OKAY projecting embodied compliance to directives

Leelo Keevallik and Matylda Weidner

The self-archived postprint version of this journal article is available at Linköping University Institutional Repository (DiVA):
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:liu:diva-177510

N.B.: When citing this work, cite the original publication.
Keevallik, L., Weidner, M., (2021), OKAY projecting embodied compliance to directives, OKAY across languages, , 338–362. https://doi.org/10.1075/slsi.34.11kee

Original publication available at:
https://doi.org/10.1075/slsi.34.11kee

Copyright: John Benjamins Publishing Company

https://www.benjamins.com/
Abstract

This chapter on Estonian and Polish OKAY focuses on complying responses to high entitlement directives. The responses are built of two parts, the verbal OKAY that completes the adjacency pair and an embodied compliance that ensues. The OKAY provides an immediate verbal notification and acceptance of the suggested action trajectory, which is relevant for the co-participants’ continuing coordination of activities in progress, while the projected embodied compliance is necessarily deferred. By looking at two genetically and historically unrelated languages and showing a similar response pattern in them, we hope to illustrate the general interactional potential of the particle OKAY, and perhaps begin to understand some of its cross-linguistic allure.
1. Introduction

Accepting suggestions by others and complying with their directives lies at the heart of human collaboration. A second action is not only crucial for achieving meaning (Mead 1934, 77–78) but also for any collaboration to happen; the precise form of a second action defines the development of the launched activity trajectory. In his lectures, sociologist Harvey Sacks vividly made that very point.

…there are various ways to begin a game. You can begin a game by having some negotiations: “Let’s play X” “Okay” “You be this and I’ll be that.” Now there are other ways of beginning games which people use. One of them is to make a first move in what could be a game. Then, that we’re going to have a game is something that others can accept, not by saying “Yes let’s play that game”, but by doing a second move. […] Others might not do a next move that involves acceptance - they might not choose to, they might not know to. What we have, then, is such a thing done which, for it to come off, involves some collaboration on the part of others present. And the character of their collaboration is sharply defined. That is to say, the
character of their collaboration is that somebody makes a second move, and not anything they might do stands as a second move for this beginning. And from among the sorts of things that they might do that could stand as second moves for this beginning, the alternatives matter a good deal.


In this chapter we will look at the collaborative character and the multilayered design of turns complying with directives, where OKAY functions centrally as an acceptance and claim of future compliance, thus indexing a specific moment in real-time trajectories of action. We take directives to include a broad variety of actions that make compliance relevant. The responses that are the focus of our analysis are built of two parts, an OKAY and an embodied compliance. The latter is termed fulfillment by Rauniomaa and Keisanen (2012, 837–838), who also documented the pattern in a variety of directive sequences. Focusing on high entitlement directives to accomplish activities that take considerable time, we will show in this study that the OKAY provides an immediate verbal acceptance of the suggested trajectory of action, which is relevant for the co-participants’ coordination of activities in progress. At the same time, the fulfillment of the directive is necessarily deferred. In contrast to an earlier study on deferred action requests and remote proposals that make relevant compliance in a rather distant future (Lindström 1999, 2017), our
response practice is used for actions that are relevant for here-and-now projects but may take a substantial time to produce.

When studying the functions of OKAY in our respective languages we found that this kind of practice for projecting embodied compliance occurred in both Estonian and Polish, two otherwise dissimilar languages, both genetically and structurally. Looking closer at the sequential and activity contexts of OKAY, we saw that the initiating actions preceding these responses in our data could be broadly characterized as directives. Drawing on the conversation analytic method and its multimodal developments, we will thus scrutinize the emergence of responses to directives that are only partially verbal and feature the word OKAY. For a generic reference to the focus item we use the English translation format OKAY throughout the paper. The generic formats for Estonian and Polish will be OKEI and OKEJ, respectively.

2. Directives and their (embodied) responses

The kind of initiating (first) actions that we are looking at in this study are often grouped among requests in research on interaction (most recently Drew and Couper-Kuhlen 2014a), defined broadly as “asking someone to do something for us” (Drew and Couper-Kuhlen 2014b, 1). Within this broad realm of requesting, researchers have demonstrated the relevance of a
range of social matters in the formatting of both the request itself as well as a response to it. Prior conversation analytic studies have shown how the necessity and the desirability of actions are encoded in the design of turns and sequences; in other words, participants orient to contingencies, that is, circumstances or potential obstacles to compliance in the design of their first- and second-positioned actions (Antaki and Kent 2012; Craven and Potter 2010; Curl and Drew 2008; Heinemann 2006; Kent 2012a; Stevanovic 2011; Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012; Schegloff 1989). Different formats of requests and directives are selected in order to implement a particular action in relation to the local sequential position and wider organizational context of which they are a part (cf. Curl and Drew 2008; Ervin-Tripp 1976; Goodwin 1990). Craven and Potter (2010) focus specifically on the kinds of actions that requests and directives implement, showing that while requests ask for something to be done, directives tell another to perform a particular task. The participants’ analysis of a sequence-initiating action either as a request or a directive is, then, crucial for their understanding of the response that these two make relevant next (Schegloff 1968; Schegloff and Sacks 1973). Directives make compliance a relevant next (Craven and Potter 2010; Goodwin 2006). It has also been shown that a request is formatted differently in case there is already an established joint project between the requester and the requestee, as opposed to when the project is unilateral, that is, in the interest of the speaker (Clark White 2019; Rossi 2012; Zinken and Depperman 2017). In the first case the
request can be formulated as an imperative in Italian, Polish and German, and it is mostly this type of requests, namely imperatively formatted ones, that were responded to with an OKAY + fulfillment in our Estonian and Polish data. The imperative is not “impolite” in either Polish or Estonian (Keevallik 2012; Wierzbicka 2003; Zinken 2016). In addition to imperatives we also have declarative and idiosyncratically grammaticalized directive formats, but the common denominator of all our first action formats is that they reflect a high degree of speaker entitlement and low contingencies for the activity to be performed. We will be referring to the first actions in our collection as directives.

