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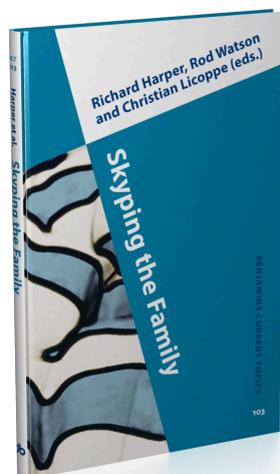
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**Skyping the Family: Interpersonal video communication and domestic life**

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# Talking about things

## Image-based topical talk and intimacy in video-mediated family communication

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### 1. Introduction

Throughout the 20th century, video communication has been thought of as one of the symbols of cutting edge technological development, associated with values of modernity and innovation. Cinematic history offers fascinating insights to these visions starting with the famous first video call appearing as far back as 1927 when Fritz Lang showed one in his *Metropolis*; these have continued, in the following decades, with a variety of imagined technological representations, interactional situations as well as ambiguous and even contradictory social consequences that follow on from video mediated communication.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, in movies criticizing industrial capitalism, video communication is represented as a tool for surveillance and control of the working class that, along with other technologies (like assembly line work), is used by the rulers to guarantee their power and domination over the ruled. This was shown in the already mentioned *Metropolis* and in Chaplin's *Modern times* (1936). This is especially apparent in *Modern Times* where the manager makes video calls and opens video screens in a sudden and unexpected manner for his subordinates. But on the other hand, in later futuristic visions, video communication also prefigures cutting edge scientific and technological achievements with positive social fallouts: for example, allowing a video call between a space station and the Earth as in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.<sup>2</sup>

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1. For a chronological set of appearances of videophones in movies, see <http://berglondon.com/blog/2012/03/13/notes-on-videophones-in-film/>

2. See also Relieu (2007) for a historical overview of video communication devices and interaction models, real and imagined.

Although the depicted situation in *A Space Odyssey* is quite extraordinary, this pioneer scene of family use of video communication between the father (Dr. Floyd, a central character in the movie) on the space station and his daughter, located at home, though made in 1968, already features many of the characteristics that we find in video interaction today. We can notice, for example, the emotional involvement and the display of pleasure and joy of the participants while seeing each other; in particular, smiling at the initial appearance of the other's image at the beginning of the call; the lack of a particular subject or agenda, the only motive of the call being to keep in touch as well as the banality of topics talked about, contrasting with the futuristic setting of the space station (e.g., the father asks a series of questions such as "How are you", "What are you doing", "Where's mummy", then they talk about the daughter's birthday party and present). As in other 20th century movies, video-mediated interaction is imagined mostly around the model of an enriched phone call: participants stare at each other while talking in a manner similar to the phone call, the visual properties of the media not affecting the conversational structure, not directly used to introduce and develop topics (like commenting on the partner's appearance or showing objects or details of the local environment, the space station providing interesting opportunities for that).

In the light of these historical representations, featuring the extraordinariness of video technology in exceptional social situations, it is striking to note the extreme triviality that marks the actual use of video in domestic environments in contemporary life. Far from the domain of the revolutionary and the exceptional, contemporary video calls make observable everyday interactional work of 'doing' being (Sacks 1984) a family: such doings include keeping in touch, exchanging news, displaying mutual closeness, affection and care, talking about "this and that" (about children, the weather or dinner); in brief, just spending time together. Video technology seems to support what one might say is the opportunistic character of family conversations as participants invent a variety of practices to make sense and use of the visual dimensions of their communications to do what family 'is' (e.g. Sunakawa 2012; Licoppe & Morel 2014).

Regarding these characteristics, our chapter aims to investigate the practical organization of such mediated conversations between family relatives and, in particular, the ways video technology is enrolled in displaying and maintaining relationships. We are interested in how conversation and a shared participation frame are maintained through time in video-mediated conversations which ordinarily do not have a particular agenda. This is in contrast to video conferences in work settings, which we will presume do have agendas – planned purposes. In order to take a closer look at this question (the organised character of video communication despite their improvised feel) we focus on a particular interactional phenomenon: the image-based topic introduction and management accomplished through *showings and noticings*.

## 2. Background: Topical talk

Topicality, the way in which topics are managed in interactions, is a central feature of conversations. Research in conversation analysis (e.g. Maynard 1980; Maynard & Zimmerman 1984; Schegloff 1990) has highlighted a number of characteristics of this phenomenon. First of all, topicality is organized and made observable in a patterned way that can be described in terms of ‘moves’. Sacks (1992, vol. 2 [Winter 1969 Lecture 1]) distinguished two kinds of these. The first, the most usual mechanism in conversation, is the ‘stepwise topical move’. It consists of linking what is being introduced to what has just been talked about. In this kind of move, topical coherence can be maintained through ‘triggerred’ or ‘touched-off’ talk (Sacks *ibid*; Jefferson 1978a). For example, a topic shift may be triggered by association with the content of previous talk or may occur when the course of the conversation brings speakers to remember things they wanted to say. The second type of move, which is referred to as ‘boundaried movement’ (Radford and Tarplee 2000), occurs where topic closure is followed by the initiation of another topic. It usually occurs in specific structural locations in conversations (e. g. openings, closings). So, topic shifts are not random events.

Maynard (1980) has shown how topic change is used as a solution to the problem of producing continuous talk, particularly when there is a failure in speaker transitions or in the formal turn-by-turn talk. It has also been shown how topic management relates to the kind of relationship between the participants, i.e. the intimacy and the distance between them (Maynard and Zimmerman 1984). For example, acquainted parties often rely on mutually assumed knowledge for changing topics. Another characteristic of the organization of topics in conversations is that conversants may use events that occur during the interaction or any aspect of a setting or environment as a resource for introducing or changing topics (Adato 1980; Maynard and Zimmerman 1984; Sacks 1992; Drew and Chilton 2000). Maynard and Zimmerman (1984) refer to this practice as doing ‘setting talk’, which is defined as “a topical form available to parties by virtue of co-presence and co-access to events and objects in the participant’s environment” (p. 304). According to Adato (1980), some events have more propensity to give rise to topics than others. These events are typically expected in the sense that they are ‘typically occasioned’ (e. g. the occasion of talking in a cafeteria while eating, events related to the activity of eating are typically expected). ‘Occasionality’ appears then as a constituent feature of topics. Analyzing conversations between acquainted and unacquainted participants, Maynard and Zimmerman (1984) observed a relationship between the degree of intimacy and setting talk. For example, when participants are not acquainted, they regularly refer to the setting to initiate topical talk. By using this procedure, unacquainted participants make them visible and achieve their relationship by virtue of the fact that it exhibits a ‘distance’.

