

**Title:** Action bids in children with speech impairments: the case of marking

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Bios

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## Abstract

The paper illustrates a practice, which we have called ‘marking’, observed in play interactions between parents and children with Down Syndrome (DS) aged 3-8. Markings are minimal turns that rely on prosody, embodied resources and indexicality to foreground events within an ongoing activity and convey a stance toward them. Markings can be both retrospective and prospective, i.e., referring to a just-occurred or an incipient event. As first pair parts, they are open action bids that prompt recipients to display their co-orientation towards the referent. Responses from parents, i.e., second markings, can take the form of repeats or expansions; after prospective marking the recipient can also add support to the incipient activity the child has marked. We discuss marking as the core constituent of a larger family of actions for ‘sharing noteworthiness’, but also as a designedly undetermined action bid with specific conversational uses for children and adults alike.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on a conversational action we call ‘marking’ used by children with Down syndrome (DS) in interactions with their parents. We focus on these interactions because in Down syndrome social interactional abilities are generally higher than linguistic skills, especially in production; this difference enables us to see what features of social actions are prioritised when few or alternative communicative resources are available (Gardner, 2009).

Early work in the field of pragmatic development (e.g., Ninio, Snow, Pan & Rolling 1994; Bates et al., 1977) was done under the assumption that children's social actions would correspond to categories of adults' actions derived from Speech Act theories (Searle, 1969). As Conversation Analysis has moved from taxonomies created in philosophy of language to actions observed in interactions, not only more numerous and more specific actions have been enlisted, but there has also been a recognition that many utterances in context present a degree of indeterminacy as to what they are doing (Enfield & Sidnell, 2017. *Child CA* (Gardner & Forrester, 2009), maintains there is no fixed list of actions to be learned, but that children produce actions that are relevant to their everyday life, achieved with the available resources at any point in time, and which may not map onto adults’ or indeed any established type of action.

In this study we examine play activities between children and parents and detail a practice whereby children share with their parents the noteworthiness of something that just occurred or will occur in the immediate future. The sequences initiated by marking actions can help us understand how children manage co-engagement in joint activities, as well as the more general work of co-orientation toward aspects of a shared reality.

## LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION IN CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

Down syndrome (DS) occurs due to an abnormality of the chromosome 21, with an estimated frequency of 1.41 in 1000 live births (Wright & Bray, 2000), and affects individuals' intellectual development and physical characteristics. Children with DS are generally motivated to engage in social interaction, have better conversational skills than children with the same level of expressive linguistic development, and can have a quality of social relationship comparable to that of typical children (Laws & Bishop, 2004). Beside the language impairment that can be related to general learning problems, specific speech difficulties are observed. These can include a delay in syntax acquisition (with two-word utterances emerging at around 4-5 years; Rondal, 1987), and, despite good vocabulary comprehension, low performance in expressive language (Fidler, 2005). Difficulties also concern intelligibility in speech, because of poor articulation due to anatomical features (Martin, Klusek, Estigarribia & Roberts, 2019).

Infants with DS, on the other hand, produce more melodic, vocalic and emotional sounds than typically developing (TD) children (Legerstee, Bowman & Fels, 1992, and as toddlers, they engage in more play, invitations and object shows (Sigman & Ruskin, 1999). Strengths are also commonly observed in the visuo-gestural domain, with good capacities of learning by seeing (Newton, 2015) and using gestures for communication. Children with DS use a greater range of "natural" gestures, such as pointing, (as distinct from signs) than TD children at the same vocabulary level (Singer, Harris, Bellugi, Bates, Jones & Rossen, 1997); they are often taught keyword (Makaton) sign language (Clibbens, 2001) for an alternative method of communication, with signing gradually dropping away as speech is established.

The asynchrony between social skills and productive language use and the uneven level of ability between the gestural/visual and the vocal/aural communicative systems mean that there could be a tension between what children with DS aim to communicate and the resources they have available for accomplishing it. What we see as a result are short but dense forms of communication. This peculiar expressive economy offers a vantage point for capturing the essentials in the assembly and delivery of social actions.

## THE ACTION IN QUESTION

Social actions in talk have been divided by Stivers and Rossano (2010) in two broad domains that they call 'canonical' and 'non-canonical'. Under the first group fall verbal, vocal or embodied moves that request or otherwise solicit some doing on the other part; these actions are invitations, requests for action, requests for information, and offers (Stivers & Rossano, 2010, p.5). The second group includes announcements, assessments, and noticings. The distinction reflects the degree to which the action comes with an obligation to respond; turns in the second group, at least in Stivers and Rossano's data, were not always taken up by other participants, without signs of that being perceived as unusual or transgressive.