When considering responses to a request, earlier literature has first of all established that the preferred response is an acceptance, while a dispreferred one would be a refusal (e.g., Heritage 1984, 265–269). An early study by Lindström (1999, 104–138) investigates the formatting of acceptance in Swedish and shows that, when the request concerns something that cannot be satisfied immediately, a simple affirmative response is actually not treated as sufficient. Such a response can nevertheless project an acceptance (ibid., 118–125). In Lindström’s phone call data, the speakers were expected to make an explicit commitment to fulfill the deferred action that would have to be taken care of after the end of the call. A parallel example from an English phone call is discussed in Schegloff (2007, 95–96). In contrast to these studies, we are looking at directives that call for embodied actions that can be accomplished in the
relatively close future or in the here-and-now, and that are projected with an OKAY. Along similar lines, in their discussion on particle responses to requests (*okay, alright, sure*), Thompson, Fox, and Couper-Kuhlen (2015, 224–236) argue that the complying action can be performed immediately or at a later point in time (ibid., 227). The pattern is also features in Rauniomaa and Keisanen (2012, 837–838), who show that in British English an affirmative response token can be used to show that the request is “about to be fulfilled” (ibid., 838). While responses in our data also consist of two components, an OKAY + an embodied action, we refer to them as doing compliance rather than fulfillment. Fulfillments, first of all, mostly followed interrogatively formatted requests in Rauniomaa and Keisanen’s (2012) analysis, which may imply a lower degree of entitlement (again, with reservations for cultural differences) than the formats we found. Secondly, the word *fulfillment* implies that the action will be completed, and, thirdly, that there will be a transition to some next-positioned action. Our responses are different in that the fulfillment of the directive is often subject to adjustments and negotiations along the way and we can see complex temporal trajectories of such second-positioned actions within larger activities in progress. The term *embodied compliance* seems to better capture the nature of the response as a process rather than a product.

In a similar vein, discussing a case of a parent directing a child to cut some meat, Schegloff (1989) suggests *en passant* that a preferred compliant response can occur in different constellations. Hence, recipients can do full
compliance when they actually perform the complying action, or they can perform preparatory actions (such as transferring a fork from the right to the left hand as prefatory to “picking up the knife with right hand”) that do not actually perform the complying action, but are an indication of “an incipient act of compliance” (Schegloff 1989, 146). The phenomenon of “incipient compliance” was later taken up by Kent (2012b), who discusses it as a response option that is at the border of complying with and resisting a directive. She also demonstrates that in the context of family mealtime interactions, a preferred response to a directive is an immediate embodied compliance. Crucially for our study, Schegloff (1989) observes that participants can also use other resources, “a compliance marker, such as ‘O.K.,’ ‘right,’ and the like”, to signal an upcoming embodied compliance (ibid., 146). This is a constellation that we study in our Polish and Estonian data but instead of calling it a “marker”, which is generally used in more static accounts of language use, we will underline its temporal potential by naming it specifically a compliance projector.

3. The data

We draw on the collection of cases from telephone conversations and co-present interactions in Estonian and Polish, genetically unrelated languages with minor historical contacts and considerable differences in morphosyntax
and lexicon. The Estonian settings include everyday and telemarketing phone-calls (344 calls, 11 hours) recorded in 1998–99 and one video of a workday at a farm recorded in 2014 (6.5 hours). The Polish corpus, recorded between 2003 and 2016, includes institutional phone-calls to a company selling shelving systems (19.5 hours), audio-taped doctor-patient interactions (4.5 hours), and music recording studio data (around 100 hours). In these materials we identified altogether 20 cases of OKAY that project embodied compliance: 8 in Estonian and 12 in Polish. This practice was used as a second action in the adjacency pair directive – compliance, as well as a third-positioned action in a sequence, such as information question – informative directive – compliance.

The particle OKAY is without doubt widely used in both Estonian and Polish. It occurs alone as well as in longer particle chains, suggesting a high level of adaption into routine activity contexts. The phonology is domesticized in a broadly similar manner in both languages, with no diphthong in the first closed syllable [ok] and no aspiration of the stop. In other words, there is no diphthong in the first syllable that is short and the vowel quality remains basically the same. Estonian features several shortened, morphologically accommodated, and reduplicated versions of the item, such as okk, okoo, oki, okas, okeïka, okeï-okeï, while okeï is the most common form. With okej being the most frequently used variant, Polish has also developed a number of alternative forms, such as oki, oka, okidok, okejka and okejos. Earlier research on OKAY in these languages, however,
is scarce, even though it is very easy to find evidence of popular concern over this “foreign” item. For example, an Estonian newspaper (Pärnu Postimees 15.03.2019) discusses the English loan *okei* as a parasitic word that should be replaced with the Estonian original *olgu*, which approximately means ‘let it be (like this)’. The Estonian *okei* is mentioned in the dictionaries and spoken language lexicons as an agreement marker (e.g., Hennoste 2000, 1779). In a study on accepting offers and proposals, it was argued that *okei* can be used for conceding to the other’s agenda, especially after negotiations (Keevallik 2017, 285). Polish *okej*, and its function as an exclamation expressing agreement, has so far only been mentioned in dictionaries and discussions of borrowings and colloquialisms (e.g., Handke 2011, 60; Mańczak-Wohlfeld 2006, 139).

Crucially, we do not claim that the word means exactly the same in Estonian and Polish, nor that it functions in exactly the same way in all its variants and contexts in the two languages. We will strictly base our analysis on very specific kinds of first and second actions, to show similarities in this sequential pattern with a stand-alone OKAY, where the particle is uttered in a separate intonation contour and as a turn on its own.