Drawing on this research and considering topic as what interaction is about (Maynard 1980) we examine the properties of setting talk in video calls: the spontaneous use of environmental features as conversational topics through noticings and the practices of introducing topics by deliberately showing objects or an environment (showings). We analyze the particular place of these practices in the topical and sequential structure of the conversation, their role in maintaining the participation frame through time as well as in accomplishing close relationships between (geographically) distant family members. Following Maynard and Zimmerman (1984), we consider relationships “as something that are subject to ongoing, step-by-step management within talk between persons (...)” (Maynard and Zimmerman 1984, 302). From this standpoint, the kind of conversational subjects talked about the ways people introduce and develop them, the ways they comment on the other’s physical appearance, local environment, ongoing events or develop ‘unsafe talk’ (Coupland and Jaworski 2003, 86), reflect the kind of social relationship, the common history and shared knowledge between them. All this plays a part in “achiev[ing] new intimacy” (ibid.). At the same time, however, topic introduction also grounds on the visual properties of the communication technology that allows a certain access to the distant environment and the emergence of a certain kind of shared visual frame.

By describing the practical actions that enroll audio-visual technology in family and domestic settings and interweaving technological and social dimensions (e.g. intimacy or privacy), we seek in this chapter to understand the link between interaction, relationship and a particular kind of technology. The data come from a video-ethnographic study of uses of video calling systems in family and personal life. It was conducted in 2010 in Paris and the surrounding area. Five participants were asked to video record video communications in their homes during a week (twelve hours of footage were collected corresponding to forty-six different sessions). Two participants used *Skype*, the others used *Windows live messenger*. The interactions involved parents, siblings and children, different family members and friends; they are originally in French (with some parts in German for one family). We also collected broader ethnographic data on the families as we visited them at home twice and conducted interviews. The analytical treatment of collected data consisted in a close, step-by-step, sequential analysis of the interactions.

### 3. Showings as visual turn taking in storytelling between relatives

In this section, we examine how the constitution of a common focus of visual attention by showing objects or parts of the environment contributes to the emergence of a common participation frame and its maintenance through time. Family video interactions are a relatively new investigation field. The existing research highlights important aspects of showing practices in family video interaction, for example the socialization of children to video technology through ‘show-and-narrate’ activities (Sunakawa 2012) or the normative regulation of camera moves and the interlacement of video-in-interaction with talk-in-interaction (Licoppe and Morel 2014). But *showing* practices also appear as a crucial resource for introducing, developing and changing topics and thus are highly consequential for the sequential organization of family video conversations.

In our data, showing practices are omnipresent and extended pieces of interaction rely on them, as in the two sessions examined below between a husband (Daniel) who is staying temporarily in the south of France for work calling his wife (Andrea) who was on summer holiday with their two children (Tom and Carmen) at her parents’ home in Germany. The second one (Excerpt 4) takes place three days after the first one (Excerpts 1–3). The video calls were recorded by Daniel so the recordings show what appeared on his screen, Daniel himself being visible on the image control.

#### 3.1 Showing an environment

The following recording started just after the opening of the communication (cf. Excerpt 1; Daniel is using a laptop with a camera whereas Andrea is connected on a PC). When Daniel’s head appears the children smile at him while moving closer to the screen, the mother tries to make the little boy say “papa” (1). This opening greeting sequence is interweaved from the outset with the first topic introduction as Daniel simultaneously starts moving his laptop, thereby producing a panning shot of his environment (the hotel where he is staying and a mountain landscape, visible on the control image) (2) as if he was using a camera stabilizer. These “showings” act as a visual ‘story preface’ (Sacks 1992, vol. 2 [Spring 1970, Lecture 2]) projecting a story to come. In the next turn Andrea aligns herself to the ‘topic’ (the environment shown by Daniel) and to the storytelling by producing an assessment: “Daniel “it’s rotten of you”” (3). The assessment is about the act of showing an attractive place treated as teasing and as known-in-common (the place is not named). Note that Daniel remains silent, he does not comment on the images and relies on an assumed mutual knowledge of his location. This visually introduced environment becomes

the first topic and may be seen as one of the reasons-for-the call. Following Sacks, we may typically expect a development of the story itself by the storyteller in the next turn (4), but instead Daniel produces a postponed silent greeting waving his hand in response to turn (1), which sparks off a return greeting from his daughter in (5). From the outset of this fragment, the powerful consequences of visual frames for the organization of the multiparty family video conversation at such crucial points as opening greetings and first topic introduction can be observed then. Distortions or differences compared to openings and storytelling in other contexts (co-presence and telephone) are also noticeably related to the specific use of visual resources – the response greetings as well as the third turn of storytelling developing the initial topic sometimes being postponed.

**Excerpt 1.** (Session 1) initial visual topic introduction (story preface) (1–17)<sup>3</sup>

- 
1. Andrea Xx papa Tom ...\*(ich) rorororo  
papa ((se penche vers Tom))  
Xx papa Tom ...\*(ich)  
rorororo papa ((leans toward  
Tom))

- 2. Daniel \*(( starts to  
move his laptop around and  
shows mountain landscape))



3. Andrea Oh:::: \*DANIEL:: t'es vache oh  
je te vois très bien hein  
(1)  
Oh:::: \*Daniel it's rotten of you  
I can see you very well right  
(1)



4. Daniel \*((Fait coucou avec sa  
main droite))->  
\*((waves with his right  
hand))->
- 

3. See appendix for transcription conventions.

5. Carmen ((Fait coucou avec sa main droite, sourit, montre sa langue))  
((waves, smiles, shows her tongue))



6. Andrea T'es avec ton ordinateur ou avec [ta tablette/  
You are with your laptop or your [tablet/

7. Daniel [(Ya) avec l'ordinateur  
[(ya) with the laptop

8. Andrea Ah t'es avec l'ordinateur je veux te dire tu vas faire du skype  
\*tu vas c'est bien ouais ((rire))  
mais bon t'auras pas le temps de te reposer dessus non/  
Ah you are using your laptop I can tell you you will use skype  
\*you will it's good ((laughs))  
but you will not have time to relax on them will you

- 9. Daniel \*(Daniel makes a static shot of the deckchairs then shows the hotel in which he is staying)



