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Keeping the pitch on track: spatiotemporal challenges in ambulant vending on a Buenos Aires trainline

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Abstract: This article examines ambulant vendors' labour on a Buenos Aires trainline. It explores how vendors employ a range of verbal and embodied resources to navigate the challenges of sustaining attention from commuters and manage the progressivity of their sales pitch as they achieve individual service encounters and deal with physical obstructions intrinsic to the local ecology of the train and the contingencies of earning a livelihood on the move. An interactional pragmatics analysis of vendors' working practices as video-recorded by them coupled with ethnographic observations, reveals the complex interplay of verbal and embodied cues, spatial arrangements, and temporal constraints in relation to the progressivity of their sales pitch. The findings challenge long-held negative views of vendors' presence in public space by highlighting the methodical approach, dexterity, and civility of their working practices, and how their labour fills a gap in the market. The article provides new insights into the dynamics of urban labour in public spaces and the intrinsicity of multimodality to manoeuvre round the unequal conditions these workers inhabit.

Keywords: multimodal resources; workers in public space; Global South; time-space constraints; sales encounter; (un)focused interaction

Resumen: Este artículo examina el trabajo de los vendedores ambulantes en un tren de Buenos Aires. Explora cómo los vendedores emplean una serie de recursos verbales y corporales para navegar el reto de llamar y mantener la atención de los pasajeros y gestionar la progresividad de su discurso de venta a medida que logran establecer interacciones de servicio, y lidian con obstáculos físicos intrínsecos a la ecología local del tren y a las contingencias de ganarse la vida en movimiento. Un análisis

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pragmático de corte interaccional de las prácticas laborales de los vendedores, grabadas en vídeo por ellos mismos y acompañadas de observaciones etnográficas, revela la compleja interacción de los recursos verbales y corporales empleados respecto a las disposiciones espaciales y a las limitaciones temporales en relación con la progresividad del discurso de venta. Los resultados desafían opiniones negativas respecto a la presencia de estos trabajadores en el espacio público, al poner de relieve la organización, destreza y civilidad de sus prácticas laborales, y cómo su trabajo llena un vacío en el mercado. El artículo aporta nuevas perspectivas sobre la dinámica del trabajo urbano en espacio público y la intrinsicalidad de la multimodalidad para maniobrar las condiciones de desigualdad en que viven estos trabajadores.

1 Introduction

In the urban landscapes of the Global South, vending in public space (VPS) is a ubiquitous and multifaceted phenomenon often associated with disorderliness. Street vendors sustain their livelihoods by providing products and services at economic prices, especially for a segment of the population who cannot afford similar merchandise elsewhere. Despite the pervasiveness of VPS and the considerable attention it has received in social science research, the situated work activity of workers in public space (WPS) has largely escaped scholarly attention.

This paper delves into the endeavours of a group of WPS to sustain their livelihoods within the Buenos Aires metropolitan train system. It examines how they navigate the spatiotemporal dimensions of vending on trains, including the pausing and resumption of their sales pitch, as well as the verbal and embodied actions they employ to this end. The paper foregrounds the methodical nature of their situated work activity and the general civility with which it is conducted and received by commuters.

VPS (generally referred to as “street vending”) pre-dates the establishment of modern capitalist societies and, arguably of the formal economy itself. It is generally regarded as surplus, its economic value better placed within the mainstream economy (see, e.g., Cross and Morales 2007), disorderly and as cluttering the urban environment (Milgram 2011).

Recent statistics show that 61 % of the global workforce earn a living in the informal sector (International Labour Office, ILO 2018), with Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa having the highest levels of informality (International Monetary Fund 2011).¹ Informal workers, whilst often stigmatised and ignored, make a

1 <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2021/07/28/na-072821-five-things-to-know-about-the-informal-economy>.

significant contribution to the global economy with circa 50 % in Buenos Aires, Argentina (ILO 2018). WPS are an integral part of the Argentinian economy. They constitute a visible body of workers in the capital whose livelihoods are, nonetheless, effaced by the very conditions of their existence.

WPS are usually considered to be part of the informal economy. The informal economy comprises a range of activities and employment relationships that lack legal recognition, regulation, and protection (Portes et al. 1989). Although these activities have market value, they are not registered by the State. The ‘living labour’ (Gago 2018) that characterises WPS is, however, best circumscribed by the popular economy. The popular economy involves market economies whose workers live outside wage relations but are subject to political representation (Fernández-Álvarez 2020). WPS create their own jobs as well as job opportunities for others in the popular economy, such as merchandise storers and merchandise security. Their work supports other businesses such as those in the formal economy, especially when they buy their merchandise from wholesalers, as is the case of the train vendors examined in this paper.²

VPS is geographically and spatially uneven – from the products being sold, their intensity and distribution, to its spatial configuration. It is contingent on a range of factors, such as the availability of vendors to staff their posts on a given day, regular police and/or municipal civil guard operations where their goods are often seized and bribes exorted; leading, in many instances, to physical violence against vendors and their arrest. Despite the diversity of VPS, in most cities, vendors fight for recognition as workers and the right to work.

In Buenos Aires, as in other Global South cities, there are vendors who sell from relatively fixed locations, like in a stall, market-like place or from the pavement; others who have semi-fixed stalls which can be moved from one point in a marketplace to another, and semi-mobile stalls such as street food carts (cf. Israt and Adam 2017). Yet other vendors, such as mobile vendors, walk around the city selling their goods. They rely on their bodies to pull carts with their merchandise or take it in boxes or carry-on suitcases. This is the case of ambulant vendors, such as the train vendors this paper concentrates on.

This paper examines the on-the-ground working practices of a group of vendors from the Buenos Aires metropolitan train workers’ cooperative which in 2021 became part of the National Union of Workers of the Popular economy (UTEP

² Metropolitan train vendors typically live outside the city centre and must travel for over an hour to buy their goods from wholesalers at Once or Lavalle. The merchandise generally comprises confectionary, drinks, useful stationery items, and the like. With their merchandise in hand, they then travel to the central train station of Retiro to start their working shifts on trains (from ethnographic observations and interviews with members of UTEP, June 2023).

<https://utep.org.ar/nuestro-sindicato>). It analyses how vendors manage time and spatial limitations in the context of making a living on trains. Specifically, it focuses on the factors that affect the progression of vendors' sales activity once on trains, and how they solve ongoing and forthcoming challenges associated with this.

The next section offers a review of research on VPS in the Global South. This is followed by a discussion of the type of interaction that characterises the space of the train (3), the data and methods deployed (4), and its analysis (5), before the conclusions are presented (6).

2 Prior research on “street vending”

Research into VPS has primarily examined the power relations that shape commerce in cities of the Global South, with special attention to sociological and public policy analyses of the conflict between the State and “street vendors” given the former's desire to maintain ‘order’ in public space and the latter's need to sustain a livelihood. Drawing on narratives and attitudes towards the phenomenon based on ethnographic fieldwork and, to a lesser extent, surveys,³ they have provided important understandings of some of the macro forces that affect vendors' livelihoods, the vulnerability of this group of workers, and some of the persistent struggles they face in trying to make an honest living: from public space conflicts, criminalisation, eviction and dispossession to indebtedness.

Studies have focused on, the micro-scale politics of street vending (e.g., Crossa 2009 in Mexico City), the way urban governance affects street vendors (e.g., Hanser 2016 in Shanghai), how formalization processes can lead to the exclusion of street vendors (Huang et al. 2014 in Guangzhou), the financial conditions and indebtedness of vendors (see Saha 2011 for Mumbai), vendors' resistance to the law (Vargas and Urinboyev 2015 in Bogotá), their marketing strategies (Saldarriaga Díaz et al. 2016 in Medellín), their well-being, (Garzón-Duque et al. 2022 in Medellín) and security (Marín Blandón 2018 in Manizales), among others.

