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Reconfiguring the interactional space: Organising the closing of encounters in an Italian travel agency

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Questo articolo esamina interazioni spontanee in un'agenzia di viaggio italiana con lo scopo di descrivere e comprendere come i partecipanti coinvolti in questi incontri di servizio negozino, organizzino e ottengano la chiusura delle loro interazioni. Attraverso l'uso di strumenti comunicativi vocali e visivi, così come la manipolazione di oggetti che si ritrovano nello spazio circostante, l'agente e i clienti realizzano, e nel contempo riconoscono, le azioni che proiettano l'avvio della chiusura degli incontri. L'osservazione di interazioni con due e più partecipanti permette inoltre di evidenziare la complessa attività di 'allineamento' o 'non allineamento' interazionale, che implica il coordinamento degli elementi presenti nello spazio circostante con il materiale linguistico utilizzato dai partecipanti. L'indagine mostra che l'organizzazione delle chiusure è sensibile al contesto situazionale, al numero dei partecipanti e alla tipologia di visita (*follow up visit* o *last visit*). L'utilizzo di videoregistrazioni analizzate con gli strumenti metodologici dell'analisi conversazionale e dall'analisi multimodale dell'interazione, permette di rivelare fondamentali aspetti dell'organizzazione delle chiusure interazionali, che risultano inevitabilmente negletti quando viene a mancare l'apporto visivo dei fenomeni osservati.

Parole chiave:
chiusure, spazio interazionale, partecipazione, multimodalità, agenzia di viaggio

1. Introduction

This study explores the ways participants engaged in travel agency service encounters organise and accomplish the closure of their interactions by drawing on multimodal (i.e. vocal and visual) resources. Past studies have revealed that *possible pre-closing* moves typically precede a topic closure or the closure of a social encounter (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Button, 1987). These pre-closings project the ending of the ongoing course of action, which can either lead to the closing, or be followed by re-openings (Button, 1987). Interactants then can mobilise multiple resources either to align with a projected closing or to disalign with it, thus prolonging the unfolding of the current topic or activity (Mondada & Traverso, 2005). The introduction of a new activity such as, for instance, arrangement sequences (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Button, 1987; Heath, 1986; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992 inter alia) is socially understood as projecting a (possible) imminent closing. These patterns have been observed in a wide range of interactional settings, both informal and institutional.

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The aims of this study are manifold: first, it shows how vocal, visual, and material resources get used and coordinated to project and achieve alignment (Goodwin, 2000; Mondada, 2005, 2009) in the service of the closing of encounters between two or more participants in an Italian travel agency. The notion of *alignment* here includes both the verbal coordination typically occurring in closing environments as well as larger patterns of actual alignment in space through body orientation, gaze, etc., whereby participants coordinate the manipulation of objects with talk. Second, the study highlights the relevance of the spatial dimension in the accomplishment of social interaction, where multimodal resources contribute to praxeologically organising the interactional space for the immediate and contingent needs of participants (Mondada, 2009). Moreover, the study describes a little analysed activity – the closing of the encounter – accomplished each time people engage in a service encounter. This closing entails the departure of the customers requiring the service from the shared interactional space. Finally, the use of video-recorded data in this study allows for a detailed analysis not only of the resources used to project and coordinate the closure of the encounter, but also of the complex collaborative work and the spatial orientation necessary to successfully bring to completion the activity of closing the current interaction. The manipulations and delivery of relevant objects, such as purchased tickets etc., are used as resources for this purpose. These activities involve participants constantly monitoring and responding to their co-participants' accountable actions within the interactional space (see, among many others, Heath, 1986; Goodwin, 1980, 2000, 2003; LeBaron & Streeck, 2000; Hayashi, 2005).

2. Closings in interaction

There have been numerous studies on closing sequences in interaction. Prior investigations of telephone conversations have highlighted the structural organisation of closings (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Button, 1987), or focused on specific language resources (e.g., use of *lovely*, Antaki, 2002) and social activities carried out in this sequential position in order to maintain and reaffirm social relationships (Button, 1987; Antaki, 2002; Bolden, 2009 inter alia). Other investigations in both informal and institutional settings have examined audio and video data and focused on the visual resources mobilised to achieve the ending of the particular ongoing activity or the whole encounter. For example, research in a beauty salon conducted by LeBaron & Jones (2002) has described in detail the interactional activity of two acquaintances who meet when one of the them is about to take her leave. The study describes how the rich social and physical environment in which the interaction takes place is drawn upon by the two ladies to organise their meeting and to bring it to its closure, thus showing how multiple involvements as well as visual and vocal resources should be taken into account to better understand how closings get

accomplished. Likewise, studies of medical interactions have explored the closing sequences of such visits (Heath, 1985, 1986; White et al., 1994, 1997; Robinson, 2001). Heath (1985, 1986) has assigned special relevance to multimodal aspects of leave-taking in medical encounters and has focused on the coordination of talk and physical movement in the ending of co-presence. What is interesting for our purpose here is the analysis of the multimodal design of the doctor's pre-closing questions, which highlights the relevance of the visual resources employed in social interaction. Other studies have explored this praxeological dimension of interaction. De Stefani (2006, 2011) has focused his analysis on couples shopping in a supermarket; besides describing the ways in which they navigate in the store, he examines the pre-closings, re-openings, and final conversational closings between the couples and a clerk, showing how talk is finely coordinated with body orientation towards either the partner or the clerk in the accomplishment of routine activities such as buying fresh food at the supermarket. Drawing from a corpus of professional meetings in an architect's office, Mondada (2006a) has demonstrated how the interrelationship of language, interaction, and cognition can be observed and analysed in human action. Her analysis of video-recorded data nicely illustrates the production and interpretation of accountable actions by closely following the participants' conduct and unveiling the details through which they mutually display their orientation to the activity in progress, making use of multimodal resources as well as object manipulation. The focus of her analysis is on a series of actions, such as the manipulation of a plan or the rearrangement of the working space, which, in coordination with the turn production, project the end of a turn and the closing of the sequence. This study shows that participants constantly monitor the progression of the unfolding talk, and that through their gestures they project trajectories that can be aligned with or abandoned, thus providing evidence of the joint accomplishment of the closure of the interaction.[1] Collectively, these latter investigations show the relevance of a multimodal approach for the description and understanding of closings, wherein participants' linguistic and spatial alignments play an important role in the accomplishment of this action.