Studies focusing on early communicative development have shown that children engage frequently in actions of the non-canonical type. In the preverbal stage they share aspects of their experience via declarative pointing (Liszkowski, 2006) and later on with "show-actions" (Kidwell & Zimmermann, 2007), assessments (Burdelski & Morita, 2017; Keel, 2015) or announcements (Strid & Cekaite, 2018). Burdelski and Morita (2017) showed that, in the absence of gaze, children's assessments can be interpreted as solo-communication, but Keel (2015), found that children do orient

to the lack of a response to an assessment by pursuing a response if the recipient does not produce it contingently. Keel (2015) argues that for children being acknowledged is central to assessment-type actions, indicating that it is relevant for children that their perspective is acknowledged (see also Morita, 2005).

A further way in which sharing one's perspective has been accounted for in CA is through stance. CA studies have shown the relevance of stance-taking in children's communication (M. Goodwin, Cekaite & C. Goodwin, 2012), and found that stance-sharing is a fundamental element of joint play (Pursi, Lipponen & Sanjaniemi, 2018).

In this paper we focus on an action which, while sharing elements of the stance-taking and show-actions recalled above, have also unique characteristics. We called it 'marking', borrowing the term from early childhood research (Csibra & Gergely, 2009); in this field it is used to indicate child-directed speech by caregivers that uses affective-emotional expressions for highlighting aspects of the immediate environment. Caregivers' marking can involve loudness shifts, high pitch and affect-conveying sounds such as laughter and breathing noises. Marking has been observed to isolate events for the infant out of the flow of an activity, for example during nappy changing (Nomikou & Rohlfing, 2011). Marking utterances are therefore characterised by making a referent salient and conveying affect about it at once (Leavens et al., 2014). This is similar to what we observed in our corpus, done by the children, i.e. using affect and other techniques for isolating the referent within the ongoing activity and expressing stance. As a term, 'marking' has also the advantage of being a fairly conservative term that can be applied to minimal turns without overinterpreting the action<sup>1</sup>.

Markings observed in our corpus can be one-word utterances – like a noun (e.g. Train), an article + noun (e.g. The gate) or a verb (e.g. Stuck)– delivered either verbally or with Makaton signs; we also included cases of gaze used as interpellation. Marking is regularly followed in our examples by a complementary turn, which we can call 'second marking'. This action, we argue, is a relatively open bid, which delivers the core component of non-canonical actions (Stivers & Rossano, 2010) i.e., 'sharing noteworthiness'. In this study we detail the resources children mobilise in accomplishing sharing noteworthiness and discuss the findings in relation to action formation and the centrality of co-experiencing as a driver for communication.

## DATA

The data used for the analysis were 8 dyads drawn from a corpus of 22 children with DS, accompanied by one parent, filmed in a centre for the support of children with DS in the South of England. The filming took place between 1996 and 1999 as part of a study on numeracy skills (Nye, Fluck & Buckley, 2001). The children were filmed three times with a year interval, with the same activities repeated at each visit. The age range of the children was 3;4 - 9;1 and the average age at each of the three time points 5;3, 6;5 and 7;5 respectively. All children had visited the centre before and were familiar with the room they were filmed in. Filming was conducted with three unobtrusive wall mounted cameras, which were controlled remotely. Consent was obtained for use of data for research purposes beyond the initial study.

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<sup>1</sup>The term has been used before with reference to children's language, however it was used to indicate a different, generic class of actions including thanking, apologizing, or expressing sentiments (Ninio, Snow, Pan & Rollins, 1994).

The sessions involved the child and the parent taking part in various counting activities, but for the first 15 minutes parents and children were alone in the room with toys and books with the instruction to play as they liked. We focused our analysis on this initial play situation. Marking episodes were numerous in the corpus and present in the interaction of all the 8 dyads, which drew our attention to this practice; however, some children appeared to be more reliant on it than others. Once the general action domain for marking utterances was identified as that of highlighting an object/event and expressing a stance, we collected all instances of such communicative moves from the children. We included marking accomplished with either verbal means, non-lexical sounds, gestures, gaze, or a combination thereof. Many of the children in our corpus use Makaton, in which signs are symbolic, equivalent to words, so we included those as well.

Data were transcribed according to Jefferson's (2004) notation. Additional symbols were used to indicate simultaneous actions across different modalities (Mondada, 2007). A single arrow (→) before the speakers' initials identifies the child's marking utterance, and a double arrow (⇒) the second marking. Intonation and intensity curves were extracted using PRAAT to visualise the moment-by-moment modulation of prosody.