The challenges and unequal conditions that WPS face in different locales have also preoccupied anthropologists. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, Perelman (2016) shed light on the lives of rag-and-bone workers in Buenos Aires, while Fernández-Alvarez (2019) analysed the political organisation of popular economy

³ Though see Duneier's (1999) sociological ethnography of street vendors in Greenwich Village which incorporates some audio-recorded interactions between vendors and prospects as well as other stakeholders such as the police. And, Llewellyn and Burrow's (2008) ethnomethodological analysis of video-recordings of how a newspaper vendor, part of the *Big Issue* registered charity, approached passers-by, how they responded, and the way in which their economic activity is constrained by and shaped by the social order of the street.

workers within the same city. In contrast, Pires et al. (2020) investigated conflicts within public space and the associated precariousness of vendors in Rio de Janeiro. Similarly, Hirata (2015) examined how changes in government regulations affecting street commerce impacted the livelihoods of vendors in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Furthermore, Goldstein's (2016) ethnography of La Cancha market in Cochabamba demonstrated how State neglect contributes to the criminalisation of ambulant vendors.

On the other hand, the scarce linguistic literature on ambulant vending has concentrated on the discursive practices of WPS, with a focus on transport vendors. Alonso Piñero (2018) examined the linguistic politeness strategies of vendors' sales pitches in Mexico City's subway. Ergueta et al. (2002) and Leisch and Murata Missagh (2019) focused their attention on vendors' verbal sales pitches on Buenos Aires buses, underground and trains by way of their own mobile phone audio-recordings and observations during the authors' transport journeys. They distinguished between the discourse of beggars who often occupy the same physical space and that of vendors in terms of genre analysis. Overall, linguistic findings reveal how vendors mitigate the potential face-threat (Brown and Levinson 1987) of unsolicited sales pitches and adopt a worker's persona that differentiates them from others who also make a living on trains. In addition, Márquez Reiter et al. (2023) conducted a multimodal pragmatic analysis of the sales pitch of vendors on a Buenos Aires trainline based on vendors' own video-recordings of their working practices. This allowed the capturing of vendors' verbal and non-verbal embodied actions (walking, stopping, hands and arms movement). The authors reported the general adroitness and professionalism with which vendors pitch products requiring more elaboration than the more commonly offered food and drinks. Three stages of the sales pitch were identified according to the alignment of body motion with other embodied and verbal activities: the opening, where the preparation of a 'pop-up' shop is done from a stationary position on the train coach, the middle, in which the product is presented from a stationary point on the coach, the extension of the middle, where a summarised upshot is offered and conducted in motion, creating thus an interactional space where product inspection or purchase become the next possible relevant action.

Contrary to the discourse of disorderliness that circulates in the media and in official discourse to refer to VPS, linguistic studies have shown vendors' professionalism when interacting with (potential) customers and the organised nature of their work practices.

This paper further delves into the live working practices of this underrepresented group of workers. It analyses how they deploy verbal and embodied resources to deal with concomitant challenges resulting from the pausing of their sales pitch as they attempt to sustain continued attention to themselves. It contributes to understanding the complexity of vendors' on-the-ground work activity by attending to a

situated activity in a social domain that has largely escaped the purview of interactional pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Our observations and insights are based on the analysis of a corpus of video-recorded interactions and supplemented by ethnographic material. Before we do so, we offer our understanding of the type of interaction that characterises the shared public space of the train (3) and the data and methods deployed in this study (4).

3 The train as a vending place

The train as a vending place is of interactional interest for individual commuters are co-present with vendors without necessarily being mutually engaged in shared activity. It represents a space where unfocused interaction Goffman (1963) is the dominant form. In unfocused interaction, people interpret and assess one another's behaviour by way of a "body idiom" for "there is an obligation to convey certain information when in the presence of others and an obligation not to convey other impressions just as there is an expectation that others will present themselves in a certain way" Goffman (1963: 35). Commuters may thus give vendors visual notice of their presence on trains (e.g., glance at them) and, at the next moment withdraw their attention (e.g., look out of the window) to convey that vendors do not constitute a target of interest. Such moments of minimal mutual focus represent cases of "civil inattention" (Goffman 1963). They are designed to make anonymity and privacy possible on public transport while signalling recognition of the claims of others in this space. Simply put, civil inattention displays respectful behaviour and underlies the personal boundaries of commuters and vendors, with commuters signalling disinterest in the sales activity without disregard for the vendors.

Vendors try to create "mutual monitoring possibilities, anywhere within which an individual will find himself accessible to the naked senses of all the others who are 'present,' and similarly find them accessible to him" (Goffman 1964: 135). This is because focused interaction entails establishing and sustaining attention to and mutual involvement in jointly managed activity. Vendors do this by enhancing their visibility and audibility on the train, such as standing in the clearing of the coach from which they engage in the sales pitch with a louder voice than that used to interact with other train vendors (Márquez Reiter et al. 2023) or commuters, to whom they typically give right of way on the aisles and near the doors.

When focused interactions are achieved in the form of service encounters (e.g., Márquez Reiter 2011), vendors need to balance the competing demands of the encounter they are engaged in within the larger activity of selling on trains, for their goal is to achieve as many sales as possible within the spatiotemporal dimensions of the train journey. According to the vendors: *hay que sumar y si es posible multiplicar*

(literally ‘one has to add and if possible multiply’). Their engagement in a focused interaction with a customer can impede their visibility and hearability to others in the coach as well as constrain their ability to monitor for other signs of interest, leading them to miss potential sales.

Despite the challenges of making a living on trains, including the fact that vending though not illegal is not officially permitted (Fernández-Alvarez 2019), the train is a sought-after workplace. First, unlike mobile vending on pavements or door-to-door selling, prospects (i.e., commuters) are temporarily stationary in an enclosed space. They constitute a potential captive audience that does not need to be physically followed around open public space. Second, there are no trolley services on these metropolitan trains or a coach where miscellaneous items or food are sold and can be consumed. Train vendors who, by and large, sell food and drinks provide an important service for commuters, especially for those with long journeys. Third, the train coaches have a clearing which can be used as a ‘stage’ to perform the sales pitch and an aisle which allows vendors to walk closer to commuters while holding, showing, and offering their products to those seated on either side of the coach. These factors, in turn, help to ensure vendors’ visibility and audibility. Fourth, the train platform affords vendors the possibility of organising their merchandise ready to be displayed and sold prior to boarding the trains as well as resting and interacting with fellow workers. Indeed, it is on train platforms where vendors usually congregate and disseminate information regarding the workplace – from the presence of Public Space officials to offers at the wholesalers. It is often at the platform that vendors, in those cases when there are more than two, decide who is going to board the train and which coach they will start working on (ethnographic observations – June 2023).

4 Data and methods

Following a successful pilot study carried out with a group of four train vendors, who were part of the train workers’ cooperative, the vendors captured their daily working practices on a Buenos Aires trainline, using their mobile phones strapped to their chests (Márquez Reiter et al. 2023).⁴ The vendors decided when to start and stop

⁴ The study was possible thanks to an SRA International Development and Inclusive Innovation grant. (PI: Márquez Reiter) in collaboration with CITRA. The four ambulant vendors who participated in the project are part of a workers’ cooperative collaborating with CITRA (Ethical clearance reference: The Open University HREC/3291R-14/04/2021).

videorecording as they engaged in their daily work on trains and the data to be shared. The data comprise a total of 28 h (263 videos) that capture everything that can be seen within the mobile phone field in the direction the vendor is facing, especially the use of their arms, hands, and body movement (walking, torquing, stopping) when manipulating and showing products to sell.

In this paper we turn our attention to how vendors manage time and space limitations within the local ecology of the train. We examine how the progressivity of the sales pitch which is designed to encourage but not demand sales is momentarily suspended when service encounters are achieved, the train coach becomes relatively congested and material resources to achieve economic transactions are unavailable.