4. OKAY as a compliance projector
As briefly discussed above, in conversation analytic literature on responses to directives the focus has often been on verbal devices in turns-at-talk. In case of requests/directives the hearable response can sometimes just be an okay (Beach 1995; Thompson et al. 2015). We would like to argue, however, along the lines of Schegloff (1989, 146) and Rauniomaa and Keisanen (2012), that this is merely the first lexical indication that the participant has accepted the suggested trajectory of action and may comply with the directive, while the actual embodied compliance is in our case at some temporal distance. In such a position, OKAY seems to be treated as a sufficient promise of upcoming compliance.

We will start by showing two straightforward examples of the practice from our audio data. Excerpt 1, taken from a telephone call in Estonian presents a directive that emerges from a discussion about who can bring a tape recorder for the upcoming aerobics class for members of a congregation. Ene, who seems to be one of those in charge of the activity, is calling from home to the church. Just prior to the excerpt Heli (HEL) has asked whether the class will take place at all. While Ene suggests that she call another person, Reet (REE), to inquire about that, Heli announces that Reet is unable to bring the tape recorder (line 4). Heli then informs Ene that Reet is also present at the church, which leads to our focus directive by Ene in line 7, where she asks for Reet to be invited to the phone. This is a straightforward order to the current interlocutor to get another person to the
phone, formulated in the imperative form. At the same time, this is a somewhat different trajectory of action as opposed to the prior discussion between Ene and Heli. The use of imperative in Estonian implies high entitlement for the speaker to produce the directive but it is not perceived as rude in this kind of sequence (Keevallik 2012), where the speakers are aligned in their interest to determine whether the class will in fact happen and whether Reet can bring the tape recorder. As Heli and Reet are in the same place (a church), the compliance to the directive essentially entails a physical rearrangement of the bodies. Nevertheless, Heli first responds with an audible lexical okei, which both accepts the revised course of action and sufficiently projects a compliance, as can be judged from the absence of more talk by Ene at that point (line 9).

Excerpt 1: Getting another person to the phone (K3 B1), 1998/99, Estonian, phone call, private conversation

01 ENE:  .hh ee tead mai tea täpselt.(.)
         um y’know I don’t know exactly (.)

02  e [   helista ree]dale kule.=
     call Reet kule’

03 HEL:  [re]t ei saa makki-]
         Reet cannot tape recorder-

04 HEL:  =ta ei sa- ta ei saa makki tuua.
         she cannot bring the tape recorder

05 ta on- ta on siin
         she is- she is here

06 me oleme siin kaljus präegult.
      we are here in Kalju at the moment

07 ENE:-> aa anna mulle reet sis.
      oh, give.I-ALL NAME then
      oh, give me Reet then
A church is ordinarily a large space and in particular the pause of 9.5 seconds suggests that Reet has been somewhere quite far from the phone. Heli’s complying *okei*, before the pause a) accepts the revised course of action, b) auditorily accounts for having to leave the phone, c) displays intention to comply immediately after the directive, even though the actual compliance will take some time. *Okei*, thus merely projects the compliance and only when Reet (REE) picks up the phone with a *jaa* ‘yeah’ in line 10, we have evidence of the actual compliance having happened. Obviously, on the phone only the verbal mode could be used for communication between Heli and Ene, and without the hearable *okei*, Ene would not have had any clear indication of the ensuing compliance.

As in this first case, the directives in the remaining examples in our OKAY collection tend to emerge contingently within an already ongoing project, where they direct a somewhat revised course of action. This suggests that OKAY constitutes a sufficiently reassuring response to a high-entitlement directive, where the complier has his/her own stakes already established (such as wanting to know whether there will be an aerobics
class). Interestingly, similar arguments are made for English by Thompson et al. (2015, 267), who note that compliance particle responses (alright, okay, sure) “signal voluntary submission to the will of the requester. This kind of response is sufficient for all immediate-action requests and for those deferred-action requests that are made with strong claims to deontic rights.”

In our Polish data we can see the same pattern: After a high-entitlement directive, an OKAY projects an embodied compliance that requires some time to be accomplished. The next fragment (Excerpt 2) comes from a call to a company selling shelving systems, and the customer (CUS) is calling the company to inquire about the possibility of placing a bigger order of shelving systems (the total number of the shelves in the order will be 100). In line 1, the customer initiates a list, starting with a mianowicie ‘and namely’, which is a combination of conjunctions used ordinarily for listing in Polish. She continues, the temporal adverb dalej ‘next’ (line 6) foreshadowing the next item of the list, and possibly projecting more items to come. While the customer is preparing to say the name of the second type of the shelf (lines 6 and 7), the salesperson repeats the first name (line 8), most probably noting it down in his computer. The shelf name oliwie ‘oliwias’ is said audibly slower and with a noticeable stretch, both of which can be hearably buying the salesperson time to actually note the name down.
Excerpt 2: Telling the customer to wait (VN680131), 2012, Polish, phone call, institutional call

Coming out of overlap, the customer takes her breath (line 7) in preparation to, most probably, start listing the next item, but the salesperson tells the customer to wait before she utters the next name. Similar to our first example, the salesperson’s directive (line 8) emerges within an already ongoing project of order listing and is thus contingent on its premises.
Looking at its design, the directive is delivered in two turn-constructional units (TCUs), each composed of one noun in accusative case. When used in this case (as opposed to nominative), these two words implement actions corresponding to imperatively formatted directives (Baňko 2008), thus making compliance an expected next action. In this case, compliance requires that the customer should relevantly stop speaking for a moment, thus making it possible for the salesperson to write the name of the shelf down. The customer’s ‘okej, (in line 11) first of all signals her understanding of the revised course of action and acceptance of the directive. At the same time, it functions as a verbal preface to compliance that will be realized in a non-vocal way, by means of withholding talk.

Again, evidence for actual compliance can be found in participants’ own conduct. Following a go-ahead from the salesperson (tak ‘yes’) that the customer may now continue (line 14), she provides the next item from the list (line 12), thus producing talk again. Keisanen, Rauniomaa, and Haddington (2014), who discussed these kinds of “suspension turns” within moments of multiactivity, showed that participants favor a consecutive rather than a simultaneous ordering of courses of action. Here, okej emerges as a device of consecutive ordering of the temporalities of the two separate, albeit complementary, tasks by the two participants – dictating and writing.

