Constructing Social Identity in the Workplace: Interaction in Bibliographic Database Searches

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Suggestions can be made in a number of ways. These different ways may have self-presentational and relational repercussions. This paper examines the construction and interactional implications of suggestions for future action made in the library setting—specifically, the on-line bibliographic database search interview. A detailed analysis of videotape-recorded, naturally occurring interaction shows how suggestions may be made unilaterally (by one search participant) or collaboratively (by both search participants working together). Each method is shown to have different implications for the construction of professional and social roles and relationships.

We are accustomed to thinking of our talk as shaped by “who we are,” and/or the character of our relationship with those with whom we are talking. For instance, if we have an intimate relationship, we talk in intimate ways. Stage theories of relationship development suggest that stages are differentiated by the kinds of talk that characterize them (see Bochner, 1984 for a review of these theories). From a conversation analytic perspective (cf. Atkinson & Heritage, 1984) though (and, more broadly, from a social constructionist perspective [Gergen & Davis, 1985]) we take it that we construct the character of our relationships through the ways that we talk with one another.

Studies of interaction have shown some specific ways in which talk may structure relationships. Jefferson and Lee (1992) show how the character of responses to talk about troubles displays alignments between speakers. Goodwin (1990) shows how the format of children’s
directives position the children vis-à-vis one another. In this paper I show how different formats for making suggestions embody proposals regarding interactants' alignments to one another. The study shows that the format of a suggestion involves not only indicating what a participant thinks should be done next, but also claims a particular role alignment between participants. Examining these suggestions in a work setting provides us with an opportunity to see how interactants use forms of talk to propose and negotiate social roles and identities.

I describe how librarians and clients make suggestions for future actions in preparing for and conducting an on-line bibliographic database search. I outline different formats used for making suggestions for future action, show how the forms in which suggestions are made appear to be differentially distributed between participants, and consider the interpersonal implications for participants of the different formats that they use. The analysis indicates that in the ways that they both shape and respond to suggestions, interactants appear to be sensitive to concerns beyond merely “getting the job done.” Their methods for constructing suggestions for next actions show both how they see themselves and each other, and how they see the relationship between them. In this sense, then, suggestions lie at the intersection of language and social organization (Goodwin, 1990).

Data and Procedures

The data examined in this paper are part of a database that was collected at Rutgers University during 1988–1990. Forty on-line bibliographic database searches, and the interviews that preceded them, were videotaped and transcribed (see Saracevic, Mokros, & Su, 1990; Saracevic & Su, 1988). It is these data that form the basis for this study. The data are examined using the methods of conversation analysis. Conversation analysis describes the sense-making processes of interactants, using tape-recorded, naturally occurring conversations as data for describing structures of interaction (cf. Atkinson & Heritage, 1984). The goal of the procedure is to spell out routine methods by which interactants accomplish everyday activities. The present study examines the interpersonal repercussions of choosing one method for doing an action over another.

Conversations were videotaped and then transcribed in detail using the transcription system developed by Jefferson (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984;
see He [this volume], Appendix A). Using this system, sound production features shown include intonation, stresses, sound stretches, and volume and pitch shifts. Such aspects of turn taking as overlaps and gaps are also represented. In addition in-breaths and out-breaths, laughter, and such vocal qualities as “smile voice” are shown. Notations of body behavior were also incorporated into transcriptions of videotapes (cf. Goodwin, 1981; Heath, 1986). The tapes were then analyzed, using the transcriptions as a guide to the conversations. Once the candidate conversational phenomenon of making suggestions for next actions was located, instances were collected and analyzed in order to produce a thorough description of the methods interactants have for making suggestions.

In this paper I use a case study to demonstrate findings made from the larger corpus of tapes and transcripts. I focus on a segment from a videotaped session in which a graduate student library user (“User”) is assisted by a librarian intermediary (“Intermediary”) in seeking bibliographic information for his dissertation. The user’s topic is, roughly, the extent to which psychiatric patients are informed of the diagnosis of their illness. The segment examined here encapsulates the findings of the study, since in quick succession we see a unilateral suggestion from the Intermediary, a collaborative suggestion from the User, and a unilateral suggestion from the User. The response to each of these demonstrates the variety of ways in which these different methods for making suggestions may be managed by recipients of them. The analysis enables us to make a strong argument regarding how these different ways of constructing and responding to suggestions contribute to the social construction of self.

Making Suggestions

Two contrasting methods for making suggestions are prominent in the data. These methods appear to be differentially distributed between intermediaries and users. The two methods for making suggestions are unilateral and collaborative. A unilateral proposal occurs when a participant overtly proposes a next action. Alternatively, a collaborative proposal for a next action may be developed in a two-step fashion involving both participants working together:

- first, a possible proposal is “embedded” in another activity, such as reporting or requesting information;
second, in responding to it, the other may treat the utterance as a suggestion for a next action, or alternatively treat it simply as either a report or request for information.