The video-data is supplemented by data gathered during an exploratory ethnography conducted by the first author between 3 and 17 June 2023.⁵ As part of this 9 h of ethnographic observations were conducted while accompanying vendors, seven interviews with train vendors were carried out, and two meetings of the train workers’ association were observed, and audio recorded, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: This table outlines the video dataset collected, identifying four anonymised ambulant vendors (AVs) who independently recorded their own working practices over a 20-day period on a trainline. Additionally, it provides an account of ethnographic observations conducted by the first author. These observations involved accompanying vendors during their selling activities on trains (distinct from those who self-recorded their activities), conducting interviews with various vendors, and attending meetings of the train workers’ association.

Date	Data	Duration (total)	Total
2020–2021	Self-recorded video data on the trainlines by 4 train vendors	5–15’ per sales activity (28 h)	263 videos recorded
06–2013	Observations of other vendors on the trainline	60’ over a period of 9 days (9 h)	9 meetings
06–2013	Interviews with train vendors	20–30’ (3 h)	7 interviews
06–2013	Audio-recording and observations of train workers’ association meetings	60’ (2 h)	2 meetings

⁵ The exploratory ethnography was funded by an Open Societal Challenges grant (PI: Márquez Reiter). Over 90 h of observations were conducted with public space vendors working in a range of public space domains, 20 h of video-recordings of their working practices were conducted and over 16 interviews carried out. Ethical clearance reference: The Open University Revised and Extended HREC/3921R-17/02/2023.

Our analysis primarily focuses on the vendors' own-video recordings from an interactional pragmatics perspective (e.g., Márquez Reiter 2009, 2019, cf. Chang and Haugh 2011) which considers the larger social context where vendors' situated activity is embedded and how the visible bodily actions (Kendon 2004) that are evident in the videos interact with verbal actions in the enactment of their sales activity. This allows us to account for the communicative resources vendors employ in real-time to create, sustain, and satisfy the (supposed) demand for the products being sold. Context-based interpretations of language in use (verbal and embodied) are offered according to the actions they serve to achieve and the sociocultural factors they orient to, including instances when they are not empirically crystallized in the videos but are, nonetheless, articulated in the ethnographic material.

The analysis of vendors' verbal and embodied work practices in real-time provides a more holistic understanding of how language as a multimodal tool is deployed to make a living, how their work activity is sewn together, attuned to the environment, and responds to the inequities they face.

The video-data captures everything that can be seen within the mobile phone field in the direction the vendor is facing, hence the vendors' heads or gaze are not visible unless when captured by another vendor's camera. Therefore, our analytic focus is on the spatiotemporal constraints of the vendors' sales activity as captured in the videos and on the commuters' verbal and embodied actions.

Given the centrality of movement (walking, stopping, torquing) for ambulant vending and its evidence in the video data, knowledge gained from multimodal studies on how verbal and embodied actions in real-time coordinate and make movement possible (e.g., Mondada 2014), and contribute to the organisation of embodied interaction in public spaces (Haddington 2019) will be drawn upon, where relevant. This will be coupled with ethnographic knowledge for it enables us not to shy away from vendors' constraints and their adaptations to the local ecology and contingencies of the train, especially when they cannot be fully explicated by the video material, and to understand how vendors' work practices in situ respond to some of the conditions of inequality in which their labour is embedded.

The focus on vendors' situated activity in a social domain which has received scarce linguistic attention and where movement is a *sine qua non* enables us to comprehend how their work gets practically done, and the service they provide to the public.

The data were transcribed following the Jefferson's transcription system (2004). Relevant visible embodied actions were described in double parenthesis, i.e., (()), with stills aligned to their anchor points (#) in the transcript. The transcription and annotation of embodied practices were done using ELAN software.

5 Analysis

The temporariness of train travel, with frequent stops and station arrivals, increases vendor's ability to access a consistent stream of passengers. Yet, it poses challenges to the progressivity of their overall sales activity as they attempt to secure sales in a timely fashion in a dynamically transient environment.

Vendors have to navigate the constraints posed by time-sensitive interactions within confined spaces. Space may become restricted by the presence of too many commuters on the aisles, and time is of the essence, considering the flow of passengers, especially as the train reaches the stations. For this reason, congested trains are typically avoided as are peak travelling times (ethnographic observations and interviews, 13 June 2023).

The analysis explores the dynamic interplay of the sales activity on trains by focusing on the combination of the verbal and embodied resources vendors employ to navigate challenges marked by welcomed and unwelcomed suspensions to their sales pitch. The 'progressivity' (Heritage 2007; Schegloff 1979; Stivers and Robinson 2006) of the sales pitch is thus taken as our analytical cornerstone. It refers to the unfolding of the vendor's pitch over time, continuously directed at the wider audience and designed to encourage but not demand sales encounters. It serves as both the heartbeat of the vendor's commercial endeavour and our primary point of reference for examining the rhythm of sales activities.

The vendor's pitch which is performed in a social space characterised by 'unfocused interaction' (Goffman 1963), sets the stage for a public broadcast typical of public spaces. While directed to no one in particular, it seeks to capture the collective attention of the commuters to the focused interactions of service encounters. It is within this flow that the concept of 'suspension' emerges – not as an end to sales efforts, but as a strategic shift to a focused interaction that momentarily pauses the pitch in response to a commuter's display of interest and/or to the contingencies of the train.

'Suspension of progressivity' thus refers to the temporary cessation or pause in the vendor's ongoing sales pitch from a general offer of products in a social space where unfocused interaction and civil inattention are warranted to the transition to focused interactions (i.e., engaging with prospects or other passengers owing to the contingencies of the train). While the train environment largely constitutes an unfocused milieu where commuters engage in personal activities, the vendor's pitch represents a bid for focused interaction. The transition from unfocused to focused interaction is not a derailment of the sales process but an integral component of their work activity.

The data show that 'suspension' of the sales pitch occurs when a commuter signals a readiness to engage in a focused interaction, the vendor's movement is temporarily halted by the intricacies of train travel, and when the completion of focused interactions requires material resources which are not at their disposal,

leading vendors to simultaneously engage in two or more work related tasks. These cases involve a pause in the sales pitch and/or in a focused encounter as the vendor adapts to the fluctuating demands of the train environment and attempts to overcome some of the material conditions of vending on the move.

In other words, ‘suspension’ refers to the adaptive mechanism of the vendor, a skilful modulation of activity that enables the optimisation of sales opportunities in a transient and complex setting. The term is employed to capture the essence of transitions from unfocused to focused interactions, rather than to imply any form of inactivity or absence of interaction. We observe that during suspensions, vendors engage in a one-to-one interaction. This focused engagement stands in contrast to the broader and more diffuse strategy of the ongoing sales pitch.

The subsequent sections will explore the choreography of transitions during which vendors’ sales pitch is paused or interrupted. These interruptions occur when vendors encounter sales opportunities or physical obstructions—such as other commuters, fellow vendors, or objects in the train’s aisle that hinder their movement and ability to freely deliver their pitches.

The following sections analyse how vendors maintain their sales pitch’s progressivity and manage instances where this flow is temporarily suspended. Section 5.1 provides the foundational context for analysing vendor-passenger interactions, illustrating vendors’ strategic engagement with commuters and the dynamic nature of their mobile sales activities. Section 5.2 explores how vendors overcome material challenges and constraints of vending on trains. Section 5.3 focuses on how vendors handle the suspension of their sales pitch progress due to restricted mobility.

5.1 Service encounters

Train vendors aim at securing as many sales as possible by exploiting the number of transient commuters that characterises train travel. Despite the pool of prospects that the train may afford them, vendors can normally only engage in one service encounter at a time, and this can be time consuming (e.g., customers selecting from the product options or finding change) considering the time-sensitive slot at their disposal. It then follows that every service encounter achieved potentially represents a suspension of the larger sales activity oriented to the rest of the commuters and in pursuit of further sales. The temporality of the service encounter requires vendors to focus their attention on one customer to the disservice of other sales opportunities, for this prevents them from fully monitoring other signs of interest as they stand near the customer’s seat (ethnographic observations, 12–14 June 2023).