## THE MARKING SEQUENCE

In the following two sections we present two types of marking. The first type has to do with something that just occurred in the flow of activity the child is engaged with, so we call it retrospective. The second type highlights an object or environmental feature that will be involved in the child's incipient activity, which we call prospective. Extract 1 present three occurrences of marking, two retrospective and one prospective, in a short span of time, illustrating the continuous cadence of this action that joins child and parent in the appreciation of play events. Extract 2 is another instance of retrospective marking, accomplished through vocalisation and gesture: the two are disjointed, and reveal how contingency with the event is crucial in identifying the referent; it also shows that marking, when non verbal, prompts the parent to fully verbalise the aspect of the play that the child has foregrounded. Extract 3 is an example of prospective marking and illustrates, among other things, how the different components of the marking are arranged in the response for a fine modulation of alignment with different aspects of the child's initial turn.

### 1. Retrospective marking

In Extract 1 there are three occurrences of marking. The referents of the first two are the child's own activities with the toy car: first parking it in the garage roof, then making it slide down the ramp and fall onto the floor. The second instance is carried out solely by gaze.

The third instance refers instead to an object to be used in an incipient next course of action (see also the upcoming section on prospective marking).

#### Extract 1)

CAMERON T1 [00.01:19] CA =Cameron (age 5;8), MU = Mum

\* gaze by CAM ; & gaze by MUM ; + hand movement by CAM ; £ hand movement by MUM



Figure 1a

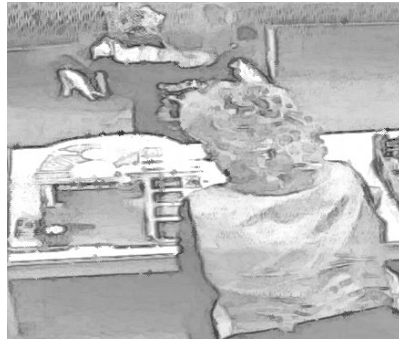


Figure 1b



Figure 1c

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01  CAM +(1.5)
    cam + puts green car in green space in toy garage parking area
02 → CAM # * + Eh↑rċ
    *looks up at MUM
    +holds hand on car
    fig # Fig. 1a
03 =>MUM h°Pa:rk↑in'°!
04  CAM +(2.9)                + & (1.9)                #
    cam + puts car on track +releases car it rolls down on floor
    mum                                &looks at car going down
    fig                                # Fig. 1b.
05 → CAM * (0.6)
    *looks at MUM smiling
06 =>MUM ↑O:ff the + t↑a:ble,
    cam + smiles more openly leaning towards toys' crate
07  CAM +(1.4)                +(2.3)
    + picks up train piece, + looks at it
08 → CAM Ta:::in: + * #
    + rotates his left hand ((Makaton sign for train))
    *looks up
    fig # Fig. 1c
09 =>MUM £ Tra:in:?=
    £ signs 'train' with the same gesture, right hand
10  CAM =Ye*a:h,
    *looks down again
11 =>MUM :Oh:::. (.) What colour?

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Figure 1d

*Makaton sign for 'train', Makatoncharity (2019)*



The toy garage has segments of different colours that are meant to be filled with colour-corresponding vehicles. Cameron at the beginning of the extract puts a red car on the red segment (line 1). The first instance of marking occurs as soon as he has done that: still with the hand on the car, he looks up toward Mum (line 2, Figure 1a) and utters a monosyllabic sound with ascending intonation (line 2). By ‘freezing’ his gesture (Kendrick & Drew, 2016), Cameron makes a display that offers the mother the referent of the vocalisation. She spells it out as 'Pa(h) :rk↑in!' with a soft and breathy tone of voice (line 3). The mother’s second marking spells out the referent, showing she read it as being about what the child *did* with the toy car, rather than the car itself or other objects around it. She also expresses stance with her exclamatory tone and with the breathy voice (index of mild surprise or positive highlighting in child directed speech). The exchange is very quick, and, as soon as Mum has pronounced the word, Cameron gets busy placing the car on top of the descending ramp (line 4). The mother’s gaze follows the car going down.

The second instance of marking occurs as soon as the car Cameron had released hits the floor: He throws a glance to his mother, and smiles (line 5). She responds with ‘↑O:ff the \*t↑↑a:ble,’ (line 6). Her utterance is high pitched and with a suspended intonation, sounding like this was a predicted or desired outcome. Cameron smiles a bit more deeply just after the first word (line 6), but again Mum's utterance is not yet finished that he moves on to the next phase of the game. Those two fleeting moments seem evidence of an established routine. In both cases, the child’s marking turn happened immediately at the end of an event in the ongoing activity; the recipient was observing the activity, and her response was also immediate. The second marking in both cases consisted in sounding out the referent and embedding stance, i.e. confirming understanding of what it is that the child finds noteworthy and echoing the noteworthiness of it. Both the action and the response do not express a particular position about what happened, but seem oriented to a mutual confirmation of the dyad co-experiencing the game and agreeing on its evaluative punctuation.

