is he?
 [Figure 14 left] [Figure 14 right]
 11 (0.6)
 12 Judy M[alarnda nga;
 Malarn-da nga
 place_name-LOC 3SG
He's at Mulan
 13 Naida [Mike nga malarnda yawi,
 Mike nga malarn-da yawi
 3name 3SG place_name-LOC poor_thing!
Mike is at Mulan, poor thing.
 15 Barb Mm.
Mm.

At line 3 Claire asks the others if the infant saw {something}, which Naida responds to with a noncommittal sigh *Mhm::*; (line 6), and Judy answers negatively (*Minyan* [“no”], line 8). As Claire asks her question, Judy turns around from looking at the baby, toward Claire; meanwhile Barbara pivots to face the group. Midway through her rotation (Figure 13, left), she asks Judy (apparently) where her son Mike is (*Wanyjila Mike*, line 4). As she produces the name *Mike*, Barbara’s gaze comes to rest on Judy (Figure 13, right), who is herself pivoting to face Claire, seated on her left. Judy doesn’t meet Barbara’s gaze. Barbara’s question, which was produced partly in overlap and partly while twisting, remains unanswered for the time being.

Barbara pursues the question at line 10, this time in the clear. Doing so, she points at Judy with a stick (Figure 14, left). This time, Judy hears the question and observes both the stick and Barbara’s eye gaze (Figure 14, right), so she answers the question at line 12 by announcing that Mike is at Mulan, a nearby settlement.¹³



Figure 13. Barbara turning to face Judy at line 4 of Extract (6): “Where’s Mike?”

¹³That Naida also answers the question at line 13 is probably an incidental outcome of Barbara’s stick being curved. Thus, at the stroke of the pointing gesture, the tip of the stick is aiming at Naida, while the hand that holds the stick (and indeed, Barbara’s eye gaze) is directed at Judy (see Figure 14). Furthermore, Naida’s uptake is sanctioned both epistemically, in that both possess the required information, and deontically, in that she and Judy are sisters, making Naida another “mother” of Mike, according to the Jaru kinship system.



Figure 14. Barbara securing Judy's gaze at line 10 of Extract (6): "What about Mike, where is he?"

Barbara's initial question, which was evidently intended for Mike's biological mother, Judy, fell victim to overlap, and at least some of Barbara's talk was delivered while twisting and was thus not adequately projected in the direction of her target. Despite the L-shaped F-formation, the participants' prior engagement with the baby off-screen has impacted on the otherwise focused participation frame.

Overall, we have found that interrogatively cued question turns are mostly responded to by the selected recipient, or else the lack of response is oriented to as problematic, which conforms with next-speaker selection as described in other CA accounts. What Extracts (4) to (6) show is that speakers do exert a degree of control over hearers, in that a failure to respond is noticed and then pursued using more of the tools of engagement than previously. In these pursued attempts speakers turn their heads to gaze toward their targets, so their voices are projected in the direction of their targets and away from co-present others. Thus in all four communities, speakers clearly *do* expect their selected addressees to respond accordingly.

Nonselecting interrogatives

In this section, we examine interrogative formats deployed for reasons other than selecting a next speaker. Although these turns are grammatically formatted as either content or polar questions, they do not impose conditional relevance because no specific individual is held accountable for providing an answer. In each extract participants are seated in F-formations (more or less), such that mutual gaze is achievable.¹⁴ Where the previous examples showed that current speakers did use explicit and implicit recipient designators in selecting next speakers, in these cases the interrogative turns lack explicit recipient designators (such as recipient-directed gaze), and unlike bona fide questions, the epistemic incline favors the speaker rather than the recipient. This is exemplified in Extract (7) from Murrinhpatha.

Prior to Extract (7) Dom, who has walked off-screen, had been talking about his ex-girlfriend. He had referred to her by her nickname, *Trixie*. Not recognizing the nickname, Bruce had asked Dave who Dom had been talking about.

