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Addressee Points in Conflictual Interactions:

A Reductionist Analysis of Action

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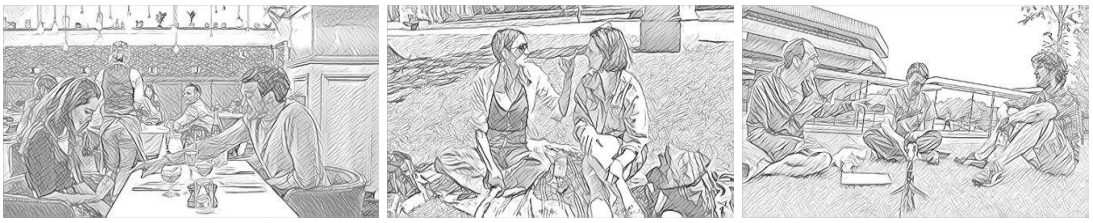
Abstract

Pointing gestures are ubiquitous in human social interactions. Among pointing gestures are those in which a speaker points at the person being addressed – addressee points. Research has shown that addressee points are frequently used to signal common ground or express agreement. In this article, by contrast, we explore previously unresearched uses of addressee points in conflictual interactions. Through a fine-grained, reductionist analysis of conduct – one involving a reconceptualization of 'action' in interaction – we show that addressee points attribute a transgression to the addressee, upgrade the perceptual intensity of the speaker's conduct, and escalate an argument or conflict. We examine the use of addressee points in terminal escalations, close (vs. far) addressee points in extreme conflicts, and lax (vs. tense) addressee points in 'non-serious' conduct. The findings contribute to research on the kinematic organisation of gesture, interactional and gestural space, and the conceptualisation of social action. Data are in English.

There are moments in ordinary social interactions when speakers point at those whom they are addressing – addressee points. Whilst it is difficult to define 'pointing at' precisely, we mean that as Self speaks to/addresses Other, Self points towards or in the direction of (but not at something on) the Other's face or upper torso. Should Self point at something on Other's face or elsewhere or something Other is wearing – as in Figure 1a when the man pointed down towards the woman's lower body, saying as he does so "it's this", which he specified as "it's the sparkly trousers" that he was looking at – these gestures are not addressee points. Neither is drawing attention to and removing an object (e.g., insect) near or in Other's eye with the point of a finger as in Figure 1b; this is a manual action, not a gesture. Neither is pointing at someone co-present and being spoken about, whilst speaking not to that person but to another Other. In Figure 1c, Kevin asks Paul opposite "who, Travis?" as he points at Travis. Although Kevin's pointing is a gesture, he is not addressing the person at whom he is pointing.

(Insert Figure 1 here)



a b c

Figure 1: Points at participants that are not addressee points

In an addressee point (hereafter AP), a speaker produces a manual gesture directed at the addressee of their turn; the addressee of the turn and the target of the gesture are the same. Pointing gestures, including APs, may be constituted through a variety of kinematic features, configurations or organisations (Kendon & Versante, 2003; Wilkins, 2003; Kendon, 2004; Trujillo & Holler, 2021), including different hand shapes (e.g., palm vertical or oblique); finger extensions (e.g., straight or curled); hand and arm movements (e.g., rapid and sometimes repeated extension and retraction of the index finger forward and backward); elbow extensions or flexions; positions of the index finger at the onset of the gestural stroke and its subsequent trajectory; the ecology of the gesture, such as the proximity of the finger to Other's face or body; and whether the point targets one or more co-present Others.

Research on pointing has focused, not exclusively but very generally, on the deictically referential functions of pointing, including the associations between deictic pointing and speech (e.g., Cooperrider et al., 2021; Enfield et al., 2007; Kita, 2003) – though for other significant pragmatic functions of pointing, particularly in the commission of 'action', see, for example, Kendon (2017), Goodwin (2003), Mondada (2007), and Cooperrider (2020). Previous research has shown that speakers use APs to indicate agreement and signal common ground (Bavelas et al., 1992; Holler, 2009; Healy, 2012); indeed we found in our initial examination of APs in a variety of interactional settings that many occur in broadly cooperative or affiliative

environments. However, we also observed frequent uses of APs in arguments, disputes, and altercations, some on the brink of violence. APs seemed quite intrinsic to such conflicts – not merely gestural accompaniments to what was said but essential to the design of the conduct as conflictual.

The analysis of social action

Our subsequent analysis of conflictual APs has led us to question how we conceptualise social action. We and other conversation analysts have relied to a considerable extent on stipulated action categories – accusation, threat, prohibition – that lack direct empirical support and are of dubious relevance to participants. The difficulties originate in our use of 'speech acts' (Austin, 1962, p. 52) to stand proxy for social action, and in the scientific imprecision of the action category descriptions we attribute to conduct in interaction. Much CA research has relied on exploring conduct that seems readily identifiable – requests (Curl & Drew, 2008), offers (Curl, 2006), complaints (Drew, 1998) – stemming perhaps from the speech acts explored in the early literature (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Austin termed such acts 'performatives' because they were acts or deeds 'performed' through utterances such as *I advise you*, *I promise you*, *I bet you*, many such words-as-actions performing a ritual or ceremonial role (Austin, 1962). These performatives were sufficient for Austin's purpose to demonstrate that "in *saying* these words we are *doing* something… rather than *reporting* something" (Austin, 1962, p. 13). If utterances are not reporting (describing), they are not statements that can be true or false, hence disallowing truth conditional semantics. However, whilst a speech act approach underlies much important research in conversation analysis (hereafter CA), it offers a limited conception of *social action*.