In the third instance of marking identified in the sequence, the child names the referent himself, first vocally, although with difficulty in articulating the '/r/' (line 8), then, simultaneously to gazing up to mum, with the Makaton sign (line 9 and Figure 1d). An evaluative stance is conveyed by the elongation and emphasis in 'Tra::in:,' (line 8), and by the fact that the child marks ‘train’ twice in two different modalities, and add to the second the interpellation of gaze. Mum opens here a repair sequence, which allows us to see separately the two essential components of the marking, i.e., the referent and the evaluative stance. She repeats the child's word with interrogative intonation (Tra:in:?) and doing the Makaton sign at the same time. The repair might be because what the child has in his hand, as far as we can see, has got wheels, so it's likely not to be a toy train. After the child confirms (Ye\*a:h), the mother continues with an appreciative 'Oh:::.' This addition points to the fact the first marking is not about labelling (Wells, 1974, Kidwell and Zimmermann, 2007), but has an evaluative component calling for alignment. The mother then asks ‘What colour?’, interpreting the marking as related to the activity to do next, i.e., parking the new vehicle in the specific colour zone.

We will discuss forward-looking, or ‘prospective’ markings, in the second section of the paper. With Extract 2 we look instead at another example of retrospective marking. Here the marking concerns a collision the child just made happen between a train and a bridge, all made of bricks.

**Extract 2)**

FELICITY T1 [00.02.20] FEL = Felicity (age 3;6), MUM = Mum  
 \* gaze by FEL ; & gaze by MUM ; + hand movement by FEL ; £ hand movement by MUM ; % body movement by FEL



Figure 2a



Figure 2b



Figure 2c

((MUM has suggested that FEL builds a bridge with three bricks like she had just done))

01 **MUM** £+(1.0)  
 mum £ extends arm with brick  
 fel + takes brick

02 **MUM** O:+ne, two:: (>that's it.<)  
 fel +puts the brick behind the other and pushes

03 **MUM** + Are fyou doing the bri:dge?  
 mum £reaches over to the lined-up bricks  
 fel + keeps her hand on one of the lined-up bricks

04 **FEL** £+(0.3) kh ((effort sound)) (0.3) #  
 mum £ slides the two bricks over toward herself  
 fel + keeps her hand on bricks  
 fig # Fig. 2a

05 **MUM** + O:ne,#  
 fel + pushes her brick's 'train' against MUM's  
 bridge, stretching until she lays on floor  
 fig # Fig. 2b

06 **MUM** Oh you want to make the train go u:ndernea:th

07 **MUM** oh + ri<sub>gh</sub>=choo choof choof choof  
 fel +bridge collapses under FELs' pushing bricks through

08 **MUM** [Choo choo choo choo choo [choo

09 → **FEL** [EH:R % [A:\*H +(0.5) #  
 % Lifts herself up to sitting



```

                                *gaze at Mum
                                + takes hands on the
                                sides of her head
                                # Fig.2c
fig
10 =>MUM Eh- fit's a:ll come dow:n hasn't it.
           £ circling hand gesture
11  FEL (1.2) + (0.5) %(0.6)
           + takes hands down
           % nods

```

The extract begins just after Mum had suggested that Felicity builds a bridge using three bricks, like the one Mum had done before. She then passes the child a brick (line 1), counting (line 2), and Felicity forms a brick line (line 2). Mum follows up on her own suggestion and asks Felicity if she is building the bridge (line 3), while reaching over to take hold of the bricks' line and sliding it towards herself (line 4), starting to count again (line 5). Felicity continues to move the bricks forward, indicating another course of action. The mother adjusts to Felicity's alternative agenda, showing her 'change of state' by prefacing her turn in line 6 with the particle *oh* and in line 7 with '*oh right*' (Heritage, 1984). She spells out the child's goal as 'want to make the train go underneath' and produces a train sound to go with it (line 7). However the bridge, which was way too small for the brick line to go underneath, crashes as the child pushes through (line 7, Figure 2c).