The present article expands on this prior research by investigating closing sequences in order to understand *when* a social encounter is brought to an end and *how* mutual orientation and alignment towards the transition to closing is organised and achieved. In this sense the examination of both dyadic and multiparty interactions proves to be fruitful in that it shows that the closure can be accomplished once the alignment between the customers and the agent has been achieved and, in presence of more customers, when all the participants align towards the same course of action.

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1 Other studies on closing include investigations in bookshops (Aston, 1988), television news interviews (Clayman, 1989), and academic advising sessions (Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992).

In a previous study De Stefani & Ticca (in preparation) have identified two categories of visits in a travel agency: "first visits" and "follow up visits". "First visits" are occurrences in which customer(s) and agents deal with the current service request for the first time. In "follow up visits" customer(s) and agents have already dealt with the current topic/trip in the past. This investigation shows that practices such as the payment of the purchased tickets and/or its delivery, if they occur, can be used to project the closing of the current interaction and of the sequences of visits, thus making the current visit recognisable as a "last visit".[2] While the distinction between "first visit" and "follow up visit" is visible in the opening phase of travel agency interactions (De Stefani & Ticca, in preparation), the transition from a "follow up visit" to a "last visit" is visible in the closing phase of the interaction. The sequential position in which travel documents are delivered, as well as the mutual orientation and alignment of participants, become crucial conditions for the achievement of the closing.

3. Data and method

This study draws on a corpus of 640 minutes of video-recorded interactions in a travel agency in Naples, Italy. This setting proved to be ideal for this study because, contrary to what occurs in other institutional settings, where routine activities tend to project the closing of the encounters (Heath, 1986; Robinson, 2001), in the travel agency encounters documented by our data, usually more than one visit take place before a routine activity, such as the delivery of the purchased tickets, occurs. The data therefore provide for a large set of cases where the projection and accomplishment of the closing is visibly negotiated through the deployment of (other) resources in the surrounding environment.

The agency where the data were collected comprises three agents, located at three different desks where cameras and audiorecorders were placed. Informed consent was signed by all the participants present in this study either at the beginning of the visit or at the end. Audio and video materials were transcribed (see Appendix for transcription conventions) and analysed following the method of conversation analysis and multimodal interaction analysis.

4. Analysis

The analytical part of this study is organised in two sections. The first one focuses on both dyadic and multiparty encounters in which no delivery of tickets occurs in the closing-relevant sequential environment (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Robinson, 2001), thus making it recognisable as a continuing interaction requiring a "follow up visit".

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[2] This obviously does not imply that the customer will stop visiting the agency in the future. "Last visit" is used here to refer to the closure of a specific trip-related sequence of visits.

The second section examines both dyadic and multiparty interactions where the closing is initiated with the manipulation of the travel documents thus making it recognisable as a potential "last visit". It will be shown how the sequential position of travel documents' delivery is relevant for the projection of the topic, sequence and interactional closing. The analysis will also reveal that, when more than one customer is present, competing activities can be pursued simultaneously, thus creating the opportunity for reopenings, disalignments, and the consequent delay in the closing of the encounter.

4.1 Closings in "follow up visits"

The purchase of a trip usually requires several visits whereby dates, fares, and other details need to be researched and agreed upon. The following cases will show how the ending of such continuing visits is negotiated and accomplished. In the first case, the customer (MINO) and the agent (CARO) are organising a cruise to the Caribbean Sea. There is a lengthy negotiation regarding dates and fares, and then the customer reveals his uncertainties about the possibilities available. Extract 1 refers to a segment of talk where, after an initial hesitation, Mino accepts the agent's suggestion to present his trip as a birthday present, so that it can be partly financed by his friends' contributions.

1) 9192avA21a (53:01–53:31) "crociera"

```
 1 MINO   va bene (va)
          okay   (then)
 2        (0.9)
 3 CARO   +è un'id#ea
           it's an idea
   MINO           #nods-->
   MINO   +withdraws gaze from CARO
 4        (0.2)#
   MINO     -->#
 5 MINO   *è un'idea• *sì*
           it's an idea yes
   MINO   *...........*takes his glasses*
    fig             •1
 6 CARO   da pre- da cogliere al [volo\
          to ta- (ke) to be seized on
 7 MINO                           [ah ma tu dimmi mia suocera non è venuta
                                 eh but tell me, my mother in law didn't come
 8        eh/
          did she
 9 CARO   no
          no (she didn't)
10        (0.5)
11 MINO   °(dai #va #bene dai non ci pensiamo xxx)°
          (well it's okay let's don't think about it xxx)
   MINO         #...#turns his body towards his bag on chair next to him-->
12        (0.2)
13 CARO   *va buo' comunque abbiamo tempo fine: [agosto
           okay   anyway    we have time until  August
   MINO   *manipulates bag handles-->
14 MINO                                        [°sì ma quella
                                                 yes but she
```

```
15        mi fa# (fare) [tutte 'ste xxx xxx xxx xx°=
          she makes me (do) all  these ((inaudible text))
   MINO     -->#
16 CARO                 [lo sai quante idee
                         you know how many ideas
17 CARO   =o ma non ti preoccupare io non-
          oh no but don't worry I don't
18 MINO    non *ci scandalizzi*amo•
          we are not outraged
   CARO        *..............*takes the brochure from desk-->
    fig                        •2
19        (0.3)
20 MINO   °poi lei è una #brava persona°#
          and she is a good person
   MINO                #..............#-->
21 CARO      •#ma è stata avvi#sata#
              but was she told about it
    fig      •3
   MINO     -->#..............#stands upright#
22 MINO      *e:*
          of course
   CARO   -->*puts brochure in front of her*
23           #(0.1# 0.8)
   CARO      #....#head turned towards PC-->>
   MINO   -->*lifts bag and puts it on his shoulder-->>
24 MINO   #va be' dai•
          okay then
   MINO   #turns towards the exit-->>
    fig             •4
```

Initially the customer agrees to consider Caro's suggestion as an "idea" (l. 01, 03, 05). During this exchange Mino withdraws his gaze from Caro (l. 03), and then grabs his sunglasses[3] (l. 05, Fig. 1), thus exhibiting a potential orientation towards the closure of the encounter and his leave-taking (sunglasses will be used only outside).