10. Tom \*((Geste de pointage vers l'écran))  
\*((points at the screen))

11. Daniel Non=  
No=

12. Andrea =Xx

13. Andrea ((Rire)) ça va/ Daniel's face is visible  
(1)  
((laughs)) how are you/  
(1)

- 
14. Daniel \*Coucou Tom  
 \*((secoue sa main gauche)) (1)  
 \*Hello Tom  
 \*((waves with his left hand))  
 (1)
- 
15. Andrea Xx Papa  
 Xx daddy
- 
16. Tom Rororo  
 (gets closer to the screen)
- 
- 
17. Andrea Rororo ((en grimaçant))  
 (2)  
 oh Tom je peux te dire il est  
 difficile en ce moment il veut  
 que marcher hein [...]  
 (2)  
**Rororo ((making a funny face))**  
 (2)  
 oh Tom I can tell you he is  
**difficult at the moment he only**  
**wants to walk right [...]**  
 (2)
- 

Instead of immediately following the ratification of the story preface by the recipient (3), this first topic development appears several turns later, in turn 9: Daniel produces a static shot of a fragment of his environment, namely the deckchair area of the hotel where he is staying. With regard to sequential organization, the moving of the laptop camera appears to overlap Andrea's turn in line 8. She interrupts her talk and topicalizes what she sees in the shot ("you will not have time to relax on them will you?") the deictic "them" referring to the deckchairs. By doing so, Andrea adjusts her utterance to the image and exhibits her understanding of Daniel's action, but also more generally of his working background and work load. The production of humor here relies on the joint use of visual interactional resources (the deckchairs shot) and knowledge of Daniel's working background at that moment. Following Maynard and Zimmerman's analysis of

the interactional display of close or distant social relationships, we can notice here that mutual knowledge and intimate relationship between husband and wife are important resource for topic introduction and management: the participants rely on these shared evidences “to *provide* sense and *make* sense in topical introductions” (Maynard and Zimmerman 1984, 305) .

In line 13, Andrea uses a typical topic initial elicitor “how are you/”, attempting to invite Daniel in the subsequent turn to provide a report of events which are newsworthy and in some way to cut off setting talk oriented by camera moves. But this invitation is not successful: Daniel does not take it up. Instead he produces a greeting explicitly oriented to Tom (14). Andrea does not treat the absence of a response as a problem nor does she repeat her question. It is interesting to note the sequential placement of the greeting performed by Daniel; it occurs just after an occasioned event: Tom’s act of pointing. Andrea spontaneously turns the addressee of the greeting (“Tom”) into a topic and opens a new line of talk (from 16–17 onward, not reproduced here) about him, the weather and a projected activity (going to the swimming pool because of the heat). She performs a topic change by producing a series of news announcements about these items which take the form of deliveries of news (Maynard & Zimmerman 1984).

News announcements are a typical device used in conversation for initiating topical talk, the development of which requires that the second speaker topicalizes the news in the next turn by providing the sequential opportunity for its elaboration (Button & Casey 1984). In the fragment, Daniel does not make use of this opportunity; he does not produce any utterance in response to the news reported by Andrea. He continues to move the laptop while Andrea is delivering news and does not seem to be paying much attention to what she is saying. His attention seems totally devoted to showing the environment.

In Excerpt 2 we can observe the second move of the visual storytelling in progress from the beginning: after the story preface (Excerpt 1 – 2) and the topicalization of a first fragment of the environment (the deckchairs, Excerpt 1 – 8, 9), Daniel puts on the screen – and thereby on the conversational agenda – a new element, a swimming pool, that gives rise to a stretch of topical talk (Excerpt 2 – 27–33).

**Excerpt 2.** (Session 1) focusing on a particular piece of the environment: swimming pool (26–39)

26. Andrea Ah okay c'est bien ça ouais parce que nous je peux \*te dire qu'on crève de chaud dans la xx mais bon on (...) [c'est quand même xxx=  
**Ah okay it is good yes because here I can tell \*you we are dying of heat in the xx but right we (...)**  
 [it is still xx=



27. Daniel **\*Daniel moves the laptop and shows a swimming pool**

28. Daniel [Tu la vois la piscine en bas non/  
**[you can see the swimming pool down there can't you/**

29. Andrea Euh ah ba là \*derrière/non xx  
 \*((pointe vers l'écran))  
**Uh ah ba there on the \*other side isn't it/ no xx**  
 \*((points at the screen))

30. Daniel On voit un tout petit \*carré là-bas  
 \*((pointe du doigt vers la piscine))  
**You can see a small \*square over there**  
 \*((points at the swimming pool))

31. Andrea Oui ah oui mais mais c'est la piscine de d'Avoriaz/ xx  
**Yes ah yes but but its Avoriaz's swimming pool/ xx** Daniel orients the laptop towards his face

32. Daniel Oui oui [on n'a pas de piscine] ici ((geste de pointage vers l'écran en secouant la main))  
**Yes yes [there is no swimming pool] here ((Points at the screen))**

33. Andrea [C'est pas la piscine de] xx  
**[it's not the swimming pool of] xx**

34.	Tom	((Secoue sa main gauche)) (2) ((Waves with his left hand)) (2)	
35.	Andrea	Sinon ça va chéri/ (5) Anyway how are you honey/ (5)	Daniel moves the laptop and shows a mountain
36.	Andrea	Allô/ Hello/	
37.	Tom	Xx ((pointe vers l'écran)) Xx ((points at the screen))	Daniel moves the camera towards his face which becomes visible
38.	Daniel	Oui oui (3) Yes yes (3)	
39.	Andrea	Bien Good	

Daniel's question may have been touched-off or triggered by the prior utterance, as Andrea spoke about going to "the swimming pool" (transcription omitted). This type of topical movement is described by Sacks (1992) as the 'most routine thing' in adult conversations. In line 35, after a long pause, Andrea produces again a topic initial elicitor (Button and Casey 1984), as before in line 12 projecting a news delivery sequence. But, this attempt is also unsuccessful. After a second long silence (35), in 36 Andrea produces a summons (Schegloff 1968) typically used in telephone conversations. Daniel remains oriented to the activity of showing by moving his laptop and responds to this summons by producing a minimal token, which is followed by a third pause (38). Interestingly, the examined interaction manifests momentary misalignments between talk-in-interaction and video-in-interaction activities of the participants.