In this way the unilateral suggestion appears to be conventionally recognizable as a suggestion, while the collaborative proposal for a next action involves interpretive cooperation from the recipient of it.1

Descriptions of “speech acts” (e.g., Austin, 1962; Ervin-Tripp, 1976; Labov & Fanshel, 1977; Searle, 1969) have proposed that many speech acts (such as inviting, requesting, commanding, etc.) may be done “directly” (“Give me a match”) or “indirectly” (“Would you happen to have a match?”). The latter is “indirect” in the sense that it investigates whether or not the addressee has the prerequisites for granting a possible upcoming request. Drawing on Schegloff’s (1980) work, Levinson (1983) offers a reformulation of the theory of indirect speech acts, proposing that utterances such as “Would you happen to have a match?” are taken by addressees as “pre-requests.” They are designed to check on those things that would preclude granting a request, both forestalling rejection, and demonstrating the speaker’s alertness to such social norms as not imposing. Thus, the “pre-request” could permit the addressee to infer that a request may be in the works, and to make a pre-emptive offer, or indicate that the resources are not available. Alternatively, it could be treated simply as seeking information. Goodwin (1990) shows how the format of a directive not only raises the question of how an interactant might come to interpret an utterance as a directive, but also of the “social proposals” that may be implied when a particular format for a directive is chosen. The way in which a directive is made may offer an indication of the alignment of participants toward one another (Goodwin, 1990, p. 73). For instance, an imperative such as “Give me a match” might imply that the person issuing the imperative assumes power over the addressee, while using a pre-request such as “Would you happen to have a match?” might imply a different social situation. However, there does not appear to be a simple relationship between the format of the directive and the social relationship it proposes. For, as Goodwin notes, to use a pre-request with an intimate may constitute sarcasm, and be distancing rather than intimate.

In the instance discussed here, and throughout the corpus of instances drawn from several tapes, unilateral suggestions were predominantly made by the Intermediary, and collaborative suggestions were predomi-
nantly made by the User. In examining how they are made and where they are used, it becomes clear that each method has different interpersonal repercussions and can be seen to contain proposals regarding the alignment of participants.

In the following instance we see in action these two different, apparently regular, methods for suggesting next actions. First, the Intermediary makes an overt suggestion with respect to what to do next. In response the User produces an utterance that could be taken as the first part of a pre-counter suggestion. However, in contrast to the Intermediary's overt suggestion, the User simply reports some circumstances about his study. His report allows the Intermediary to infer that he may be suggesting an alternative tack, but leaves the Intermediary in the position of drawing the implications and making the suggestion overt.

I outline each method, and discuss its implications for the task at hand and for the interactional construction of self in the work setting.

Unilateral and Collaborative Suggestions

The fragment to be examined occurs after thirteen minutes of interaction. It is presented in its entirety in Appendix B. The lines preceding the suggestions that are our focus provide the context out of which the suggestions emerge. These lines are drawn upon in constructing the suggestion. In the interaction so far, the Intermediary (I) has been asking the User (U) about his study—its context and various methodological questions. Before going on-line, they discuss possible terms they could use to represent to the database what it is the User is interested in. One of the activities they are engaged in, then, is translating the User's terms into the terms used by the database.

In lines 203–205 the Intermediary makes a unilateral suggestion concerning what they should do. In response in lines 206–25 the User initiates a collaborative suggestion. I outline the unilateral and collaborative methods and discuss their possible relational implications before turning to an instance where the User makes a unilateral suggestion. I contrast the way in which the Intermediary's unilateral suggestion is responded to with the way in which the User's unilateral suggestion is responded to. The description of interactants' methods for making suggestions enables us to infer the role relationships and self- and other-constructions that suggestions may participate in accomplishing.
The unilateral suggestion by the intermediary. An example of an Intermediary's unilateral suggestion occurs in lines 203–205:

203 I: --> So the first thing we would have to do is try: (0.5)
204 the Psych Lit approach
204a U: Mm hm
205 I: --> Again I see: whether we can find there what it is you're looking for.

She offers a course of action, proposing it as a solution to the problem that she establishes just previously that both she and the User have done before without success:

189 I: tech hh I (.) looked briefly and I can tell that there
190 will be some problems in trying to get at it, because the
191 combinations don't fit naturally.
192 U: Right.

In lines 193–94 she reports the terms she used: She put "client education" together with "diagnosis":

193 I: "u:mm" you look at client education. That's fine and die-
194 You put that together with diagnosis.

She then guesses that the the User also was frustrated in his attempt to search the database, and he confirms her guess:

193 I: "u:mm" you look at client education. That's fine and die-
194 You put that together with diagnosis. And you said you had
195 tried Psych Abstracts.
195a (0.4)
196 I: I suspect you didn't get what you were looking for
197 U: tech No I
197a didn't get anything really.

Having established the problem, that each of them has made an unsuccessful previous attempt at accomplishing the task, in lines 203 and 204 the Intermediary offers a solution: She suggests that they should re-try "Psych Lit" (the database of articles in psychology).

203 I: So the first thing we would have to do is try: (0.5)
204 the Psych Lit approach
204a U: Mm hm
In line 205, after the User's "Mmm hm" in line 204a, she continues her turn, offering a reason for doing what she proposes:

205 I: Again t'age: whether we can find there what it is you're looking for.

In addition to its being hearable as a solution to their problem, the following features of this turn provide for it to be recognizable as a suggestion. First, by beginning her turn with "So" she proposes what follows to be a consequence of what she has just established. In this way the User can hear what follows as connected to, and a proposed solution to, the problem that the Intermediary has indicated.