The crashing is initially marked with two subsequent, loud non-lexical vocalisations with end rising intonation (line 9, Figure 2d); Felicity then lifts herself up to a seated position (line 9, Figure 2c), putting the palms on the sides of her head (line 9, Figure 2c) while looking at Mum (line 9). The mother had started responding to the vocalisations (Eh: line 10) but in seeing the gesture abandons the utterance and says instead 'it's a:ll come dow:n hasn't it.' (line 10). Her second marking identifies and expands the referent (both verbally and with the gesture demonstrating 'falling'). She mirrors the child's stance with the emphasis on 'all' and 'down'. She concludes the turn with a tag question (line 10) that creates a slot for the child to ratify this interpretation, which Felicity does with a nod.

The marking in this sequence is accomplished by a combination of resources. Firstly, just after the brick crash, Felicity utters two vocalisations, one shortly after the other, with rising intonation (Figure 2d). Those appear to be a sort of generic 'information placeholder' that summons the interlocutor (Csibra, 2010). Secondly, as she recovers a seated position, she delivers with a gesture an evaluative comment<sup>2</sup>. The action is assembled in such a way to maximise interpretability: to establish the referent, as discussed, the onset of marking has to occur right at the end of the relevant event. Felicity's body position however did not allow lifting her hands to deliver the sign at that juncture, because she was lying down and leaning on her elbow. She used her voice instead for achieving the contingency between event and marking, while rearranging her body so that she could perform the hands-to-the-head gesture. The 'turn quality' of the gesture is conveyed also by its duration: Felicity stays with her hands up, gazing at her mum, until the end of the latter's verbal response.

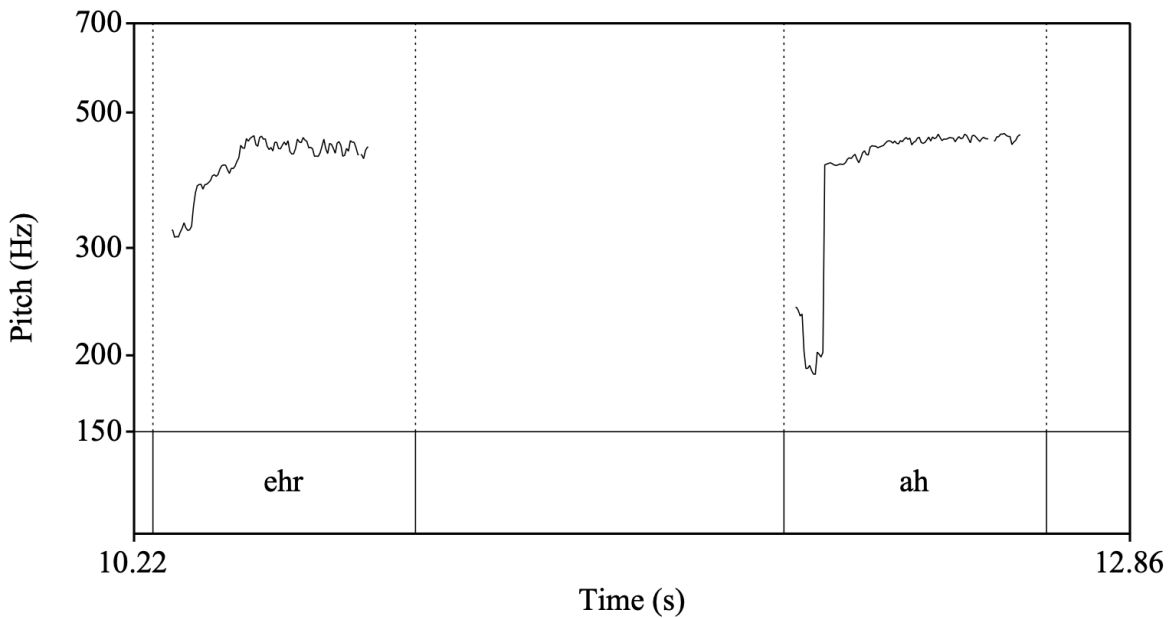
Like in Extract 1, the mother oriented to the child's turn as referring to, and sharing the noteworthiness of, the just-occurred outcome of the child's activity. In second markings like these, that put the referent in words and mirror the child's stance, the child becomes the author of a turn animated by the mother (Goffman, 1979; see also Goodwin, 2007). In this extract, Felicity's response to the tag

<sup>2</sup> The gesture has the appearance of a sign but we could not find a reference for it.

question in line 10, which confirms mother's second marking, shows that the child has a degree of ownership on the way the mother put her gesture in words. At the same time, mirroring the child's affect, as we said for Extract 1, also makes the mother a co-experiencer of the event. Second marking is thus done both *for* the child and *with* the child.