The initial example in this section sets the stage for the subsequent instances detailed within this article, presenting the foundational context for the ensuing analysis of vendor-passenger interactions.

The first example depicts a vendor's sales pitch for a notepad and pen set priced at 50 pesos (Excerpt 1 below, lines 1–23). Near the end of the sales pitch in Excerpt 1, the vendor suspends the pitch in response to an embodied action from a commuter (Excerpt 2, lines 22–41) which functions as a pre-request to buy a notepad and pen.

Subsequently, a second purchase is initiated by another commuter seating nearby (Excerpt 3, lines 42–64). This unfolds simultaneously with the vendor's general call to the passengers in line 44, succinctly announcing the price, “Cinuenta pesos abonán/Fifty pesos for these.” This moment of overlap – where the vendor's general call co-occurs with an individual's purchasing action exemplifies the dynamic and overlapping nature of interactions within this type of mobile sale activity.

Excerpt 1 demonstrates the vendor's tactical approach to engage commuters by strategically structuring the sales pitch. Instead of beginning with traditional greetings, the vendor immediately presents the product to capture their attention, leaving the opening (e.g. greetings) of the sales pitch for later. In line 3, the vendor employs a hook by highlighting the utility of the product with the phrase, “PARA LA CARTERA = PARA EL BOLSO” (“For the handbag = for the bag”), before actually naming the product. This technique, common among ambulant vendors, serves to pique interest early in the interaction.

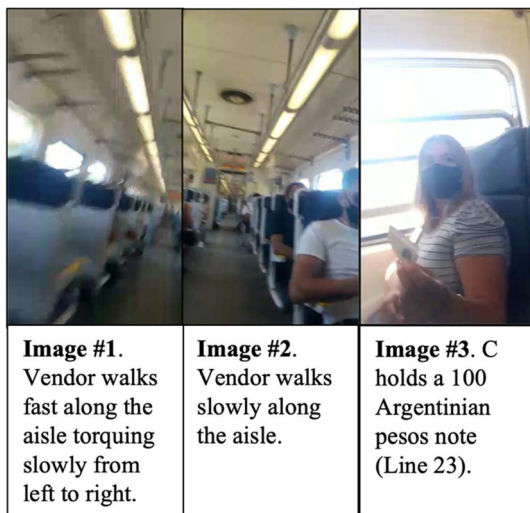
Following this, in line 4, the vendor greets the commuters, presents the product, mentions its price, and offers practical examples of its affordances, such as “to do the math” (line 19) Throughout the pitch, the vendor provides reminders of the product's price and utility. By utilising these strategies, the vendor creates a perceived need for the product, aligning the pitch with the commuters' collective knowledge and adapting it to their immediate or personal use (Márquez Reiter et al. 2023).

The vendor's interactional tactics effectively manage the flow of the pitch. The deliberate sequencing – from the utility-focused hook to product demonstration and practical examples – facilitates a smooth transition from initial engagement to the closing of the sales pitch. This method ensures the pitch remains relevant and persuasive, catering to the commuters' situational needs and enhancing the likelihood of a successful transaction.

To support these interactional selling tactics, the vendor's embodied behaviour plays a crucial role. The vendor walks along the aisle of the train (first section of the coach before the doors) three times, hence passing by the same commuters on three repeated occasions. The first time, she walks relatively fast using a high volume, then slows down and continues pitching in a high volume, though at a lower speech rate. When walking, she torques her body slightly to the sides facing commuters, but without staring at them, in line with the civil inattention that characterises the space of the train.

Excerpt 1: AVR 12C 53400: sales pitch

1. V ((Vendor (V) sings while preparing to start offering merchandise)) ← Preparation phase
2. walks quickly to the next coach
3. >PARA LA# CARTERA = PARA EL BOLSO= ← V starts sales pitch
For the handbag = for the bag
Img. #1
4. =TENGAN USTEDES MUY BUENOS DÍAS< (.) ← Greetings (postponed)
I (wish) you (all) a very good day
5. [PRESENTE Y EN]TREGO COMO SIEMPRE (.) EL ANOTADOR CON LA LÁPICERA
I present and deliver as always (.) the notepad along with a pen
6. C_{2,3}[---Look at V]
7. (0.3)
8. walks slowly slightly torquing upper body towards the sides→
<LOS DOS ARTICULOS #(.) LOS VAN ALLEVAR>
both of these items (.) you will take
Img. #2
9. (0.2)
10. <AL ANOTADOR CON LA LÁPICERA>
the notepad with the pen
11. <EN EL VALOR DE CINCUENTA PESOS>
for the amount of fifty pesos
12. (0.3)
13. >TAMBIÉN ES CIERTO QUE AL MOMENTO DE QUERER ANOTAR ALGO=
it's also true that when you want to jot something down
14. walks slowly slightly torquing upper body towards the sides
=NO ENCONTRAMOS NINGUNA DE LAS DOS COSAS< (.)
we can't find either of them
15. turns around
NI PAPEL NI LÁPICERA
neither paper nor a pen
16. (0.2)
17. walks slowly
<CINCUENTA PESOS ABONAN (.) CINCUENTA PESOS LA OFERTA> = EH?
fifty pesos you pay (.) fifty pesos is the offer = okay ← Price and offer
18. (0.2)
19. PARA LAS CUENTAS? (.) PARA LLEVARLE A LOS CHICOS=
to do the math(.) to give to your kids ← Provides another example
20. =Y TENERLOS ENTRETENIDOS
to keep them occupied
21. (0.4)
22. V walks slowly stops
ANOTADOR CON LÁPICERA = E: H? ← Suspension of sales pitch
(a) notepad with a pen = okay
23. C
Img. #3 [((#looks at V holding a 100 Argentinian pesos note))]



In Excerpt 2, a first sales transaction (lines 23–37) unfolds, (also illustrated at the end of Excerpt 1, lines line 22–23), as the vendor delivers a summarised upshot of the product while walking along the train aisle (line 22) (Márquez Reiter et al. 2023), and a commuter expresses interest by trying to make eye contact, orienting her head (upwards and to her right) towards the vendor and holding up a one-hundred pesos note (line 23 and Image 1) with her left hand. This embodied composition of posture and orientation of her upper body (head, gaze, arm and hand) is held for at least 0.4 s. During this time, the vendor pauses the pitch to transition from an unfocused to a focused interaction with the prospect, stops and turns towards the prospect's seat. While the prospect's preparation phase is not seen in the video, the recording captures the prospect's body posture and how she retracts it by lowering her arm, looking down and turning her head forward as she waits for the vendor to get change. The vendor responds verbally to the prospect's pre-conditional request for change (line 24), confirming thus that the sales is contingent on obtaining the right cash.

Excerpt 2: AVR 12C_54280: first sale

22. V walks slowly stops
ANOTADOR CON LAPI[CERA = E:H? (3.9)
(a) notepad with a pen = okay
23. C Looks at V
[((#holds a 100 Argentinean pesos note))
 #3
24. V <AHÍ TE DOY el vuelto>↓
Right away I'll give you the change
((P waits for the change looking at V))

25. (1.2)
26. **ACÁ TENÉS <CUARENTA>**
 here you have *forty*
 ((V hands over the change to C, who receives it))
27. (3.8)
28. **Y DIEZ <CINCUENTA>**
 and ten *fifty*
 ((V hands the rest of the money to C))
29. C ((C receives change from V and pays# her))
Img. Looks at V #4
- 30.
31. (0.8)
32. **[QUÉ COLOR DE LAPICERA QUERÉS?**
 what colour pen do you want
 ((V receives the money from C))
33. C [Looks at V
34. (0.1)
35. C **(azul)**
 blue
 ((Looks down counting the change received))
36. (0.1)
37. V **<AZUL>**
 blue
 ((Searches for a blue pen))
38. C Looks down looks up to the vendor
39. V **>PERFECTO = GRACIAS = QUÉ TENGÁS BUEN DÍA BUEN VIAJE = E:H?<**
 Perfect = thank you = have a good day and a safe journey = okey
 ((Gives pen to C))
40. C ((Receives pen)) Looks down
41. V ((Turns around))

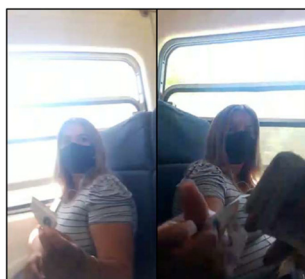


Image #3. C holds a 100 Argentinean pesos note (Line 23).