The two above examples are then fairly non-problematic sequences consisting of a directive and a verbally prefaced embodied compliance. They show that even on the phone, where interactants have no visual access
to one another, or precisely because of that, it is crucial for the participants to indicate that the requested course of action will be carried out. In our collection of cases, OKAY seems to function as a device for signaling understanding and acceptance of the proposed course of action and projecting compliance with a directive. Moving on to co-present interaction, we will now show that the temporalities of compliance may be much more complex than a purely verbal adjacency pair suggests. This will help to further elucidate the function of OKAY as a temporal index in an emerging real-time course of action.

5. Trajectories of verbal-bodily compliance

A similar sequence of directive and OKAY + compliance also occurs in face-to-face settings. Crucially, video data enable us to analyze not only the exact timing of the production of OKAY in relation to the embodied compliance but also document how the embodied compliance emerges within the directive trajectory. As compared to a one-word response, an embodied compliance can be considerably more complex and time-consuming, and the question is how the moral obligations to comply are actually managed in time and space where other matters may have to be taken care of first. OKAY in our data thus marks a sufficient understanding of the projected course of action, accepts to go along with it but merely
projects a compliance, which may or may not happen due to various contingencies. We will show four cases of such temporally more complex patterns of directive followed by an OKAY and an embodied compliance, exposing the temporal nature of OKAY.

The first instance is in Estonian (Excerpt 3) and recorded in a sheep stable where a group of friends are clearing the space of manure. Two people, Jaan and Renee, are currently in charge of the wheelbarrows that are used to transport the manure out of the stable, while others are digging and lifting in various positions in the stable. The excerpt starts with a discussion between Jaan (JAA) and Renee (REN) concerning the re-organization of the wheelbarrow tracks. When the sequence is coming to an end with Renee agreeing to Jaan’s proposal, Meelis (MEE) initiates a turn in the overlap (line 10), thereby launching a new course of action. He produces an imperatively formulated directive to Renee to bring the wheelbarrow closer to where he is working. Renee immediately utters a short oke(h)i, in response, both accepting the new course of action and displaying intention to comply.

**Excerpt 3:** Placing the wheelbarrow (Sõnnik 3, 11:40), 2014, Estonian, face-to-face, informal work interaction

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 01 JAA: | renee kule.  
Renee listen |
| 02 REN: | jah  
yeah, |
| 03 JAA: | mis sa arvad kui: üks käru jääks |
what would you think if one wheelbarrow kept

rolling on this and the other one stayed outside

(0.7)

possible

then we could throw straight out

if- if you’re able to throw that far then fine

from here in principle (xxxx)

if you can throw that far then fine

(MEE:-->

[kU]le:_    tule: (.)

listen.IMP come.IMP

listen come

for a second

(REN:=> oke(h)î,=

OKI

=läbi    vel.

by/through once

through here once.

(0.3)#(0.4)

fig    #fig.1
Renee trying to find a path to the confinement. Meelis is in the confinement, outside the screenshot.

15 REN: a:ga::
        bui:t:::

16 VEL: sinna sa saad küll.
        you can go there

17 (0.5)

18 JAA: et jää sina siia sisse sõitma (onju).
        so you stay rolling inside (right)

19 REN: noo_ okei.
        well okay

Meelis’ directive in lines 10–11 is in the imperative form, reflecting the diggers’ entitlement to have reasonably comfortable access to the wheelbarrows. There is yet no immediate trajectory of joint action established here but the overall organization of work during the day gives him the right to guide the wheelbarrow. Indeed, he hedges the directive with a minimal time formulation korraks ‘for a second’. Renee, who is at this
time looking for a spot to place the wheelbarrow produces the compliance projector \textit{oke(h)i}, immediately (line 12). In fact, the \textit{oke(h)i}, emerges before Meelis’ grammatical completion of the utterance with \textit{läbi vel}, approximately ‘by/through once’ (the utterance was not complete before, which is evident in the elative case of the word \textit{siit}, approximately ‘from here’). The \textit{oke(h)i}, is thus uttered almost too early, or literally at the earliest possible moment, which is characteristic of compliance projectors, especially in a setting where the bodies are involved in complex work activities while the vocal tract is relatively free to respond quickly.

However, the actual compliance is both spatially and temporally complex. Meelis is working in a remote corner of a lamb stall and the passage to the stall is partially blocked by Vello who is lifting manure at this particular spot. After his verbal response and compliance projector Renee can thus be seen to be actively looking for a possible path for the wheelbarrow: He holds on to the handles of the wheelbarrow and rotates it while scrutinizing the surface under it (as shown in Figure 1). After a short silence of (0.7) seconds he also utters a lengthened \textit{a:ga::} ‘but’ (line 15), which makes his troubles not only visible but also hearable to other workers. Vello (VEL) immediately orients to this trouble indicator, looks up, and suggests a pathway to Renee (line 16), pointing to a narrow area where he has not piled up too much manure. Renee takes his advice and rolls the wheelbarrow along the path suggested by Vello towards the confinement where Meelis wanted to have it. In this excerpt we can thus see
how a verbal compliance projector can be uttered very quickly, in fact before the directive is grammatically completed, while the embodied compliance takes considerable time and engagement by co-present participants to accomplish. Importantly, the verbal oke(h)i, here functions as an important clue for those working between Renee and Meelis as to their needs and intentions for organizing the immediate workspace. They can adjust their behavior accordingly. While rolling the wheelbarrow to his new assigned spot in the stable, Renee is continuing his conversational exchange with Jaan (lines 18–19), which actually also concerns coordination of activities, albeit in a somewhat more remote future, when he will return with an empty wheelbarrow next time. This compliance is also projected by an okei. (line 19), but as it is also prefaced by no (expressing “emergence form resistance”, Keevallik 2018a), we did not include it in our collection for this study.