¹⁴The caveat mentioned in FN11 with respect to Extract (3) from Garrwa applies equally to Extract (9). Although Hilda and Kate are seated side by side, Hilda does not speak in the extract. Moreover, because she is leaning forward (see Figure 19), she and Kate can see each other easily enough.

14 (1.2)
 15 Mabel Tsk (0.3) jaamandji ngarayi.=↑Aibin berrngerlbat
 jaam-wandji ngarayi Ai bin berrngerl -bat
 belly-INDF find 1SG NFUT get_funny_feeling-PROG
Tsk. I had this funny feeling in the middle
 16 mendewoondi, thoowoorranyji.
 mendewoon-di thoowoorra-wanyji
 nighttime-FOC why -INDF
of the night, I don't know why.

At the beginning of Extract (8), as Mabel's prior story about three of her grandsons draws to a conclusion (lines 1, 3), Phyllis gazes up into the sky (line 2). At lines 5 and 6, Phyllis conjoins a content question ("These clouds, why are they coming out to us?") to a polar tag question ("Is it going to rain, or what?"). The combination rings as a possible complaint; presumably that while the clouds might purport to bring rain, they are unlikely to deliver it. As she asks these questions, she gazes up into the sky and at neither of her co-participants (see Figure 16).

Eileen's reply at line 9 ("maybe for no reason") is a negative response to Phyllis's first question, which requests a reason for the presence of the clouds. Mabel's negative handshake ("no"/"nothing," line 7, Figure 17) is a negative response to this request ("no reason"). Mabel's vocal reply (*googandi* ["no reason"]) echoes Eileen's response in line 9, as well as her own prior negative handshake at line 7. Both Mabel's and Eileen's replies align with the potentially complainable stance implicit in the questions—that clouds are perhaps teasing them, being unlikely to bring rain. At line 12 Phyllis produces a second polar tag question¹⁵ ("Is the country crying, or what?"), once again, without directing her gaze at either of her co-participants (see Figure 18). This interrogative format presents a rather spiritual candidate explanation for the presence of the clouds—that the country is crying for the spirits of the deceased. Mabel then launches into a new story at lines 15 and 16. That she does this suggests that Phyllis's turn at line 12 was not produced to elicit an answer, though it does receive an acknowledging response ("Mm") from Eileen in line 13. Feasibly, it doesn't require an answer because, despite being interrogatively formatted, it delivers an assertion that constitutes Phyllis's own answer to her prior questions. Thus, the interrogatives in lines 5, 6, and 12 have a range of rhetorical functions, none of which include selecting a next speaker.

The final extract from Garrwa (9) includes four complaints from Kate, two of which are formatted interrogatively.

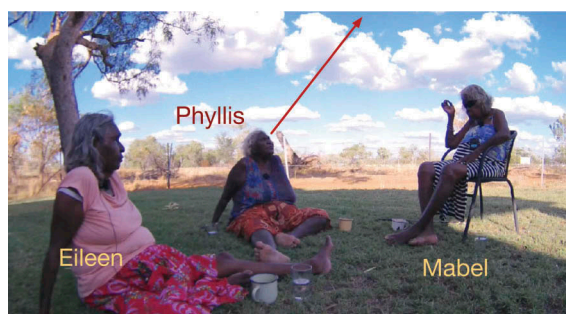


Figure 16. Line 5 of Extract (8): "These {clouds}, why are they coming out to us-?"

¹⁵This interrogative is marked as polar in two places: firstly by the polar suffix *-ma* to the coverb *ngardawoo* ("cry"), and secondly by the tag *goo gaboo* ("or what?").

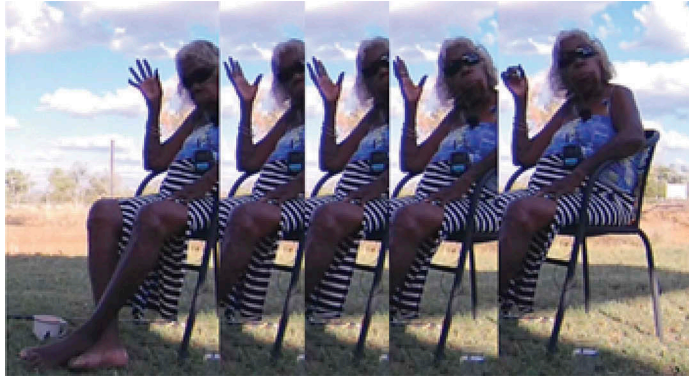


Figure 17. Mabel's negating handsign ("no"/"nothing") at line 7 of Extract (8).