### 3.2 Showing one's clothing

Andrea then tries to reinstate continuous talk by searching for a topic (Excerpt 3 – 40), but again, she is interrupted by Daniel's visual topic introduction, this time by showing a feature of his clothing, a shirt from the Tour de France race (41). Again, this visual move overlaps Andrea's talk, reorients her turn in progress and stands for a new story preface.

## Excerpt 3. (Session 1) clothing as a topic (40–46)

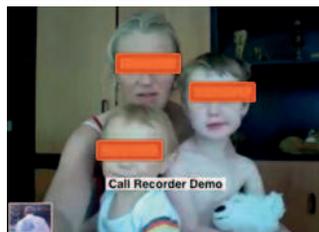
40. Andrea Bien (3) c'est bien chéri \*et qu'est-ce que  
je voulais dire OH LA LA/ et ils ils vont  
ont donné ça/

(3)

**Right (3) good honey \*and what I was  
going to say OH DEAR a and they  
they gave it to you**

(3)

dadada



41. Daniel \*((Pose  
l'ordinateur, recule et montre son dos))

**\*((puts his laptop  
and moves back, shows his back))**

42. Andrea \*Tu vas les garder ou tu vas les redon-  
ner à la fin/

(3)

**\*are you going to keep them or you  
will give them back/ (3)**

43. Daniel \*((Se remet face à la caméra et forme le  
chiffre trois avec sa main droite, paume  
orientée vers la caméra))

**\*((rotates, face in front of the camera  
and shows the number three with his  
right hand, palm oriented towards the  
laptop))**

44. Andrea Trois/

(2)

**Three/**

(2)

45. Daniel \*((Oriente la paume de sa main vers  
lui))

**\*((orients the palm of his hand  
towards him))**

46. Andrea \*Vous avez eu trois t-shirts/->

**\*You have got three t-shirts/->**

This procedure of topic initiation can also be seen as a non-verbal news announcement which takes the form of a riddle (like saying “guess what I am wearing”). Andrea treats it as such: she recognizes and topicalizes the “news announced” (the

fact that his company gave him clothes) which results in a course of continuous talk, changing the initial orientation of her utterance (40), then continuing the topic (42). Interestingly, this scenic introduction of a new topic or story line relies on a particular technological affordance, the angle of the web camera, which offers quite different interactional opportunities compared to situations of co-presence. As Daniel is positioned fairly close to the camera, only his head is visible for the distant family members, thus enabling him to trigger a surprise by moving away from the lap top and showing his jersey.

In this first video call, the participants seem to follow disjointed conversation lines: while Daniel is oriented to showing, sharing and discussing his immediate environment in a storytelling mode, Andrea basically tries to initiate news talk but finally aligns herself to topics elicited by her husband. We can note the considerable weight of what is shown on the screen compared to what is said for topic management in video-mediated conversation, especially when a participant moves the camera, thereby engaging the co-participant in the unfolding temporality of the movement. Showing the t-shirt and the environment seem to have been planned by Daniel, as well as his prepared scenic entrance in Excerpt 4 (session 2) below while activating the video stream and appearing dressed like a racing cyclist.

**Excerpt 4.** (Session 2)

1. Andrea ils reviennent quand \*là pour le-& (2)  
when do they come \*back for-& (2)

2. Daniel \*(puts the video  
on and appears dressed as racing cyclist,  
first shows his head, then moves to show  
jersey)



3. Andrea (stops speaking and stares at Daniel,  
switches from French to German)  
& Ach DU Heilige/ Ach Du Heilige  
Vati/ (...) ruf' den mal rein (.) schnell  
(.) Ich glaub's ja wohl nicht [ICH  
glaub's wohl nicht Ey  
& OH MY GOD/ OH MY GOD (turns  
her head) Dad/ (...) ey call him in (.)  
quick (.) I can't believe this  
[I can't believe this (laughs) hey



4. Daniel [on est p- on est prêts pour l'interview  
ou pas là  
[we are- we are r- we are ready for the  
interview aren't we/



Daniel's physical appearance raises a line of topical talk about the tour de France and racing cyclists that lasts fourteen minutes, until the end of the session, involving Andrea and her father who joins the conversation (see Figure 1). It is important to stress once again the particular property of showing actions in VMC (video-mediated communication): they may be used to take a turn and they can be treated as such. Daniel's scenic action is treated as an interruption by Andrea: she stops speaking in the middle of a word (1) and stares at Daniel (3), then, after a silent pause, she drops the current topic and takes up the new topic – the racing cyclist appearance (3). Andrea marks the topic change by a language switch from French to German to draw the attention of her father and thus to enlarge the participation framework. Here again, the first topic is not only introduced in a scenic way, its development is also oriented and sustained by visual actions: first only Daniel's head is visible, then he moves to show his jersey and to sustain comments on it (3, 4).



**Figure 1.** Visual topic development. Andrea's father reacting to Daniel's showings that appear on the control image (bottom left).

Figure 1 shows the use of the same visual method to sustain talk by producing views on different details in the following interaction: the logo of the team "Milram" (image a), the number of one of the cyclists, i.e. 144 (image b), and then a hole in the back of the jersey (image c). The conversation takes the form of a common inspection of the object presented by Daniel: Andrea and her father look closely at the screen and comment on what they see. Daniel's utterances clarify what is shown on the screen and give further information. The topic development through time in this multi-party interaction lies on the visual materials which Daniel successively makes available to the co-participants.

### 3.3 Summary

Visual topic introduction and management through showings in the family video calls we have examined seems to have a typical structure of storytelling, as described by Sacks (1992, vol. 2 [Spring 1970, Lectures 2, 3, 4]) and summarized by Jefferson (1978b, 219):

For example, storytelling can involve a story preface with which a teller projects a forthcoming story, a next turn in which a co-participant aligns himself as a story recipient, a next in which a teller produces the story, and a next in which story recipient talks by reference to the story. Further, the story preface can have consequences for the story reception, and thus a rather extended series of turns at talk can be seen as a coherent conversational unit.

Following on Sack's observations on storytelling organization, Jefferson showed that stories are both 'locally occasioned' from turn-by-turn talk and 'sequentially implicative' for it (Jefferson 1978b, 220).

Although Sacks and Jefferson are concerned with verbal actions, visual storytelling analyzed here is consistent with the structure and features they describe. In the examined materials it is noticeable that most of the time the storyteller is silent: while visually introducing a topic by displaying an image on the screen and also in the following turns while guiding and sustaining the development of the topic by successive camera moves. Showing, here, takes the place of saying or describing, so that we can speak of visual turn taking anchored in the laptop camera's affordances.