Second, the Intermediary proposes a specific future activity that they "ought" to do. In formulating it as something that they "would have to do," she formulates it as a recommendation. She is not simply telling the User what they will do, but rather constructing it as the appropriate course of action. Formulating it as something they "have to" do invokes a sense of "correct procedure" for the search, where there is one appropriate first step, which she is able to determine, apparently unproblematically. This is one aspect of the unilateral character of the suggestion: What should be done is determined independently by the Intermediary. In addition to her independent determination of the appropriate course of action, another characteristic of this suggestion adds to its unilateral character. This is her use of "we." It can be heard as indicating that she takes herself to be speaking on behalf of them both. While on the one hand including the User in the search "team" in this way could indicate that she treats him as an equal, she has apparently made the decision about what to do on behalf of both of them. Including him like this is a way of speaking on his behalf, and displays an assumption on her part that it is appropriate for her to be deciding on behalf of both of them what ought to be done. It also indicates that she assumes his cooperation with her. In these ways her utterance is hearable both as a suggestion and as unilateral.

A final feature of her suggestion is that she glosses his topic as "what it is you're looking for." He must rely on her earlier formulation of "the nitty gritty" (line 186), "client education" (line 193), and "diagnosis" (line 194) to judge what she takes him to be looking for. These turns of the Intermediary put the User in the position of inferring that the Intermediary is proposing to retry the Psychological Abstracts database using these terms.
Both by formulating the "correct procedure," and by appropriating the User into the search, the Intermediary makes a unilateral suggestion: One party, the Intermediary, determines and proposes the appropriate first step in the search on behalf of them both. While her suggestion is unilateral in the sense that it is initiated and constructed independently by the Intermediary, it is offered in such a way as to make it available for his inspection and approval or disapproval, prior to her actually performing the action.

Methods for performing conjoint actions—those involving more than one participant—can be seen to fall along a continuum. There are those such as imperatives in which one party simply appropriates the other party into the action. The collaborative character of the action is minimal in the sense that in issuing an imperative one party claims the authority/ability/right to decide on behalf of the recipient of the imperative what they should do. In such a circumstance, then, the other's right to determine for him or herself what his or her actions should consist of is not given recognition. In contrast, many methods for performing conjoint actions are collaborative in character. For instance, invitations may be achieved by reporting sociable events, leaving the invitee to infer the possibility of joining in the sociable event, and showing their willingness to participate (Drew, 1984). Blame may be collaboratively accomplished when one speaker reports an agentless unhappy event, and the other joins in proposing who the responsible party might be (Pomerantz, 1978; Mandelbaum, 1993). In this way the method chosen for suggesting an action contains proposals regarding interactants' view of their relationship. An imperative involves an assumption that one speaker may legitimately control the actions of another. Collaborative methods indicate greater autonomy since they allow decisions regarding conjoint action to be arrived at by both parties working together.

The Intermediary's unilateral suggestion here is clearly closer to the imperative end of the continuum, since she proposes unilaterally what it is they should do. However, in formulating her suggestion as what they "would have to do," as contrasted with, for instance, simply going ahead and doing it, she introduces the possibility of his accepting or rejecting the proposal. However, he is not invited to coparticipate in constructing the suggestion. Thus, in the way that her suggestion is shaped an indication is available that the Intermediary takes it that she has authority over what approach should be taken in pursuing the search; by offering a
specific course of action as the appropriate next step she proposes herself as legitimately authoritative over correct procedure for the search. By apparently including the User in "we" as a fellow agent in the search, she indicates that she takes it that she may decide for both of them what should be done. In making her proposed course of action available for the User's approval or disapproval, though, she shows orientation to the appropriate character of his legitimate participation in the search process. In line 204a the User's "Mm hm" may be taken to indicate his affirmation of her proposal. This indicates that he takes it that his approval or disapproval may be relevant at this point. This understanding is further exemplified in his response in line 206, where he initially approves what she has proposed (""Okay""), and then goes on to report some circumstances that can be heard as beginning an objection to what she has proposed.

Therefore, while no overt role characterizations are offered we, and presumably the interactants, can draw inferences regarding how they see themselves vis-à-vis one another from the way that the Intermediary structures her suggestion, and from the way that the User begins to respond to her.

The collaborative suggestion by the user. The User's response provides us with an example of a collaborative method for proposing a next step in the search process. In responding to the Intermediary's turn, the User in line 206 initially agrees with her proposal, but then he produces a fairly long turn at talk in which he:

1. reports some facts about "demographic questions" (lines 206-208);
2. reformulates what he takes to be key about his study (lines 210-12); and,
3. indicates what he takes to be a possible additional useful resource for him (lines 212-25).

In these ways he reports information about his study, but does not explicitly show what he expects the Intermediary to make of what he is reporting. Rather, he puts her in the position of inferring what he may be trying to do by telling her this. While his turn consists mainly of reporting, in the context of (which is to say, immediately following) her proposal for the next action in the search, the Intermediary can infer that his reporting may be relevant to her suggestion. In the context of her suggestion, part of understanding his turn involves understanding how it responds to hers. It seems that he understands her "client education" in
line 193 as educational level rather than "doctors educating patients," and in this sense he sees it as a demographic characteristic. Part of his problem with her suggestion, then, seems to be rooted in a misunderstanding of the terms she may be proposing. He recharacterizes the "demographic question" as secondary.

Next he offers a version of what he takes to be key: "patient knowledge of diagnosis," or "patient understanding of diagnosis" (in lines 210 and 211). While he preserves "diagnosis" from the format used by the Intermediary, he substitutes "patient knowledge" and "patient understanding," apparently for "client education." By preserving one part of the term that the Intermediary proposed to use, and replacing the other part, the User permits the Intermediary to hear that he may be offering a replacement for part of her term. By reporting this here, rather than overtly rejecting the Intermediary's proposal, he puts her in a position to infer from his report that he may be rejecting the terminology he takes her to be using — "client education" — and making available a possible substitute — "patient knowledge" or "understanding" of diagnosis. He reports what he takes to be central to his project, allowing the Intermediary to infer just what this could mean for her proposed first step in the search.