A conception in which lexical action category descriptions are central to the study of social action has numerous problems. The first is a potential confusion of the object of study. If our point of departure is the words we use to describe social action, we can unwittingly attribute properties of these words, such as their semantics and categoriality, to a complex and dynamic stream of conduct whose organisation is not dependent on its (etic) description. Our metalanguage for action can obscure the actual practises participants use, and their interactional effects, leading us instead to explore the semantic fields of a domain: is it a complaint or an accusation, a warning or a threat, a suggestion or a proposal? Such uncertainties and difficulties of attributing action labels to stretches of talk are compounded when multimodal conduct is considered, as we do here (as is suggested by 'speech act' terms – promises, requests and the like – they are more easily applicable to *speech*); moreover, they are not easily or straightforwardly replicable cross-culturally or cross-linguistically (e.g., there seems to be no distinction between 'correction' and 'repair' in Finnish, nor can 'suggesting' and 'proposing' be distinguished lexically in Danish). Lexical action descriptions are inherently analytically deficient. The existence of lexical action category descriptions does not entail the existence of discrete action categories outside the realm of semantics, nor does the categorial nature of these words evidence a categorial nature of social conduct. The proliferation of such words in our lexicon reveals rather our profound interest in, and the practical utility of,

describing social conduct. Such words are resources for social action – whether mundane, legal, literary or other – and should not be mistaken for exponents of it.

An associated problem with lexical action category descriptions is that the field currently has no scientifically precise, reliable and reproducible method for the attribution of such descriptions to social conduct – we have no method with the emic validity (Clayman, 2024) of participant orientation. Without precise and reproducible means of categorising actions, there is uncertainty about "where the action is" (Goffman, 1969). Whilst participants in interaction do on occasion use such action terms/categories, particularly to disavow an action attribution, actual or anticipated, by the other (e.g., "I'm not complaining"), we have been focusing not on these action attributions, but on our analytic action attributions, whether or not they might coincide with or reflect participants' understandings. The congruence between participants' use of action categories and our analytic and again etic categories is uncertain (Drew, 2022). This lack of scientific foundation in the attribution of action descriptions Levinson (2013) referred to as the "soft underbelly of CA" (p. 105). Lexical action category descriptions are not only analytically deficient, they are also analytically superfluous; the names we give to the forms and uses we identify are important for their communicative and rhetorical value, but it is not these names that have been discovered in the data or that demand empirical justification. It is the observation and description of precise configurations of social conduct, their uses and effects that comprise a *reductionist* analysis of social action; for these configurations of social conduct the field does indeed have reliable and reproducible methods (Robinson et al., 2024).

This wariness of lexical action category descriptions is reflected in the frequent use in CA of non-vernacular and rather precisely defined descriptions of social action, such as 'next turn repair initiator' (Schegloff, 1992), 'confirming allusions' (Schegloff, 1996) and 'interjacent overlap' (Jefferson, 1986). In a notable instance, Sacks observed that on being asked to account for doing something, people would quite routinely or systematically answer *Everyone does, don't they?*, thereby blocking the requirement to give any more specific account.

> "Where persons are engaged in trying to get an account from somebody, there's an object that the person who's being questioned can slip in. This is one of them. And what it does is, it cuts off the basis for the search for an account. I don't have a terribly elegant name for it. What I called it was, 'account apparently appropriate, negativer.' Or A3N." (Sacks, 1992, p. 136-138)

'A3N' was an attempt to introduce a reproducible, technical name for a systematic practice for which there was no vernacular description. This method centres attention on the systematic uses of interactional practices rather than the semantics of lexical descriptions, shifting focus from abstract categorizations to observable patterns of conduct. By avoiding the assumption that lexical descriptions correspond to discrete action categories, technical descriptions can better recognize the dynamic and

multifaceted nature of social action and free an analysis from the constraints and limitations of the action lexicon of a given language.

There is a further reason to be cautious about describing stretches or sequences of conduct in 'action' terms, when those are not the terms participants themselves have used to describe their conduct. In describing a sequence of sounds (Levinson, 2013) and bodily conduct in terms of action categories, we are, as is widely understood and endorsed in the CA literature, *attributing* actions to sounds and bodily conduct. In CA we perhaps generally regard 'action attribution' as a feature of the sequential unfolding of talk, through a next speaker's understanding of what the prior speaker was 'doing' in their prior turn, as displayed in the next speaker's response – the supposed 'proof procedure' in CA (but see Drew, 2022; Gubina et al. 2025/this issue). Hence, participants may be regarded as attributing 'actions' to one another's talk and conduct; in this way, participants' attributions of actions are themselves forms of social actions, the significance of which is evident in the sequential unfolding and the contingent dynamics of sequences of interaction. Just as "recipients are 'doing' something when they treat a prior turn as having implemented a given action" (Drew, 2022, p. 58), so too when as analysts we describe some turn or stretch of interaction as an [action], we attribute that [action] to a speaker's (audible and visible) conduct, thereby superimposing that [action] onto and into the unfolding interaction. Action ascription is itself, always and irremediably, a social action. It might be noted, parenthetically, that even referring to a point as an action is an attribution, given the uncertainty and contestability of labelling a hand-finger configuration, in a particular instance, as a point (Goodwin, 2003, p. 1-2).

For these reasons, we have taken a different analytic route, to *observe and describe the precise configurations of social conduct, their uses and effects*, that constitute the basis for action ascription, whether by participants themselves or by analysts. Our analysis here focuses on features of conduct and technical descriptions of the mechanics of interaction. Mindful that "even quite elementary procedural accounts of the practice(s) for doing some action ('elementary' both in the sense of 'simple' and in the sense of 'explicating the elements'), grounded as they are in the empirical detail and specificity of actual instances, open the door to empirical examination" (Schegloff, 1996, p. 168), we identify those 'elements' of conduct through which APs are mobilised in conflictual interactional episodes. It is for this reason that we refer to our analytic approach as reductionist: we are analysing a complex phenomenon – escalating conflictual encounters – in terms of their common fundamental constituent properties; we are analysing and understanding the conflictual character of interactions in terms of their basic, component parts, focusing especially on one of those parts – addressee points. Our analysis shows that in environments of disaffiliation and discord, APs work together with other multimodal (lexical-syntactic, prosodic, and gestural) practices to attribute a transgression to the addressee, upgrade the perceptual intensity of the speaker's conduct, and escalate an argument or conflict. We examine three facets of this complex interactional object: the use of APs in escalations that precede disengagement from and termination of a conflict; a socially normative association between APs whose apex comes close to the

addressee and extreme escalations; and the interactional import of distinct kinematic organisations, in particular a distinction between tense and lax manual movements.