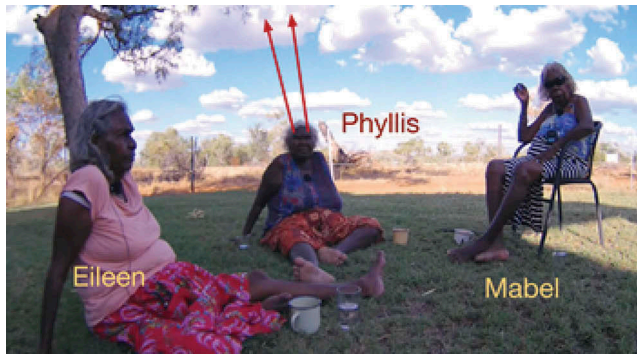


Figure 18. Line 12 of Extract (8): "Is the country is crying {for the deceased}, or what?"

(9) Garrwa: RROffice Wajarriji Scene S

- 01 Kate Any kulkul?
any turtle
Any turtle?
- 02 (0.7)
- 03 Mabel Nothin' Iy never ↑go: yet-;
Nothing, he/she's not gone yet.
((From a distance))
- 04 (3.4)
- 05 Kate Q→ [Y a ng ka] [nay';=jangay' balba wajarrijiɿ=yang:ka
Yangka nayi ja=ngayu balba wajarri-ji yangka
how here FUT=1SG.NOM go fish-PURP how
How am I going to go fishing? Which
[((Glance>Daphne))] [((Gazes to the right)) --->
- 06 Q→ >wanyi-ngi jangana ↑kuyu <ngakinyi mungkijiwanyi.]
wanyi-ngini ja=ngana kuyu ngaki-nyi mungkiji-wanyi
what-ERG FUT=1SG.ACC bring 1SG.DAT-ERG relative-ERG
of my relatives is going to take me?
--> ((Gazes right, Figure 19))]
- 07 (2.1) ((Kate's gazes over Daphne's head, toward door))
- 08 Kate >Mikukiya ngay' jarr:ba,=kulk(r)u::lɿ=↑wa:h ɿbulin(ji)kurrij
Miku=kiya ngayu jarrba kulkul wabulinkurrijba
NEG=OBLIG 1SG.NOM eat turtle wait
I don't get to eat turtle, {I've been} waiting ages.
- 09 (0.2)

10 Kate ((snort))
 11 (1.0)
 12 Daphne >Ngay' miku↓ (*mirra) barriwa*hh.
 Ngayu miku-(mirra) barriwa
 1SG.NOM NEG-INTS finished
I don't ever {get to eat turtle}, period.
 13 (5.3)

This sequence begins with Kate calling out to Mabel, who is outside the office, to ask whether anyone had collected some turtle. This receives a negative response (line 3). This prompts Kate to ask how she is going to go fishing (line 5), which can be construed as a complaint. The three old women have spent a lifetime collecting food from the bush but are no longer very mobile and have to rely on others to drive them out to collect bush food. Without pausing, Kate specifies her question more narrowly by asking which of her relatives is going to take her (line 6). These questions are both epistemically skewed toward Kate herself—she is the most likely to know how she can get out and who (if anyone) could take her, so it is perhaps unsurprising that these complaints are not responded to by the other participants. Kate follows this up with further complaints at line 8: She doesn't get to eat turtle, she's been waiting ages to eat it, to which Daphne affiliates with a matched complaint in line 12.