Finally, in his multiunit turn in lines 212–25 he explains how a different field, the medical field, might provide useful resources for his study. He reports tentatively what he "thinks": "I think there may be literature in the medical field on patient knowledge and understanding of diagnosis." This tentative language may indicate that what he reports is to be taken as possibilities, rather than certainties. His highly tentative formulations with respect to what is available in the databases may be a way for him to indicate his lack of expertise in this domain, and by implication to defer to her expertise.

In this turn then he has, in immediate juxtaposition with the Intermediary's unilateral proposal about what they should do, apparently recharacterized as secondary one of the terms she has proposed to search on, reiterated the terms he takes to be central to his study, and also reported another possible source of information: the medical database. While it is clear that in her turn the Intermediary is proposing a specific course of action, in his turn the User reports some information that she could hear simply as information or "news" about his study, but could take to be responding to her suggestion by proposing some modifications. Rather than overtly turning down her proposal or overtly mak-
ing a counter-suggestion, he reports facts about his topic and reasons for these facts.

This raises the question of how the Intermediary might come to recognize his turn as a response to her suggestion. Schegloff (1980) notes that some utterances are conventionally heard as initiating pre-sequences. For instance, “Are you busy Saturday night?” may conventionally be heard as a precursor to an invitation. Some utterances though do not have this conventional understanding. Schegloff shows how understanding them as indicating another action in the works may hinge on their placement in an ongoing sequence. This appears to be the case here. For it would be possible to take the User’s utterance simply as reporting some information about his study. Potentially, the Intermediary could respond to it as such. However, she has just suggested a course of action. In lines 204 and 206, with his “Mmhm” and “Okay,” the User has shown that he takes it that his approval/disapproval may be relevant. It is possible to hear that his turn may be directly relevant to her suggestion, and may encompass possible modifications to what she suggests. Given both the sequential location of the turn (right after a suggestion for future action) and its content (hearable as containing possible alternatives to what the Intermediary has proposed), then, the Intermediary could hear it as indicating possible disagreement with her suggestion, and possibly venturing an alternative suggestion. However, the format of the turn is a simple report. This puts the Intermediary in the position of either being able to draw the implications for their joint action from this response to her proposal, or to treat what he has reported simply as news. Coming directly after her action proposal, his response could be heard as a pre-rejection of it. That is, it does not overtly or immediately reject it, but rather enables the Intermediary to see grounds upon which a rejection might be premised. This could put her in the position to forestall the rejection by reformulating her suggestion. The information presented could also provide grounds for a competing suggestion and could therefore be heard as a pre-suggestion—that is, a turn that enables the Intermediary to hear that the User may be going to offer an alternative suggestion. However, since this is accomplished using the format of a report of information, the Intermediary is not constrained to deal with the pre-rejection/pre-suggestion implications of the turn, and may also take up the report simply as information or “news.”
In terms of the proposal that the User's turn makes with respect to the role relationship between User and Intermediary, both the fact that his turns consists of a report, rather than an overt counter proposal, and his tentativeness with regard to the relevance of the alternative database, reinforce the asymmetrical alignment between the participants that the Intermediary's turn proposed. Her suggestion is constructed in such a way as to co-opt the User, to decide what should be done, and to speak on his behalf. In contrast, his turn simply makes information available (mainly about his study). While he reports "facts" about his study apparently unproblematically, claims with regard to material such as bibliographic databases, that could be considered within her domain, are highly tentative. In these ways, in his turn he defers to the Intermediary with regard to the search, thereby tacitly reinforcing her position as expert regarding the search process. In contrast his descriptions of his study claim authority over it.

Given the sequential context of this turn, coming as it does right after an overt suggestion, it seems far-fetched to assert that the Intermediary could treat it as simply a report of information. However, in lines 226 and 227, "uhh I wouldn't be surprised because the- the right to know laws are a very recent phenomenon," the Intermediary does in fact take up the information about his dissertation project by addressing the question of why there is a lack of research in his area, and thus why he is pursuing this topic in the first place. That is, she does not initially take up the implications his turn could be heard to have for the suggestion that she has made. She does take up the implications his turn has for the search eventually, though, and in lines 294–302 she shows orientation to his concerns about the term "client education," and incorporates some of the other material that he makes available in his turn.

In line 295 she quotes from the Psychological Abstracts, "huh We've got a heading- in Psych Abs (1.0) for patient- for client education, which is what they call it." "We've got" can be heard to indicate that she takes this term to be relevant to them—she formulates it as though it "belongs" to them. By describing it as what "they call it," though, she disjoins it from the searchers, and allocates it to the database. This may indicate her orientation to the User's concerns about the term "client education," which his response to her first suggestion seemed to indicate. In this way she shows alertness to his concerns, while simultaneously demonstrating for him the source of the term. In line 297 she
shows her doubts about the terms, "um I don’t know whether that will work or not." In lines 299–300 she incorporates terms he raised during his response to her first suggestion. She proposes it in a way that makes it hearable as her suggestion. In this way his report in response to her first suggestion has provided her with materials for making a further suggestion about the search as though it were her own idea. Nevertheless, she formulates it in a tentative way, indicating that she has low expectations regarding the likely success of this tactic. In this way his turn does become part of a collaborative suggestion: she incorporates aspects of his turn in her modification of terms for the search. Nonetheless, her tentativeness in doing so may reinforce the indication that his proposal for the search does not have the same status as hers.