Image #4. C pays vendor (Line 23).

The material display of money and its observability by the vendor is enabled by the physical proximity afforded by the aisle and the viewing it provides to each party (i.e., seated vs. standing viewing). It allows the payment phase of the service encounter to take place earlier and to obviate non-essential elements (e.g., greetings) (Márquez Reiter 2011).⁶ It is also indicative of the material challenges faced by vendors regarding payment options, and their need to carry the right type of change considering the product price and the notes in circulation at the time.⁷

The co-occurrence of the passenger's head movement towards the vendor as he becomes proximally close, and the display of money indicate that the passenger is now a prospect. It offers a direct signal to the vendor of the passenger's communicative goal: a summons to shift from unfocused to focused interaction. The note constitutes a pre-conditional request for change and ensures the vendor understands what is required for a sale to be achieved prior to engagement. It makes relevant the transitory nature of vending on trains, the time-boundedness of service encounters therein and the passenger's attunement to the vendor's activity.

The vendor responds to the summons (Levinson 1983; Schegloff 2007) by confirming their ability to provide change (line 24). This is done with the inclusion of the spatial deictic adverb "ahí" ('there') functioning as a temporal indicator in initial position and uttered with a higher volume, relative to the rest of service encounter. It indicates that the change will be provided there and then, and that the transaction can be effected. Before handing over the product the vendor gives the change to the customer (lines 26–28) using a higher volume of voice when counting the money. This serves a two-fold purpose: it helps to establish the vendor as a reliable service provider and represents a potential hook for those who may be interested in the product but are unsure if the vendor can provide change.

The higher voice volume serves as an alignment signal, indicating that the requirements of a sales transaction can be met. It confirms the availability of change and underlies the footing (Goffman 1981) adopted, aligning the vendor with the image of an efficient and trustworthy salesperson. In short, the footing adopted demonstrates the vendor's competence, preparedness, and expediency.

Immediately following the first transaction (Excerpt 2, lines 22–41), a nearby passenger (i.e., seated on the other side of the aisle, one row behind C, Image 5 below) summons the vendor (Excerpt 3 below) by lifting her head and chin up in the direction of the vendor whilst holding her wallet in her hands (Image 5), as the vendor uses the

⁶ See Halonen and Koivisto (2023) on customers' orientation to progressivity in Finnish kiosks by making money observable prior to the shop keeper's price announcement.

⁷ *Mercado Pago*, an online payment service tool was not used at the time. Since then, many transport vendors advertise it by displaying a sticker to this effect in the boxes or carry-on suitcases used to carry their merchandise (ethnographic observations – June 2023).

momentum of the just achieved sales to resume the pitch before engaging with another customer. Thus, in line with the previous example, prospects adjust their embodied orientation toward the vendor to transition from unfocused to focused interaction (De Stefani and Mondada 2018) and accompany it with a relevant material display (i.e., money, wallet).

The short gap between the end of the first service encounter (Excerpt 2, line 40) and the re-initiation of the pitch via a summarised upshot of the product focusing on its value only (Excerpt 3, line 44) allows the vendor to efficiently address both activities simultaneously (lines 43–45). This chaining of transactions demonstrates how the spatial arrangement of seats and proximity (see Image 5) can influence sales opportunities and create momentum for others to buy products, when they are within auditory and visual range of the vendor. It shows how spatial proximity can affect the temporality and structure of the service encounters.

The limited space of the coach aisle from which vendors typically engage in focused interactions with prospects can, however, present advantageous opportunities and result in further sales. The data show how the spatial closeness between the vendor and passengers during service encounters can create a “contagious effect” (Cialdini and Goldstein 2004 on ‘social influence’), leading to more sales as nearby commuters, who might have been initially disinterested or unaware of the vendor’s presence, may be prompted to unplanned purchases (e.g., Stivers et al. 2009). Hence, an observable service encounter in action, even if heard but only captured peripherally (Heath and Luff 1992; vom Lehn et al. 2001) offers prospects more time to decide whilst the vendor is standing close by.



Image 5. Spatial distance from transactions 1 and 2. Passengers seated diagonally from each other on opposite seats rows as indicated by the white arrow in the middle. The image on the right corresponds to the first transaction, the one on the left to the second transaction, and the middle one shows the distance between passengers involved in both transactions.

In the second transaction captured in Excerpt 3 below, the vendor strategically addresses both, commuters on the coach and a single customer by modulating their volume as they shift from a focused interaction to the unfocused interaction that characterise the space of the train. The vendor raises their voice to make the ‘call’ (line 44) trying to attract the attention of prospects. In contrast, they adopt a lower and softer volume when ascertaining the customer’s pen colour preference (line 48) engaging thus in a more personalised interaction with the passenger. Volume modulation is thus used to enhance the efficiency of the sales pitch and signals the different interaction orders the vendor attends to.

Excerpt 3: AVR 12C_81685: second sale

42. (0.5)
43. C₂ [#=(dame) una
give me one
((C looks at her purse, searching for change))
Img.#6
44. V [<CINCUENTA PESO ABONAN>
fifty pesos (for these)
45. >CUÁL QUERÉS?<
which one do you want?
((Shows notepads options to the commuter))
46. C₂ (2.1)
((Takes a notepad and gives it to her accompanying commuter))
47. LA LAPICERA?
the pen
48. C₂ #Qué color?
Which colour
((Looks at her accompanying commuter))
Img.#7
49. C₃ rojo
red
50. (0.1)
51. C₂ rojo
Red
((Looks back at V))
52. V >TENÉS ROJA, NEGRA, AZUL Y VERDE<
you have red, black, blue and green
((C₂ and C₃ look at V))
53. (0.5)
54. C₂ Rojo
red
((Looks down to get the money from her purse))
55. (0.1)

56. V **ROJO. COMO NO**
Red. of course
57. (0.7)
58. **SERVI:TE (.) MUY AMA:BLE**
here you go (.) much appreciated
((Gives the pen to the commuter))
59. (0.4)
60. **#GRACIAS. >QUÉ TENGA BUEN = DÍA BUEN VIAJE<**
thank you. have a good day and safe journey
((V receives the payment for the purchase))
Img.#8
61. turns around and starts walking
(0.4)
62. **PERMISO**
excuse me
63. (0.2)
64. moves down the train aisles
ANOTADOR CON LÁPICERA (.) LOS DOS POR CINCUENTA PESOS = EH?
notepad with a pen (.) both for fifty pesos= okey
((V moves down the train aisle))

		
Image #6. “Give me one”, C ₂ looks down checking for money in her bag to pay V (Line 43).	Image #7. “Which colour?”, C ₂ turns her head to the side looking at C ₃ (Line 48).	Image #8. C ₂ pays V for purchase by extending her arm towards V, holding the money in her hand (Line 60).

Once the customer chooses a colour (line 51), the vendor lists (Jefferson 1988) all available pen colours using a higher volume to effectively reach the customer and other commuters. It is not clear if the vendor heard C₂ saying “red” or if they wanted to reinforce their salesperson footing in the light of there being other potential prospects on the coach.