Figure 2d

*Intonation curves of Felicity's vocalisations from Extract 2, line 9*



## 2. Prospective marking

We have seen so far, with the exception of Cameron's 'train', all examples of retrospective marking; we have illustrated how they were selecting/highlighting a referent and expressing a stance toward it. We have noted how the children, with essential resources, elicited a full-fledged description from the parent, achieving 'sharing noteworthiness' in relation to something they had accomplished or precipitated. The extract in this section shows prospective marking. As we have begun to see with the 'train' example in Extract 1, the parent's response to prospective marking is more complex, because the referent is inchoate, not yet a part of the shared landscape of the interactant. Furthermore, the sequence trajectory and completion will depend on the development of the activity.

### Extract 3)

JOHN T1 [00.00.10] JOH= John (age 06;08), MUM = Mum  
 \* gaze by JOH ; & gaze by MUM ; + hand movement by JOH ; £ hand movement by MUM ; % body movement by JOH ; \$ body movement by MUM



Figure 3a



Figure 3b



Figure 3c

```

01  JOH hi he % ( ) be +*(1.2)
    joh %squats +picks up a brick-->
    joh *gazes at brick-->
02  MUM >Are you going to make some bricks.<+*
    joh -----+
    joh -----*
03  JOH %&( ) %BUH. ((about letter B on the cube))
    joh %stands up % walks toward toy garage-->
    mum & follows JOH with gaze-->
04  JOH Uh &(0.9) %
    joh -----%
    mum & gazes at garage
05  JOH %*&(2.4)
    joh % stands in front of the toy garage
    joh *gaze on garage-->
    mum &gaze at JOH-->
06 → JOH The #+G::↑↑A::&#T::E, (0.2)
    → joh +extends arm to top of ramp holding brick-->
    joh -----*
    mum &lowers gaze to bar at the end of ramp
    fig #Fig. 3a # Fig. 3b
07 =>MUM The+ #fg↑a:&%te.
    mum £touches the bar with her pointed index finger -->
    mum &looks up at JOH
    joh ----+ %kneels down
    fig # Fig. 3c
08  JOH Th--+th-th£ the g↑ate.
    joh +places the brick on top of the ramp
    mum -----£
09  MUM The brick is gonna $%*come do:wn here=is it?
    mum $leans over toward ramp
    joh %stands back
    joh *gazes at ramp with brick on top
10  (1.0)
  