For another illustration of embodied compliance that is managed within temporarily complex confines of an already ongoing project, consider this Polish case (Excerpt 4) from a home-based recording studio. The fragment features two participants; Maciek (MAC), an audio engineer, who is sitting behind the mixing table and the computer, and Michal (MIH), a singer, who is standing behind the microphone, being recorded while he is imitating a trombone. The trouble that Maciek addresses in lines 1–3 has to do with the fact that Michal finds it hard to vocalize the high C note. Maciek’s directive instructs Michal to try singing it in a lower key.
Excerpt 4: Singing in a different key (959_0157_1), Polish, 2011, face-to-face, professional talk

01 MAC:-> .hhh spr^óbu j taka wersj e z tym: ce- (.)= try.2SG.IMP such version with this c
  try a version with this c-

02 ->=ce_ które jest u góry:: oktawę niżej.=
  c that be.3SG
  =c that is high
  an octave lower

03 ->=czyli t^u::ru[u:ru: (.)] |tu::: ru:
  so tū rū tū rū

04 MIH: *[u: us:: |u:::*:: u:::* *
  mac
  *nods------]*

05 MAC:-> >t^u:: ru t|u:: tu ru.<

06 MIH:=> okej.#
  OKEJ

  fig
  #fig.2

Figure 2: Maciek presses the recording button after Michal says okej in line 6.

07 MIH: ((clearing throat))

08 MIH: pu:::::: pu:: p[u:*:::*] pu:: pu::::::
  mac
  *nods------*

Maciek’s turn at line 1 is a high entitlement directive, formulated in the
imperative, which reflects his deontic rights, as an audio-engineer, to direct
the singers’ actions. The second TCU (line 3) starts with czyli ‘so’, which
frames the upcoming action as projected by Maciek’s prior talk and
provides explicit illustration of what the notes should sound like. Starting in overlap (line 4), Michal starts to respond and chimes in briefly with Maciek’s rendering of the notes. Maciek’s nod treats Michal’s sotto voce singing as his display of understanding of the directive, and it also offers approval. Crucially, the actual compliance has not happened yet. In line 5 Maciek repeats the key phrase in the clear, thus now performing the directive only vocally and non-lexically. This is received with a prompt *okej.* (line 6), which indicates Michal’s understanding of the action suggested by Maciek’s directive. It is only at this point that Maciek orients to Michal’s *okej* as projecting an ensuing embodied compliance (which will be a revised version of the musical phrase). *OKEJ* among other things marks Michal’s acceptance of the course of action proposed by the directive. While his sotto voce overlapping singing (line 4) was only a try-out in synchrony with Maciek’s exemplification (line 3), *okej.* claims sufficient understanding of what Maciek has solicited from him. Sequentially, it also projects Michal’s ensuing actual singing (which happens in line 8). This verbal indication is crucial for the temporal organization of the activity at hand, since having heard Michal’s *okej,* Maciek is now, and only now, able to start the recording (Figure 2, Maciek presses the record button after Michal says *okej.*). Once the recording is started, Michal (line 8) begins to sing the phrase in a way suggested by Maciek (with C in a lower key).
This excerpt illustrates the function of *OKEJ* at a moment of interaction where the imminent actions of co-present participants are dependent on the minute temporal coordination of the compliance. *OKEJ* serves as a verbal index of understanding and accepting of the course of action. By projecting compliance, it provides a necessary signpost for the participants in organizing the activity trajectory in progress.

Likewise, the actions by different participants in the Estonian sheep stable are dependent on mutual orientation to the here-and-now directives and on complying with directives. Let us look at a case where the absence of an immediate embodied compliance after *OKEJ* leads the involved parties to account for their current actions. In this episode (Excerpt 5) the same people who are clearing a sheep stable of manure, are re-gathering after lunch. The work is organized in such a way that two persons are assigned to the wheelbarrows that are to be rolled in and out of the stable, while all the others fill the wheelbarrows at their respective positions in the stable. Vello (VEL) has been rolling a wheelbarrow for quite a while before lunch and when the workers return, he suggests that another person, Rain (RAI), take charge of it (line 1).

**Excerpt 5:** whose wheelbarrow (Sõnnik 5, clip 2, 29:00), 2014, Estonian, face-to-face, informal work interaction

01 VEL:-> rain läheb #käru peale (vää).
   NAME go-3SG wheelbarrow:GEN on-ALL or Rain will take the wheelbarrow (or)
   fig #fig.3
02 RAI: mh_#
huñ
fig #fig.4

03 VEL:-> läed kāru peale äkki.
go-2SG wheelbarrow.GEN on-ALL maybe
maybe you’ll take the wheelbarrow

04 (1.4)

05 RAI:=> o:kei.
OKEI

06 (0.8)# (. ) #(1.5)
fig #fig.5 #fig.6

07 VEL: s ma saan ka #kätt selle anguga: (. ) proovida.
then I can also try out the fork
fig #fig.7

08 (0.3)

09 RAI: #võta (teine)
take.IMP other
take (the other one)
fig #fig.8

10 (1.5)

11 RAI: (X) viskame selle täis ja sis_
throw-1SG this.GEN full and then
(X) let’s fill this up and then
Figure 3: Vello’s directive to Rain.  
Figure 4: Rain turning his head.  

Figure 5: Rain lifting his leg to empty the fork.  
Figure 6: Rain turning his gaze towards Vello.  