The examined segment reveals a pattern of actions and responses between the vendor and the second passenger (C₂). C₂ initiates the interaction by requesting the product on sale (line 43). The vendor reacts by inquiring about their colour preference (line 45). The customer's immediate response is non-verbal: turning their head to look at their accompanying passenger (line 46), presumably to inquire about the colour preference (not hearable in the video). It functions as a pre-conditional inquiry, seeking information needed to complete the purchase transaction.

The sequence continues as the prospect's gaze is directed towards the accompanying passenger, who subsequently chooses a colour (line 49). Once the colour preference is established, the customer's attention returns to the vendor (line 51). Notwithstanding this, the vendor repeats all available colours in a higher volume (line 52), attempting to maintain continued attention to themselves and to the offer given that it is not immediately visible to others in the coach. Immediately after this, the customer verbally repeats their selected colour to let the vendor know their decision (line 54) and the vendor confirms it in high volume (line 56), highlighting her marketing-like strategies (e.g., fluctuations in vocal volume) resulting from the efficient management of time and space constraints during sales rounds on the train, and how spatial proximity can influence sales opportunities.

5.2 Overcoming the material conditions of vending on the move

In Excerpt 4 below, a commuter requests change amounting to 1,000 pesos (implicitly assumed as a precondition for the purchase), resulting in a disruption to the vendor's activity due to the unavailability of change. The prospect apologises (line 107) for what turns out to be a truncated sale resulting in the vendor's temporary pitch suspension.

Excerpt 4: AVA 15c_163176

91. V walks down the aisle
BEBIDAS FRE:SCA::S
Cold drinks
92. (1.6)
93. walks towards commuter and stops
[Ho:la= qué tal?
Hello, how are you?
94. C **[#Tenés cambio de mil?**
Do you have change for a thousand?
 ((Looks at A while orienting her body toward A as well))
- Img. #9

95. (0.4)
96. V **>Te doy<?**
I give you...?
97. C **<Cambio de mi:l>**
Change for a thousand
98. (0.4)
99. V **>Cambio de mil<?**
Change for a thousand?
100. C **(Sí)**
Yes
101. V (3.0)
((#Searching for change))
Img. #10
102. C **<Me parece [que no llegás>**
It seems you don't have enough
103. V **[No: = no llego = no sé**
No, I don't have, I don't know
104. C (xxx)
105. (0.5)
starts walking and stops
106. V **BE[BIDAS FRÍAS**
Cold drinks
107. C **[Mil perdones**
(I'm) very sorry
108. (0.4)
109. **Perdó:n**
Sorry
110. (0.2)
111. V **>OTRA VEZ SERÁ (.) NO IMPORTA<**
Maybe another time. It doesn't matter.
112. (0.2)
113. C **Gra:cias**
Thank you.
114. (1.0)

115. V starts walking slowly
 >si consigo te traigo = sabés<
If I get some change, I'll bring it to you, okay?
116. (0.5)
117. E::?
Hm?
118. stops walking
 <SI CONSIGO = TE TRAIGO>
If I get (some change), I'll bring it to you.
119. C >Dale dale<
Alright, alright
120. V continues walking
 BEBIDAS FRÍAS = POMELO NARANJA MULTIFRUTA Y AGUA BIEN FRESCA
Cold drinks, grapefruit, orange, multifruit and very cold water
121. (0.2)
- ((While in the following coach, V approached a fellow vendor to exchange a 100-pesos note, but V's colleague did not have any change either)).

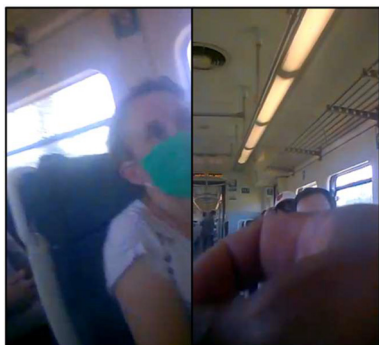


Image #9.
 “Tenés cambio de mil?”
 Commuter gazes at the vendor and inquires, (Line 94).

Image #10.
 The vendor inspects for change, but they lack sufficient change to provide to the commuter in exchange for the sale (Line 101).

The prospect's initial action of apologising and explaining their inability to complete the purchase can be seen as a repair strategy aimed at mitigating potentially negative repercussions for the vendor's activity. By acknowledging their inability to meet the vendor's expectations, they display an understanding of the circumstances involved in train vending and of the civility that characterises passenger-vendor relations. The vendor handles the situation by initially minimising the perceived 'wasting time' action (line 111), demonstrating professionalism. The vendor's response in line 111 ("maybe another time, it doesn't matter") suggests alternative future opportunities for the customer to purchase a beverage. It indicates non-resentment towards the situation, thus providing a means to resolve the issue while maintaining a positive social relationship. That it is produced in a higher volume suggests the vendor's simultaneous orientation to the prospect and to other commuters within hearable proximity on the coach. Immediately after that, the vendor seeks change from a fellow vendor working on the same coach (segment not included in Excerpt 2).

Subsequently, the vendor closes the interaction with the prospect by proposing an arrangement (lines 115–118). Contingent on the vendor obtaining change within the space of the coach, the time-boundedness of train travel and their work therein, the cash would then function as a tie (Mazeland 2004) to re-engage in a focused interaction with the prospect and secure the sale. The arrangement shows customer service responsiveness to the prospect and to potentially others on the train, as well as some of the material challenges of having to earn a living on the move.

Multitasking is an endemic feature of vending on the move. Vendors rely on their bodies to carry their merchandise with them while displaying selected samples and managing the spatiotemporal constraints of a moving train. This requires the maintenance and coordination of relevant courses of action in parallel or sequentially (Haddington et al. 2014) in pursuit of multiple sales opportunities, as well as corporeal stability.

Excerpt 5 below illustrates one of the vendors' distinctive multitasking strategies within the context of their sales pitch as they concurrently engage in two or more work-related tasks. In this instance, the vendor suspends the progressivity of the sales pitch as they engage in the sale of a drink but attempts to maintain the verbal articulation of the pitch once the customer has been secured (line 61). This enables the vendor to capitalise on the just achieved sale and effectively manage the limited time window inherent to this type of sales activities; thereby, optimising sales efficiency and overall productivity.

Excerpt 5: AVA 18a 96020

49. V walks towards commuter
Hola↓
Hello
50. C **=no tenés saboriza:da?**
Don't you have flavoured ones.
51. V **>Coca-Cola = saborizada de naranja y agua mineral<**
Coca-Cola Orange-flavoured and mineral water.
52. C ((#Glances at the drink choices))
Img. #11
53. **Agua, dame**↓
Water, please.
 ((Checks their wallet for some money))
54. (1.6)
 ((continues searching their wallet))
55. V **>Te doy<?**
I give you?
56. (0.2)
57. C **#Agua=**
Water.
 ((continues searching their wallet))
Img. #12
58. V **=Agua**
Water.
59. (3.8)
 ((searches for the drink and holds it until P finds the money to pay))
60. C **(Cuánto vale?)=**
How much is it?
61. V **=BEBIDAS FRÍA:S::**
Cold drinks
62. (0.1)
63. **SESENTA**
Sixty
64. (0.5)
65. C **(Gracias)**
Thank you.
 ((Hands money to the vendor to pay for the water))

