

Material and embodied resources in the accomplishment of closings in technology-mediated business meetings

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Abstract

This study uses conversation analysis (CA) and video-recorded data from an international company to investigate closings in technology-mediated (i.e. distant) meetings. The focus is on the situated affordances and multimodal resources that the chair and participants deploy to transition from meeting talk to a coordinated exit. Due to restricted access to bodily-visual leave-taking behaviours, other mutually recognized practices need to be implemented to initiate and advance closings: 1) when closing is made relevant as the next step, 2) when opportunity spaces to move out of the closing emerge, and 3) when departure from the meeting needs to be negotiated. This progression requires the close coordination of co-participants' vocal and embodied conduct in the physical setting and rendering actions publicly intelligible via the screen at specific moments. The analysis portrays closings as emergent, collaborative accomplishments, in which the import of multimodal turn constructions and (dis)aligning behaviours must be negotiated *in situ*.

Keywords: distant meetings, closings, embodied resources, conversation analysis, multimodality

1. Introduction

Business meetings today are frequently organised between people in different geographical locations. Previous studies show that engagement by participants in multiple interactional spaces (see e.g. Mondada 2013) affects the ways in which participation frameworks are organized at the beginning of meetings (Heath and Luff 2000; Muñoz 2016; Markman 2009; Oittinen and Piirainen-Marsh 2015; Rintel 2013) and become reshaped at other junctures in meetings, e.g. in moments of interactional trouble (Oittinen 2018). However, findings on the ways distributed work groups end their encounters are scarce. In face-to-face meetings closings include initiating and traveling through a “closing track” (Button 1991), shifting from one turn-taking format to another, i.e. from meeting talk to multiparty talk (e.g. Boden 1994; Nielsen 2013), and doing the actual leave-taking. All these stages require the mutual coordination of talk and embodied actions that are produced in conjunction with each other and the ongoing activity (see LeBaron and Jones 2002). In technology-mediated settings, where the participants have limited or no visual access to each other’s environments and conduct, the joint utilization of interactional resources and bodily configurations for the sequential work of closing is more challenging. The present study investigates the situated affordances and multimodal resources that the chair and participants draw on to manage this practical problem when ending audio-based multiparty meetings.

The data comprise ten intracorporal business meetings that were video-recorded in one of the offices of a large international company. The meetings involve participants in different geographical locations who use the Microsoft Live Meeting software to connect with each other. They have an audio connection but cannot see each other, albeit the agenda, participant list, and other relevant materials can be shared in an online workspace and projected on wide screens in the meeting rooms. The recordings depict the events from the physically co-present, local participants’ site, illustrating the ways in which they renegotiate the frames and conditions for their involvement in multiple interactional spaces: the local space, overall meeting space, and potentially, other adjoining spaces (Oittinen, 2020; cf. Mondada 2013). The study uses conversation analysis (CA) to examine the moment-by-moment organisation of coordinated exits. The analysis shows closings as intricate, collaborative accomplishments that require specialized practices to manage crucial junctures and advance the closings’ overall trajectory: 1) when closing becomes relevant as the next step, 2) when opportunity spaces to move out of the closing track emerge, and 3) when departure needs to be negotiated. This progression is established in concert with verbal and bodily-visual practices, and it involves mutually

achieved alignment(s) by which the context for closing and leaving the overall meeting space is (re)configured. Orientation towards the screen, monitoring the list of participants, and rendering physical actions reflexively relevant and intelligible via the screen function as important constituent elements in the unfolding of the activity. Overall, there is variation in the ways the meetings end depending on contextual factors: e.g. the number of parties, the situated affordances available to the participants, and the physical location of the chair. This study extends earlier research on the organizational properties of technology-mediated interaction (e.g. Hutchby 2001; Due and Licoppe 2020; Mlynář et al. 2018), highlighting the complexities of coordinating actions via material and embodied resources in multiparty meetings that are audio-based.

2. Closings

Closings of turns and sequences have been extensively studied via conversation analytic methods (e.g. Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Schegloff 2007; Button 1987, 1991). As suggested by Schegloff (2007, 118), sequence-closing sequences in general comprise three turns: an initial turn, recipient's aligning turn with which s/he indicates collaboration or agreement, and a final token that ratifies the mutual understanding to close (also called a "sequence-closing third"). Similarly, reaching alignment is central when negotiating closings of encounters. In face-to-face situations there are various resources, such as body movement, that are typically mobilized in conjunction with talk to achieve a collaborative closure (LeBaron and Jones 2002). The way closings unfold depends on the interlocutors' mutual orchestration of their verbal and embodied alignments which are often simultaneously pursued (Ticca 2012, 99; see also Mondada 2011; Broth and Mondada 2012). Sometimes this may involve upholding the conversation while bodily indicating its imminent end. In his study on closings of in-car interactions, Haddington (2019) illustrates the complexity of mobile settings, namely drop-offs, which require subtly negotiating two parallel yet intertwined activities: a conversational closing and the actual leave-taking. In addition, he shows how attentiveness to the interactional contingencies and monitoring the physical environment become key in advancing the overall closing trajectory.

Previous studies show that whereas informal meetings tend to end when key members leave the room (Boden 1994, 102), closings in formal meetings are governed by the pivotal role of the chair. However, they also require the participants to display mutual alignment towards being on a closing track (Button 1991). An essential part of creating the context for closing is

shared attentiveness towards its imminence, which might be drawn by preclosing sequences, such as summaries, back-references, appreciations, solicitudes and arrangements (Button 1987, 1991). In her study on departmental meetings, Nielsen (2013) introduces further steps that model closings, comprising four chairperson's techniques: topic bounding or preclosing, concluding remark/moral/lesson, last call for new mentionables and declaring closure by thanking the participants. In addition, she identifies two participant's techniques: showing readiness to close and passing the opportunity to talk. Overall, key in the accomplishment of closings is whether the co-participants align with the proposed closing-implicative action(s) or take advantage of sequentially suitable slots, namely opportunity spaces, to continue discussing a topic (Button 1991; Schegloff and Sacks 1973).