Figure 7: Rain emptying the fork by hand.  
Figure 8: Rain’s gaze towards the spare fork.
The directive is here formulated as a third person declarative (or an interrogative; the question word vä cannot be heard clearly). A declarative is a grammatical format that expresses less entitlement to have the action done than the imperative (which occurred in Excerpts 1 and 3) but at the same time states the future as a fact (c.f. Couper-Kuhlen and Etelämäki 2015 on Finnish in this regard). This certainty about the future is only slightly tweaked when the turn is a vä-interrogative: any interrogative makes relevant an answer by other, while vä marks a relatively low level of uncertainty by the speaker. Both grammatical alternatives make a response relevant for the person mentioned in the reference (Rain), who is likewise defined as the actor of the formulated activity, taking care of the wheelbarrow. Rain, however, initiates repair in line 2 and Vello reformulates his prior turn into a grammaticalized directive format with the modal äkki ‘maybe, lit. suddenly’ (line 3). This format reflects even less entitlement by the speaker than the declarative/interrogative in line 1, while still addressing Rain through the second person form.

After a longish pause Rain answers with okei (line 5), which both accepts the suggested new course of action of him working on the wheelbarrow and projects future compliance. Within the verbal channel this sounds like a neat directive-compliance sequence, albeit suggesting resistance through the pause before the response and the lengthening of okei itself (lengthy pauses, however, are characteristic of the activity setting and
treated as unproblematic; Keevallik 2018b). The actual embodied compliance with the directive comes after a considerable time, when the wheelbarrow has been filled and is ready to be rolled out of the stable. Having access to video data allows for a close multimodal analysis that reveals several further details that complicate, and may even undermine, the neat sequential analysis presented thus far. In fact, the temporalities of compliance may be much more complex than the adjacency pair analyzed above suggests.

Let us go back to the beginning of the excerpt and see how the interaction develops in full. Rain is the first one to enter the stable. He puts on his work gloves and hits the surface with his fork. He then, however, turns around and rolls the wheelbarrow to a position that is closer to his digging site. At this moment Vello enters and sees his former tool (the wheelbarrow) being manipulated by another person. He chooses not to stop at the wheelbarrow but moves past it towards the back of the stable, thereby not re-claiming his right to the wheelbarrow. Rain, however, starts digging and lifting, which is inconsistent with his potential new role as the manipulator of the wheelbarrow. Exactly when Rain has lifted his first forkful of manure and it lands in the wheelbarrow, Vello utters the turn in line 1 (as shown in Figure 3, Vello in brown is standing behind Rain who is lifting manure). His declarative/interrogative utterance draws on the affordances of the current situation in many ways. First, there is a common work history, as before lunch Rain did not roll the wheelbarrow while Vello
did, and the participants are expected to take turns on it. Second, Rain has just moved it, thereby potentially inhabiting the role of a wheelbarrow roller, even though by the time of Vello’s utterance he is already performing an alternative worker role. Third, Vello himself has not yet started doing anything work-related. He is just idly hanging around. The timing in particular makes Vello’s turn into a directive – it will redirect what Rain is currently doing as well as have consequences for what he himself will be doing.

During line 1, Vello and Rain have no visual contact, but during the repair initiation Rain starts turning his head backwards. This move reaches its apex during Vello’s reformulation of the directive, on the word käru ‘wheelbarrow’ in line 3. Simultaneously with the repair initiation, Rain’s forkful has landed in the wheelbarrow. During the ensuing pause in line 4, Rain stares at the fork, taking an idle step back and forth. The o:kei. is said in a mumbling manner, with relatively low voice and no gaze on the recipient, even though his decision concerns the general distribution of work tasks in the group. During the pause, others would have had a chance to intervene with this arrangement by proposing alternatives. Instead, it will now be only Rain and Vello switching their tasks.

Rain then lifts up one leg, apparently to empty the fork (Figure 5) but abandons the move halfway (Figure 6). In any case, he is actively working on the task of emptying the fork of manure. Vello, by contrast, is just standing and staring to the ground. At the end of his balancing act on one
leg, Rain is in a body torque, gazing at Vello, who is still roaming around (Figure 6). This gaze is consequential, as it elicits an account from Vello. While Rain turns back and starts pushing the piece of manure off the fork, Vello utters the account in line 7 – he claims to be willing to try out a fork. Figure 7 shows the body configuration on kätt ‘hand’: Vello is now gazing at Rain, but still not moving or making any effort to start working. This turn makes it implicitly clear that Vello is waiting for Rain to hand him the fork that he is currently using (there has been a shortage of forks and spades for a while, after some of them broke). Furthermore, as a wheelbarrow roller, Rain should not continue lifting manure. Vello himself had just waited for the wheelbarrow to be filled when he was in charge of it during the morning shift. Following Vello’s comment, however, Rain suggests that he take another fork (line 9). He also quickly gazes towards a spare one on the wall (Figure 8). Rain thus treats Vello’s turn in line 7 as an implicit request for his, Rain’s, tool, which he refuses. Rain also accounts for his own current activity in line 11: the current load should be filled up together.

Indeed, two minutes later, when the wheelbarrow is full, Rain rolls it out of the stable, thus finally complying with Vello’s directive in an embodied manner. He continues to work on the wheelbarrow for about an hour, thus reflecting a temporally extended directive-compliance trajectory. Somewhat later (after one more round of rolling the wheelbarrow) he also embraces the possibility of waiting and not lifting, apparently a privilege of the one rolling the wheelbarrow, just as Vello and others had done earlier
during the day. With the gradual adjustment of participation, the social work order of the stable has thus been re-established.

Throughout the episode there is a negotiation between the two workers as to the distribution of the tasks. Importantly, Vello’s ostensible account for his proposal is actually occasioned by Rain’s continuous involvement with the fork, rather than simply his o:kei.-response. The reasons for the development of the sequence can be found beyond the verbal activities. While an initial sequential analysis foregrounding the verbal exchange suggested a relatively simple directive-verbal compliance adjacency pair, the actual bodily and historical trajectories suggest a complex negotiation of who is going to do what, which involves claiming and releasing tools related to various tasks. As a former roller, Vello claims the right to assign the wheelbarrow to a next person by uttering the directives in lines 1 and 3. While digging and lifting are the default activities, available to all participants, there are only two persons at a time who can take care of the wheelbarrows. Rain, who is selected as the next roller, is being disturbed by Vello’s directive, as he was already involved in the digging and lifting, which he in fact goes on to do for quite a while. There is thus also a hierarchy established between the two persons, where one acts in an entitled manner while the other has to adjust. OKEI works to accept this order of things and project a future embodied compliance, but this will only happen when treated as relevant by the complier during the ongoing flow of the workday. This illustrates the relative “low cost” of
uttering an immediate verbal compliance projector in contrast with the actual embodied compliance that may be considerably postponed as well as temporally extended. Crucially, this highlights the temporal function of OKEI as an index of the moment when a compliance is due after a directive, while projecting and postponing relevant future actions by the speaker.