```

11 JOH + Eha:::

+pushes the brick down the ramp

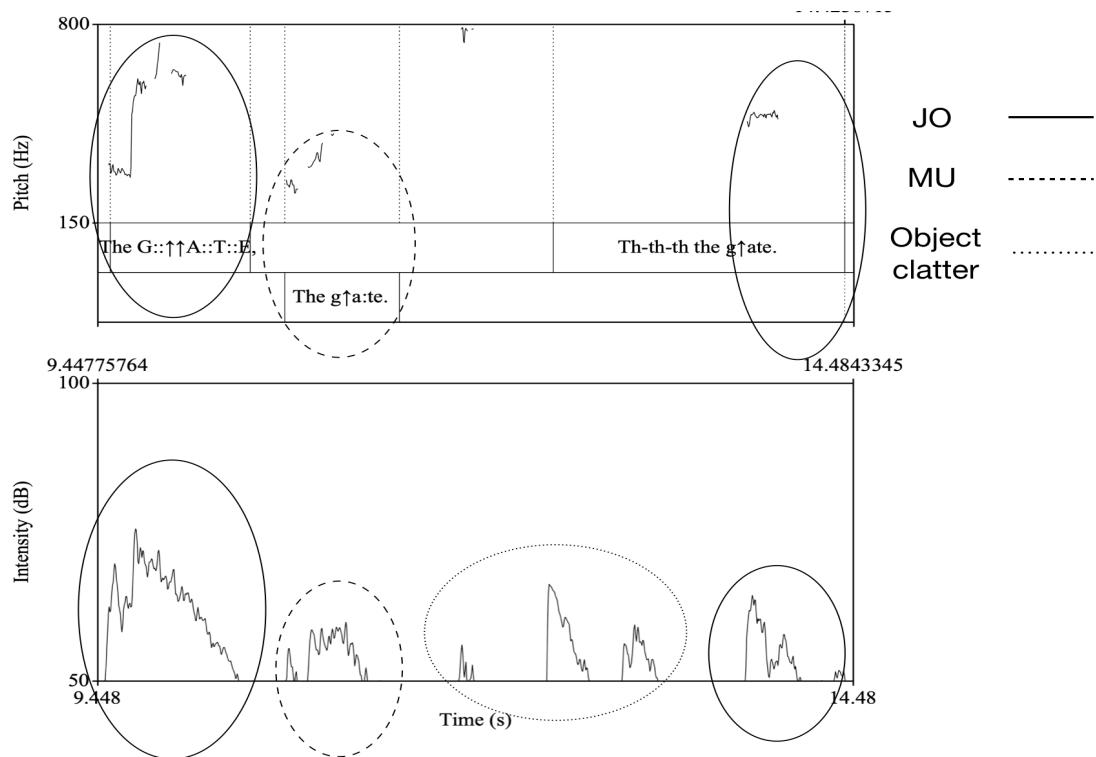
The extract begins with the child squatting in front of several plastic bricks, then picking one up looking at it while saying something that could be about the letter it has on it (B) (line 1). The mother treats this as an indication of the child's next action, and she asks John whether he is going to "make some bricks" (possibly stacking them up or reading out letters) (line 2). John stands up and walks towards the toy garage (line 3), stops in front of it and looks at it for approx 3.5 seconds, in silence, his mother looking at him (lines 4 and 5). John then says 'The \*G::↑↑A::+T::E,' (line 6) with a very high pitched and shrill voice, and a steep intensity curve (see Figure 3d). Simultaneously he points towards the top of the garage ramp by extending the arm that holds the brick, and freezes the gestures (line 6, Figure 3a). The mother produces the now familiar second marking with both lexical and tonal repetition (line 7). However, she had lowered her gaze to a different part of the garage, where the closing bar is (line 6, Figure 3b) which she goes on touching (line 7, Figure 3c) and the repeat of John's utterance (line 7) is done with lower volume and descending final intonation (see Figure 3d). Next, the child kneels to the floor (line 7), places the brick on top of the garage ramp and repeats the words 'Th-\*th-th the g↑ate,' (line 8). The utterance this time comes without an ostensive component (e.g., no pointing, no gesture freezing and no gaze at his Mum), proffered as the child is bent over the garage positioning the brick (line 8). The mother follows this up with the suggestion 'The brick is gonna come do:wn here is it?' (line 9), while moving closer to the ramp exit. After a gap of one second in which Cameron sits still (line 10), he reaches for the brick again and takes it down the ramp (line 11), with a sound that may be a 'Yeah' in response to the tag question (in line 9) or voicing the downhill movement of the brick.

It is even more visible than in the previous examples how marking is assembled via a vertical construction, or 'stacking' (Rossi, 2018). The word plus article and gesture identifies the referent, the very loud and high-pitched voice as well as the long stretching of the word in the middle conveys high excitement; the pointing itself is an energetic stretch, mirroring the potency of the voice. Furthermore, by staying in position with the extended arm until the mother responded, similarly to Cameron and Felicity before, John intensifies the turn quality of the gesture. Gaze rests on the object for the duration of the turn and after, and is not directed to the recipient at any point.

The way the utterance is embedded in the ongoing activity, i.e., after the mother had asked about the child's plans, and before he had done anything with the named object, indicates that the child's marking is forward-looking, orienting to something that is going to happen next. It is not clear why the child says 'gate' when pointing at the ramp. It might be that he is looking at the elevator's door, or that he is aiming to reach the gate, as in the closing bar, by sliding the brick down..

Figure 3d.

*Intonation and intensity curves of the first marking produced by the child and the second marking produced by the mother.*



The mother uses a similar prosodic contour, thus echoing the child's stance (Ogden, 2006), however, she tempers the excitement by enunciating the words with lower volume and intensity, and concluding on a descending rather than ascending intonation (see Figure 3d; the curve only captures the initial matching part, because the voice is too soft on the last sound). Repetition as a resource displays hearing without necessarily confirming understanding (Svennevig, 2004); by looking at and touching a different part of the garage while repeating the words, she embeds an exposed repair about the referent in the turn (Jefferson, 1987). The uptake of the first marking is in this case an alignment to stance but with an embedded element of disaffiliation that is hearable in the quality of the repeated words and delivered through the gestural modality.

The absence of gaze to the recipient in the last extract suggests that gaze might be used by children as a specialised semiotic resource in the play environment, indexing retrospective marking when directed to the recipient in combination with a gesture or vocalization and prospective marking when directed to the object or environmental feature that is vocalised.