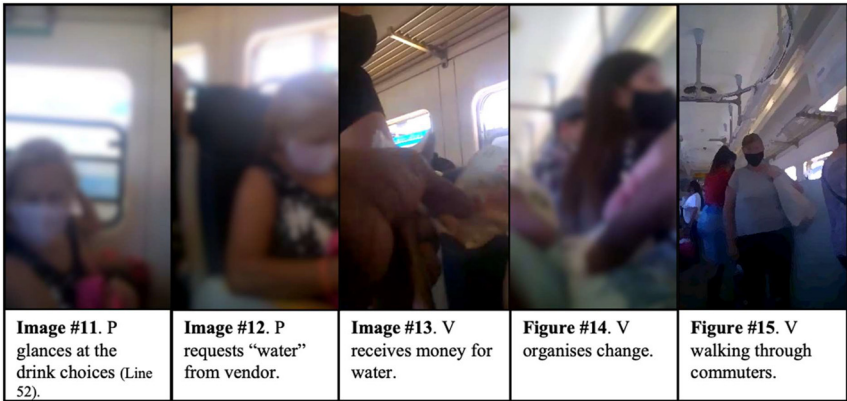
In line 51, the vendor proactively lists (Jefferson 1990) all the available drink options despite the prospect's yes/no question ("don't you have flavoured ones", line 50) which specifically inquiries about flavoured water. By presenting the full range of available

products, the vendor employs a marketing strategy that enhances their chances of making a sale not only to this prospect but also to others within earshot. It serves to maximise sales opportunities and minimise the risk of an unsuccessful sale considering the time-boundedness of vendors' activity and of train travel. The strategy proves successful, as the prospect ultimately purchases a bottle of mineral water instead of the only option of flavoured water initially offered. Had the vendor simply stated, "I only have orange flavoured water", the prospect may have declined the offer altogether.

While awaiting payment, the vendor adopts a professional posture (Svinhufvud 2018) (see Images 11 and 12 below) and seizes the opportunity to resume the pitch as the customer lowers their gaze to search for money to pay for the water (line 57). Just before the vendor resumes the pitch, the customer inquires about the product price (line 60). The vendor, however, prioritises the pitch over providing an answer, once again using a higher volume to reach other commuters on the coach. The vendor's delayed response (line 63) is facilitated by the achievement of the sale and the brevity of their pitch, allowing them to continually indicate their presence and availability to other commuters.

Excerpt 5 cont.

66. V (0.4) # <GRACIAS>
Thank you.
((Receives the money))
Img. #13
- 67.
68. (2.4) # BEBIDA BIEN FRESCA:H↑ = <SABORIZADAS Y AGUA MINERA:L>↓
Cold drinks = flavoured and mineral water.
((Arranges money-----))
Img. #14
69. (3.3) # COCA-COLA = BEBIDAS FRÍ:A:S↑
Coca-Cola = cold drinks
((continues arranging money -----))
Img. #12
70. starts walking
(2.0)
71. continues walking along the train aisle
GRACIAS
Thank you.
((Says to commuters))
72. continues walking
(2.8) #
Img. #15
73. **BEBIDAS FRESCA::S↑**
Cold drinks
74. continues walking
(1.2)
75. continues walking
SABORIZADAS DE NARANJA = COCA-COLAS Y AGUA = BEBIDAS FRÍ:A:S↑
Orange flavoured, Coca-Cola and water, cold drinks.



In Excerpt 5 the vendor displays additional multitasking strategies. In line 68, the vendor engages in three simultaneous actions: meticulously organising change with both hands, sorting it by the denomination of notes (Image 14), whilst holding a product sample and moving along the aisle.

This example encompasses various sales activities: individualised customer engagement while proceeding with the sales pitch, and the transition from the service encounter back to general sales activity, aimed at capturing additional sales opportunities. It underscores the adeptness of these train vendors in handling the suspension of progressivity within their sales pitch as they deftly manage the interplay of time and space characteristic of their daily work routines. The need to transition between unfocused and focused interactions in a transient space is coupled with several material conditions of earning a livelihood on the move. These conditions include not having access to the right change, attempting to procure it within the spatiotemporal limitations of the train travel, and, contingent on obtaining it, resuming or aborting the transaction.

Other factors which may impinge on the progressivity of the pitch relate to the fluidity of movement that is possible in the space of the train. We turn our attention to this in the next and last subsection of the analysis.

5.3 Suspension of mobility (walking) during the sales pitch

The coach clearing and the aisle from which vendors typically offer their merchandise can be further constrained by overcrowding, leading to the (partial) suspension of the pitch’s progressivity. While, in theory, the presence of more passengers may result in potentially more customers, it restricts vendors’ physical mobility. It forces them to continuously stop and re-start their pitch as they find a gap

to move to or decide to go onto the next coach. Pitch postponements may also occur when trains are not full but passengers aboard the train and walk along the coach aisle to find a seat.

Excerpt 6 below shows how vendors manage to resume their sales pitch when such momentarily suspensions occur. It illustrates a case of partial suspension of vendors' sales activity as the vendor walks along the coach aisle using an extended 'call' format (i.e., mentioning the range of drinks on offer and their quality). Upon noticing a passenger walking towards them, the vendor continues with the pitch but stops walking (line 98). The vendor moves towards the doors and temporarily stands there to give the passenger right of way. This temporary pause affects the vendor's movement trajectory: it suspends their lower limbs mobility (i.e., stops walking), while continuing to verbally articulate the pitch. Although the vendor is not entirely visible to commuters on the coach at this moment (Image 16), their continued vocal activity aims at ensuring they can still be heard. Once the passenger walks past, the vendor resumes movement along the coach while seamlessly continuing with the 'call'.

Excerpt 6: AVA 15c_20857

91. V >BEBIDAS FRÍAS SABORIZADAS Y=
Cold flavoured drinks and
(Walks towards a new train carriage)
92. =AGUA DE POMELO = DE NARANJA = MULTIFRUTA< =
Pomegranate flavoured water, orange flavoured, multifruit
(Walks down the corridor)
93. = BEBIDA FRE:SCA::S (1.1)
Cool drinks
(Continues walking)
94. >SABORIZA:DAS Y AGUA MINERAL< = BEBIDAS FRÍ:A:S:
Flavoured and mineral water, cold drinks
(Continues walking)
95. (1.7)
96. BEBIDA: FRESCA:: Cool drinks
(walks towards the first clearing of the coach)
97. (2.2) #
Img. #16
98. >SABORI#ZA:DAS Y AGUA MI#NERAL< = BIEN FRESCA LA BEBIDA=
Flavoured and mineral water, the drinks (are really) cold
(Stops and moves to the side of the aisle -by the doors-,
as a commuter walks past them gazing at them briefly)
Img. #17 #18
99. = >POMELO NARAJA = MULTIFRUTA = BEBIDAS FRÍ:A:S<
Pomegranate, orange, multifruit, cold drinks
(Walks along the corridor)

100. (1.5)
101. **TÁ FRESCA LA BEBIDA = >SABORIZA::DA:S Y A:GUA:<**
Refreshing (cold) beverages, flavoured and water
102. (1.6)
103. **BEBIDA::S**
Drinks



The halting of movement while continuing with vocal activity shows the vendor’s adaptability to the temporal-spatial constraints of the train and their orientation to the social dynamics therein, where passengers are typically treated as occupying a legitimate position relative to vendors. Vendors typically display their professional ‘embodied stance’ (Goodwin 2007) as they give priority to passengers. Vendor-initiated passage facilitation involves their pausing ongoing activities and temporarily positioning themselves ‘on the side’, acknowledging commuters’ presence and prioritising their convenience over their own sales activities. It signifies a momentary shift in the vendor’s attention and behaviour, reflecting their awareness of the moral order (Márquez Reiter 2022) of this shared space and willingness to temporarily adjust their positioning to ensure smooth movement for others. In essence, this action conveys the vendor’s cooperative and customer-centric stance, fostering a positive and respectful interaction with the commuters, and their orientation to passengers’ right to occupy this space v. their own.

The interweaving of verbal and embodied actions observed in Excerpt 6 and in the behaviour of other train workers in the corpus consists of multimodal actions in pursuit of respectful service encounters. The potential separability of these actions

(e.g., walking past seated passengers showing products without any verbal articulation and the possibility of verbal articulation unaccompanied by visual display) is what enables these train vendors to continue with their sales activity within the time and space constraints of train journeys.