Recent conversation analytic research has focused on embodied practices and the use of material objects as interactional resources during the different phases of meetings (e.g. Deppermann et al. 2010; Ford and Stickle 2012; Hazel and Mortensen 2014; Mondada 2006; Nielsen 2012). As part of her progressive model, Nielsen (2013, 50) introduces a set of physical actions that indicate participants' readiness to close a meeting, i.e. being in a "meeting preclosing phase", such as gazing at one's wristwatch, packing belongings and collecting empty coffee cups. Mondada (2006) observed how a simple activity like putting aside a printed form may function not only as a gestural anticipation of a sequence closure but also as an opportunity space for others to either align with the closing invitation or elaborate on the previous topic. Physical co-presence thus enables meeting participants a wide repertoire of multimodal resources with which to accomplish activity shifts and enact their institutional roles (see Hazel and Mortensen 2014). It also provides them the opportunity to monitor each other's conduct in real time, namely the ways the frames and (pre)conditions for interaction, i.e. interactional space, are constructed, maintained, and (re)configured (e.g. Mondada 2011, 2013; see also Raclaw et al. 2016; DiDomenico and Boase 2013). However, in meetings where participants cannot see each other, recognizing these configurations and closing-relevant behaviours is challenging. In the data for the present study, the local participants frequently orient to the distant parties' silences during closings as alignment, although competing involvements can easily occur.

3. Closings in technology-mediated environments

Research on the interactional practices of technology-mediated meetings has formed an area of interest that continues to grow (e.g. Hutchby 2001, 2014; Luff et al. 2016; Markman 2009).

Some studies have found that successful meeting interaction, including mutually accomplished transitions such as openings, requires making the overall meeting space a number one priority (i.e. ceasing other activities) and adopting a shared orientation to the activity at hand (see Markman 2009; Muñoz 2016; Oittinen and Piirainen-Marsh 2015; Wasson 2006). As participants in distant meetings coordinate their actions in multiple interactional spaces, verbally established junctures have special relevance (cf. Raymond and Zimmerman 2016).

Previous literature shows that asymmetrical access to co-participants' physical environments can sometimes be consequential for the sequential unfolding of interaction (e.g. Arminen et al. 2016; Heath and Luff 2000; Rintel 2013). In cases where only an audio connection is used, the most problematic features are delays that can interfere with the conversational structure (Olbertz-Siitonen 2015). Scholars working on video-mediated interaction have further concluded that even with video-mediated co-presence, procedures for turn-taking and transitions can be challenging, but they can also result in newly established practices (see Hjulstad 2016; Licoppe and Dumoulin 2010; Licoppe and Morel 2012; Oittinen 2020). In their study on distant meeting openings and closings in a holding company, Ruhleder and Jordan (2001) give one example of this, highlighting the absence of "liminal" phases that usually function as transition spaces between informal and formal phases in meetings. They found that especially closings tend to be abrupt, since there is no "dusk" period that usually contains interpersonal multiparty talk, and because the conversational closing is managed concurrently with the technological closing. Overall, in both audio- and video-mediated meetings, technology seems to create special frames and conditions for achieving coordinated entries and exits, but the progression must still be jointly accomplished *in situ* (cf. Muñoz 2016).

Markman's (2009) study on chat-based meeting closings proposes that reaching the end of interaction is a two-stage process, including an initial "so"-prefaced turn and a second turn that projects future action. However, due to the lack of vocal and bodily-visual cues, the process can easily be derailed because of overlapping turns appearing linearly on screen. The present study builds on these empirical investigations and seeks to find out, on the one hand, how co-located and distant participants' orientation towards both the affordances and constraints in audio-based meetings affect the coordination of closings (cf. Rintel 2013). On the other hand, it contributes to a better understanding of the contextual "structuring resources" (Mondada 2013, 270) that the chair and participants have at their disposal when dissolving the meeting structure and the shared interactional space.

4. Data and methods

This study draws on video-recorded data of ten meetings collected in one of the offices of an international company in Central Europe. These meetings total ten hours of recorded footage, and they are part of a larger data set from a 14-hour corpus collected in 2012 and 2013, which includes also co-present and video-mediated meetings. The participants in the data come from different geographical locations, and they speak English as a lingua franca, which is also the official company language. The recorded meetings can be characterized as formal: i.e. they are pre-scheduled, planned events in which the chair and participant roles are predetermined (see Boden 1994). The chair can be either a local or a distant participant, which means that he or she is not always visible on camera. All participants gave their consent to be audio- or video-recorded either prior or at the beginning of each meeting. The study also adheres to the bilateral agreement made with the company representatives and follows all ethical guidelines. In the transcripts, pseudonyms are used to secure the participants' identities.

The meetings were arranged using Microsoft Live Meeting, which enables audio-connection between all participants and the distribution of the agenda and other relevant materials (e.g. Word files, charts) in the shared workspace. Everyone participating in the meetings with a laptop or computer can individually utilize the mute function, however, in larger meetings, there is typically one person in the party who controls the devices. In the absence of video-collected data from the distant locations, it is still challenging to know which of the participants are muted. Exceptions form those meetings in which the list of participants is projected on a wide screen in the meeting room(s) during the closing phase. In these cases, the use of the mute function is also visible to the co-present participants and the researcher, who stayed in the room for the duration of all recordings.

The data were analyzed using conversation analysis (CA), which enables close examination of the ways in which verbal and embodied resources are both temporally and sequentially organized in the social and material environment (see Streeck et al. 2011; Hazel et al. 2014; Nevile et al., 2014). CA's focus on the moment-by-moment unfolding of interaction makes it possible not only to detect the junctures where closing negotiations become relevant but also to view how concurrent, parallel activities contribute to the process of achieving coordinated exits. The data excerpts were chosen as illustrative of the vocal, material, and embodied resources the chair and participants commonly deploy when accomplishing closings, also showing other features that fashion their typical progression. Although having video footage

from only one location could be seen as problematic for the in-depth analysis of closings, the study yet provides an *emic* perspective on the co-located and distant participants' conduct: i.e. how they themselves orient to the absence of visual access and draw on “the assemblage” of situated affordances (Arminen et al. 2016, 301). The data extracts were transcribed adapting the conventions by Jefferson (2004) and Mondada (2001; see Appendix). The distant participants are marked in the transcripts with capital letters.