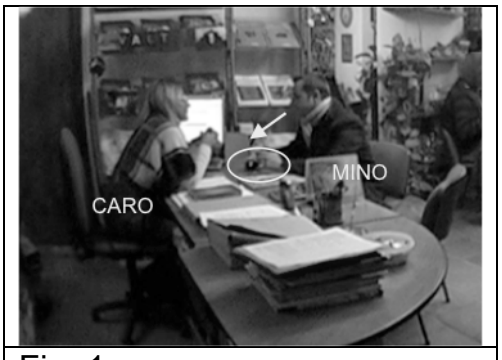

Fig. 1

Interestingly, in the next turn Caro operates a self-repair on her linguistic choice ("da pre-"; 'to ta-(ke)') replacing it with a 'figurative expression' ("da

[3] In this last phase of the interaction, the customer has frequently manipulated his personal objects and moved his body projecting an orientation towards the closing of the interaction, but the agent has never aligned with him until the moment described here.

cogliere al vo[lo\"; 'to be seized on', l. 06). According to Drew & Holt (1998) this type of expression can be used to project topic transition, but also to close down conversational episodes. This seems to be the case here. But unlike what is described in Drew & Holt, where the topic shift is achieved after the overt agreement of the figurative expression's recipient, Mino not only does not display any agreement with his co-participant, but he also introduces a new topic (l. 7), which leads to the continuation of the conversation. It is only after Caro's reply (l. 9) that Mino produces a low voiced turn ("°(dai va bene dai non ci pensiamo xxxx)°"; '(well it's okay let's don't think about it xxx)', l. 11), turns towards his bag, grabs its handles (l. 13), hence orienting towards his upcoming departure (LeBaron & Jones, 2002; Lauriel, 2008). Caro visibly aligns with Mino by reorganising the spatial configuration of her working space (she takes back the brochure positioned in front of Mino, l. 18), while she still talks with him (l. 21). Simultaneously, Mino begins to stand up (Fig. 3), Caro moves the brochure in front of her, and turns towards her computer (l. 23, Fig. 4).

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

With these movements the participants reconfigure the interactional space by manipulating their personal and professional objects and making them 'relevant' for the current course of action. In other words, the participants' diverging focuses of attention favour the transition to the closing of the encounter; indeed, Mino actually stands with his bag on his shoulders and, while torquing his body, gazes towards the agency exit (l. 23, Fig. 4). It is worth noticing that until line 23 there is not a clear verbal sign of the closing even as the nonverbal signs accumulate. This shows how participants are able to simultaneously engage with the current conversation while projecting a future action.

Fig. 4

The interaction continues for a few more turns in extract 2, with Mino standing up in front of Caro as she plans a future encounter.

2) 9192avA21a (53:32–53:55) "crociera"

```
24 CARO   allora #ci sentiamo telefonica+mente tanto# comunque:::: penso
          so we phone each other               because anyway     I think
   MINO          #turns towards CARO----------------#
   CARO                                 +gazes at MINO-->
25        che anche a tua moglie come data va bene diciannove ventisei
          that your wife too will be okay with the date nineteen twenty six
26        perché comunque abbiamo trovato un [buon compromesso
          because anyway  we reached      a good compromise
27 MINO                                      [secondo me xxx ventisei
                                              to me      xxx twenty-six
          ((participants summarise the details of the offer, 13 lines
          omitted))
40 MINO   va buo' e[: xxx
          okay    and xxx
41 CARO            [ci sentiamo domani mattina e:: vediamo di confermà 'sto
                  we'll talk tomorrow morning and  we'll try to confirm this
42        [fatto
           issue
43 MINO   [#va bene#
           okay
   MINO    #.......#-->
44        *(0.2)*(0.3)*
   MINO   *...........*-->
   CARO         *.....*-->
45 MINO      #tanto io t- *ti# tele#fono/
              anyway I'll c-  call you
   MINO   -->#step twds  CARO#,,,,,#
   CARO                 -->*shake hands-->
   MINO                 -->*shake hands-->
46        (0.3)
47 MINO   tu che *fai mi*: inserisci i ↑dati e:
          you what do you do you put in the info and
   CARO       -->*,,,,,,*
   MINO       -->*,,,,,,*
48 CARO   confermo [tutto a posto poi passi e vieni a saldà cioè vieni a[:
          I confirm all right then you pass by and come to pay I mean come
          to
49 MINO            [poi vengo la sera poi sabato #vengo                [#ˇe
                  then I'll come in the evening then saturday I'll come   yes
   MINO                                          #moves away---------#turns
          towards CARO-->
50 MINO   ti [vengo a:: °a rego#lare ˇe° #va bè
          I'll come to     pay you    yes okay
```

```
   MINO                    -->#........#moves towards exit-->>
51 CARO      [a regolare+
              to pay me
   CARO                 -->+
52          (0.3)
53 CARO     TRANQUILLAMENTE GRAZIE
            no problem  thank you
54 MINO     CIA:O: arrivederci\
            ciao  good bye
55 CARO     CIAO:
            ciao
```

In this final phase of the visit, Caro first suggests a next call to keep updated and then reassures the customer regarding the suitability of the proposed trip (l. 25), thus summarising the advantages of her offer before the customer's departure. Caro's summary in fact delays the departure, as exhibited by Mino who reorients towards the action in progress (l. 24). In what follows, participants reiterate the details of the trip (data omitted). The transition is set up after Mino's turn in line 40: his pre-closing item "va buo'" ('okay') is followed by an arrangement sequence (l. 41-53) – which repeats the suggestion made in l. 25 – during which participants shake hands (l. 45). Their last turns are produced with Mino moving towards the exit and Caro orienting her body and gaze away from the customer. This disjointed body orientation is finally followed by the goodbye sequence (l. 54-55), after which no more is said or done, so the immediate encounter is definitely closed.