Two kinds of visual story prefaces are found in our data: showing an environment (Excerpt 1 – landscape) and showing a detail of one's own physical appearance, in this case a piece of clothing (Excerpts 3 and 4). Visual topic management shows a recurring form of organization in two steps: first, a preface or general introduction of a topic by showing something and second, a collaborative elaboration of the 'story' supported by subsequent showings (e.g. deckchairs and swimming pool in session 1 as details of the environment under inspection; the logo, the number and the hole as significant details of the jersey in session 2).

Jefferson also stresses the 'segmental structure' of storytelling, i.e. the story is not a block of talk but is constructed by segments that alternate turns of storyteller and story-listeners (*ibid*, 245). This aspect is particularly interesting regarding the question of the maintaining of a shared participation frame through time in video mediated spaces. Here, the segmental structure of storytelling may be grounded on visual resources constituted as a common focus of attention of multiparty interactions and developed by progressively introducing new shots treated as topically coherent with what precedes. In comparison to face-to-face situations, 'setting talk' in video conversation is not simply 'small talk' (Coupland 2000) about a shared environment as participants have a restricted and asymmetrical visual access to

each other's locations. This is why setting talk can take the form of storytelling – it is like a guided tour of the storyteller's location that can be unfamiliar to his partners. The storyteller chooses the details he wants to show and interact upon as well as their temporal order. Showing practices do not only structure the sequential and topical organization of family video conversation, but are also involved in the accomplishment of intimacy and closeness: the type of relationship between participants is highly consequential on what is shown, especially concerning person's body and local environment, and how is it shown. Moreover, shared history and mutual knowledge that characterize close social relationships are important resources participants rely upon to make sense of what they see on the screen (see also Sunakawa 2012, 274).

#### 4. Noticings as intimacy achieving practices

Sacks (1992, 87) observed that participants in face-to-face conversations tend to produce a particular kind of communicative action, namely 'environmental noticings', which have the particularity of changing the topic of the current conversation. These noticings have several characteristics. First, they are about the environment (e.g. a noise or an object) or about attributes participants have or possess (e.g. their physical appearance, "things" they brought with them like clothing). Possession or ownership is conversationally consequential, in the sense that if a participant makes a remark about an attribute another participant has, it is very likely that the 'owner' of the attribute will talk next. Second, noticings can be interruptive in the sense that they can cut into someone else's talk; but whether they are specifically interruptive is an open question. Third, they are not related to previous talk and may give rise to a new line of topical talk as in the following example given by Sacks (1992), in which a participant spontaneously makes a noticing about the current speaker's physical appearance (2):

- 1 Roger: ...of the desk that 'e li//likes  
 2 Al: Hey you have a hole in your shoe  
 3 Roger: heh Do(hh)n'tell me. hhh heh  
 4 Al: This place cos:s too much money. Can' afford buy shoes.

(adapted from Sacks 1992: 87)

This example shows that a participant's attributes are "possible *makings of a conversation*" (Sacks 1992, 92). Another important feature of this kind of noticing is that they cannot simply occur anywhere in the conversation. For example, the placement of noticings about physical features of persons is more likely to be placed after the talk of the person whose feature is noticed.

Noticings have also been observed in telephone conversations. Drew and Chilton (2000) examined instances of habitualized, ‘keeping in touch’ family phone calls in which participants spontaneously produce noticings about something in their immediate environment (e.g. an object, an event or the weather), particularly in the opening sequences of calls. The noticings analyzed by Drew and Chilton, which often appear before the completion of the ‘how are you’ sequence, are sometimes topicalized and occasion episodes of ‘small talk’ (e.g. Coupland 2000), i.e. talk which is about matters which do not ordinarily constitute a reason for calling (e.g. members’ current activities, the weather, what is in flower in the garden, what they have been eating). In other words, this kind of noticings constitutes a feature of a particular type of family phone calls, those that are not made to talk about a specific purpose, but only for keeping in touch, i.e. for maintaining relationships. However, it should be noted that, unlike face-to-face interaction, in telephone conversations the “objects” of these noticings are not shared in the sense that they are not visible to the distant participant.

So noticings seem to be a *common* feature of ordinary conversations used to change or to introduce topics. In our data of video calls, we observed different kinds of noticings which play the same role and give rise to more or less short lines of topical talk. Let us examine some examples of family video calls in which noticings about the physical appearance and the activity of children are spontaneously produced. These examples are extracted from conversations between two sisters: Anna, who lives in the outskirts of Paris, and Julie, who lives in the south of France.

#### 4.1 Noticings about physical appearance

In the first example, Anna and Julie are talking about Halloween, and more precisely about how Anna made a Halloween pumpkin. Carla, Julie’s baby, is also present.

##### Excerpt 1.

- 
- |       |       |   |
|-------|-------|---|
| 1.    | Julie | *Tu as RACLE et tout/<br>*((secoue sa main gauche))<br>*You CLEANED out the inside and all<br>*((shakes her left hand)) |
| <hr/> |       |   |
| 2.    | Anna  | Oui/<br>Yes/  |



- |     |       |   |   |
|-----|-------|---|---|
| 3.  | Julie | <p>Attends (...) *je crois parce que je pense que tu m'entends pas (...) t'as raclé et tout/<br/> *((prend la télécommande tenue par Carla et la lui redonne))<br/> Wait (...) *I think you can't hear me very well (...) you cleaned out the inside and all/<br/> *((grabs the remote control and gives it back to Carla))</p> |     |
| 4.  | Anna  | <p>Ah ça va mieux oui j'ai raclé<br/> <b>Ah it's better yes I cleaned out the inside</b></p>  |   |
| 5.  | Julie | <p>D'accord ((gratte son menton avec sa main gauche))<br/> <b>All right ((scratches her chin with her left hand))</b></p>   |    |
| 6.  | Anna  | <p>Ah mais dis-donc c'est vrai t'as la varicelle/<br/> <b>Ah but my word that's right you have the chickenpox/</b></p>  |   |
| 7.  | Julie | <p>*Eh bien ouais xx<br/> *((tourne son bras gauche devant la caméra))<br/> *Well yeah xx<br/> *((turns her left hand in front of the camera))</p>  |   |
| 8.  | Anna  | <p>Mais que sur les bras ou ailleurs/<br/> <b>But only on your arms or elsewhere/</b></p>   |   |
| 9.  | Julie | <p>Partout/<br/> *((montre son bras droit))<br/> <b>All over/</b><br/> *((shows her right arm))</p>   |  |
| 10. | Anna  | <p>Et t'as la varicelle alors/<br/> <b>So you have the chickenpox/</b></p>  |   |