5. Accomplishing closings via vocal, material and embodied resources

Distant meeting closings are progressively accomplished through mutually coordinated actions in and across the physical environments. The first subsection (5.1) examines how the first transition is initiated and closing made relevant as the next step. The second subsection (5.2) illustrates the emergence of opportunity spaces and the chair and participants' ways to manage them. The third subsection (5.3) analyzes the terminating sequence and the moment when departure needs to be negotiated. The analysis shows that verbal practices, such as audibly achieved junctures by the chair, are important for the joint accomplishment of closings (see also Asmuß and Svennevig 2009; Boden 1994), but they also require multimodal turn constructions and the use of various resources, such as gaze, gestures and manipulation of material objects. Orientation and alignment towards the closing activity are achieved and maintained through a skilled organisation of these constituent features. Due to the lack of visual access between the parties, using the screen to render physical actions reflexively relevant and intelligible is important in that it not only reconfigures the context for current and next actions but can also demarcate one phase from another. However, as it is typically the chair who controls the devices, this affordance is not available to everyone.

5.1 Initiating the closing of meeting proper

Verbal contributions that anticipate the end of meetings, e.g. boundary markers, declarations, and summaries, are considered important for bringing closings into shared interactional focus (Button 1987). These central means for making the imminence of closure explicit are typically deployed by the chair, but the first step is still collectively accomplished. The analysis illustrates that transitioning from meeting proper to the closing track includes bodily (re)arrangements in the meeting room(s) that contribute to reconfiguring the context, and the chair's manipulation of material objects. Although embodied displays cannot be communicated between the distributed parties, actions on the screen(s) (e.g. typing) have an important

function. They can become *visual signposts* for the transition (cf. Hazel and Mortensen 2014), being thus very much embedded in the local interactional ecology.

The first extract comes from a meeting with six distant participants from diverse locations and two local participants, Hans and Marja, who sit opposite each other in a small meeting room. The agenda is displayed on a wide screen. Prior to the extract, the chair, Hans, has given an update about implementing new company practices and shared his PowerPoint presentation with the others. Once he reaches the end of his last slide, he first self-corrects a spelling mistake on the screen, a “visual repairable” (Greiffenhagen and Watson 2009, 66), and then produces a concluding statement that launches the verbal transition (Lines 7-9). Concurrently, he clicks and opens the participant list on the screen, where it becomes visible to the other local participant, Marja. The excerpt shows that the closing is made relevant as the next phase via the chair’s multimodal turn construction and through his use of the screen: he signposts the way towards the closing track. The co-participants contribute to the transition via aligning vocal and visual behaviors.

Extract 1

((Marja orienting to wide screen, Hans to laptop))

1	Hans	six: uh number six the (op)s buying from the workshops need of course to follow these: (.)
2	Hans Hans Hans	(p)+(o)+(1.0) +frowns +lifts upper body, hand on mouse --->
3	Hans	(A)s (.) sorry about that °↑one°
4	Hans fig	+(1.0) +# (1.7) +types +manipulates mouse ---->+ 1.12 #1
5	Hans	which are valid in the respective countries,
6	screen	/(2.8) /cursor moves from bottom right to upper left corner on 'save' icon
7	Hans screen	<that /basically wha- (.) was /changes saved to ppt
8	Hans Marja	*what I had *(.) on my (.)> *rubs right arm*
9	Hans	list +now (0.2) open,
10	Hans screen fig	/#fo:r, (0.4) questions (.) and: (0.5) /name list opens on screen #2



Figure 1. Hans orients to laptop.



Figure 2. Name list opens on screen.

11 Hans remarks: +
 Hans ---> +
 12 (2.2) * (0.2) + # (3.2)
 Marja *stretches neck
 Hans +grins -->
 fig #3



Figure 3. Hans grins.

13 EINO Eino +here (.) one comment, the planning side ---
 Hans +---> glances down at keyboard

The extract begins when Hans mentions the last point of implementation listed on his last slide. He notices a problem with spelling of an acronym to which he orients by frowning, putting his hand on the laptop mouse and suspending his verbal display after uttering the first two letters, “p” and “o” (Line 2). When uttering the last letter, he initiates self-repair, an apology that anticipates his engagement in remedial work during the ensuing silence (Lines 3-4). His reference to “that one”, i.e. what he is apologizing for, functions as a specification of his noticing of the typo that everyone can now see being corrected on the screen (Line 3). Maintaining his orientation towards the laptop, Hans finalizes his on-screen operations and produces a concluding assessment on the topic (Line 5). After this, there is a silence of 2.8 seconds, during which Hans moves the cursor from the end of the line to the upper left-hand corner and clicks on “save”. Marja, who has been looking at the wide screen all along, monitors the cursor’s trajectory via gaze and thus displays her orientation to Hans’s multimodal turn construction along with the interlude that the saving activity occasions (Hazel and Mortensen 2014, 19). When Hans begins to formulate what reads as a closing-implicative summary (Line

7), a notification box appears momentarily on the screen, informing that the changes to the ppt have been successfully saved.