In these face-to-face encounters, where the customer is expected to exit the agency, or, in Kendon's (1990) terms, to permanently move away from the F-formation,[4] body orientation is crucial to accomplishing the shift to the closing. Nonetheless, we have seen that Mino's orientation towards the exit has begun before the conversation ended. So the definite closure of the encounter is achieved through the coordination of the embodied disjunction from the current interactional space and the shift to the exit, also accomplished by the goodbye sequence. In sum, the closing is completed after a lengthy negotiation, projected by the manipulation of personal belongings as well as pre-closing initiator devices and summaries. The mobilisation of these resources allows the interactants to display their reorientation and alignment with the current action and simultaneously to reconfigure the interactional space to their current needs. It also seems that non-finalising a ticket purchase favours this lengthy closing sequence. This suggests that "follow up" closings are more likely to be extended than closings associated with "last visits", a pattern we will encounter again in the next section.

When more than two customers take part in an encounter, all parties must agree and align towards the accomplishment of its closing. In extract 3 a

[4] Kendon (1990) describes in terms of F-formation the space created by two or more individuals who interact together (see p. 209-237).

couple (Pepe and Emma) and the agent (Caro) are negotiating the best procedure to book a trip to Gardaland (an amusement park in Northern Italy) as a gift for the couple's family members. Pepe is hesitant regarding the booking for his brother's trip because he is uncertain about the date.

3) 9212av1A31a (54:42–55:50) "gardaland"

```
Pepe is gazing down, Caro and Emma are looking at each other.
 1 CARO   #e quindi po+ssiamo giostrare come vo↑glia#mo con i prezzi che#
            and so     we can   play     as we want    with the prices that
   CARO   #leans forward-------------------------#,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,#-->
   CARO               +gazes at PEPE--->
 2           #vogliamo\#
              we want
   CARO   -->#,,,,,,,,,#
 3 EMMA       +sì
              yes
   CARO   -->+gazes at EMMA-->
 4         (1.8)#(0.2)#
   EMMA         #.....#-->
 5 EMMA       #em/#
              yes
   EMMA   -->#head twds PEPE#-->
 6            +(3.2)•*(0.3)*(0.4)*#(0.3)#
   CARO   -->+at PEPE-->
    fig             •5
   EMMA              *nods *
   PEPE                    *nods *
   PEPE                           #.....#-->
 7 PEPE   va #buo'/#
          okay
   EMMA   -->#,,,,,#
 8         (0.8)+(0.5)          +(0.4)+
   PEPE         +gazes at CARO+,,,,,+
 9 PEPE       #>me ne sto anda'<
               I'm gonna go
   PEPE   -->#body torque twds desk-->
10         (0.3)
11 PEPE    cia'
           bye
12         +(0.5)
   PEPE    +looks at a paper on the desk-->
13 EMMA    eh *eh •eh eh
           he he   he he ((laughs for 0.6))
    fig           •6
   EMMA       *moves back on her chair-->
14            #(1.0)#•(0.5)#          #(1.0)#
    fig               •7
   EMMA    -->#moves forwards and starts standing up-->
   PEPE          -->#,,,,,,#twds  EMMA#.....#-->
15 EMMA    sei stato ripre:so# immo:rtalato negli studi di +non so cosa\•
         you've been filmed immortalised in the studies of I don't know what
   PEPE                    -->#stands upright-->>
   EMMA                                                  +gazes at CARO~~>
    fig                                                              •8
16         (0.3)
((participants talk about the recordings and the trip brochures, 43 lines
omitted))
59         (0.9)
60 EMMA    v[a be'/
           okay
```

```
61 PEPE    [*va *buo:no•
              okay
   PEPE     *...*moves hand-->
    fig                •9
62         (0.4)*(0.2)*
   CARO         *.....*moves hand-->
63 CARO    gra*zie [*bacio       *gra*:zie buon uicchend*
           thanks   kiss         thanks have a nice weekend
   CARO    -->*shake hands w PEPE*...*shake hands w EMMA*-->
   PEPE    -->*shake hands w CARO*,,,*
   EMMA             *............*shake hands w CARO----*-->
64 PEPE            [*cia*:o# °xxx [xxxx°
                     ciao    xxx  xxxx ((inaudible talk))
   CARO          -->*,,,*
   EMMA          -->*,,,*
   PEPE                     #oriented towards the exit-->>
65 EMMA                             [cia:o
                                     ciao
66 CARO    [ciao #grazie
            ciao thanks
   CARO           #turns to the right-->>
67 EMMA #[anche a te•
            to you too
   EMMA #turns away-->>
    fig               •10
```

The extract begins with the last turn of the prior sequence, in which Caro reiterates the flexibility customers have in choosing the dates and the different fares available for the trip (l. 1-2). The addressed recipient of this turn is Pepe, selected by Caro's gaze,[5] which is coordinated with her body orientation towards him (l. 1). Pepe keeps looking down so Caro turns to Emma, who acknowledges the agent's turns at talk (l. 3). Almost at the conclusion of the pause at l. 4, Emma starts turning towards Pepe, who remains silent, and solicits a response from him with the token "em/"; 'yes', (l. 5). There is still no response from him, and in the next lengthy pause Emma starts nodding, while gazing at Pepe (l. 6, Fig. 5), an action that shows the maintenance of her orientation towards the ongoing talk.

Fig. 5

5 For studies on gaze as an interactional resource to display recipiency see, among others, Kendon (1967), Goodwin (1980, 1981), Heath (1986), Robinson (1998), Lerner (2003), Rossano, Brown & Levinson (2009).

At this point Pepe nods too, moves his body, and then produces an agreement token ("va buo'/"; 'okay', l. 07). This is followed by a lengthy pause (l. 8), during which neither of his co-participants take the floor nor embody any response, but keep gazing at him. So Pepe first gazes towards the agent for 0.5 seconds, then gazes away and announces his leaving (">me ne sto anda'<"; 'I'm gonna go', l. 9). A further pause occurs, which makes the lack of his co-participants' uptake noticeable (l. 10), and then he adds a goodbye (l. 11). Note that Pepe's modification of his body orientation contributes to a rearrangement of the current interactional space and prepares it for the next departure. Indeed, he turns his body around and keeps avoiding eye contact with his co-participants (l. 12), thus breaking the current participation framework (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2004).