11. Julie	Non <b>No</b>
12. Anna	T'as été chez le docteur/ <b>Have you been to see the doctor/</b>
13. Julie	Non (2) j'attends <b>No (2) I am waiting</b>
14. Anna	T'attends quoi/ (2) <b>What are you waiting for/</b> (2)
15. Julie	Parce que si j'y vais il va vouloir m'arrêter <b>Because if I go and see him he will put me on medical leave</b>
16. Julie	Et il faut pas <b>And he should not</b>
17. Julie	J'ai pas envie je vais passer l'examen et tout là j'ai pas envie <b>I don't feel like it, I am going to take the exam and all I don't feel like it</b>
18. Anna	Tu passes quel examen/ <b>What exam are you going to take/</b>

Anna spontaneously produces a noticing about her sister's physical appearance after she noticed that Julie has spots on her left arm (6). This noticing, which gives rise to a new topical talk, is triggered by the sudden appearance of the spots on the screen as Julie moves her arm. It takes the form of an affirmation that exhibits what Anna seems to already know ("that's right"). In other words, this noticing rests on and reveals a mutually assumed background knowledge, demonstrating their close relationship and Anna's concern for her sister. It seems that the visual perception of the spots touches off her memory. Her remark can therefore be described as a special case of 'touched off' utterances (Sacks 1992) in the sense that it is not an utterance which triggered Anna's noticing but a physical feature. In conversation analysis, touched off refers to a mechanism where an utterance triggers the memory of a participant, who then produces an announcement that has a topical connection with the previous turn at a moment where this announcement is not expected.

However, it is not clear whether Julie actually has this disease or not (11). Julie's response is multimodal; she confirms her sister's statement and shows her arm (7). Anna's noticing occurs just as Julie leans to the side, and in doing so, incidentally makes the spots on her arm visible to Anna (5). This noticing does not interrupt the previous turn. Julie's explanation of why she does not want to go and see the

doctor (17) gives Anna the opportunity to move the conversation towards a new topic (18). This second topic change, which is indirectly linked to the noticing, is certainly related to the fact that the explanation revealed a piece of information that was not shared by Anna. This example shows how a noticing generates lines of talk that contributes to the making of the conversation.

Excerpt 2 illustrates another instance of noticings which is also about the physical appearance of the remote participant. However, unlike the previous one, this noticing appears after a line of talk which was not focused on a specific topic. Anna spontaneously makes a noticing about the color of her sister's skin (10). This noticing does not interrupt the ongoing talk and the topic it gives rise to is quickly exhausted. It appears as an attempt to maintain a continuous state of talk (Goffman 1964). Indeed, it is produced in a particular conversational context: the previous topics were quickly dropped in spite of Anna's efforts to find a lasting one. Note that the call was initiated by Anna who – typically for family video calls – did not have a special subject to talk about.

#### Excerpt 2.

- |    |       |  |
|----|-------|--|
| 1. | Anna  | Je te dérange pas<br><b>I hope I am not interrupting</b>     |
| 2. | Julie | Non<br><b>No</b>   |
| 3. | Anna  | Non qu'est-ce que vous faisiez<br><b>What were you doing</b> |
| 4. | Julie | Euh on vient de rentrer<br><b>Hu we have just come back</b>  |
| 5. | Anna  | Vous avez été où/<br><b>Where have you been/</b>             |
| 6. | Julie | xx   |
| 7. | Anna  | xx   |
| 8. | Anna  | Tu nous entends bien/<br><b>Do you hear us well/</b>         |
| 9. | Julie | Ouais<br><b>Yeah</b>   |



10.	Anna	Bon t'es toute bronzée t'as été où/ <b>Right you've got a tan where have you been/</b>
11.	Julie	Non :: <b>No ::</b>
12.	Marie (Anna's daughter)	*Montre son doudou <b>*Shows her blankie</b>
13.	Anna	Non <b>No</b>
14.	Julie	Non <b>No</b>
15.	Anna	Non <b>No</b>
16.	Julie	Non non <b>No No</b>
17.	Anna	Carla elle fait dodo/ <b>Carla she is sleeping/</b>
18.	Julie	*((baille)) Elle est en train de prendre la douche [xx] <b>*((yawns)) She is having her bath [xx]</b>

If most of the noticings are about the distant participant's physical appearance, we also observed some made by a participant about her *own* physical appearance as in Excerpt 3 below.

### Excerpt 3.

1.	Anna	Et heu hmm (...) tu t'as pas travaillé hier alors <b>And uh humm (...) so you you did not work yesterday</b>
2.	Julie	Hein/ ((touche ses cheveux)) <b>What/ (strokes her hair)</b>
3.	Anna	T'as pas travaillé hier <b>You did not work yesterday</b>
4.	Julie	Non hier j'ai été au code <b>No yesterday I was at the driving lesson</b>

---

5. Anna A ::h t'as repris le code  
A ::h you are taking the driving lessons  
up

---

6. Julie Ouais  
Yeah

---

7. Anna Ah c'est bien  
Ah that's good

---

8. Julie Ouais ((touche ses cheveux))  
Yeah ((strokes her hair))

---

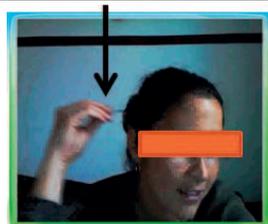
9. Anna Et alors t'as fait combien de fautes  
[And so how many mistakes have you  
made/

---

10. Marie [xx  
(Anna's  
daughter)

---

11. Julie Regarde mes mèches ((rire puis tire ses  
cheveux))  
Look at my locks ((while pulling her  
hair))




---

12. Anna ((rire)) Tu veux voir les miennes ((rire  
puis tire ses cheveux))  
((laughs)) Do you want to see mine  
((laughs and pulls her hair up with her  
hands))

---

13. Julie Je sais pas pourquoi ça fait mais bon c'est  
pas grave ouais j'ai repris le code j'y suis  
allé quatre heures hier  
((laughs)) I don't understand why they  
are like that but it does not matter yeah  
i took up the driving lessons I spent four  
hours there

---

Julie and Anna are talking about Julie's Highway Code lessons. Julie spontaneously produces a noticing about her hair (11). It takes the form of an invitation to notice something, so it can also be seen as a case of showing in the sense that it directs Anna's attention towards something (Julie's locks). This noticing, which relies on a presupposed shared access to the object of the remark (Julie's hair), occurs in an abrupt way, interrupting the ongoing topic and the completion of the adjacency

pair projected by Anna's question. We can note that part of Julie's attention was oriented towards her hair since line 2. This noticing may appear as a dis-preferred second pair part (Levinson 1983) regarding the question in the first part of the pair. Anna, however, accepts this sudden topic change by imitating her sister: she pulls her own hair up (12). The new topic is abruptly and unilaterally closed by Julie, who reorients the talk to the topic that had been suspended by her noticing. So, we can see the sequence of talk occasioned by her noticing as an inserted sequence. It is interesting to note that this noticing and the imitation were made possible by a technological feature, the image control, which allows the user to see oneself on the screen like in a mirror.