By stating that he is finished with the official topics of the meeting and using a clear boundary-marking pre-start, “now”, (Lines 7-9), Hans reinforces his role as the chair and initiates the transition into the next phase: preclosing. Despite some movement in her seat, Marja maintains her focal orientation towards the wide screen and shared interactional space (Fig. 1). With his subsequent abridged verbal invitation, a prepositional phrase, Hans opens the floor explicitly for questions and comments (Line 9-11). Concurrently, he puts his hand again on the laptop mouse and opens the participant list on the screen that also shows whether the others have their microphones on or off (Fig. 2). With these actions, he marks the beginning of the “question phase” and grants himself and Marja access to monitor the distant parties’ state of availability. During the long silence that ensues, Marja continues to look at the wide screen and Hans his laptop screen, and by doing so, they both orient to the distant participants as potential organizers of the next action (Line 12; see Deppermann et al. 2010, 1707). The change in Hans’s facial expression after 2.2 seconds, namely his grin, indicates his orientation to the long silence as potentially problematic (Fig. 3). Moreover, it makes the liminal stage of opening the floor for questions relevant and having a particular institutional and organizational function: it is not expected to be let pass. When Eino finally takes the floor with a verbal identification marker by stating his name and frames his upcoming turn as a comment, Hans resumes a more neutral facial expression and orients to listening.

The extract shows that the shift towards the closing phase is accomplished through the chair’s multimodal turn construction and rendering actions on the screen intelligible in and across the physical environments. Whereas Hans’s verbal initiations are crucial, his simultaneous mobilisation of other resources and alignments creates the space for implementing a visual demarcating practice that distinguishes one activity phase from another. Overall, Hans’s role is pivotal in transitioning into the closing phase in that he controls the devices and turn-taking, depicting the typical conditions of the setting and the responsibilities that the chair has in the organisation of closings.

The next extract illustrates a case in which closing is initiated by a participant who is not physically in the same room with the chair. As minimal visual cues cannot be used to project turn-taking (cf. Ford and Stickle 2012), prompting the transition becomes a practical problem. There are three local participants, Erkki, Marja, and Cleo, and two distant participants, Bert

and Andy, of which the latter is also the meeting chair. Half a minute before the excerpt begins, Cleo has grabbed his smartphone from the table and at this point, where discussion on the budget is ongoing, he is still engaged with it. In the extract, Marja begins to orient to closure because of another meeting. She makes the emergence of this aspect relevant via bodily reorientations and object manipulations in the local space (Line 5-10), but because of the visual barrier between her and Andy, she must find another way to bring it also into shared interactional focus. What makes verbal intervention necessary is foremost Marja's role in controlling the devices in this end: her laptop is used to enable the connection between the local and distant environments, and she cannot leave without interrupting the meeting.

Extract 2

- 1 ANDY so then they just (.) <know> (this) can come
 2 *from the (company)
 Marja *turns gaze to screen
- 3 ANDY or [(0.2) or (.)
 4 [((buzz from Erkki's phone))
- 5 *them it's: uh stemming up to *#our (.)
 Marja *turns gaze to E's phone *turns gaze to screen
 fig #4
- 6 ANDY our figure+s
 Erkki +turns gaze to middle of table
- 7 BERT >okay so we make< separate (cupboards) plans which
 are *#being incorporated
 Marja *turns gaze down to wrist watch
 fig #5
- 8 BERT *into one () cupboard
 Marja *straightens posture, begins to neatensleeves --->*

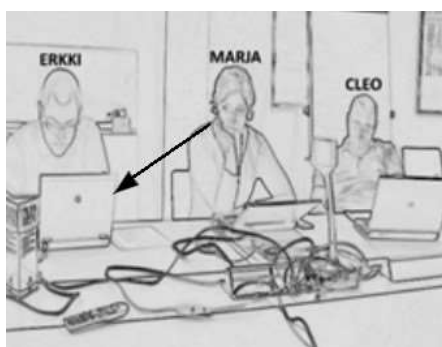


Figure 4. M turns gaze to E's phone.

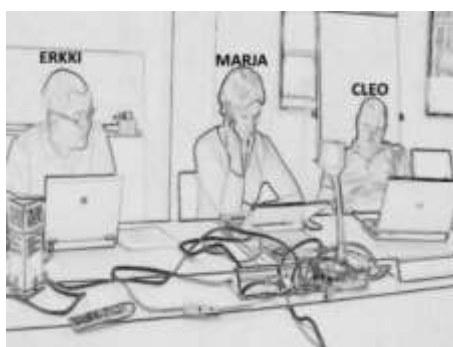


Figure 5. M looks at wristwatch.

- 9 ANDY yes yes.
 10 BERT *uhm okay

22 (0.9)
 23 ANDY okay

The extract begins with an account by Andy, relating to the best protocol for getting delivery process figures to match with the current budget. During his turn, Erkki's phone, which is placed on the table in front of him, buzzes (Line 3). Almost instantly, it draws Marja's attention, while Erkki himself displays no recognition of the sound (Fig. 4). Instead, with a slight body torque he redirects his gaze in the direction of, yet past, both Marja and Cleo. While another distant participant, Bert, takes the floor and produces a proposal for future action (Lines 7), Marja again orients away from the main activity. She first turns her gaze downwards to briefly look at her wristwatch and then begins to neaten her sleeves in a more upright body position (Fig. 5). With her embodied behavior so far, Marja not only orients to time but also displays readiness to close the meeting. In contrast, Cleo displays his unavailability by continuing to use his phone, and he does not seem to orient to the closing activity at all. After Andy's agreement token, "yes yes" (Line 9) and concurrently with Bert's sequence closing "okay", Marja turns her gaze back to the laptop screen and still pulls her sleeve under the table. This bodily repositioning indicates her raised attentiveness to the ongoing discussion, while it also manifests the difficulty to inform the distant parties of her potential preparedness to take the floor.