Data and methods

This investigation was based on a large and diverse set of over 500 addressee-oriented manual gestures. Within this set we identified all APs, as defined above, that occurred in arguments, disputes and other conflictual environments, resulting in a collection of approximately 60 APs from 41 interactions. The data came from videos of everyday interactions recorded by researchers and students, for which ethical approval and informed consent were obtained, television news and reality programmes, and publicly available opportunistic third-party videos (Jones & Raymond, 2012) identified on video sharing platforms. The use of third-party video has proven to be an effective method for the study of interactional conflict (Whitehead et al., 2018; Bowman et al., 2018), allowing examination of APs in a wider range of interactions than would have otherwise been possible.

The interactional episodes were analysed sequentially using CA with particular attention to the temporal coordination of multimodal conduct (Deppermann & Streeck, 2018; Goodwin, 2017; Mondada, 2014). The analysis considered various aspects of gesture production, including hand shape and orientation (Kendon & Versanta, 2003); movement phases (Kita et al., 1998; Kendon, 2004) and kinematics (Trujillo & Holler, 2021); gesture space (McNeill, 1992) and local ecology (Mondada, 2014); and the coordination of gesture and talk (Schegloff, 1984). The analysis of prosody used auditory rather than acoustic methods (Walker, 2013) to identify prosodically prominent syllables (Loehr, 2007) and describe voice qualities. The extracts were transcribed according to conventions developed by Mondada (2024).

Addressee points in terminal escalations

We begin with a set of cases that illustrates the use of APs in the escalation of conflict and a common but not invariable association between APs, escalation, and termination of the sequence.

Interactionally, escalation is the product of sequential and turn-constructional practices (Hoey et al., 2020; Afshari Saleh, 2022). If a response to a sequence-initiating action, for example, is disaffiliative or non-cooperative, the first speaker has an opportunity in the third turn to close or expand the sequence (Schegloff, 2007). If the speaker pursues an affiliative or cooperative response, the disaffiliation that emerged through the first two turns has the potential to escalate. In such positions, the use of particular lexical-syntactic, prosodic, and gestural practices in the construction of a turn can upgrade the audible and visible intensity of the conduct and display a conflictual stance in the pursuit of affiliation or cooperation (Afshari Saleh, 2022). In this way, what begins as a minor disagreement can ratchet up incrementally turn-by-turn, escalating from discord to conflict, which can in turn escalate further still towards violence (Whitehead et al., 2018; Bowman et al., 2018).

APs are one of those practices that occur in escalated positions in sequences of conflict, serving together with other multimodal practices to upgrade the perceptual intensity of the conduct and display a conflictual stance. In this environment, APs commonly occur in *terminal escalations*, climactic moves preceding a disengagement from the conflict.

Consider the AP that Gary produces in Extract 1 in a contentious interaction with the representative of an airline at an airport ticket counter. The airline has just cancelled Gary's flight to Barcelona the day before New Year's Eve, offering no replacement flights until New Year's Day. After the representative informs Gary of the airline's complaint procedure (line 4), Gary uses a range of practices, which are not the focus of our investigation, that expand the sequence and pursue an alternative remedy (lines 5-20). The designs of Gary's turns are upgraded through the use of profanity ("oh sod the complaint procedure mate"; cf. Hoey et al., 2020), increased acoustic intensity ("we wanna get to BARCELONA TONIGHT."; cf. Ogden, 2006), and interjacent overlap (lines 17 and 20), among other practices characteristic of the interactional environments in which we find APs. However, APs do not appear at the outset of a disagreement but rather in and as an escalation of a conflict.

Extract 1 [UK Airline 1.01]

```
1  REP:    we don't have that informa[tion to give.
2  GAR:                              [>w'll what'd'y'mean< you don't
3          have it.=someone's got it.=
4  REP:    =no there's a complaint procedure in place.[=what we're=
5  GAR:                                               [oh sod the=
6  REP:    =[recommending]
7  GAR:    =[compla i n t] procedure [mate.=we wanna get to BARCELONA=
8  REP:                              [wha-
9  GAR:    =[TONIGHT.
10 REP:     [wha-
11 REP:    what we're recommending is you keep your receipts 'n write
12         in.=that's the complaint pro[cedure.
13 GAR:                                [keep (y'receip') 'n write in.
14         =write in to who.
15         (.)
16 REP:    to our customer [support unit.]
17 GAR:                    [Stelios.] that pratt.
18         (.)
19 REP:    to our customer s[upport unit.
20 GAR:                     [that praat Stelios.
21 CUS:    (°what should we do[:?°)
22 REP:                       [ok[ay.
23 GAR:                          [Y*OU'VE CUT [THAT P*LA#NE OUT=
                                  *.................*pt-------->
   fig                                             #fig.2a
24 CUS:                                      [(°can you find°=
25 GAR:    =[DELIBERATE*LY. ]
                 -->*,,,,,-->
26 CUS:    =[°can you find a]nother*+ flight# from another airport?°)
   gar                          -->*
   gar                             +turns away-->
                                           #fig.2b
```

27 REP: I've checked Gatwick...

(Insert Figure 2 here)

a b

Figure 2: Garry's addressee point and disengagement

The sequence enters a loop when each participant repeats his prior turn and thus halts progressivity (lines 13-20). In this case, the loop precipitates an escalation: with increased acoustic intensity relative to his prior talk, Gary explicitly attributes a transgression to the addressee as a representative of the airline: "YOU'VE CUT THAT PLANE OUT DELIBERATELY." (line 25). The adverb *deliberately* denotes that the airline considered what to do in the circumstances and decided, in their best interests, to withdraw the flight. As he does so, he points at the addressee with an extended index finger, the other digits curled into a fist with his palm down (Figure 2a). The gesture is produced with two visually prominent movements that align with the second and third prosodically prominent syllables: on each, the point extends rapidly forward towards the addressee, before it returns to a more neutral position. While the representative's solution to the problem called for action from the customer ("keep your receipts 'n write in"), by contrast Gary treats the airline as responsible for the cancellation and by implication responsible for remedial action (line 23-25).