#### 4.2 Focusing conversation on children's activities through noticings

One prevalent kind of noticing in our data concerns children. Their presence, their physical appearance, and their activities are often turned into topics in a spontaneous way. Excerpt 4 below, which constitutes the beginning of a video call involving Julie and Anna, illustrates how the activity of a child triggers a series of noticings, giving rise to a line of talk focused on it. In this example, noticings appear in the beginning of the call.

##### Excerpt 4.

1.	Julie	[Tu m'as vu toute nue/ [You saw me stark-naked/
2.	Anna	*Oui *Yes
3.	Franck (Anna's husband)	*((s'en va)) *((goes away))
4.	Franck	On coupera We will cut it
5.	Julie	Mais c'est parce que j'étais en train je pensais pas que ça allait répondre aussi vite (...) alors du coup quand j'ai accepté je me suis dit que ça va mettre un temps et en fait ça j'avais pas mis xx <b>Because I was I didn't expect you would respond so quickly so when I accepted I thought it will take time but in fact I did not put on xx</b>

6. Anna ((Rire)) Bon  
((Laughs)) Well

7. Julie Tu m'as vue/  
You saw me/

8. Anna Et oui ::  
Oh yes::

9. Julie [xx  
[xx

10. Anna [Qu'est-ce qu'elle mange Carla/  
[What is Carla eating/



11. Julie Ah::: mange ça ((lui prend le téléphone mobile et lui donne une télécommande))  
ça elle mange mon appareil mon téléphone  
Ah::: eat this ((takes the cellphone from Carla and gives a remote control)) this she is eating my device my cell phone



12. Anna Ah mais c'est pas bien non plus il y a les ondes/  
(3)  
Ah but it is not good either there are waves/  
(3)

13. Julie [Hein  
[what

14. Anna [Il faut lui (..) C'est pas bien les télécommandes il y a les ondes  
[you must (..) The remote control is not good there are waves

15. Julie Les ondes de quoi/ ((geste de pointage vers la télécommande))  
Waves of what/ ((points at the remote control))

16. Anna Eh bien avec la télé ((rire))  
Well with the TV set ((laughs))

---

17.	Julie	xx (4) xx (4)
18.	Anna	Bon ça va/ <b>Well how are you/</b>
19.	Julie	C'est quand Halloween/ <b>When is it Halloween/</b>

---

In the first part of the call (not transcribed), the participants talk about the Halloween feast. While Julie is opening a new line of talk about what happened during the opening of the video call (1), this topical move is quickly shortened by Anna who spontaneously makes a noticing about the activity of Julie's daughter, Carla (10). The child's activity appears to be a 'relevant fact' to mention for Anna who introduces it in the conversation. Another possible explanation of the occurrence of this noticing at that moment is that Anna wanted to change the topic because she was embarrassed by the ongoing discussion about the opening sequence during which Julie appeared briefly "half-naked" as she describes herself. In this case, the noticing could be seen as a contingent method used by Anna for orienting the conversation to another less embarrassing topic. The noticing interrupts the ongoing topic and takes the form of a question ("What is Carla eating?") which overlaps Julie's turn, certainly in relation to the previous topic, although her utterance is not clearly audible. Julie realizes that Carla is nibbling at her cell phone, takes it away from her daughter and gives her another object (a remote control, 11). Then Anna spontaneously makes a remark on the danger of electromagnetic waves produced by remote controls, and by doing so, shows concern for her niece. The way this second noticing occurred is different from the first one since it did not interrupt the ongoing topic and is directly related to it. Julie did not seem, however, concerned by the danger indicated by her sister, so the topic is quickly curtailed. Anna then produces a 'topic initial elicitor', typical for opening sequences (18: "How are you"), certainly to maintain a continuous state of talk since it is produced after a long pause. This is in line with research on the occurrence of topic changes after lapses (Maynard 1980). But Julie does not answer Anna's question and goes back to the topic initiated at the beginning of the call ("Halloween"). The lines of talk generated by the noticings take the form of an inserted sequence as in Excerpt 3 insofar as the initial topic is retaken at the end of the fragment.

In the following instance, a noticing about Carla's (Julie's baby) activity occurs not directly triggered by the activity of the child.

## Excerpt 5.

- 
- 1 Anna Et ce matin vous avez fait quoi/  
**And this morning what did you do/**
- 
- 2 Julie Tt ce matin on était à uhm :: on a fait le ménage enfin ouais on fait le ménage et puis après il y a romain et amandine qui sont venus manger à midi à la maison et après on est on est partis à xx acheter les pizzas  
**And this morning we were at uh:: we did the chores well yeah we did the chores and then after Romain and Amandine came to eat at noon at home and then we went to xx to by pizzas**
- 
- 3 Anna Et bien dis-donc  
**Well you don't say**
- 
- 4 Julie Et là on les revoit ce soir (2) ah chaton ma copine ((regarde Carla))  
**And we are going to see them this evening (2) ah kitten my friend((looks at Carla))**
- 
- Carla ((regarde Julie and tire son pull))  
**((Looks at Julie and tugs at her sweater))**
- 
- 5 Anna Comment elle te regarde ((rire))  
**How she looks at you ((laughs))**
- 
- 6 Carla ((se met debout et cri))  
**((stands up and yells))**
- 
- 7 Julie [xx  
Anna [C'est son pyjama là=  
**[It is her pajamas that/=**
- 