When Bert continues the sequence (Line 11), Marja opens her mouth, which projects her attempt to take the floor. Although being cut off before audibly producing anything, she aligns with Bert's following humorous remark by smiling (Line 12). After this, Erkki finally turns his gaze to his phone, picks it up and displays detachment from the ongoing activity (Fig. 6). When another sequentially suitable slot for Marja to take the floor emerges after Bert's closing assessment, she again fails because of being cut off by Andy, who continues Bert's note (Lines 15-16). She reacts to this by dropping her upper body and orienting away from the screen (Fig. 7). As soon as Andy's turn ends, Marja takes the floor with a turn-initial marker, "uh", with which she prefaces her upcoming intervening account, i.e. an explanation for the reason for having to leave (Lines 17-20). Concurrently, she looks at her mobile phone and then the researcher, reconfiguring the context of her actions within the leave-taking activity (Fig. 8; see Hazel and Mortensen 2014). With her turn, Marja finally succeeds in bringing closing into interactional focus and accomplishes the preconditions to proceed towards a coordinated exit. She extends her turn with a continuously uttered "so" and an audible in-breath, which give her

account a sense of closure. This invites Erkki's attention who ceases manipulating his phone and restores his orientation to the meeting. The pause of 0.9 seconds indicates that initiating the activity shift is potentially surprising, but Andy still aligns with the proposed trajectory and ratifies the transition from the meeting proper to the closing phase with an agreement marker, "okay" (Line 23).

The second extract represents a practical problem faced by a participant who needs to leave while meeting talk is still in progress. As Marja is accountable for making her leave-taking known, i.e. she is in control of the device used for the established connection in the local space, she must find a suitable way to flag her need to take the floor. Although she projects her orientation to leave-taking via embodied resources, her actions do not occupy the current speaker or the chair's attention because of the visual barrier. Therefore, making use of the audio channel to produce a verbal intervention is necessary. The analysis shows how Marja builds her turn through various closing-projecting bodily practices and by monitoring closely the physical and sequential environment. The reason for doing so is that she does not have access to the situated resources with which subtle shaping of the course of action would be possible.

This section has examined how the shift from meeting proper to the closing phase is jointly accomplished and ratified. The two illustrative cases show that the chair and participants draw reflexively on the situated affordances to initiate and align with a proposed closing-relevant trajectory, i.e. to establish the configuration relevant to closing. This involves multimodally constructed turns and attentiveness to the sequential and sociomaterial environments that form the local ecology for actions. The next section focuses on what happens after the initial transition.

5.2 Managing opportunity spaces

When being in the closing phase, there are junctures that the chair and participants need to locally and interactionally manage, namely opportunity spaces for potential re-openings (e.g. Ticca 2012). These spaces are usually explicitly afforded by the chair, and they can either lead to topic continuation or to the next stage of the closing. The most straightforward way to proceed is to pass the opportunity to speak and show embodied orientation to close (e.g. by looking at the screen). However, without visual access between the parties, it can be difficult to know whether these junctures are meant to be utilized and a response is actually preferred.

The next extract is from a large team meeting, involving twelve local participants and three distantly attending parties. The purpose of the meeting is to give updates on the teams' work, and after ending the connection between the parties, all of them continue discussing future procedures in their physical locations. In the site where the recording took place, the agenda is displayed on a wide screen on the wall and the audio connection established via the local team leader Hannu's laptop. The meeting is chaired by one of the company managers, Dietmar, who is attending the meeting distantly. The extract follows a just-concluded presentation on the results of a work task given by Minna on behalf of the local team. At first, a distant participant, Roberto, responds by expressing his gratitude to Minna for a job well done (Lines 1-4). Thereafter, Dietmar claims his role as the chair and provides the participants with various possibilities for re-openings (Lines 9, 12 and 15). However, the participants let these opportunities pass and contribute to the closing process not only by remaining silent but also through sequentially organized bodily practices in their local space. The extract illustrates how the location of the chair and the large number of participants allows the mobilization of multiple alignments that, however, are not made available to all parties.

Extract 3

1 ROB thanks Minna for the good work you have done
 2 a great job *the whole team has done a great job
 Minna *smiles and nods

3 ROB (0.3) congratulations and keep on- keep on
 4 updating us on these findings (.) thanks
 5 (3.0)/(1.5)
 /((three people glance at screen one by one))

6 DIETMAR if there are no further (.) questions <or
 7 if somebody: needs to speak up no:w>
 8 (1.2)

9 Leonore +#o:hm, (0.3) then we +will
 +turns gaze to C +smiles, turns gaze to B
 and nods heavily
 fig #9

10 Minna close *the: (0.5) ohm, (0.3) >the meeting<
 *turns gaze to L and smiles

11 Minna *(1.0)+(4.7)*~#(0.8)
 Minna *glances at wide screen, turns gaze to laptop
 Leonore +nods
 Minna *nods
 Beat ~nods
 fig #10



Figure 9. L nods heavily.

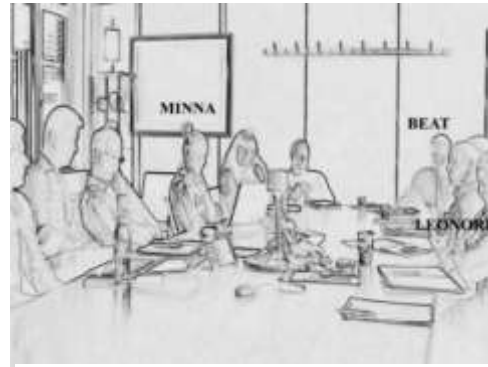


Figure 10. L, M, and B nod.

- 12 DIETMAR seems to be the ↑case
- 13 Leonore +°eh°
Leonore +turns gaze to screen
- 14 (1.5) *^#(1.0)+(1.0)
Minna *turns gaze to screen
Bruno ^glances at screen, turns gaze to table
and taps his leg
fig #11
Leonore +turns gaze to B

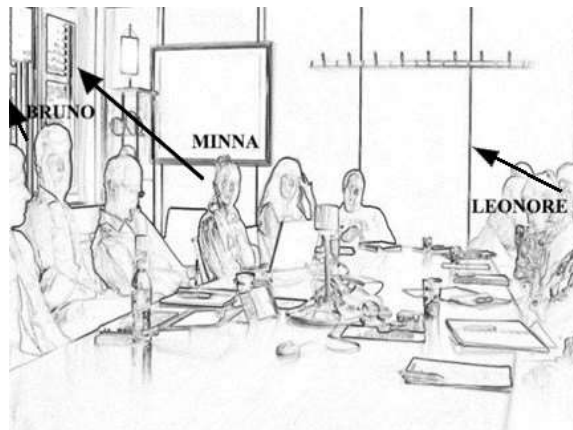


Figure 11. M, B, and L gaze to screen.