Another example from the Polish home-based recording studio demonstrates that OKAY is a crucial temporal organizing device, which coordinates the collaborative accomplishment of actions relevant in the here-and-now. Excerpt 6 shows a short segment in which Jaras (JAR), who is an audio-engineer, issues the directive *go* ‘go’ (line 4) for the three participants on the other side of the glass screen to start singing their chorus line. Prior to this fragment, the singers have already made numerous attempts at singing the line, but none of them satisfied Jaras, who now wants the singers to give it another try. Sajek (SAJ), who is one of the singers, responds to the directive with *^okej*. (line 4) before starting to sing (line 6).

**Excerpt 6**: Telling another person to start singing (95010161), 2011, Polish, face-to-face, professional talk

```
01 * (0.8) * * (1.2)
jar *arm on leg* *arm from computer to-->
02 JAR:-> *go:::i, *
   *go.IMP
goo control table*
03 (0.2) * (0.3) *
jar *gaze to SAJ*
```
The directive *gol* (line 2) is formatted as an imperatively formulated Polish rendition of the English word ‘go’. This is a high entitlement directive for a next-positioned action. After a moment of silence, Sajek, who is the recipient of the directive, produces a verbal indication of compliance, ^okej. (line 4) and subsequently an actual embodied compliance in the form of singing (line 6).

Similar to the multifaceted trajectory of compliance illustrated in the Estonian sheep stable (Excerpt 5), here as well, freeing ourselves from the confines of the verbal transcript and inspecting the video, allows us to appreciate an entirely new level of nuance. Let us then re-consider the sequence step by step.

Jaras is the one operating the control tables, which stems from the fact that in addition to being a singer himself, he is one of the two audio engineers in the ensemble. As part of his tasks, he distributes and adjusts the volume of the backtracks in the singers’ headphones. This role grants Jaras the right and authority to tell the other participants, the singers, what to do and how to do it. Figure 9 illustrates the positioning of the participants, with Jaras sitting in front of the computer and control table (wearing a sweatshirt...
that he later on takes off) and Sajek standing on the other side of the glass screen, behind the microphone.

Just prior to where Excerpt 6 begins, Jaras releases his arm from the home position (on his leg), turns towards the computer, lifts his right arm and when it is positioned above the keyboard, he lifts the index finger of his right hand as in preparation to press a button that would start the recording (Figure 10). Not a word has been said yet.
Even though the physical preparation and circumstances are ripe for it, Jaras does not, however, press the button on the keyboard of the computer, but relocates his arm further to the right, to where the backtrack control table is located, his index finger still ready to push the button that would launch the track in the singers’ headphones. The trajectory of Jaras’s arm movement can be compared to a concave line. The turning point of this concave (point of transition between the computer and the mid-table shown in Figure 11 below) is synchronized with a verbal command for action, as Jaras produces the imperatively formatted directive got ‘go’ (line 2). In terms of its realization, this got is significantly lengthened.

Excerpt 6.1: Telling another person to start singing (Detail 1)

01 *(0.8) * *(1.2) jar *arm on leg* *arm from computer to-->
02 JAR:-> #got:...ł, *
go.IMP
  go,
Following the verbal directive, Jaras puts his hand on the control table (furthest to the right), keeping his hand and finger ready and hovering above the buttons (which can be seen reflected in the mirror at the back of the room, Figure 12), ready to press them.

**Excerpt 6.2: Telling another person to start singing (Detail 2)**

```
03  #(0.2)*(0.3)      *
jar        *gaze to SAJ*
fig       #fig.12
```
The transcript contains an indication of a 0.5 second silence (line 3). What we can see upon inspecting the video, however, is a multilayered configuration of resources that are used to accomplish actions collaboratively and intersubjectively. Jaras’s directive to goł does not receive an immediate response. He then turns back from the control table and looks at Sajek across the screen (his arm still extended in a ‘hold’ position, reflected in the mirror in the back of the room, Figure 12 above), possibly in an attempt to elicit some acknowledgment that Sajek has heard, understood and is ready to comply with the directive. Jaras maintains this position of ‘hold’ until he hears ^okej, produced by Sajek (line 4). Sajek’s ^okej is a verbal indication that he has understood Jaras’s directive and is ready to go along with the proposed course of action, that is singing, but the ^okej itself is not doing it yet. Importantly, immediately after Sajek’s ^okej, which conveys Sajek’s readiness to start singing, Jaras pushes the button on the control table to launch the backtrack. Jaras thus visibly analyzes the ^okej as a temporal index projecting embodied compliance, that is Sajek’s singing (which happens in line 6).

Excerpt 6.3: Telling another person to start singing (Detail 3)

04 SAJ:=> ^okej.#

fig OKEJ #fig.13
Figure 13: Jaras pushing the button after hearing Sajek’s ‘^okej’.

Jaras then retracts his arm and shifts back to the computer to press the record key (Figure 14 below). At this point Sajek starts to sing (line 5).