A further reason why Kate's interrogatively formatted complaints receive no response is that, while she very fleetingly glances at Daphne in line 5, for the remainder of this segment she gazes everywhere but at her co-participants (Figure 19). Kate's gaze even skirts over the head of Daphne (who is gazing at her) before moving toward the door (line 7). Similarly, Kate does not look at Hilda, who also is gazing toward her. Kate's follow-up complaint is that she doesn't get to eat turtle. Again, she gazes neither at Daphne nor Hilda but straight between them. Daphne *does* gaze toward Kate, self-selects and produces her affiliated complaint: She doesn't get to eat turtle either. This sequence, particularly the long pauses before (line 7) and after (lines 9–11) the complaint, is predominantly marked by gaze aversion by Kate. It is also marked by epistemic skewing toward herself.

These examples include utterances that are morphosyntactically interrogative but where the epistemic incline favors the speaker rather than the recipient. Furthermore, the fact that during production of the question the current speaker gazes away from all recipients suggests that such questions are not produced to select a specific next speaker. This in itself doesn't preclude recipients self-selecting, but the fact that sometimes speakers produce a second interrogative turn so promptly after the first¹⁶ suggests that these interrogatives do not expect "answers" so much as affiliation to



Figure 19. Line 6 of Extract (9): "Which of my relatives is going to take me?"

¹⁶For instance, Phyllis's second question at line 6 of Extract (8) after a brief disfluency, as well as Kate's second question at line 6 of (9), which is latched onto her first question.

the stance expressed by the speaker. While this might suggest that interrogative morphosyntax plays a lesser role in response mobilization than gaze direction and epistemic status, it might also be that in the absence of explicit or implicit recipient designation, alternative inferences must be drawn about the action implication of nonselecting questions. Finally it should be noted that in these nonselecting interrogative turns, participants are mostly seated in F-formations, which would allow gaze to be straightforwardly used for selecting next speakers, if so required. However, unlike the examples discussed in the fourth section, here the participants actively avoid explicit recipient designation, precluding the expectation that a specific next speaker should respond. We also see participants accordingly orient to these interrogative turns as not being questions requiring answers.

Discussion and conclusion

This research contributes to the question of how participation in conversation is achieved and how cultural variation may impact upon this. We have focused on bodily orientation, voice projection, and gaze behavior in the context of participants' configurations in space. We have also considered the use or nonuse of other tools of engagement such as vocative expressions, interrogative grammar, and prosody. In unproblematic cases, next speakers are selected without issue using tools that specify *which* recipient should respond and *how*. As discussed in the fourth section, when problems arise, second attempts are upgraded using more tools of engagement than in the initial attempts. In the fifth section we showed that interrogatively formatted turns without recipient-directed gaze are apparently built to specify “no one” as being obligated to reply, thus avoiding next-speaker selection altogether.

These results are consistent with Stivers and Rossano (2010), who showed that (in dyadic talk, predominantly) recipients are more motivated to respond when turns are interrogatively designed and accompanied by recipient-directed gaze. By focusing on multiparty conversations, we have shown that the utility of gaze as a “tool” is somewhat contingent on the bodily orientations of participants. That is, we show that problems in selecting next speakers frequently arise when seating arrangements preclude clear lines of sight between participants, and when participants *are* in F-formations, they can use gaze avoidance to design interrogative turns as “nonselecting.”

In other words, we have found that a focused arrangement of participants (an F-formation) facilitates the receipt and return of speaker gaze but doesn't guarantee it. Some tools (e.g., eye gaze, voice projection) are sensitive to the configurations in which participants arrange themselves. However, when engaging next speakers, recipient-directed gaze and epistemic status tended to trump grammatical and prosodic turn-design features. This suggests that a specification of which participant is being designated—if any—is critical for whether recipients judge a response to be warranted or optional, as well as for *how* they decide which type of response is appropriate. Although further research is needed to elaborate how these various tools work together, we can see here that attaining mutual eye gaze is important for indicating *which* recipient is being selected to speak, and that speaker-gaze is perhaps the most salient tool for effecting this¹⁷—although prosodic tools like elevated amplitude and pitch, as well as twisting one's body or craning one's neck, and pointing with sticks, etc., are also involved in drawing recipients' gaze.