In some cases, the obstruction of movement can lead to a complete suspension of progressivity, necessitating a halt to both corporeal (walking) and verbal actions. When vendors seek to move through areas occupied by passengers, they have the option of either employing their bodies to negotiate the space or opting for a more socially considerate method: accompanying embodied displays with a politeness formula. In so doing, vendors engage in a communicative act that acknowledges the presence of others. Vendors operating within the intricate dynamics of crowded train coaches exhibit a clear understanding of the social rules needed to pursue their work. Across the dataset, we observe a consistent pattern wherein vendors seek permission from commuters to pass through when their paths are obstructed.

Excerpt 7, below, illustrates how vendors utilise perfunctory apologies (Goffman 1967) to this end: uttering conventionalised politeness formulas (Márquez Reiter 2000) such as “excuse me” and “sorry” (lines 81, 88).

Excerpt 7: AVA 9c_319070

((crowded train: people and vendors standing along the aisle))

80. V walks down the aisle
 # BEBIDAS FRÍAS AGUA MINERA::L
cold drinks, mineral water
 Img. #19
81. # (1.2) #>permiso<? (0.3)
excuse (me) ((stops))
 Img. #20 #21
82. C standing moves to the side
83. V walks slowly next to B walks slowly around another vendor
 gracias (1.0) # gracias (0.9)
thank (you) thank (you)
 Img. #22
84. walks towards the end of the coach
 BEBIDA FRÍA::S
cold drinks
85. walks towards the next coach
 (2.9)
86. walks
 <SABORIZA:DAS Y-
flavoured and

stops while waiting for commuters getting off the train

87. # -AGUA MINERA:L BIEN FRESCA:>
mineral water, very fresh
Img. #23

starts moving slowly next to a few commuters standing in front of
them in the clearing

88. >perdón< (0.6) >permiso< (5.1)
pardon excuse (me)

walks along the aisle

89. BEBIDAS FRÍA::S:: (2.8) BEBIDA::S
cold drinks drinks

90. stops before the end of the coach



The uttering of perfunctory apologies makes relevant the obstruction to the progressivity of the pitch from the vendor's perspective in a space generally characterised by unfocused interaction. The vendor thus makes relevant their presence to passengers using the space of aisle. These apologetic tokens coupled with the giving of thanks (line 83) as they pass through constitute an announcement of their presence which is not treated by the passengers with any signs of surprise or newsworthiness. They serve to accomplish overt aisle-passenger attentiveness to their presence and indicate alignment with the social norms expected in this public shared space.

The action of proffering a formulaic apology token momentarily suspends progressivity, after which the vendor promptly resumes the sales pitch (line 84). Notably, when addressing commuters obstructing their path, the vendor adopts a lower volume to announce that they are coming through (lines 81, 88). Conversely, during the sales pitch, they utilise a higher volume to engage the general audience

within the coach. In essence, they adeptly transition from addressing those near them to trying to captivate the entire coach with the sales presentation.

The level of politeness proffered stands in contrast with that of commuters performing similar actions (ethnographic observations on this trainline-June 2023). It is indicative of the way vendors strive to maintain an image of professionalism informed by the norms of civility (Goffman 1963) that ought to operate in this shared public space and in the provision of services. It is also one of the norms discussed and emphasised in the meetings of the train workers' association as well as brought to light in interviews conducted with various (train) vendors *el respeto al público ante todo* (lit. trans. 'above all, respect towards the public').

Although the presence of perfunctory apologies is not always necessarily relevant for progressivity, they are commonly proffered to move along the coaches as the train becomes relatively full. They are part of the civility expected of vendors in public space.

6 Conclusion

This paper examined how a group of workers in public space master the progressivity of their overall sales activity against the time-spatial constraints that characterise the social space of the train based on vendors' own video-recordings of their daily work activity and knowledge gained from an exploratory ethnography. This has allowed us to document and analyse their work activity in real-time, enabling us to reach a more holistic understanding of the value of their labour as situated in its visual, physical and material context, the *raison d'être* of the practices reported, and some of structural and material constraints that motivate it.

Installing multiple cameras on the train coaches used by vendors would have provided a more comprehensive perspective of the scene, capturing vendors' head movements, gaze, and other dynamics of the environment. However, such an arrangement would not necessarily have facilitated the identification of what the participants observed or focused on. Moreover, implementing this setup would not have been possible or practical. Train vending is not officially permitted and substantial resources would have been required to instal cameras across the nine coaches of the train.

The train environment offers a unique tapestry of constraints and opportunities where vendors must calibrate their approach by continuously juggling between the ambient sales pitch and the pointed attentiveness of direct transactions. The interplay of these modes of interaction is important to understand how vendors maintain the fluidity of their commercial narrative within the flow of the train's social milieu. The analysis has shown how vendors suspend and resume the progressivity of their sales

pitch by skilfully integrating speech, embodied movements, spatial arrangements, and other non-verbal cues in a mobile transient space characterised by unfocused interaction. In this environment, physical space and time are intricately connected for both vendors and commuters. Vendors thus have to coordinate their speech and corporeal movements to respectfully navigate their way along the train, while attempting to sustain attention to themselves in pursuit of multiple sales.

The enclosure of the train coach enables vendors to be heard by commuters within earshot. It also allows them to modulate the volume of their speech as they transition to and from the general sales pitch to the focused interactions of service encounters. We have shown how prospective customers transition from unfocused to focused interaction by way of their embodied orientation toward the vendor. As the vendor gets proximally close to their seats, prospects orient their head, gaze, and torso in the direction of the vendor while holding and displaying money (cash, money wallet). This embodied summons warrants vendor's engagement. It suggests that peripheral awareness and hearing are active in the unfocused interaction that characterises the anonymity of train travel. It also indicates passengers' attunement to the vendor's sales activity, for it offers the vendor time to complete the activity in progress or to pause it at an appropriate interactional juncture before proceeding to a focused encounter with the prospect. Prospects' meaningfully oriented behaviour towards vendors evince the comprehensibility of the verbal and embodied actions that characterise vendors' work activity, its motives and the adequacy with which it is conducted.

Prospects' behaviour coupled with vendors' sales pitches which are designed to encourage sales while respecting passengers' right to civil inattention, provide evidence of the general civility that characterise relations between passengers and vendors, and the value of their labour. Both parties demonstrate an awareness of each other's goals, needs, roles, and limitations throughout the interactions. For instance, the lack of response by a prospect to the vendor's greeting serves as a means of saving time. It underlies the time-boundness of sales encounters on trains and the ubiquity of train vendors. Similarly, the presence of apologies and thanking from vendors and prospects to one another, reveals the consideration with which they orient to each other's presence on trains.

The findings have shown that multitasking is an integral part of vendors' working practices, considering the time-boundedness of their work activity on trains and the material conditions of selling on the move, requiring reliance on their bodies to carry the merchandise and display it, while maintaining their own balance. For instance, whilst engaging in service encounters, vendors are temporarily stationary insofar as walking is concerned. Being temporarily motionless (not walking), does not mean that they are passive. We have seen how they concurrently perform various work-related activities: serving a customer and organising cash while

resuming the sales pitch in a louder voice, and pausing transactions while they attempt to obtain the material resources needed for these to be achieved (i.e., the right change).

Vendors' ability to seamlessly transition between unfocused to focused interactions, bridging the gap between sales pitches and sales encounters, showcases their juggling and marketing-like skills. We have observed how they capitalise on a sale to try to capture the attention of the broader audience, by the deployment of lists and fluctuations in vocal volume and speech rate.

Contrary to the view that VPS clutters the environment and is disorderly, the study has demonstrated the methodicalness and highly dexterous nature of these train vendors' working practices, how their work fills a gap in the market by providing otherwise unavailable services to commuters, and the general civility with which they conduct themselves.

Finally, we hope that this study has contributed to decentring the gaze of pragmatics and sociolinguistics from traditional social domains to pervasive social contexts characterised by ingrained social inequalities.

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