8	Carla	=((cri)) =((yells))
9	Julie	Ohohoh xx <b>Ohohoh xx</b>
10	Jim (Julie's husband)	Elle adore la caméra <b>She loves the camera</b>
11	Julie	Elle adore la caméra je pense <b>She loves the camera i think</b>
12	Anna	((rire)) (1) C'est son pyjama ou :: c'est un vêtement ((laughs)) (1) <b>Is it her pajama or :: a cloth</b>
13	Julie	oui c'est son pyjama [xx <b>Yes it is her pajamas [xx</b>
14	Anna	[C'est joli [ <b>It is cute</b>

The conversation is focused on Julie's activities until line 4 when she suddenly orients her attention to her daughter who solicits her by looking at her and tugging her sweater (4). Julie's verbal reaction to her daughter's action (4: "ah kitten"), opens a new line of talk focused on Julie's daughter and based on two consecutive noticings produced by Anna: a first one about Carla's interaction with her mother (5), and then a second one about her clothing, which takes the form of a question, just after Carla stands up, making her clothing more visible (7). Note that the first noticing is directly related to Julie's orientation towards her daughter, so in terms of placement, it does not interrupt an ongoing talk insofar as it makes reference to the previous turn (4). This example and the previous one show how the presence of children in family video communication may spontaneously become the focus of the interaction and consequently give rise to topical changes through noticings.

### 4.3 Summary

Noticings are pervasive in the family video calls we have observed. They are made possible by the visual access to physical appearance and activities of distant participants and reveal how video images may give rise to sequences of small talk. Video frames appear then as an important conversational resource available at any moment of the interaction. Unlike the examples of showings examined in this chapter, an important feature of these noticings is their *situatedness* (Suchman 1986) insofar

as they are made spontaneously, depending on the ‘things’ or events that appear on the video frames. The majority of the noticings we observed generated topic shifts that were unilaterally introduced and were never treated as being improper or interactionally irrelevant by the co-participants even when they abruptly interrupt an ongoing topical talk. It is possible that video calls that do not have a particular agenda constitute an environment in which noticings and off-topic talk are considered by the participants as part of what may ‘normally’ happen or, in other words, these noticings can be seen as *typically occasioned events* (Adato 1981). By enabling the occurrence of these noticings, video communication seems closer to face-to-face situations than telephone calls which do not allow participants to see each other and to make remarks about visual physical attributes or events such as children’s activities or presence. Noticings essentially based on sound events can be observed in telephone conversations as participants may spontaneously produce remarks about a background sound or the voice of the co-participant. The noticings we described here are not unique to video communication, they can also be found in face to face interactions. Moreover, our study confirms some of Sack’s observations about the placement (e.g. interruption of the ongoing talk) and the ‘object’ of noticings (e.g. physical attributes participants have) that occur in face to face interactions. We also observed that noticings do not systematically interrupt someone’s ongoing talk and can be used as a device to maintain a continuous state of talk as in Drew and Chilton’s (2000) study of ‘keeping in touch’ telephone calls. The ‘content’ of the noticings we examined displays a particular relationship between participants. They manifest and accomplish a certain degree of intimacy between the participants. Children’s activities or physical attributes appear as conversationally relevant for the participants in the light of the relationships between them and the type of conversation they are engaged in (not focused on a specific topic). To sum up, the noticings examined in this chapter illustrate the interplay between technology, social relationships and talk in family video communication.

## 5. Conclusion

Video communication is usually considered as a tool that helps distant family members to maintain their relationships (Kirk, Cao and Sellen 2010). Seeing and talking to each other is considered as achieving affective and intimate dimensions of these relationships. To follow on this line at the interactional level, we examined how people actually mobilize the visual features of the technology in family video calls. Focusing on image-based topic management, we described two different practices that anchor parts of the interaction in the shared visual environment: showings and noticings. In the first case topics are introduced and maintained through time by a

particular interactional procedure that can be characterized as planned visual topic introduction. We found two cases of this procedure. In the first case, the speaker displays part of his environment on the screen and then moves the laptop camera through the environment, inviting his distant co-participants to comment on it. The visual dimension of the participation frame is used, so to speak, on purpose. It is noticeable that the first speaker is not always visible on the screen placing himself in the role of a news reporter: showing something and orienting the perspective and the understanding of his public. This kind of topical talk exhibits a typical structure of storytelling. The same structure is found in a second type of showings but this time it is produced by putting successively on the screen different parts of first speaker's clothing. Unlike showings which are in part planned, situatedness is a distinctive feature of noticings insofar as they are made spontaneously, depending on what is visible on the screen. The contingent references to children's presence or remote participants' visual physical features contribute to the maintaining of a continuous state of talk as they are available to be topicalized at any moment in family video communication, as in face to face interactions (Sacks 1992; Adato 1980).

Both showings and noticings display and achieve a certain degree of intimacy between the participants. As interactional practices they are constitutive of video-mediated family encounters: they allow geographically distributed participants to spend time together by sharing or talking about mutually accessible events through screens. In the case of noticings, intimacy is accomplished through remarks on events or things that are mutually known or intimate (e.g. physical appearance). These noticings therefore generate episodes of small talk that are characteristic of conversations between acquainted persons or when there is no particular agenda to discuss (Drew and Chilton 2000; Maynard and Zimmerman 1984). In the case of showings, closeness is achieved by sharing experience through storytelling, making distant participants acquainted with the local environment, appearance, clothing, surrounding objects and other aspects of the storyteller's *here and now* situation. In the light of the analysis developed here, image-based topical talk can be seen to constitute a link between video communication technology and social relationships, so is central to understanding the appropriation and social uses of visual communication technology.

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## Appendix. Transcription conventions

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word/	Rising intonation
word\	Falling intonation
wo :rd	Extension of the sound or the syllable it follows
< word >	Faster fragment than its surrounding talk
pre-	Cut-off or self-interruption
<u>Prefer, extra</u>	Emphasis
WORD	Louder voice
° word °	Quieter fragment than its surrounding talk
xxx	Inaudible segment
(word)	All or part of an utterance in parentheses indicates uncertainty on the transcriber's part, but represents a likely possibility.
[	Overlapping talk
[	
(1)	A pause timed in seconds
(.) (.) (...)	Micro pauses less than a second
=	Latching
=	
&	Continuation of turn for a same speaker
&	
word *	Activity articulated with simultaneous talk
* looks at B	
(( <i>laughing</i> ))	Described phenomena
Looks at B →	Non-verbal actions accomplished during a turn of speech
<i>Goes to the window</i>	Descriptions of non-verbal actions
( <i>italics</i> )	
Hhh	A hearable breathing, the repetition of the letter indicates more important duration

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