This sudden modification of the interactional course of action is not joined by the other co-participants, as exhibited by their minimal body and linguistic activity (l. 12). By starting to laugh (l. 13, Fig. 6) Emma seems to orient to some problem in Pepe's activity.[6] Nonetheless, after a brief hesitation, she aligns with Pepe's conduct and begins to stand up (l. 14, Fig. 7).

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

After a pause Pepe joins her by beginning to stand up as well. Participants are now both oriented towards the closing, as also displayed by the topic shift initiated by Emma, who mentions the videorecordings (l. 15, Fig. 8).

Similarly to what we have observed in the previous case, the interaction continues within the new spatial configuration: the customers stand in front of the agent, talk about the trip brochures, and then make arrangements for the next visit. The encounter is concluded briefly afterwards: Pepe moves his hand towards Caro (Fig. 9), thus initiating the hand shake ritual (l. 63), an activity which is joined by all participants (l. 61-63). Once they have all shaken hands, Pepe turns towards the exit (l. 64), followed by Emma (Fig. 10). Note that Caro turns her body towards her right side where her colleague is,[7] thus

6 For the use of laughter in serious talk, see among others, Glenn (2003), Haakana (2001), Ticca (in press).

7 Caro's colleague silently moved behind the desk during the omitted talk in extract 3.

embodying her engagement with her and consequently displaying her disengagement with the two customers. The dissolution of the current interactional space is accomplished and the immediate encounter is definitively concluded (see also Kendon, 1990).

Fig. 8

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

This case presents an initial disalignment in the construction of the closing sequence. After the production of the first (possible) pre-closing item "va buo'", 'okay' (l. 07), the two co-participants do not offer any response, nor initiate a new activity. It is only after a short 'impasse' that the two customers coordinate and prepare for the closing of the interaction, while the agent instead embodies her orientation towards the progression of the visit. Despite Emma's initial disalignment the closing is then collaboratively accomplished with the physical move of standing up. This leads to a second observation regarding the co-participation in organising and accomplishing social actions: a successful closing initiator requires not only the mobilisation of a focused verbal and bodily activity, but also the co-ordination of the two customers' orientation and alignment towards the proposed closing action.[8]

4.2 Closings in (potential) "last visits"

Interactions in a travel agency often result in a purchase that concludes the visit or sequence of visits. The following cases show how the closing of such "last visits" is negotiated and accomplished. Extract 4 refers to a "follow up visit" where the customer Rossano (ROSS), attended by the agent (DAVI) pays and collects his travel documents. As it has been observed elsewhere (Aston, 1992; De Stefani, 2006), the manipulation of the requested goods in service encounters,[9] can project the imminent closure[10] of the social encounter. This is the case here, where the multimodal action of delivering the

8 The full negotiations which lead to a new visit are not shown here for reasons of space.

9 By 'service encounter' we mean a social interaction where one or more persons provide a service or good to a customer, thus expanding the notion of service encounter offered in Merritt (1976: 162), which only refers to 'buying and selling encounters between a seller and a customer'.

10 For medical consultations, Heath (1986) describes how the manipulation of the patient's files can propose the end of the ongoing business.

travel documents is treated by both participants as projecting the closing of the overall interaction.

During the visit, the agent puts the customer's travel documents into a folder, on the desk in front of him. While talking, he repeatedly touches the folder with his hands.[11]

4) 9192avA11a (26:36–27:05) "matera"

```
 1 ROSS   per caso ci sta marisi (0.2) con loro\
          by chance is Marisi          with them
((participants begin a negotiation about who Marisi is. 11 lines omitted))
12 DAVI   marisi no\ c'è:
          Marisi (there is) not, there's
13        +(0.3)
   DAVI   +looks down at the list of participants-->
14 ROSS   >c'è marisi ma[rito e moglie\<
          there's Marisi husband and wife
15 DAVI                 [+signor cica*la*
                          mister Cicala
   DAVI                    -->+looks at ROSS-->
   DAVI                           *..*-->
16           #(0.2)+(0.2)•*(0.3)
   DAVI      #leans back on his chair-->
   DAVI   -->lifts ticket from desk-->
   ROSS           +gazes at ticket-->
   ROSS                  *moves hand from desk-->
    fig                  •11
17 DAVI     [*ecco *a* voi
             here you are
   DAVI   -->*.....*brings ticket up in front of ROSS*,,,-->
18 ROSS     [e va bene *li conoscerò* do•mani\
            it's okay I will meet them tomorrow
   DAVI            -->*gives ticket to ROSS*
   ROSS            -->*takes tickets from DAVI*
   fig                                •12
19        (0.5)#
   DAVI     -->#back to home position on his chair
20 ROSS   #allora la pro+ssima gita noi ci vedia•mo/#
           so next trip we will see each other
   ROSS   #.....#-->
    fig                                      •13
21        (0.3)•(0.2)
    fig        •14
22 DAVI      #prossima gita/ che volete fa' ↑pasqua
             next trip what do you want to do, (an) Easter (trip)
   ROSS    -->#stands upright-->>
((D and C talk about a possible destination for a next trip, 13 turns
omitted))
35 ROSS   va be' quando vengo da: da^h mon[teca*tini• ə::
          okay when    I come from from Montecatini hem
   ROSS                                      *moves hand-->
    fig                                          •15
36 DAVI                                  [occhei (allora) ve*dia^hmo 'h
                                          okay     then   we'll see 'h
   DAVI                                                    *moves hand-->
37 ROSS    ti [*ringrazio#: ə ci#ao\•
```

[11] A further person has been sitting at the desk since before the current interaction started, but he will not take an active part in it.

```
                thank you       bye
   ROSS         *shake hands-->
   DAVI         *shake hands-->
   ROSS                   #.....#turns away-->>
   fig                          •16
38 DAVI       ['h arriveder*ci+ grazie*
                goodbye       thank you
   DAVI                    -->+gazes away
   ROSS                 -->*,,,,,,,,,,*
   DAVI                 -->*,,,,,,,,,,*
```

The extract begins with Rossano asking whether a person he knows will attend the upcoming trip he has just purchased. After establishing the person's identity (lines omitted), Davi responds negatively (l. 12). As Rossano repeats the names of the persons he knows (l. 14), Davi gazes at the him and adds the name of someone else (l. 15). While Davi proffers this turn, he starts picking up the ticket (l. 15) he had put on the desk. Then he leans back on his chair, brings the ticket up in the air, and finally delivers it to the customer. Note how his orientation towards the delivery of the ticket starts before his talk, which is produced when the ticket is in the air just in front of the customer (Fig. 11).