Excerpt 6.4: Telling another person to start singing (Detail 4)

05 (0.3)

06 SAJ #something in the wa:::y
    #fig.14-->
In contrast to the initial sequential analysis of the excerpt, which presented a purely verbal directive-compliance adjacency pair, a closer inspection of the video allows us to unravel the multifaceted trajectory of this compliance. The data lend support to the observation that actual compliance is more than an individual turn produced by an individual participant. Rather, it emerges from a constellation of collaboratively produced actions. In this episode, from the recording studio, it may be worth to reconsider the various facets related to the distribution of epistemic and deontic rights that bear on the actual accomplishment of compliance. Jaras, who is an audio engineer and thus has an upper hand on the manipulation of the control tools, has the right and authority to tell the singers what to do and when to do it. Yet, for the recording activity to be successful, Jaras needs intersubjectively and temporarily synchronized cooperation from the singers (in this case Sajek). In this configuration, Sajek, who is wearing headphones and communicating with the audio engineer via the microphone/headphones only, has the responsibility to indicate to the audio engineer that he understands and is able to follow Jaras’ instructions/orders. Sajek’s ^okej. (line 4) is thus crucial for the organization of the activity at hand, as it signals his understanding of the proposed course of action and conveys his readiness to go along with it, thereby organizing the activities in real time. It is thus through a detailed analysis of the global activity context and the local
participant roles that we can start to fully appreciate the function of OKAY: as a constellation where the verbal projection of an upcoming embodied compliance is absolutely relevant for the synchronization of ongoing and next relevant tasks.

Video data in particular reveal that the ecology of compliance can involve nuanced adjustments in participation. In an example from the Estonian sheep stable (Excerpt 5), the complying OKAY to a directive about taking charge of the wheelbarrow is produced at a moment when the speaker is still involved in an alternative work task and the embodied compliance can ensue only later, at a relevant junction in the overall organization of the work-day. In the examples from the Polish recording studio (Excerpts 4 and 6), the OKAY that is responsive to directives about how to sing and when to sing is a necessary signpost for the overall organization of the activity in progress, since it is simultaneously a “directive” cue for the audio-engineer to start recording. It emerges at a moment in interaction where the imminent actions of several co-present participants are mutually dependent on precise temporal coordination. This is crucial, given that in our examples from the sheep stable and the recording studio alike, the embodied compliance is actually temporally extended.
6. Discussion

In this paper we dissected the role of the accepting responsive OKAY within the temporal trajectories of embodied compliance. We showed that compliance is not necessarily just a turn-at-talk but can comprise a longer trajectory of actions within activities in progress. OKAY is a device for organizing these trajectories in real time. As has also been mentioned in earlier literature (Schegloff 1989; Rauniomaa and Keisanen 2012; Thompson et al. 2015), an OKAY can be uttered immediately after the completion of a directive, while the embodied compliance can take a considerable time to accomplish. Such an OKAY, which forms a turn on its own, projects an imminent compliance in the not-so-distant future. We therefore proposed to call OKAY in this use a *compliance projector*, a more or less immediately producible sequentially relevant temporal index in situations where the actual compliance necessarily takes some time.

Even though our data come from two unrelated languages, their close inspection revealed a comparable pattern. Both in Estonian and in Polish, responses to directives lay out a trajectory, where OKAY provides an immediate verbal notification of participants’ understanding and acceptance of a directive, which is relevant for the co-participants’ continuing coordination of activities in progress, while embodied compliance emerges over time. The temporality of these complying responses was traceable in our audio and video data alike. For instance, comparing Excerpts 1 and 5,
we can see that the temporal horizons of directive-compliance action pairs are different. While Heli in Excerpt 1 was commissioned to the phone almost immediately, the wheelbarrow in Excerpt 5 could only be rolled at a relevant later moment in time, so that Rain could even continue with an alternative task for a while. However, there are many similarities between the two cases, such as the overall activity already being in progress. In Excerpt 1, the speakers were already talking about the person to be called to the phone and the one to comply with the directive was herself interested in whether there would be an aerobics session that day. In the stable episode, Rain had already moved the wheelbarrow, and thus taken charge of it for a brief moment, when the directive was uttered. Furthermore, there was also an overall commitment of all the workers to get the task done. A compliance projector was made relevant in both occasions, primarily because of the prospective temporal delay or extension of the complying action.

Our analysis suggests that the purely auditory OKAY is relevant for moment-by-moment development of the activities at hand. In Excerpt 2, the customer’s ^oke::j, offers an intersubjective indication of her acceptance of the revised course of action and projects ensuing embodied compliance, allowing the customer to pace her dictation accordingly. In the studio data in Excerpts 4 and 6, where the fine-grained temporality of collaboratively produced actions has immediate consequences for the success of the recording, the singers’ OKEJ conveys readiness to go along with the proposed course of action and projects the embodied compliance. It is thus
crucial for the local calibration of mutual temporalities of the participants’
activities. The embodied responses emerge in the temporal trajectory of the
here-and-now collaborative projects. Importantly, with the compliance-
projecting OKAY we can see how participants orient to the completion of a
verbal sequence and not only to the compliance itself.

The trajectories of OKAYs that precede embodied compliance to
directives that we found in our Estonian and Polish data suggest that the
ecology of continuous negotiation of temporality of such compliance
extends beyond a single next turn. This observation is in line with what Betz
and Deppermann suggest in the overview chapter in this volume (Chapter
3), where they explore the sequential implications of OKAY as an initial
index that addresses the practical concerns of signaling or restoring
understanding and intersubjectivity in interaction. Our chapter provides
evidence for the sequential import of OKAY in managing locally sufficient
understanding in temporally extended activities. There thus seem to be
double social obligations involved in the verbal and embodied modalities of
interaction, where the OKAY functions as a verbal projection of an
upcoming embodied compliance and thereby bridges the two modalities into
a temporally coherent whole.

Acknowledgements
Leelo Keevallik’s research was carried out within the project “Vocal Coordination of Human Action”, Funded by the Swedish Research Council 2016-00827.

References


Clark White, Anne Elizabeth. 2019. Authority and camaraderie: The delivery of directives amongst the ice floes. *Language in Society* (online first)


Arnulf Deppermann, and Jürgen Streeck, 97–122. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.


* Untranslatable particles are rendered in the original language in the gloss.