- 15 DIETMAR then (0.4) I wish you very good discussions
(0.6)
- 16 DIETMAR ohm, I hope that you also understand workflow
17 is one of our +key tools (0.3)
Leonore +turns gaze to B
- 18 DIETMAR it would be nice that our key tools would be
19 *good (0.3)
Minna *turns gaze to L

The extract begins with Roberto's assessment with which he compliments Minna and makes future activities relevant. After this, he marks the sequence closure via thanking (Nielsen 2013, 55). During the ensuing silence of 4.5 seconds, three people in the local space glance at the screen one by one and orient to the possibility that a distant participant will take the floor (Line 5). Thereafter, the role of the chair is pivotal in that besides controlling the turn-taking, Dietmar provides the participants with opportunity spaces to move out of the closing track (Lines 9 and 12; Button 1991). He first produces a conditional clause (Lines 7-8) that makes closing relevant as the preferred next action, unless someone wishes to take the floor at that moment ("now" uttered emphatically in Line 8). The in-turn pause that follows is the first opportunity for a re-opening (Line 9). Thereafter, Dietmar declares the consequence if the opportunity is let pass, meeting closure (Line 11). Partly in overlap, Leonore orients towards Cleo, sitting next to her, and nods visibly (Fig. 9). This embodied action aligns with the projected closing as it functions as a token of agreement to end the distant meeting. It is also acknowledged by Minna who, concurrently with Dietmar's declaration, turns to look at Leonore briefly and affiliates by smiling. The long silence that ensues functions as another opportunity to insert a new sequence, and while the other local participants display their readiness to close by remaining silent, some nod (Fig. 10). Since none of the participants take the floor, Dietmar produces a sequence-closing assessment to ratify that there are no more topics to be discussed (Line 12). Some of the local participants react to this either audibly or by turning their gaze towards the screen (Fig. 11; Lines 13-14).

After the silence of 3.5 seconds, Dietmar begins his closing summary, making it clear that the meeting will continue in all the physical environments after the audio connection is disabled (Lines 15). It is followed by his account on the importance of the workflow (Lines 16-17) and an implicit request to take care of this central "tool" (Lines 18-19). During this, Leonore first turns her gaze to Bruno, after which Minna turns to look at Leonore. The sequential placement of these bodily-visual displays indicates a stance taken by the local participants, however, without making it known to the distant parties. Overall, the extract depicts the affordances of the local configuration and shows a typical way to jointly negotiate opportunity spaces during closings of large meetings: the chair making these possibilities verbally explicit and the participants do not pursue topic continuations. What makes the situation fundamentally different from co-present meetings is asymmetric access to co-participants' aligning and disaligning behaviours. In this case, multiple alignments relevant to the closing are accomplished, but they are not made intelligible within the shared interactional space, vis-à-

vis the other parties (see also Mondada 2013). Instead, the chair treats the participants' silences as legitimate go-ahead markers.

The next extract comes from the meeting where the chair, Hans, and Marja form, from the researcher's perspective, the local party. The meeting is already on the closing track, and Hans has explicitly opened the floor for the liminal question phase and opened the participant list for mutual monitoring. The excerpt shows that Hans gives several opportunities to establish re-openings (Lines 2, 14, and 25), and he does this in diverse recipient-designed ways. In addition, he uses the screen as a resource to monitor the distant participants' state of availability and to initiate the appropriate next step (Line 24).

Extract 4

- Hans* >> #leaning on elbow, gaze to screen --->*
- fig* #12
- 1 Hans further questions
- 2 (3.1)
- 3 Hans good (.) then (.) seems not to be the case
- 4 what I would propose is -
- ((6 lines omitted during which Hans proposes a plan for future action))
- 11 Hans but I would (.) u::h think that it is something
- 12 let in- in the (O P) organization=Onni I don't
- 13 know how you ↓see that one
- 14 (2.3) *#(1.0)
- Onni* *turns off mute
- fig* #13
- 15 ONNI yeah (1.0) I think (.) we (.) proceed like that



Figure 12. H leaning on elbow, gaze directed at screen.



Figure 13. O turns off mute.

16 Hans okay
 17 (0.8)
 18 Hans so *I will make sure
 Onni *turns on mute

 19 that this is bein- this information is being
 20 shared and then we can discuss abou- about
 21 the: also let's say the motive operations for the
 22 .hhh for the coming *#weeks (.) month.
 Marja *turns gaze to hands and
 fig stretches fingers-->
 #14
 23 (2.1)
 24 Hans a:l?right (.) *any further ↑questions (.) re↓marks
 Marja -->*turns gaze to screen



Figure 14. M turns gaze to hands, stretches fingers.

25 (2.3)
 26 Hans otherwise I consider <this meeting> (.) as
 27 closed and uh thank you very much for your
 28 participation and let's keep in touch:

The extract begins when Hans gives the other participants an opportunity to continue the liminal phase by asking for “further questions” (Line 1). The silence that ensues is crucial (Line 2). The fact that it is not exploited by anyone not only indicates the co-participants’ readiness to close, but it also functions as a boundary element that marks the shift from the preclosing to the actual closing. When Hans then continues with an assessment, “good”, and produces a final summary, including a proposal for future action (Lines 3-11), he ratifies this second transition (cf. Markman 2009, 164). He ends with a hesitant statement of not being sure about a company policy and targets Onni as a recipient of his turn, giving another, yet more restricted opportunity to expand on the prior topic (Line 12). Onni has thus far displayed his status as a “silent” participant by having mute on, but during the following silence of 3.3 seconds, his actions on the screen show that he changes this status prior to responding (i.e. mute is switched

off; Fig. 13). Onni acknowledges the prior turn with “yeah” and after some delay, agrees with Hans’s point of view (Line 15). When Hans closes the sequence via “okay” and after a small pause proceeds towards a “so”-prefaced summary (Lines 17-20), Onni again turns his mute on and thus projects that he is not going to take the floor. Towards the end of Hans’s turn, Marja gazes down and stretches her fingers (Fig. 14) by which she indicates a shift away from the business of closing and towards leave-taking.