Immediately after Gary retracted the point, he turns away from the representative, taking a step back from the ticket counter (Figure 2b). He thus orients to his prior turn as terminal – a final, climactic move that terminates the sequence of conflict, neither anticipating nor providing an opportunity for further response from the addressee.

In the following case, an AP again occurs in a terminal escalation, but here the terminal position of the escalation is constituted not only through visible bodily actions, but also the use of a specific linguistic practice, "period.", produced incrementally. The conflict occurs in a parking lot after the driver, Marcus, who is in the car, has locked the doors with Nia and Del still outside. When Marcus starts the car engine (line 3), projecting an imminent departure, Del, who is recording the encounter, moves rapidly from behind Nia on the driver's side of the car towards the front. This projects a trajectory in which he will round the front of the car and move towards the passenger door. Nia then interposes herself between Del and the car: she extends her left arm towards him and raises her right hand with the palm open towards the car, gesturally depicting a barrier and physically obstructing Del's movement (Figure 3a). Her turn-initial alert ("woa:h"; Kendrick & Drew, 2016;

Kendrick, 2021) prefaces an account for her interposition (line 7). The prosodic accent on the first-person pronoun invokes a contrast set (Schegloff, 1998, p. 250), which in this position, after the second-person pronoun, constructs a contrast between the two agents and the order of events.

```
Extract 2 [FM109 00.40]

1  NIA:    open the fuck[in door. ((to man inside car))
2  DEL:                 [°heh heh°
3          (0.1)|(0.2)
   car           |engine starts-->
4  NIA:    open your fuckin door.
5          |(0.3)
   car     |engine revs loudly-->
6  DEL:    ↑wah hah |[°hah°↑
7  NIA:             [woa:h you not gettin in the car [befo#re I do.
8  DEL:                                              [.HHH I go(h)t
   fig                                                    #fig.3a
   car           -->|
9          [heh .hhh
10 NIA:    [I don't ca:r[e.
11 DEL:                 [I (wa(h)nt to(h)) .hhh I do(h)n't I'm not
12         a part of this.
13 NIA:    [I don't ca:re.
14 DEL:    [.hhh ↑I don't got nothin to do with [this.
15 NIA:                                         [you're *not
                                                     *...-->
16         [gett*in in the ca#*r  t* i l l  I  +d*o.*]
17 DEL:    [.hhh I(h) do(h)n't ha(h)ve no(h)th ]in=
   nia       -->*pts at Del---*....*pts to self--*,,*
   fig                      #fig.3b
   nia                                      +turns away-->>
18 NIA:    =period.#
   fig             #fig.3c
19         (0.2)
20 DEL:    .HHH I don't [got nothin to do with this.
21 NIA:                 [period.
```

(Insert Figure 2 here)

a b c

Figure 3: Nia's interposition, addressee point, and disengagement

The practices Nia uses stop Del's movement towards the passenger side door and establish a locally normative constraint on the order in which the two should enter the car (her before him) and prove effective as Del remains in a relatively stationary position (Figure 3a) for approximately 3.8 seconds. However, he then resumes his movement towards the passenger side of the car, an action that projects a violation of the local constraint set by Nia's turn. When he rounds the front of the car, she again physically interposes herself between him and the car, reissuing her prior turn in modified form (lines 15-16).

In this reissued form the turn-initial alert is dispensed with (Schegloff, 2004); acoustic intensity and duration of the sentence are increased. The second-person pronoun is produced with a prosodic accent and cliticized form of the verb *to be* is inserted, both of which upgrade the prominence of the contrast. As she produces the first clause ("you're not getting in the car"), she points at Del. The stroke of her AP aligns with the predicate of the clause (line 16); "before" is replaced with "till", more clearly indicating that an event persists (or in this case should not persist) up to a temporal boundary. With the second clause ("till I do."), the AP transitions into a self-referential gesture (Turk, 2007).

The AP is a visual-gestural practice that occurs together with other practices to upgrade the perceptual prominence of the contrast between the two events being described. In this position in the sequence – after Nia's prior turn had set a locally normative constraint on Del's conduct and his conduct had projected a violation of it – the upgraded audible and visible intensity of the previously employed practices renews and reinforces the constraint, hence escalating the conflict.

The upgraded turn is designed to be terminal. Even before it comes to a possible completion, Nia begins to turn away from Del (see Figure 3c), adding an increment to her prior turn-constructional unit ("period.") and shaking her head. Produced as a stand-alone item with falling intonation, "period." is a practice that explicitly terminates a prior turn and sequence and is designed to forestall further expansion. Her head shake conveys negation, indicating that no exceptions will be allowed (Kendon, 2002). When Del then responds, Nia repeats "period." in interjacent overlap (Jefferson, 1986), reinstating the terminal position of her prior turn.

The association between APs and terminal escalations is common, but not invariable. APs do not make termination sequentially relevant, nor do they project a speaker's disengagement. APs are, however, adapted to a particular interactional niche. The non-cooperative practices speakers use in conflictual environments promote sequence expansion and perpetuate the conflict. Bringing a conflict to a close is thus a complex social-organisational problem (cf., Jefferson's, 2015, analysis of closing troubles tellings, p. 194-230). Using APs in terminal escalations is one solution: the speaker upgrades the intensity of their conduct, establishes a contrast, attributes a transgression to the addressee, and disengages. A terminal escalation is a final, climactic move that ends a conflict on the speaker's own terms (cf. Drew & Holt, 1998).

Close and far addressee points and the transgression of social boundaries

How does an AP come to serve as a practice for the escalation of a conflict? As we have seen, the answer to this question can involve:

a) a visual-spatial identification and localisation of the addressee;
b) an increased visual intensity of the conduct in coordination with an increased audible intensity; and
c) the construction of a contrast between speaker and addressee.

In this section, we explicate a further answer to this question. The extension of a pointing gesture towards the addressee, especially the face, can approach, encroach or even transgress a socially normative boundary of physical-interactional distance between speakers and addressees. Such *close points* appear in environments of extreme escalation where they serve, together with other multimodal practices, to project a further escalation of the conflict.