We return now to the ethnographic observations that prompted our investigation—that Aboriginal conversationalists tend to “broadcast” their talk and not select specific next speakers. Most of the questions in the 24 conversations we have examined for this study are designed to mobilize particular selected recipients to respond appropriately, and if the selected recipient does not respond, a further redesigned and upgraded attempt is made. Next-speaker selection is made using tools that predominantly select *for* a next speaker (interrogative morphosyntax and prosody) and other tools that predominantly select *which* participant should respond. The person selecting tools—recipient-directed gaze, voice projection, bodily orientation and epistemic skewing toward a particular recipient—are potentially

¹⁷The person designating function of speaker gaze is also important in recruiting others to perform physical tasks, such as making tea, passing cigarettes, etc. (Blythe, *in press*).

more salient than interrogative morphosyntax and prosody.¹⁸ That is, the expectation that a conditionally relevant response should follow is defeated through their privation.

Evans and Wilkins (2000, p. 582) note that Aboriginal friends prefer to sit side by side rather than face to face and that prolonged eye gaze is not common. By contrast, our video corpus shows that configurations facilitating face-to-face conversation are more common than linear arrangements. That said, the preferred arrangements are L-shaped or semicircular F-formations (12/24 scenes, see Figure 4), which are approximately side by side. These afford each participant equal access to the same external viewpoint (e.g., a road, the ocean, etc.), as well as a view of each other. When selecting next speakers, participants who are not in F-formations *do* move their bodies so as to gaze at their targets. That is, while “prolonged” eye gaze is not common, gaze *is* used as a tool of engagement in much the same way as has been described for other cultures (Rossano et al., 2009).

As outlined in the fifth section, we do find examples of talk that appeared designed to avoid the selection of a next speaker. In these situations the interrogative turn format leaves open the possibility that a question is being asked, but the accompanying embodied behavior (i.e., gaze avoidance, body orientation away from potential recipients), as well as the epistemic skewing toward the speaker—rather than a recipient—shows that the turn is designed to be “nonselecting” of a next speaker. There are fewer of these nonselecting interrogatives in our corpus, compared to the many unproblematic examples of next-speaker selection, and the problematic examples. If Walsh’s observations about Aboriginal conversation were based on similar “nonselecting” questions, this would suggest the “broadcast” characterization might actually be a locally contingent phenomenon connected to specific actions like complaints, rather than a general feature of conversational style.

Prior work by two of the authors has indicated that some questions for which a recipient has been clearly selected do not necessarily result in an answer and that a nonanswer does not necessarily disrupt the progressivity of the talk (Gardner, 2010) and that some conversations are generally unhurried (Gardner & Mushin, 2015), at least those in small remote communities. Similarly, Blythe (in press, 2017) shows that many attempts at recruitment are ignored, and these nonresponses are often not treated as problematic. These findings suggest that the key to understanding “broadcast” ways of talking in ordinary conversation lies in understanding the relationships between particular grammatical/prosodic constructions and the actions they deliver, the configuration of participants (as enabling focused or unfocused participation), the epistemic and deontic authority of current speakers, and their embodied behavior. We leave this for future work.

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¹⁸The importance of epistemic skewing in question construction, relative to morphosyntax and prosody, accords with similar observations about polar questions in Italian, American English, and Yéli Dnye (Levinson, 2010; Rossano, 2010; Stivers, 2010). In Yéli Dnye, particularly, morphosyntax and prosody seem not to be involved in polar question construction at all.

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Appendix

Abbreviations and glossing

Most glosses adhere to the Leipzig Glossing rules. Additional glosses are as follows: CL = clitic, DO = direct object, EMPH = emphatic, IO = indirect object, INTJ = interjection, NC:ANM = animate noun class, NC:PL/T = place/time noun class, NC:VEG = vegetable noun class, NC:HUM = human noun class, NC:SPEECH = speech noun class, NFUT = nonfuture, NS = nonsingular, OBLIG = obligation, PQN = polar question, RDP = reduplication.