After a silence of 2.1 seconds, Hans produces another boundary marking utterance, “alright”, with a rising intonation, which is followed by him explicitly marking the last juncture at which it is still possible to extend the closing sequence (Line 24). This is emphasized with the word choice, “any”, and a falling intonation. During the ensuing silence of 2.3 seconds, Hans and Marja both look at the screen and wait for a potential response from the distant participants. As none appears, Hans then finally declares the meeting closure, thanks the others for participating and makes their relationship as colleagues relevant by encouraging them to keep in touch (Lines 24-25). Extract 4 foremost illustrates the diverse recipient-designed ways in which the opportunity spaces are made relevant in the course of interaction and oriented to by the local and distant participants. Furthermore, the local participants make use of the screen to monitor visually perceivable actions for joint sense-making, namely for interpreting the distant participants’ state of availability for turn-taking. This practice highlights the affordance of the online workspace for the mutual organisation of actions.

This section has shown how opportunity spaces are typically provided by the chair and need to be locally negotiated via different constellations of multimodal resources. While remaining silent is taken as a manifestation of co-orientation to the joint business of closing at these moments, more can be going on that is audibly communicated. Furthermore, the co-present participants can mobilize multiple alignments amongst themselves, which makes the local space configuration hold special relevance for them. The two analyzed extracts illustrate how, in the absence of visual access, the shared screen in the meeting room(s) is an essential resource for maintaining orientation to and organizing the closing activity.

5.3 Negotiating departure from the meeting

Once the potential moments for re-openings have been negotiated, what still needs to be achieved is the termination sequence that results in departure from the overall meeting space (cf. Haddington 2019, 67). This means dissolving the meeting structure, preparing for the

35 Hans bye bye
 36 () +(take *#care)
 Hans +glances at the wide screen
 Hans *repositions laptop, unplugs cable
 fig #16



Figure 16. H turns laptop.

During the silence of 4.7 seconds that follows Hans's closings words, the screen shows how the names of two distant participants disappear, indicating that they treat this moment as a legitimate place to leave the overall meeting space. Besides allowing the participants an opportunity to exit the meeting in the other end(s), the long silence indicates a significant delay in responding to Hans's turn by those still present. Marja, who has also been in a waiting stance oriented to the screen, finally thanks the others (Line 33) and concurrently with a subtle movement of her upper body turns her gaze away from the screen. At the same time, Hans repositions himself and starts reaching for the laptop cable (Fig. 15). He thus orients to the disappearance of the names as "closing-implicative signals" (Haddington 2019, 76) that makes the next action relevant: the preparation to unplug the devices. With the aforementioned bodily rearrangements Marja and Hans jointly reconfigure the context for ending their interaction with the distant participants, although not having received a verbal response. Of the four remaining distant participants, Mervi is the only one who produces a matching terminal token, a "thank you", accompanied with an expression of farewell, "bye-bye" (Line 34). After this, another name disappears from the list on the screen. Hans produces a similar farewell token (Line 35), to which another distant participant responds. While still touching the laptop cable with his left hand, Hans then briefly glances at the wide screen, slightly repositions the laptop (Fig. 16) and finally unplugs the cable (Fig. 17). The overall meeting space becomes thus dispersed although some distant participants are still online. This indicates that the ways to negotiate the terminal sequence and transition from the final stage of closing to the state of unavailability are not fixed, but they are instead negotiated in the moment.

The third subsection has focused on the terminal phase of distant meetings, illustrating how the context for the actual leave-taking develops moment-by-moment through verbal (dis)alignments and bodily rearrangements. A coordinated manner to exit the meeting space requires sensitivity from all the parties to the sequential and technological surroundings as well as the chair's monitoring of the screen for closing-implicative signals before disconnecting. The terminal phase is different from the other closing-relevant sequences in that negotiating the juncture leads to the end of mutual focus and trajectory instead of attempts to maintain it.

6. Conclusions and further considerations

This paper has investigated the progression of closings in distant meetings and the interactional resources that are drawn to manage the overall trajectory and crucial junctures: 1) when transition into closing becomes relevant as the next step, 2) when opportunity spaces emerge, and 3) when departure from the meeting needs to be established. The analysis has shown that closings are emergent, joint accomplishments in which the coordination of verbal and embodied actions in and across the local and distant environments plays an important role. Due to the restricted visual access between the physically co-present and distributed parties, the chair and participants need to employ distinctive practices to establish and maintain shared focus and alignment towards the business of closing at its different stages. The unfolding of closings depends on the situated affordances and multimodal resources available in the setting, but this is foremost so from the perspective of *how* they are oriented to and made intelligible in connection with the activity.

As in face-to-face encounters, closings of distant meetings are organised in a process-wise manner, involving the mobilisation of multiple alignments and local negotiations by which interaction is brought to an organised end (Button 1991; LeBaron and Jones 2002; Ticca 2012). The present study shows that this progression includes coordinating actions in multiple interactional spaces, resulting in a conversational closing and an exit from the overall meeting space. Echoing the findings of prior studies, these closing-relevant trajectories are not separable, but instead, they are pursued in conjunction and consecutively (cf. Haddington 2019). This means that although the negotiation of the first two phases is a prerequisite to the third one, i.e. to the terminal phase and disconnecting the devices, actions that project leave-taking, such as specific bodily reorientations (Extracts 3 and 4), can occur along the way. Hence, the negotiations to move between the closing-relevant sequences are fluctuous and partly overlapping. The terminal sequence also differs from the other closing-relevant activity

phases in that the latter involves interactional work to maintain mutual focus, whereas the former aims to end it. As the possibilities for mutual monitoring of the co-participants' conduct are limited comparing to co-present and video-mediated interactions, communicating orientation and alignment towards the closing trajectory is a practical problem that the meeting participants must solve *in situ*. Despite the visual barrier between the distributed parties, the local space configuration and embodied practices, such as gazing at the screen and nodding, serve as important resources for this. Whereas previous literature has shown the relevance of bodily displays in the beginning of closings, i.e. during preclosings (see Nielsen 2013), the analysis of this paper emphasizes the relevance of embodied practices throughout the process: before/during the initial step, when being in a preclosing phase and during/after other relevant junctures, such as when negotiating re-openings and departure.