We will see three cases of APs with similar kinematics: a preparation phase in which the forearm adopts a vertical position before the hand extends outward in a point. These cases show a contrast in the proximity of the participants and of the apex of the speaker's point. The close point into the addressee's face (Extract 4) occurs in an extreme escalation of a conflict whereas the *far point* (Extract 3) occurs in a less prominent one. This difference is not coincidental but rather a product of a socially normative organisation (see Goffman, 1971, on personal space): the physical proximity of a close point encroaches into the addressee's personal space; visually and spatially projects a possible physical contact; and thereby interactionally projects a further escalation of the conflict, in some cases towards violence. We will then examine a deviant case (Schegloff, 1996), a far point in an extreme escalation (Extract 5) and see that the speaker designs his turn verbally and prosodically to display restraint.

The first case comes from a conflict in a public skate park. An adult woman, Delta, has intervened into the activities of a group of adolescent boys, one of whom, Zane, was, she says, "cussing like a sailor" (line 16). According to her account, when Delta asked him to refrain, he refused (lines 16-19). Thus, although the AP comes at the beginning of the recording (line 2 is the first audible turn), there is evidence it occurs in an escalation of the conflict. As three other boys approach and become unaddressed recipients, Delta employs a conventional linguistic practice: *to make an example of someone*. This accounts for her conduct as a post-hoc enforcement of a locally normative expectation (which she later cites as "a rule that says no profanity") that applies not only to Zane as the addressee of her turn and the producer of the transgressive conduct ("cussing like a sailor") but also to the other boys as unaddressed recipients.

Extract 3 [FM059 00:00]

```
1          (1.1)*(0.1)
   del          *.....-->
2  DEL:    I'm making* #an exa*mple of #you.=*right here right no:w.
                  -->*holds---*points at Z---*points down-->
   fig               #fig.4a         #fig.4b
3          (0.3)
4  DEL:    *they better all hear it.
           *sweeps point across bystanders--> ((points continue))
5  X:      °heh heh heh heh°
6  DEL:    any profanity- (.) no.=you laugh, you laugh, any profanity
7          comes out of any of y'alls' mouths, (0.4) there is a rule
8          that says no profanity. (0.3) there's a city policeman
9          who's sittin' right over the:re. (0.6) and I will take any
10         one of y'all, (0.3) to him. and y'all will go to juvenile
11         court. (0.3) tape record, put it on YouTube, put it
12         wherever you like.
13 COL:    I [am.
14 AUS:      [where- where is this coming fro:m.
15         ((cut in video))
16 DEL:    he was cussing like [a sailor.=and I asked him not to.
17 AUS:                        [Zane?
18         (1.6)
19 DEL:    and he refu:sed.
```

(Insert Figure 4 here)

a b

Figure 4: Del's pre-stroke hold and addressee point

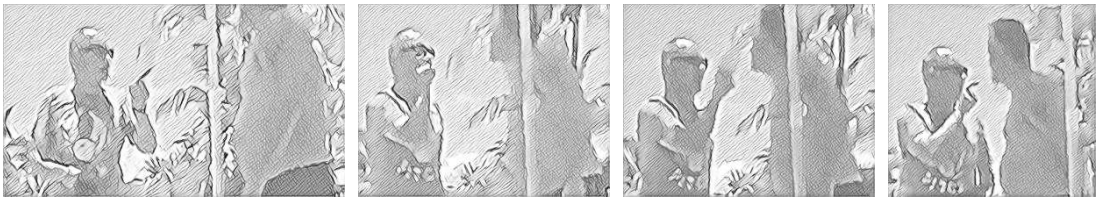
As Delta addresses Zane, she raises her hand from a rest position at her side, with the index finger already extended and the other fingers curled in a fist, up to a static position in front of her face such that her forearm is roughly vertical (Figure 4a). She then holds this pre-stroke position for approximately 200 ms before she extends the point out towards the addressee in a relatively slow movement which takes approximately 400 ms (see Figure 4b). The stroke reaches its apex at the onset of the second-person pronoun and is held for the word's duration. A prosodic accent on the pronoun invokes a contrast, not between speaker and addressee but rather between the addressee and other members of a collective to which he belongs. In this way, the contrast disaggregates Zane from the group of boys who have just approached and for whom he is to serve as an example (Turk, 2007).

Note the proximity of the participants in the conflict and the distance of the gestural apex from the addressee's body. Delta stands more than an arm's length away from Zane as she addresses him and would not be able to touch him without leaning or stepping forward. When the point reaches its apex, her arm is not fully extended – a closer point would have been possible. Delta's is a far point. Compare this with the AP in Extract 4, which comes from an extreme escalation of a conflict at a public pool. The conflict centres on whether Marc should open a parasol attached to his sunbed, thereby blocking the sun from a neighbouring sunbed occupied by Richard. After Marc forcibly repositions the parasol in preparation to reopen it, Richard grasps the parasol's poll, and Marc pushes Richard's hand away (line 2). Moments later, Marc lifts the parasol from its base and forcefully hits Richard with it (line 10). The conflict, in this case, thus escalates to violence. A series of APs occur later in the interaction.

```
Extract 4 [FM088]

1          (1.2) ((Richard pulls a parasol held by Marc))
2          *(0.3)*#
   mar     *pushes Richards's hand away forcefully*
   fig            #fig.1a
3  CAM:    alright ↑we need somebody?
4          (0.8)
5  RIC:    listen BUDDY.
6          (0.5)
7  RIC:    listen.
8          *(0.2)
   mar     *.....-->
9  RIC:    >I don't know where you *[think yuh-<]*
10 BY1:                             [(M a r c.) ]
   mar                          -->*hits Marc with parasol*
11 BY1:    (MA:RC.)
           (0.6) ((parasol crashes loudly on sunbed))
12 CAM:    Je::s[u::s.
13 BY2:          [excuse me there's [kids out here.
14 CAM:                             [right, sto:::p.=come o:::n:.
15         ((14 seconds omitted))((camera cuts))
16 RIC:    *what (I'm) [*go#n*na do.
17 MAR:                [*a:#t*te:nti*o:*n. *I #*CA:N# KI:L+L* YOU*:.+
           *............*pts-*,,,,,,*..*sp-*...*pts----------*,,,,*
   fig                      #fig.5a            #5b   #5c
   ric                                                 +steps fwd+
18 RIC:    +>go on 'en.*<=kill me *[th*en.+
19 MAR:                           *[↑I* #CA:N KI:*LL [YOU*:.
   ric     +steps fwd----------------------+
   mar                  *..........*pts----------*,,,,,,,*
   fig                                 #fig.5d
20                                                  [((bystanders shout))]
21                                                  [--------(2.0)-------]
```