The collaborative method provides a delicate way for managing disagreement with a suggestion for future action by providing the information necessary to put the Intermediary in a position to modify the suggestion. Thus, the User’s turn provides the information in a way that permits the Intermediary to incorporate it into the search if she chooses, or to take it up simply as news (which she initially does). In this way he does not tell her that what she has proposed is inappropriate. Rather, by reporting circumstances about his study, he puts her in the position of being able to incorporate his knowledge into her proposals for what they should do.

In this way the collaborative method could be seen as a method for the User to defer to the Intermediary. In proposing what they should do, the Intermediary implicitly constructs herself as knowledgeable with respect to the search. In simply reporting information, the User gives the Intermediary access to materials which permit her to make a proposal he can accept—one that appropriately captures for the database the character of his study. The fact that he reports the information but does not tell her what to do with it may also encompass an orientation to or proposal of her expertise in this domain. He speaks knowledgeably about his study, but with great tentativeness regarding the bibliographic databases.

A unilateral suggestion by the user. The delicate, gentle way that the User turns down or modifies a unilateral suggestion by the Intermediary constrasts strongly with the way the Intermediary turns down a unilateral suggestion by the User. The vehemence with which the Intermediary turns down the User’s unilateral suggestion may also be explained
as a sensitivity to the proposals regarding their relative expertise that the suggestion may contain.

In line 303, when the Intermediary may have reached a completion point in her current set of proposals of terms for the search, the User makes an overt, specific suggestion to modify a key term: "Okay. Do we wanna specify in-patient?" In line 307 the Intermediary strongly rejects this suggestion. This fragment provides further insight into how suggestions and responses to them are used in proposing and constructing the relationship between the participants, and their relative expertises. For in making a proposal of this sort, the User presumes a certain level of competence in the search process. In disallowing the suggestion, the Intermediary implies that the User may not be competent to make a suggestion of this sort.

299 I: I think we also probably have to try: just putting- the two
300 words together. patient with knowledge.
301 U: Okay,?
302 I: [ I think-
303 U: "Okay*: Do we wanna specify in-patient?
303a (2.5)
304 I: hhh
304a (0.8)
305 U: or psychiatric patient, or is that assumed.
305a (0.7)
306 I: We [ II,
306a U: [ ("at this point")
307 I: No. I think: I don’t think you do: want to, because I don’t think-
308 (0.4) from what you’re telling me you’ve found very much so far.
309 U: tch! No, uh:: my:: I haven’t found anything.-u: m directly (0.3)
310 dealing with "that." But on the other hand, hh u:: m my:: sophistication
311 with Psych Lit is: nil. So: I may have overlooked- a lot of-
312 possibilities. (0.5) u:: m and I ha:ven’t really pursued this too much
313 on my own because I deferred it. = with the understanding that
314 going to work on it-

The User’s overt suggestion in line 303 contrasts with his participation in the search so far in two ways. First, he makes an explicit suggestion for the Intermediary’s approval or disapproval. Second, by using "we" he apparently includes himself as an agent in the search. I discuss each in turn.
First his turn consists of an explicit proposal seeking the Intermediary's approval or disapproval. While like her he makes an explicit proposal, at the same time he defers to the Intermediary in the sense that he poses this modification in a format that requires a "yes" or "no" answer. That is, by using a first pair part turn, which makes relevant a yes or no answer, he explicitly puts her in the position of accepting or rejecting it. In this way he indicates that while he may have a contribution to make, she is the final "authority." Nonetheless, in the same way that the Intermediary made a unilateral suggestion initially in line 203–205, here the User makes a unilateral suggestion by proposing that they narrow the term "patient" to "inpatient" or "psychiatric patient" (lines 303–305). In so doing he may be taken to be presuming that he may legitimately participate in, and therefore has the knowledge relevant to, determining just how the search should be conducted. In making a proposal about a term for the search, he engages in a similar activity to that which the Intermediary is undertaking. A similar self-inclusive stance may be inferred from his use of "we" in this utterance.

So far the Intermediary has proposed the terms to be used. As she makes her proposals she refers to the agent of the search as "we." In line 294 she says, "We've got a heading." In line 299 she says, "we also probably have to try:" She does not specify who "we" includes. While she could simply be using "we" in a generalized way to refer to herself, we (and presumably the User) can infer that she is including the User as an agent in the search. In line 303 the User employs this inclusive "we" reference when he offers his modification to the Intermediary's proposal: "Okay. Do we wanna specify in-patient?" He uses "we" for an activity that so far the Intermediary has been pursuing. In using "we" he could be heard to be assuming the right to include himself as an agent in the search with the Intermediary. In this way, his use of "we" could embody an assumption of competence in the search process.

In the format of a question, then, he proposes a modification of a term that the Intermediary has offered. He suggests narrowing the term. The proposal is framed in such a way as to make relevant approval or disapproval from the Intermediary, but nonetheless he offers a unilateral modification of one of the terms that the Intermediary has proposed using. The combination of an outright suggestion with the self-inclusive use of "we" may be understood by the Intermediary as the User proposing that
he may have at least sufficient competence in the search to make procedural suggestions, and be included as an active agent.