Prospective marking may also elicit inquiries about the activity to come. Given that the marking was *projecting* a noteworthy play activity rather than *commenting* on it in retrospect, the mother's first response did not close the sequence. After the reissue of 'Th-th-th the gate.' by John in line 8, less affect-laden, and after the child has put the brick in position at the top of the ramp but without doing anything with it, the mother expands the child utterance describing a potential next activity, which the child then enacts. This sequence further shows that marking is an open bid, with the action being defined through the sequence as a whole. This is true for all adjacency pairs and talk-in-interaction in general; however, as Goodwin (2007) has demonstrated, the analysis of speakers with speech impairments can show how, on the one hand, the speaker with the impairment can inhabit the

words of co-participants, and, on the other, how through a process of mutual reflexivity interactants build meaning as they go along.

## DISCUSSION

The article illustrated a practice identified in the interaction of children with Down Syndrome, while playing with their parents in an institutional setting. The practice consists in delivering minimal turns, contingently to an event accessible to the co-participant, which shape the event into a referent and present it as noteworthy. This is achieved through very essential means, as children with Down syndrome, even at the higher ages in the sample, have difficulties in combining words into phrases or sentences. However, we have observed that children use the resources at their command to imbue their short utterances with communicative content. We showed that even when the marking utterance *names* an object, it highlights it as a noteworthy element of the activity, and it is not exhausted in the ostensive actions that constitutes labelling exercises; it is also not related to establishing a common focus of attention, like in declarative pointing observed in younger children used for sharing something the adult has not seen; with marking, a joint attentional focus is already there.

We have detailed how the child's body was arranged to maximise access of gestures to co-interactants, how the child could 'freeze' the game or their own gestures in combination with gaze to shape a turn, and how volume, prosody and elongation imbued utterances with almost phrasal meaning. Marking utterances, furthermore, mobilised the co-participant to identify the referent and manifest their alignment with the affective stance that was conveyed in the first pair part, thus essentially into co-shaping the marking together with the child. As Goodwin, Cekaite and Goodwin (2012, p.9) note, affect displays construe the relevant object in the environment, while also attaching an emotion to it, but because the process is dialogical, the emotion changes and gets different properties as it is appropriated by others. The role of prosody in marking could not be overestimated; in fact, prosody is the modality that in larger degree compensates for the verbal limitation of the children, both in vocal, non-lexical sounds (Extract 2) and used within words (Extract 3). We have limited our analysis here to a rather superficial detection of the prosodic similarity between the first and the second marking pair part, in cases of repeats; however, the data would deserve a separate longitudinal study to observe how children assemble the relevant bundle of prosodic features to achieve specific actions as they add them to their repertoire (Wells & Corrin, 2004), and what is the range of parents' responses in demonstrating different kinds of alignments.

We have distinguished between retrospective and prospective marking, and shown that when the child is marking an incipient event, and the referent is still in the making, repeats or expansions can also be followed by inquiries or suggestions about what to do next. We also observed that gaze is used more systematically by the child when doing retrospective marking; as the relevant event has already happened, gaze has the advantage of also gauging the parent's independent reaction to it, whereas for future events the gaze may be involved with the rest of the body in the realisation of the upcoming activity.

Markings appear in well-oiled routines between child and caregiver and distribute "empathic moments" (see Heritage, 2011) throughout the joint activity, when treated as first pair parts and seen through. Despite falling into the non-canonical action class, marking awaits response and can add interpellation strength by use of gaze (Stivers & Rossano, 2010) and *ad hoc* resources such as holding a gesture until a response begins. Quoting Enfield and Sidnell again (2017, p.529), studying social

actions means "to focus on the social problems that people need to solve", where actions are intended as "means-for-ends solutions to these problems". Exploring a practice like child marking, especially in children with asymmetrical abilities between language production and socio-communicative skills, gives us indications of children's communicative priorities: by making parts of their activity stand out, whether already performed or incipient, the children foreground their agentic power on their world while simultaneously inviting the parent to witness and appreciate those events, be it the crashing of bridges or cars sped down tracks till they fly onto the floor. In all extracts we have shown, the child follows a game trajectory divergent from what the parent had proposed, suggesting that agency is central in both engagement and evaluation of the play activity.

The present analysis focused on interactions of children with atypical development and their parents, because of the characteristics they bring into interaction. Yet, on the more general point of actions dedicated to perspective sharing for children in general, marking can be considered both an action in itself but potentially also the nuclear component or precursor of a family of actions such as assessments, noticings and announcements, which all present the recipient with a referent about which something is predicated. This poses interesting questions on the trajectory of development of social action in childhood; furthermore, it opens an arena of investigation also for ordinary adult conversation. Open bids about sharing noteworthiness are needed, for example to express stance without bending towards a negative or a positive evaluation (a phrase like "oh my goodness" for example is used to do this work; Heritage, 2019). Marking, by opening the interactional field to the co-definition of noteworthy observables, may as well be a more widespread practice than we have realised so far.

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