(Insert Figure 5 here)



a b c d

Figure 5: Marc's addressee points

After the cut in the video, the parasol is again upright and open and the conflict between Marc and Richard continues. As Richard steps towards Marc, Marc, who speaks with a French accent, raises his hand to point at Richard and uses a linguistic practice borrowed from French ("a:tte:ntio:n.", which can be translated as "watch out") that alerts Richard to an imminent action with adverse consequences. As Richard continues his approach and begins to lean forward, Marc continues his turn: he points to himself and then to Richard as he describes an act of extreme violence: "I CA:N KI:LL YOU" (line 17). The clause is produced with maximal acoustic intensity, at or near the top of the Marc's range, and has a strained voice quality resulting from muscular tension in the larynx and vocal folds. In the preparation phase of the point, Marc raises his hand up towards his own face with his forearm in a vertical position, holds for approximately 160 ms (Figure 5b), and then quickly – within the span of two 40-ms video frames – extends his hand outward towards Richard, coming within a hand's width of his face (see Figure 5c). The gesture reaches its apex precisely before the predicate of the clause. In this case, the points to Self and Other are elements of a single clause (cf. Extract 2) and do not depict a contrast but rather give visual prominence to the transitive relationship between the arguments of the clause with the speaker, Marc, as the agent of the violent event and the addressee, Richard, as its semantic patient.

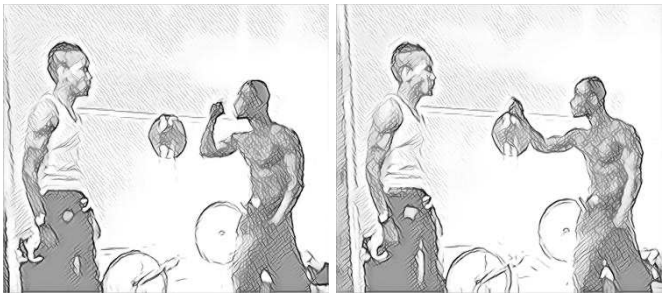
This is a close point in an extreme escalation of a conflict. In comparison to the AP by Delta in Extract 3, the AP by Marc is produced with other practices that constitute a more extreme escalation: a clause that describes a violent event with the addressee as the patient, a prosodic design with maximal acoustic intensity and voice quality indicative of strain, and a relatively rapid gestural stroke. It is no coincidence that these practices are employed as the participants are in close proximity nor that the apex of the point is directed towards and comes close to the addressee's face. The comparison of far points such as that in Extract 3 with close points like that in Extract 4 reveals an association between close points and extreme escalations that project still further escalation.

The AP in the next extract – a *far* point in an extreme escalation – would appear to be an exception to this generalisation; however, the speaker's conduct is designed, linguistically and prosodically, as a *de*-escalation. It is thus a deviant case that reveals an orientation to a normative organisation. The conflict, which is among the most extreme in our collection, concerns the presence of Jordan in Damian's house and Jordan's association with Serina (to whom Damian refers at line 1). The focus of our analysis is Damian's turn-constructional unit at line 9 and the associated APs.

```
Extract 5 [FM110 00.49]

1  DAM:    this is MY motherfuckin woman. .hh this's my house.=you see
2          them pictures still here, .h it's my mama. .h and my aunt
3          n**** everything in here me n****.
4          ((10.4s omitted))
5  SER:    calm down.= ((from distance))
6  DAM:    =so get the fuck up outa here.
7          ((4.5 seconds omitted))
8  DAM:    now whatchu gonna do. .h I'm widdit n****.=I'm a goo:+n.
                                                              +..-->
9          .h I'M #G+IVIN Y+OU A +PA#:SS.
                 -->+pt-----+.....+pt-->
   fig             #fig.6a          #fig.6b
           (0.3)+(0.1)
   dam       -->+.....-->
10 DAM:    get the F+UCK+ up out my motherfuckin+ house.
                 -->+fist+,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,+
11         ((Damien continues; Jordan backs away 11s later))
```

(Insert Figure 6 here)



a b

Figure 6: Damian's pre-stroke hold and addressee point

Damian uses a conventional linguistic practice, *to give someone a pass*, which treats Jordan's conduct as transgressive but signals that the consequence Damian would normally impose, which is recognisable as violence, is being withheld. It also renews the relevance of Jordan's departure (cf. in line 6) and provides an opportunity for him to back down and thereby deescalate the conflict. It projects violence as a possible consequence if Jordan does not leave the house, at the same time as it signals violence is being withheld. This duality is evident in the phonetic design of Damian's talk: the practice is produced with a voice quality that results from muscular tension in the jaw which limits its movements and causes dental occlusion. This simultaneously displays a high level of affective intensity and a high level of control or restraint.

The kinematics of the gesture also align with the lexical-syntactic and phonetic design of the conduct. As Damian produces the subject of the clause, he raises his hand to his face with his forearm in a vertical position (Figure 6a) and then immediately extends his hand out to point at Jordan with no pre-stroke hold. (In contrast, the pre-stroke holds for Delta's point in Extract 3 and Marc's point in Extract 4 were 200 ms and 160 ms, respectively.) The first stroke of the gesture aligns with the onset of the predicate of the clause and coincides with a prosodic accent (on

"GIVIN"). Damian curls his index finger inward such that his hand forms a fist and returns his forearm to a vertical position. He then rapidly extends his hand outward again towards Jordan as he produces a second accented syllable (on "PASS") and simultaneously reextends his index finger such that the stroke ends as a point (Figure 6b). The gesture thus interleaves an iconic representation of an act of violence together with a deictic reference to the addressee. The gesture is not, however, produced with a maximal extension of the arm, nor does Damian lean or step towards Jordan. With each stroke, Damian holds his upper arm in a horizontal position and moves his hand outward towards Jordan via elbow extension but stops rapidly (within the span of a single 33 ms frame) when his forearm reaches an approximately 45 degree angle. The gesture could – but does not – extend further and could – but does not – come closer to Jordan.