Fig. 11

Fig. 12

As for Rossano, he first gazes at the ticket Davi is holding in his hand (l. 16), then moves his own hand from the desk, thus orienting towards the agent's body movement. Then, in overlap with Davi's turn in line 17, Rossano replies with the item "va bene" ('okay'), typically used in pre-closing sequences (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Merritt, 1976), and with a reference to a future activity ("[e va bene li conoscerò domani\"; 'it's okay I will meet them tomorrow'). With this conversational move Rossano orients towards the closing of the current topic. Then, once the ticket is delivered (l. 18, Fig 12) and the agent returns to his previous position (l. 19), Rossano initiates a future arrangement sequence ("allora la prossima gita noi ci vediamo/"; 'so next trip we will see each other', l. 20) and simultaneously begins to stand up[12] (l. 20, Fig. 13; l. 21, Fig. 14).

12 As it has been shown in studies on doctor-patient interactions (Heath, 1985: 28), physical leave-taking occurs before the interactional encounter is brought to conclusion.

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

By standing up, Rossano modifies the current interactional space, and prepares for his upcoming departure. Note that the arrangement for a next meeting produced in line 20 is not related to the current business but to a future, tentative next trip. This action keeps the activity in progress (data not shown), until Rossano concludes the topic with another remark about a future arrangement ("va be' quando vengo da: da^{h} mon[tecatini ə::"; 'okay when I come from from Montecatini hem', l. 35). This utterance remains syntactically unfinished, probably due to the overlapping turn of Davi, ("occhei (allora) vedia^{h}mo 'h"; 'okay then we'll see 'h', l. 36). While uttering this turn Rossano moves his hand towards the agent (l. 35, Fig. 15), who joins his co-participant's movement and then a moment later they shake hands (l. 37). At this point Rossano initiates the thanking and goodbye sequence and then turns away (Fig. 16). By completing the thanking and goodbye sequence (l. 38) the agent displays his alignment with the customer and the interaction is thus brought to its conclusion, with the two co-participants oriented towards the dissolution of the current interactional space.

Fig. 15

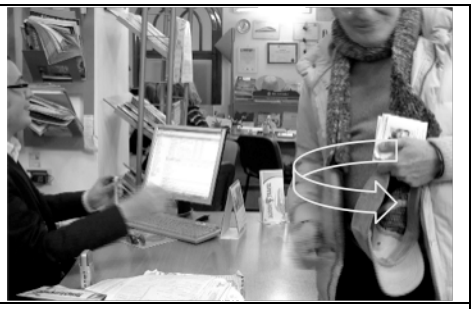

Fig. 16

This case illustrates how the delivery of the ticket initiates the transition to the closure of the visit. The embodied alignment of the customer, who begins to stand up as soon as he receives the ticket, crucially contributes to the accomplishment of the proposed action by projecting the upcoming departure. The delivery of the tickets in this phase of the encounter together with the talk on future trips clearly shows that the business of the current visit is concluded,

thus marking it as a "last visit". Nonetheless, we have observed that the delivery of the ticket itself does not suffice to conclude the encounter. Indeed, the interaction goes on with the customer holding the ticket in hand and standing upright in front of the agent, until the closing is accomplished with the handshaking and the final ritual sequences.

A similar case is illustrated in extract 5. But contrary to what we have observed above, the encounter ends after a lengthy closing sequence. The customer (JETA), at the agency with his partner (LISA), has just paid part of their upcoming trip to Sicily. The extract refers to the moments immediately following Jeta's delivery of a cheque to the agent, which occurs after a lengthy visit in the agency.

5) 9192avA21a (190:34–190:46) "sicilia"

```
 1 CARO   [*s*ignor jeta volete che i biglietti li conservo [io/
            mister Jeta do you want me to keep your tickets
   CARO  >>*moving documents on her desk-->
   JETA    >>*wallet in hand-->
 2 JETA   [xxx xxx-
 3 LISA                                                    [sì^sì^sì
                                                           yes yes yes
 4 CARO   [occhei\
           okay
 5 JETA   [#ə ə:#
            ə ə
   JETA    #....#-->
 6        (0.2)
 7 JETA   me[jo
          (it's) better
 8 CARO     [allora vi dò il contra^h^tti^hh^no *[e *tutto*
             then I'll give you the contract and everything
   JETA                                  -->*wallet in pocket*
   CARO                                      -->*gives contract to JETA-->
 9 JETA                                      [>a me il materasso #e la
                                               to me the mattress and the
   JETA                                                      -->#upright->>
10        [•*tenda*/< eh
            tent     yes
   JETA     *takes contract from CARO*
   CARO                           -->*
    fig    •17
11 LISA   [volevo sape[re solo +na cosa
           I just wanted to know one thing
12 JETA               [*a mi me devi da' *soltanto [i-
                       and you have to give me just the-
   JETA                 *.................*puts documents into his bag-->>
13 LISA                                          [ma questa+ tenerife
                                              but this Tenerife is it
   CARO                                                  +gaze LISA-->>
14        #<conviene> *o •ce- ce costa di più#
          convenient or it- it costs us more
   CARO  #leans twds LISA-------------------#
   CARO               *hands below chin in listening posture-->>
    fig                 •18
15        (0.3)
16 CARO   <tenerife> è oceano\
           Tenerife is ocean
```