The present study extends upon earlier research on distant meeting interactions (e.g. Due and Licoppe 2020; Heath and Luff 2000; Hutchby 2001, 2014; Mlynář et al. 2018; Rintel 2013), showing that the closing phase is sensitive to contextual factors, namely the technology used, the roles enacted, the location of the chair and the number of participants attending the meetings. One reason for this is that the situated affordances available to the chair and participants for initiating and advancing the activity are different. The analysis highlights that in addition to the chair's pivotal role in controlling turn-taking and contributing to the crucial junctures verbally, she or he is also always the person in control of the devices and screen display in one end. This grants him or her the right and responsibility to monitor and adjust not only the sequential environment but also the means by which focus on the shared interactional space is drawn. However, as illustrated in Extract 2, the participant(s) in other locations can also be accountable for initiating actions in order to dissolve the meeting structure, if it is their device used to enable the connection. Overall, similarly to openings of distant meetings (Muñoz 2016; Oittinen and Piirainen-Marsh 2015), verbal references to the ongoing activity or what is done on the screen, such as repair, serve as efficient techniques to draw the other parties' attention to the business of closing. Although the present paper has not been able to investigate closings with data from all the remote sites, it still provides an important emic perspective on audio-based meetings, in which the participants do not have access to the other physical environments. It highlights in an authentic way how the participants themselves might experience the affordances and resources available for the accomplishment of joint activities (Arminen et al. 2016; Olbertz-Siitonen 2015).

In addition to framing the verbal and bodily contributions by which the context for closing is (re)configured at its different phases, the technological surrounding and material objects are used in meaningful ways to facilitate the process. They thereby function not only as relevant constituent features but also as important “structuring resources” that shape and are shaped by the ongoing activity (Mondada 2013, 270; see also Arminen et al. 2016; Hjulstad 2016; Licoppe and Morel 2012). All the extracts illustrate how the screen(s) functions as an important organisational hub within the interactional ecology, and even in cases in which the chair is physically located elsewhere the local participants arrange their bodies accordingly (DiDomenico and Boase 2013; Mondada 2011). The affordance of the screen also enables rendering closing-relevant actions besides talk mutually intelligible in the overall meeting space. For instance, during the initial transition into closing or when negotiating opportunity spaces, the chair can manipulate the screen display to visually demarcate activities or activity phases (see Extracts 1 and 3) and signpost the direction for next action (cf. Hazel and Mortensen 2014). This practice is distinctive comparing to other non-video-mediated settings, such as chats (see Markman 2009), because one can access and monitor both vocal and *screen-based behaviours* in real time. The technological and material setting thus affords reflexive ways to create, sustain and manipulate the joint interpretative framework for actions, enhancing the participants’ involvement in the closing phase. Furthermore, since this strategy is usually available only to the chair, it is a key feature in the realization of the institutional roles and identities.

The present study has investigated the material, vocal and embodied resources used in the accomplishment of closings in audio-based distant meetings. It has illustrated in detail how initiating closings emerges as the relevant next step and what kinds of negotiations are needed to transition from meeting proper towards a coordinated exit. Furthermore, the focus has been on unravelling the situated affordances and distinctive practices that the chair and participants employ in their local space and the overall meeting space. Similarly to previous studies on distant meeting closings (see Ruhleder and Jordan 2001), this paper has highlighted closings as social and technology-oriented activities, lacking non-work multiparty talk. An important finding is the way the joint activity shapes and is shaped by its social, material and technological surroundings. As the study provides foremost insights into the verbal and embodied practices of participants in one location, in the future, it would be fruitful to look into the reorganisation of interactional space(s) more comprehensively, i.e. taking into consideration the various sites that are involved in dissolving the meeting structure.

Furthermore, as technologies have become a significant part of our daily lives, more studies are needed in the area “technologized interactions” (Hutchby 2014) to further our understanding of the consequentiality of actions in these settings and of the overarching interactional ecologies that have emerged.

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APPENDIX. Transcription conventions

The excerpts have been transcribed according to the conventions developed by Gail Jefferson.

Multimodal details have been described by applying the conventions developed by Lorenza Mondada.

,	intonation is continuing
.	intonation is final
↑	rising intonation
↓	falling intonation
=	latched utterances
[]	overlapping talk
tha-	a cut-off word
<u>what</u>	word emphasis
>what<	speech pace that is quicker than the surrounding talk
<what>	speech pace that is slower than the surrounding talk
°what°	speech that is quieter than the surrounding talk
WHAT	speech that is louder than the surrounding talk
£what£	smiley voice
@what@	animated voice
wh(h)a(h)t	laughingly uttered word
(what)	uncertain hearings
()	unrecognizable or confidential item
(.)	micro pause, less than 0.2 seconds
(0.5)	silences timed in tenths of a second
((gazes))	transcriber's comments
#	location of the figure in relation to talk and non-verbal action
* *	delimitate one participant's actions descriptions
+ +	delimitate other participant's actions descriptions
...	gesture's preparation
*--->	gesture or action described continue across subsequent lines
*--->>	gesture or action described continue until and after excerpt's end
---->*	gesture or action described continue until the same symbol is reached
>>--	gesture or action described begins before the excerpts beginning