Damian's conduct is intricately designed, through specific lexical-syntactic, phonetic, and gestural practices, to display restraint and project violence as its alternative. So while the APs in this case are far points and the escalation of the conflict is extreme, this case does not contradict the association between close points and the intensity of the conflict we have observed; it rather reveals an orientation by a participant in the design of their conduct on a specific occasion to this very association. The distance of the gesture from the addressee in this case is one feature among many that signals to the addressee that the conflict has not yet reached a maximal escalation.

Tense and lax addressee points and 'non-serious' conduct

In extreme escalations, the kinematic organisation of APs involves rapid movements of the hand and arm, sudden halts and holds, visible and audible muscular tension in gestural and vocal articulators, and close proximity of the gestural apex to the addressee, especially the face. Through the kinematic design of a point, together with the phonetic and linguistic design of the talk, a speaker's conduct can project a further escalation of a conflict. In contrast to such *tense* points, some APs are notably *lax*, insofar as perceptible articulatory tension is largely or completely absent. In this section, we show that APs produced with relatively slow and visibly lax movements of the arm and hand are associated with 'non-serious' conduct (see Yasui, 2023).

This case occurs during a conversation between friends sitting in an open area of a university building. At the beginning of this extract, Mark and Victoria both reach for a bag of chocolates on the table between them but slightly closer to Mark. Although he reaches for the bag first, he lifts it and moves it closer to Victoria. As she picks up the bag and takes some chocolates, she looks up at Mark and says, "Lisa ow:es me. seriously. she ate half the bag last night." (lines 9-12), which attributes a transgression to Lisa in the service of claiming an entitlement to the chocolates. With the production of her ironic increment "seriously", Victoria begins to smile, an expression she maintains as she shifts her gaze from Mark to Lisa (line 12).

Extract 6 [RCE22a 20.47]

```
1  CON:    I don't know %if the anti+christ %is different from the+
   vic     >>reaches----%,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,%reaches-->
   mar     >>reaches for bag--------+moves bag--------------------+
2  CON:    devil?
3  LIS:    yeah %I was [thinking that.
   vic       -->%takes bag-->
4  MAR:               [yeah it is.=I thin[k.%=
5  CON:                                   [hu(h)h
   vic                                    -->%
6  MAR:    =it's li[ke it- I think the=
7  LIS:            [yeah.
8  MAR:    =anti%chri[st is more like a representative.]
9  VIC:              [ L i s a   o w : e s   m e .     ]=
                %gazes at Mark-->
10         =seriously.
11 CON:    [okay. ((to Mark))
12 VIC:    [she ate half the bag] last [ni%ght.
13 MAR:    [huh heh heh heh hah ]      [.hh HAH HAH
   vic                                   %gazes at Lisa-->
14 LIS:    [ho:w da:re you. ]
15 VIC:    [%ha:lf %of the ba:](h)g% heh heh
            %gz M--%gazes to Lisa--%gz to M-->
16 RAC:    [↑.hh heh [heh  heh heh heh heh heh ↑.hh
17 CON:              [mhuh huh huh heh heh heh yea[h
18 VIC:                                           [and ate
19         [it.%
20 LIS:    [>fuck off.<=it w*as #on y*ou#r* side #[of the ta*ble.
   vic      -->%gz to Lisa-->
   lis                    *........*pt--*,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,*
   fig                        #fig.7a  #fig.7b  #fig.7c
21 VIC:                                           [there were six
22         peo:p[le the:re.
23 MAR:           [but the- serious[ly like the  ][antichri[st]=
24 LIS:                            [they were on-]
25 VIC:                                          [h a : l [f.%
26 MEG:                                                   [.hhh
   vic                                                    -->%
27 MAR:    =[might be a really cool guy because [he's] [jus'=
28 LIS:     [  h o : w    d a : : r e    y o u  [ :  ]
29 VIC:                                         [heh ] [heh=
30 MAR:    =[  s o r t a   l i [k e  ]
31 VIC:    =[heh heh heh heh he[h heh]
32 MEG:                        [but  ][just (     )
33 LIS:                               [I wa[sn't even crun-]=
34 MAR:                                    [ °b i : t c h °]
35 LIS:    =I don't even crunch them.=I su:ck them.
```

(Insert Figure 7 here)

a b c

Figure 7: Lisa's lax addressee point

Lisa's initial response, "ho:w da:re you." (line 14), is a conventional linguistic practice, used either seriously or humorously to treat an addressee's conduct as transgressive. She follows with a po-faced rejoinder (Drew, 1987) that "it was on your side of the table" (line 20). As she says this, Lisa, who had extended her left arm to touch chocolates on the table in front of her, lifts her arm, raises her hand and points at Victoria (Figures 7a-7b).

Three features are particularly evident. First, although Lisa's turn, "it was on your side of the table", is prefaced by a profanity ("fuck off"), which as we have seen is common in escalations, Lisa's facial expression changes only slightly when she says "ho:w da:re you."; that is, her expression does not become taught. Indeed, when she adds "fuck off", she begins visibly to smile, retained through "it was on your side of the table", a trace of which remains as Lisa later repeats "ho:w da::re you:" (line 28). Second, though extended, the laxness in her bent elbow and arm enables Lisa to point at Victoria in fluid movement, with a slightly bent index finger and her other digits hanging limply beneath it. Thus, her verbal escalation is not matched by her gestural conduct. Third, Lisa's AP is a far point; she does not lean forward to shorten the distance between the gestural apex and her addressee but remains seated, without changing her posture and leaning back in her chair.