His suggestion is first met with silence in line 303a. The Intermediary then sighs in line 304. There is a further gap in line 304a. The lack of response from the Intermediary could be understood by the User as indicating possible upcoming disagreement (Sacks, 1987 [1973]; Pomerantz, 1984). In this way the gaps provide him with an opportunity to modify his suggestion in a direction that might provide for agreement instead of disagreement. The User shows some alertness to the possibility of upcoming disagreement when in line 305 he offers a modification: "or psychiatric patient," and then a possible reason why this suggestion might be unnecessary (and presumably, why the Intermediary may be about to disagree with his suggestion): "or is that assumed." In this way he provides her with an agreeing way of turning down his suggestion. She could disagree with his suggestion by agreeing that it is "assumed." However, in lines 307–308 the Intermediary offers a strong rejection of the User's proposals: "No. I think- I don't think you do: want to. because I don't think- (0.4) from what you're telling me you've found very much so far." While it is further postponed by the gap in line 305a and the "Well" in line 306, in line 307–308 she employs the same format with which the User formulated his suggestion, but negates it. "Do we wanna" becomes "I don't think you do: want to." In addition to negating his terms, she substitutes "you" for "we," disjoining herself from the suggestion. She also offers a reason for rejecting the suggestion: the User's lack of success so far in finding anything. On the face of it, it may not be transparent why she offers this as her reason for rejecting his suggestion. She leaves him to infer, on the basis of minimal information, why she offers this as her justification for rejecting his suggestion. This may indicate an assumption on her part that he understands the search-methodological repercussion of his suggestion—that is, that it would further narrow the search, resulting in a smaller harvest of bibliographical references. While he can hear her mention of his lack of success in the search process so far as an implicit reason for rejecting his suggestion, it would be possible for him to hear this also as criticizing his competence in the search process.

In his response to her rejection of his suggestion in lines 309–14 he agrees that he has not found anything, but offers two explanations for this: First, he has no expertise with this database, and second, he has not
pursued it, since he expected to pursue it in the search with the Intermediary:

310 U: But on the other hand, hh y::m my:: sophistication
311 with Psych Lit is: nil. So: I may have overlooked- a lot of-
312 possibilities.
313 U: (0.5) y::m and I haven’t really pursued this too much
313 on my own because I deferred it - with the understanding that
314 we were
go to work on it.-

In offering these explanations, it appears that he understands her to be criticizing him for not having found anything so far: “So: I may have overlooked- a lot of- possibilities.” In offering an account here (regarding the use of accounts in responding to “failure events” cf. Buttny, in press; Cody & McLaughlin, forthcoming; Schonbach 1990; Scott & Lyman, 1968) the User indicates that he takes her turn as an accusation, an indictment of his expertise in the search process against which he needs to defend himself. In lines 310 and 311 he explicitly characterizes his expertise, “my: sophistication with Psych Lit is: nil,” and offers his lack of expertise as one of the possible reasons why he did not find anything so far. In offering this reason the User appears to be attempting to show that his lack of success in finding anything so far is due to lack of expertise and not lack of effort. That is, he appears to take it that his inability to find anything so far is due to his lack of expertise with the search process. This presumably can be heard as an explanation for why he might have chosen an inappropriate term here. In his response he seems to be oriented to explaining the lack of knowledge and effort that accounts for his inability to find anything rather than showing any awareness of how specifying in patient might be problematic.

It is probable that the Intermediary rejects the User’s suggestion because it narrows the search, and thus makes it less likely that they will find anything. However, she make this available in a highly implicit way. The User would need to know some search methodology to be able to understand the possible limitations of this particular term with respect to the fact that if “inpatient” were used instead of “patient” it would cut down the number of articles that the computer would locate as relevant. Although the Intermediary could make this information available to the User, here she simply rejects the User’s suggestion without a technical explanation for how the number of articles found so far accounts for her rejection.
Thus, the User’s unilateral suggestion results in a strong rejection by the Intermediary. In rejecting the proposal in this way, the Intermediary may also be understood to be rejecting the User’s positioning of himself as a competent coparticipant in making a suggestion for the search. In this way her response to his unilateral suggestion not only emphatically rejects it, but rejects it in a way that capitalizes on just what may have prevented his unilateral suggestion from being successful. To understand her reason for rejecting his suggestion he needs just that which his suggestion indicates he may not have—an understanding of search methodology. She reinforces the tacit proposal of his lack of competence in the search by using a reason for rejecting his proposal that would be understandable to him only if he had a more sophisticated understanding of the search process in the first place—in which case, presumably, he would not have made this suggestion. The Intermediary’s emphatic and unyielding rejection of the User’s unilateral suggestion contrasts strongly with the User’s rejection of the Intermediary’s unilateral suggestion discussed above. His rejection of hers appears to be designed to provide her with information she could use to make an acceptable suggestion. In this way he makes his expertise available to her in such a way as to enable her to combine it with hers in order to pursue their task. In contrast, the Intermediary uses her expertise to reject his suggestion, but in a way that would only provide for his drawing on her knowledge to advance their shared task if he already had that knowledge. He deploys professional resources in an attempt at a collaborative task. She reserves hers, and in this way inhibits his ability to collaborate on the task.

Conclusions

This paper describes two contrasting methods for making suggestions in the bibliographic database search process. From examining unilateral and collaborative methods for making suggestions we are able to speculate about possible role-constructional consequences of interactants’ choice of different methods to do an interactional task.