The segment begins with Caro asking Jeta whether he wants her to keep their tickets. Note that the agent is involved in moving documents on her desk, in a 'tidying up' attitude which might suggest the closing of the current activity (l. 1). Caro's proposal is accepted by Lisa, who self-selects to respond to the agent's turn (l. 3). In overlap with Caro's next acknowledgement (l. 4), Jeta initially hesitates (l. 5) and then agrees as well. What is interesting for the development of this exchange is Jeta's body activity: he stands up, places his wallet in the back pocket of his trousers (l. 5-8) and then takes the document Caro is handing him (l. 8). The orientation of the two participants is visibly focused towards the delivery/receiving of these documents (Fig. 17). In this case the payment of the tickets and the delivery of the contract could define this as a "last visit". But in fact the tickets will be kept in the agency, so a new visit is required to collect them.[13]

Jeta's body disposition and the sequential position in which the exchange of documents occurs project the closing of the encounter. And this is indeed how Lisa treats it. In overlap with Jeta's turn (l. 9-10), she produces a *pre-announcement* (Schegloff, 2007) ("[volevo sape[re solo 'na cosa"; 'I just wanted to know one thing'; l. 11) and a following topic shift ("[ma questa tenerife <conviene> o ce- ce costa di più"; 'but this Tenerife is it convenient or it- it costs us more'; l. 13-14), with which she re-introduces a topic previously treated (data not shown). As a result, the transition to closing is delayed (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Button, 1986): the agent accepts the proposal to keep the conversation open by first embodying her engagement with the customer (l. 14, Fig. 18), and then delivering her answer (l. 15 and following, not shown).

Fig. 17

Fig. 18

[13] In this case then, despite the fact that the business has been completed, the series of visits might not be. But given the type of follow up activity needed, in which the tickets can be sent to the customer, this can in fact be considered as a canonical "last visit".

Interestingly, Jeta does not visually[14] re-join the previous participation framework (he is now standing behind Lisa), but he maintains his orientation towards the ending of the interaction. This is shown in extract 6 below.

6) 9192avA21a (191:10–191:22) "sicilia"

```
41 CARO   [è *giusto per vedere una vita diversa
          it's just  to see     a different life
42 LISA   [xx*xxxx*
          ((inaudible))
   LISA      *....*-->
43        (3.1)*(1.4)*
   JETA       *.....*-->
44 JETA   possiamo anda[re/
          can we    go
45 LISA                [e se no: nel frattem*po *possiamo* anche: *valutare:
                        and otherwise in the meantime we could also consider
   LISA                                  -->*handbag in arm*
   JETA                                  -->*moves hand twds CARO-->
   CARO                                                        *moves
            hand twds JETA-->
46           *(°qualche altra cosa°)*•
                 something else
   JETA   -->*shake hands----------*
   CARO   -->*shake hands----------*
    fig                              •19
47 CARO   io st[o con la xxx vicino\ xxx che vi piace basta >(venire)<&
          I'll be with the xxx close by xxx that you like you just come
48 JETA        [#grazie
                thank you
   JETA         #moves away-->>
49 CARO   &pure da sola
           even alone
```

While Lisa and Caro engage in the conversation on Tenerife, Jeta moves towards the desk and asks whether they can leave the agency[15] (l. 43-44). Lisa keeps verbally oriented towards the current topic (l. 45-46) (but see that she manipulates her handbag, an action which might be interpreted as a display of her orientation towards the upcoming departure from the agency). While Lisa is talking, Jeta pursues his effort to conclude the visit by moving forward and offering his hand to Caro, who responds to this action by shaking hands with him (Fig. 19).

14 On occasion Jeta verbally contributes to the new activity carried on by Caro and Lisa, although he does not physically join the spatial frame created by his co-participants. The contrast between his bodily orientation and his verbal output seems to be marking the parallel activity as secondary with respect to the main one, which he is bringing to conclusion (on parallel orientations and multiactivity in interaction see Mondada, 2006b).

15 Note that shortly before Jeta's proposal to leave, Lisa has moved her bag to her side, a relevant action in projecting the next departure (LeBaron & Jones 2002; Lauriel 2008).

Fig. 19

Yet Caro stays involved with Lisa, so their conversation continues (l. 47-49 and following). The completion of this conversation, followed by the conclusion of the whole encounter, is accomplished a little later, as illustrated in extract 7:

7) 9192avA21a (191:37–191:53) "sicilia"

```
((JETA is in front of CARO, one meter behind LISA))
59 CARO   potremmo vedere sì\ qualcosa di
          we could see yes    something
60        *simpatico* voi xxx se* eventualmente voi venite fra un mesetto
           nice       you     if in case      you come in a month
   LISA   *.........*removes plastic bag from desk*-->
61           *un mesetto e mezzo* valutiamo le cose
              a month and a half we'll see things
   LISA   -->*bag on arm--------*
62 LISA   #eh#
           eh
   LISA   #..#-->
63 CARO   e vediamo sulla* scelta=
          and we'll see the choice
   LISA                --->*stands upright-->>
64 JETA   =la tasca +principalmen+te+
           the pocket mainly
   LISA              +gazes at JETA+,,+
65        (0.7) *(0.2)
   CARO         *...-->
66 LISA   +°xxx *xxx (frega *niente) xxx°
                      (I don't care)
   LISA   +gazes at Caro-->
   LISA         *...........*shakes hands-->
   CARO                   -->*shakes hands-->
67 JETA   =l'+a*s[s*egno* io ve l'ho #dato +e/
           the cheque   I gave it to you right
   LISA   -->+gazes at Jeta----------------+
   LISA     -->*,,,*
   CARO     -->*,,,*hand lifted up-->
   JETA                              #turns towards the exit-->
68 CARO           [signor jeta/ graz- signor *jeta:
                   mister Jeta than- mister Jeta
   CARO                                    -->*hand extended-->
69        (0.2)
70 CARO   una #mano
          one hand
   JETA    -->#moves towards CARO-->
71 JETA   *scusate*
          I'm sorry
   JETA   *.......*-->
72        (0.9)
```

```
73 CARO       *grazie    mi*ll#e
               thanks a million
   CARO    -->*shakes hands*
   JETA    -->*shakes hands*
   JETA                    -->#turns towards the exit-->>
74 JETA   PRE:GO:
          you're welcome
75 CARO   arrivederci
          goodbye
76 LISA   buonasera
          good evening
```