Lisa's AP is not constructed in the same way as those shown in previous sections; her gesture is produced without visible muscular tension in its articulation. The laxness of the gesture is one element of the non-seriousness of Lisa's conduct. In a second example, Arthur is cooking while Lily sits at a counter across the room, looking towards him. She tells him that a mutual friend may attend a public event "in the summer" (line 1); Arthur's response (lines 5 and 6) is accompanied by a lax AP.

```
Extract 7 [SCD2017]

1  LIL:   ↑uhm Sandra was saying they're thinking about doing like
2         the bring a friend thing maybe in the summer.
3         (0.2)*+        (0.3)       *
   art          *drops fork on counter*
   art           +turns and looks at Lily-->
4  LIL:    °or some[thing.°
5  ART:            [NO.
            (1.5)
6  ART:    *f:#:*i#lth.*
           *....*pt----*
   fig        #8a #8b
```

```
7          *(0.1)#(0.5)*
   art     *,,,,,,,,,,,*
   fig           #8c
8  ART:    blasphemy.
9          +(2.0)
   art     +turns around-->
10 ART:    +socials are meant for one time only.
           +gazes at Lily-->
11         (0.8)
12 ART:    we've got loads of- socials+ this summer.=loa:ds.
                                  -->+gazes away-->>
```

(Insert Figure 8 here)

a b c

Figure 8: Arthur's lax addressee point

After Arthur's negative reply in a minimal and prosodically prominent form, "NO." (line 5), Lily makes no response but instead turns away from Arthur and looks at her phone. Arthur continues his turn with two closely positioned morally evaluative expressions: "f::ilth." and "blasphemy.". As Arthur says "f::ilth.", he points at Lily (Figure 8). The gesture is produced relatively slowly, and the changes in velocity are gradual, in contrast to those of tense APs which can occur within the span of a single video frame (e.g., Extract 4). Arthur does not extend his arm fully to shorten the distance between the gesture and Lily, nor does he take a step towards her, so the AP is both far and lax. Arthur's AP is associated with some escalation in the sequence, from his minimal but prosodically prominent negation to extreme expressions of moral evaluation. Nevertheless, the point is lax in its articulation. As with Lisa's AP in Extract 6, the laxness of Arthur's AP is an element of the non-seriousness of his conduct: his exaggerated claims that the event or its reporting are "f::ilth." and "blasphemy." contrast with Lily's neutral description of a mundane occasion and are recognizable as a form of irony (Clift, 1999).

Discussion

In environments of disaffiliation and discord, APs work together with other multimodal (lexical-syntactic, prosodic, and gestural) practices to attribute a transgression to the addressee, upgrade the perceptual intensity of the speaker's conduct, and escalate an argument or conflict. The lexical-syntactic practices in multimodal escalations include contrast constructions, profanity, explicit attributions of intention, and

descriptions of violent events with second-person objects. The prosodic design involves salient increases in acoustic intensity and voice qualities indicating muscular strain, while visual-gestural practices include forward head extensions, leans towards the addressee, and ambulatory approaches. In some cases, these practices culminate in terminal escalations – final, climactic moves that precede a disengagement from the conflict

The intensity of the speaker's conduct and conflictual stance are visible in the gesture's production across two key dimensions: the physical proximity of the point to the addressee and the tenseness of its articulation. While all APs occurred during escalations, far and close points differed in degree of escalation. In extreme conflicts, speakers produce points that encroach into the addressee's personal space, especially the face, visually projecting possible contact. This observation suggests that gesture space, defined as the space in front of a speaker in which a gesture is produced (McNeill, 1992), should be integrated with research on interactional space (Goffman's, 1971, pp. 248-256, *umwelt*; Kendon, 1990; Mondada, 2013) and reconceptualized as fundamentally social and relational – as an *interactional* gesture space.

The tenseness of articulation also varies meaningfully. In extreme escalations, speakers produce APs with rapid movements and sudden halts, indicating high muscular tension. These embodied displays, combined with other elements of conduct, enable APs to project a possible escalation toward physical violence. Conversely, APs with lax, fluid movements appeared in sequences of ironic or mock conflict where speakers employed practices of de-escalation. The findings show that the kinematic design of an AP makes visible specific properties of the speaker's conduct, namely whether the conduct escalates the conflict and to what degree, and thus contributes to research on gesture kinematics and the accountability of social conduct (Kendon & Versante, 2003; Enfield et al., 2007; Levinson, 2013).

The analysis of APs presented in this article is an analysis of social action. We have avoided, wherever possible, attributing lexical action categories to multimodal conduct and have instead adopted a molecular approach to understanding the unfolding character of interaction. Our aim has been to highlight – and avoid – the inescapable possibility of alternative classifications and attributions of action. We found no principled basis for differentiating between categories like accusations, admonishments, or threats, nor evidence that participants attributed such categories to each other's conduct. Instead, we identified analytically-relevant categories – multimodal and terminal escalations, close and far points, tense and lax movements – as constituent elements of social action. Our analytic reductionist approach has focused on the components of conduct that together constitute what are perceived to be conflictual episodes. Whilst only one of these components – addressee points, with their particular kinematic configurations – can be considered to be a practice in the way that is understood in CA (e.g., Heritage, 2010; Drew, 2024 p. 253), at least so far as we have shown here, nevertheless other multimodal aspects of conduct such as muscular tension, approach and proximity, and prosody are components of conflictual episodes. Together, they constitute interpersonal conflict in interaction.

The constitutive nature of these components of multimodal conduct is rather well captured in this quotation, for which we are grateful to an anonymous reviewer:

> Faced with an angry or threatening gesture, I have no need, in order to understand it, to recall the feelings which I myself experienced when I used these gestures on my own account . . . I do not see anger or a threatening attitude as a psychic fact hidden behind the gesture, I read anger in it. The gesture *does not make me think* of anger, it is anger itself. (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.214, emphasis in original)

This perspective is congruent, in certain respects, with critiques of action formation and ascription that question the relevance of action categories (Enfield & Sidnell, 2017). The *lexical* action descriptions that have been central to so much research in CA prove both analytically deficient and superfluous, unable to capture the complex, multifaceted nature of social action. Action ascription itself is a social action (Drew, 2022), and relying on unexplicated terms, whether vernacular or technical, sets an analysis on an uncertain foundation. Rather than correlate forms of conduct with lexical categories, we should, as far as possible, set these words aside as we investigate forms of conduct and their uses in social interaction.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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