With respect to how participants understand the possible action that the report might be accomplishing in the collaborative suggestion, we saw how participants drew on resources beyond the format of the turn in question in order to understand what it could be taken to accomplish. Specifically, the location of the reporting turn in the environ-
ment of ongoing planning for the search, coming immediately after a first pair part suggestion by the Intermediary, enabled the Intermediary to treat it as a possible pre-suggestion (although she initially took it up as "information").

A unilateral suggestion incorporated a claim of competence, knowledgableness, or expertise. Making a unilateral suggestion constituted a claim to an ability to determine on behalf of both participants what was to be done next. While the User permitted the Intermediary to do this, by putting the Intermediary in the position of correcting her own proposal, the User's unilateral suggestion was strongly and outrightly rejected by the Intermediary. Thus, while the Intermediary's posturing of herself as competent in search procedure was allowed, the User's was strongly rejected.

The collaborative suggestion examined here showed reporting information being used by the User as a pre-rejection and a pre-suggestion. It operated in these ways by providing the Intermediary with the materials necessary for altering her suggestion. Since an overt rejection of the Intermediary's suggestion, or a strong counter suggestion, were not made, accepting or rejecting a suggestion was avoided as the overt business of talk.

We found that the methods were differentially distributed among participants. A unilateral suggestion from the User was emphatically rejected by the Intermediary, while a collaborative one was incorporated by her, if tentatively. On the other hand, a unilateral suggestion from the Intermediary was treated as acceptable by the User. It seems that the way the suggestion is formulated participates in differentiating speakers. The way in which they suggest next actions in the search, and deal with those suggestions, contains proposals about how participants see themselves and one another. A dynamic that is revealed by the management of suggestions in this setting indicates something about the core of the conjoint action that this and many other workplace encounters require. For each participant needs access to the other's expertise in order to successfully use their own. Yet how they make their expertises available to one another has repercussions beyond merely getting the job done. As Goodwin (1990) notes with respect to directives in her study, here the shape of the suggestion contains a proposal concerning the amount of control the speaker takes it they can exert over the addressee and the amount of knowledge one participant has in the other's domain.
of expertise. In this way the format of the suggestion becomes a way of proposing and constructing professional personae. Presenting and protecting their own and each other’s professional faces may explain some aspects of how suggestions are constructed here. For a recurrent problem for the Intermediary is that proposing a next step in the search implies an understanding of what the User is looking for. For the User, proposing a next step in the search implies an understanding of how a search should proceed. That is, in attempting to collaborate to conduct a search, they run the risk of treading on one another’s professional toes. In the ways in which they engage in the search process, then, they show sensitivity to these issues. They appear to construct their talk in ways that construct the other as expert in their area of expertise. It seems that problems arise when their talk does not demonstrate this sensitivity. It is when the User makes a suggestion in a way that suggests he takes himself to be knowledgeable about how to conduct the search that the Intermediary harshly rejects his proposal. The way in which a suggestion is made then appears to be sensitive to considerations beyond simply “getting the job done.” Considerations of appropriately constructing self and other are apparent in the ways in which suggestions are made in this work setting. Interactants then are engaged in understanding not just the speech action an utterance may be performing, but also the roles it may be taken to indicate and the relationship it proposes between speaker and addressee. In structuring their suggestions for future action, and responses to these suggestions, in the ways that they do, interactants in the library setting appear to be sensitive to the relational implications of the formats that they choose for making suggestions. Here then we see that speech acts to get the job done, but that how it is used to get the job done is replete with relational sensitivity. In this sense, when interactants propose what to do next, their proposals appear to be shaped to indicate who they take themselves and one another to be.

Note

1. It is important to note that, strictly speaking, what I am calling “unilateral” suggestions are collaborative also, in the sense that in making a suggestion a speaker can be taken to be doing a first pair part (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973), which warrants a second pair part from the person to whom the suggestion is made, who may, in response, approve the proposal or reject it. However, what I am calling “collaborative” proposals here are collaborative in a special sense: they do not
become overt proposals without the collaboration of the second party. I am grateful to Anita Pomerantz for pointing this out to me.

References


**Appendix A**

The transcription symbols used for the present study were developed by Gail Jefferson. The following explanation draws on the description in Atkinson & Heritage (1984, iv–xi).

(o.) Indicates a pause or gap in tenths of seconds.

- Underlining shows stress on words or sounds.

. Period indicates falling inflection, not necessarily at the end of an utterance or sentence.

, Comma indicates "continuing" intonation.

? Question mark indicates rising inflection, not necessarily a question.

? Question mark and comma combined indicates a rising intonation weaker than that suggested by a question mark alone.

( ) Double parentheses enclose transcriber’s descriptive remarks.

( ) Single parentheses enclose words about which transcriber is doubtful.

[ ] Square brackets indicate the beginning [ and ending ] of overlap.

[ ] Double square brackets mark the simultaneous onset of two utterances.

- A hyphen at the end of a word or part of a word indicates that it sounds "cut off."

" The equals sign indicates that two utterances are contiguous, but not overlapping.

:: Colon(s) indicate the extension ("stretching") of the sound it follows.

° Degree marks enclosing a fragment of talk indicate that it is produced more quietly than talk on either side of it.

AAH Capital letters indicate increased volume.

hhh h’s indicate audible out-breaths.

hhh h’s preceded by a raised dot indicate audible in-breaths.
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(h) An h, or h's enclosed in brackets, sometimes within words, indicates explosive aspiration, such as laughter or breathlessness.

hahahuh h's followed by a vowel such as "a," "e," "u," and so on, indicate laughter tokens.