During Caro's turn in lines 59-60 Lisa removes a plastic bag from the desk and begins to stand up (l. 62). This occurs at the moment Caro suggests a new visit to discuss the vacation the two ladies have been discussing so far. Then Jeta comments on the need to consider the fares of this new trip, to which Lisa responds with a non-affiliative turn (l. 66). During the pause in line 65 Caro initiates a hand movement which clearly projects the handshaking with Lisa, which occurs immediately after. At this point Lisa turns her gaze towards her partner, who first makes sure he delivered the cheques to Caro (l. 67) and then turns towards the exit. All participants are now clearly oriented towards the next departure of the two customers. But interestingly the agent is not yet ready: she calls back Jeta and offers him her hand (l. 68), thus inviting him into a new handshake, which happens immediately after (l. 73). It is only after this action and the following thanking and goodbye sequences that the customers take their leave (l. 74-76).

Once more this case illustrates the relevance of participants' mutual and collaborative orientation for the accomplishment of the closing. Jeta's proposal to initiate the conclusion of the visit by multimodally reconfiguring the interactional space turned out to be temporarily unsuccessful. Indeed, his co-participants maintained 'active' the (con)current interactional space by reciprocally engaging with gaze and body orientation on the discussion of a new topic, before finally aligning towards the closing of the encounter.

Unlike what was described in the previous cases, the standing up movement operated by Jeta does not by itself initiate the closing of the conversation and the correlated departure from the agency. This proves that closing-relevant practices such as delivering relevant objects, standing up or shaking hands are not efficacious *per se,* but are sensitive to what occurs in the surrounding environment. As we have described, the fact that the interaction might continue after a handshaking has occurred, shows how moving the encounter to conclusion is the result of a subtle and articulated orchestration of multiple activities, to which interactants jointly contribute. Specifically, the analysis shows the relevance of the closing-relevant activities' sequential organisation, in which the handshaking is typically followed by the thanking and goodbye sequences.

5. Discussion

We have examined some of the ways in which participants in both dyadic and multiparty interactions in a travel agency organise and close their encounters. In this specific context the closing implies an initial reconfiguration of the interactional space and its following dissolution, which takes place with the customers taking their leave from the agency. The achievement of these closings involve multiple alignments, multimodally accomplished. The examination of long sequences of action enables the description of how participants embody their orientation towards the closing in different ways: they can orient to it verbally, by summarising the information given/received, making arrangements for next visits or contacts, inserting specific resources such as the Italian *va bene*/*va be'*/*va buo'*; or they can engage in activities such as handing over a ticket or another travel document to a co-participant. For closing to progress, the participants' alignment with the closing-oriented actions is required. If this does not occur, then the closing event is suspended, and continuations occur. We have also observed that the final stage of the closing sequence is typically constituted by ritual exchanges (handshakes, thanking, goodbye formulas, body orientation towards the upcoming departure, etc.). Nonetheless, engaging in these events if all participants are not oriented towards the same line of action does not lead to the accomplishment of the pursued action. Thus, the closure of these encounters is the result of the moment by moment organisation of the verbal and visual activities of all the parties involved in the interactional event. Moreover, these activities seem to be related to the type of visit in which they are embedded. We noted for instance that in "last visits" closing sequences are recurrently initiated by a routine activity such as the delivery of the travel documents, which shows that the larger booking event has been brought to an end. In the cases where the current encounter is likely going to lead to further "follow up visits", the closings are articulated in more lengthy sequences, rich in negotiations, re-openings, and so on.

In sum, the shift to the closing of an interaction with multiple parties, dealing with multiple involvements (cf. Goffman, 1963), is subject to negotiation, and its organisation not only responds to the general interactional contingencies, such as for example re-openings initiated by a co-participant, but also to the specific material (such as the manipulation of key physical elements present in the surrounding space, e.g., the ticket) and social (such as the asymmetry among participants deriving from the particular type of encounter, e.g. informal vs. institutional) environment in which these encounters occur. The practices enacted to close and depart from a service encounter are indeed responsive to social constraints such as, for instance, the fact that one of the participants will remain in the agency or that she is interested in making sure all the possible information is delivered before the customers take their leave. These

factors are certainly relevant and distinguish these from other closing sequences or 'ritualistic performances' (LeBaron & Jones, 2002) occurring in different interactional settings.

In conclusion, the study of how participants in concert with each other complete their institutional encounter, whereby the physical departure from a shared space (in contrast to what occurs in telephone conversations for instance) is implied, shows the relevance of a multimodal approach in the study of closings, adjusted to the place of the closing within the larger ongoing series of encounters, and sensitive to the specific physical and social factors present in the given institutional setting.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions

/ \	rising or falling intonation of the preceding segment
↑↓	rising or falling intonation of the next segment (dotted underline)
(1.5)	timed pause in seconds and tenths of seconds
[ ]	beginning and end of overlap
xxx	inaudible segment
( )	dubious hearing
((writes))	transcriber's comments
< >	slowed down tempo
> <	faster tempo
=	contiguous utterances
<u>ca</u>sa	stress
CASA	high volume
CASA	middle-high volume
°casa°	low volume
:	stretching of prior syllable
ca-	cut-off
^	liaison
'h	inbreath
h'	outbreath
ˇ	glottal stop
ca^{h}sa^{h}	pronounced laughing
+	beginning and end of a gaze orientation
*	beginning and end of a gesture
#	beginning and end of a body movement
.....	gesture/gaze/body movement preparation
----	gesture/gaze/body movement maintenance
,,,,,	gesture/gaze/body movement withdrawal
-->	gesture/gaze/body movement continuing in the following lines
-->>	gesture/gaze/body movement beyond the extract/beginning before the extract
~~>	continuing gesture, movement or gaze (end not visible in the data)
>>	gesture/gaze/body movement beginning before the first line of the excerpt
•	situation of the interaction represented in the corresponding figure