$ A dollar sign encloses talk produced with "smile voice."

* An upward-pointing arrow indicates a rise in pitch

\ A back-slash indicates a fall in pitch.

Appendix B

184 U: (\(\ldots\)) Those kinds of questions. -That's something I will be
discussing. Hhh But what I'm trying to do, hope [fully,
Is the nitty-gritty.

186 I:

187 U: Is get the background dat[a

187a I: ["Okay"

187b (0.5)

188 U: to build on that ah because I don't think it's th*ere.

188a (0.3)

189 I: tech, hh I- (. ) looked briefly and I can tell that there will some
problems in trying to get it, because the combinations (0.3)
don't get naturally.

192 U: Right.

193 I: "=m" you look at client education. That's fine and die-
You put that together with diagnosis. -And you said you had
tried Psych Abstracts.

195 (0.4)

195a I:

196 U: I suspect you didn't get what you were looking [for.

197 U: tech] No I didn't

197a get anything really.

197b (0.4)

198 I: Okay. That's- One possibility is of course that since: (0.5) all
the dissertations are not gen the Psych Lit (1.2) What you want
may've been done in somebody's dissertation. - but won't show
up out th*ere.

201 U: That would be nice.

202 U: So the first thing we would have to do; -is try: (0.5) the Psych Lit

203- I: approach-

204a U: Mm hm

205- I: Again t*see: whether we can find there what it is you're looking for.

206- U: "Okay." (0.5) Some of the demographic questions and so on are

206a secondary.

206b I: Mm hm

207 U: Because that's data I can find, "oh uh* experimentally in a

208 sense- you know I could actually gather that data. (0.5) u:hm but the

209 I: "mm hm
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168 U: basic question of patient (0.5) knowledge of diagnosis or patient
understanding of diagnosis. hh y:um that (0.3) I think is sort of
the keystone. I think there may: be (0.3) literature in the
medical field. (0.4) on patient knowledge and understanding of
diagnosis (0.5) probably- particularly I would imagine with terminal
illness: and cancer and things like that. hh I may: be able to sort
of work (0.5) by analogy from that, or not so much analogy but
extrapolating and (0.5) using developing and theorizing on the basis
of that. And that: may be one of the tricks that I'll have to take.

18a U: uhmm But I- wouldn't imagine somewhere there must be some stuff. You
know- it's really amazing to me- A:ll the literature. >not all
(of) the literature<, there- there: little things that touch on this.
hh But there doesn't seem to be much (0.5) discussion of the patient
perspective on diagnosis. It- it's all (0.5) you know how to:
diagnose and the treatment implications of a diagnosis, hh um and
so this is what I think might be lacking.

225a I: teh: hh I wouldn't be surprised because the- the right to know laws
are are a very recent [ phenomenon. ]

228 U: mm hm mm hm that's a: that's actually a very
(a sixty-three-line discussion of patients' rights to know, etc., is omitted here)

291 U: ( (...) ) but otherwise it's not a- a: standard part of an interaction
by any means.

293 I: No it's not. It clearly isn't ( ). Just from what you see
reading. Okay: (1.3) hh We've got a heading- in Psych Ab (1.0) fo r:
patient- for client education, which is what they call it.

295a (0.5)

296 U: Uhuh.

296a (0.5)

297 I: um I don't know whether that will work or not.

297a (0.5)

298 U: Okay.

299 I: I think we also probably have to try: just putting- ( ) the two
words together. patient with knowledge.

301 U: Okay: I think

302 I: and see whether anything comes up.

303 U: "Okay" Do we wanna specify in-patient?

303a (2.5)

304 I: hhh

304a (0.8)

305 U: or psychiatric patient, or is that assumed.

305a (0.7)

306 I: We'll,

306a U: (* at this point*)
I: No, I think— I don’t think you’d want to, because I don’t think—
(0.4) from what you’re telling me you’ve found very much so far.
U: ‘eh! No, uh: my:- I haven’t found anything.-um directly (0.3)
dealing with “that.” But on the other hand, .hh um: my: sophistication
with Psych Lit is: nil. Sg: I may have overlooked- a lot of-
possibilities. (0.5) um and I haven’t really pursued this too much
on my own because I deferred it - with the understanding that we were
going to work on it-
I: Yeah.
U: here. uh: but diagnosis is a- is a key word that I think is important.
(0.5)
I: or patient: Would- would we be able to get at something like patient
knowledge of diagnosis. “is that” ( )
That’s where the problem comes.
(0.4)
U: um. In working with one of these systems- what you ha:ve (0.3) are
terms or words in the abstract- “ or the title.
I: Right
(1.5)
I: There isn’t a heading for patient knowledge.
U: Okay
I: Doesn’t exist. Hasn’t been- something that’s been written about ’nough
to ‘ave prompted. (0.3) I can look for the two words to be adjacent to
one another.
(0.5)
U: “Okay.”
I: “Okay. ( ) That’s one way of looking for it… hhh
U: The other- options might be awareness: ( ) and understanding. Those
three.” “Looking at “
(0.3)
U: If we’re looking for juxtapositions of words.
I: “Mmm.” That’s what you- what we’re gonna to have to do… in part.
U: “( )”
I: Because what you’re after is not a term- not a- a clearly defined
(0.3) interaction- “that’s gonna exist.”
U: Okay.
I: either previously or automatically going to come up.