Responsive animation and the negotiation of (shared) self-deprecating attributes and experiences in interaction

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\textbf{A B S T R A C T}

Speaking on one’s own behalf and asserting one’s entitlement to assess oneself are regular features of interaction, but participants often sound for others through practices like responsive animation, through which they are seen to be temporarily “doing being” others in a responsive slot. In this paper we study a collection of responsive animations consisting primarily of non-lexical vocalisations with gestural ensembles produced in contexts where territorial rights are in tension. We focus on environments where a participant engages in self-deprecating disclosures around past or projected negative happenings that may be shared by a co-participant (albeit experienced independently) and who animates an aspect of these in response. We describe how co-participants sound for each other by deploying animations that instead of minimising deprecating components, actually amplify them through a transformed and creative vocal and/or visual demonstration of a jointly negotiated (shared) attribute or experience. These animations create brief moments of heightened involvement and other-attentiveness before transitioning to a new/next order of conversational business.

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1. Introduction

Speaking on one's own behalf is not just a common feature of conversation (Lerner, 1996) but also a form of entitlement that speakers display and negotiate through their interactional practices (Goffman, 1974; Heritage, 2011; Pomerantz, 1980). Speakers exercise this right in several ways, such as by publicly assessing their own experiences and personal traits (Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Speer, 2019) and asserting their rights to know themselves and their experiences better than others (Heritage, 2012; Sacks, 1984). However, speakers may also incorporate mechanisms by which they temporarily speak on behalf of others, one of such forms being what, following prior work, we call animation (Cantarutti, 2020; Goffman, 1981).

Animation is a multifaceted practice with which a participant can temporarily present themselves as a “sounding box” (Goffman, 1981) for a “figure”, in other words, sounding for or “doing being” (Sacks, 1992) a past/fictional version of themselves, absent or co-present others, or even inanimate objects (“ventriloquising”, Tannen, 2010). Through animation, participants stage “live” in the here-and-now of interaction a behaviour or a concept, abstract or concrete, fictional or real (Terraschke, 2013), or a sound effect (cfr. ideophones, Dingemanse, 2018) belonging to another person, object, or time. In

\textsuperscript{1}While we use Goffman’s “sounding box” metaphor for the role of the animator and the term “sounding for” in alignment with the theme of this Special Issue, we take the word “sound” to actually cover all forms of multimodal activity.

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other words, animation is a form of “demonstration” or “depiction” (Clark, 2016; Clark and Gerrig, 1990), and so it requires that it be made recognisable as such to a co-participant, which is often done through lexico-grammatical shifts in deictic anchoring as well as disjunctive shifts in gaze, facial expressions, prosody, posture, and/or gesture (e.g. Cantarutti, 2021; Couper-Kuhlen, 1999; Klewitz and Couper-Kühlen, 1999).

While frequently employed by tellers, animation is also a practice available for story recipients. Our introductory example below showcases our phenomenon: an animation, in a responsive slot, of someone else’s just-described experience. Housemates Ben, Kerry, and James are in the kitchen preparing their respective meals debating whether to leave the camera on during dinner.

Excerpt 1 RCEHousemates “Spat” (GAT-2 Fine and Mondada Multimodal Transcription conventions; animations in bold. Gesture delimitation: *= Ben)

01 KER:  i ~SAID i `dOnt particu-\textit{lar}\textit{ly like EATing my ~DINNer}-=
02 = = <\textit{p}> in `\textit{FRONT of it};
03 `SHOULD i? (`HEIGHho;)
04 BEN:  `OH.
05 KER:  `\textit{who}: \textit{CA:RES-} (0.6)
06 BEN:  `\textit{who}: \textit{gIves a i-\textit{SHI:TE}-}
07 `\textit{who}:s gonna `\textit{S\textbf{EE} it a i-\textit{GA:I[N-}
08 KER:  [\textbf{I}] `\textit{SPAT; =
09 =all over my com`\textit{PUTer (for/with)} that
fig.   #1.1
10 `\textit{YESter}*\textit{day;}[<\textit{pp}> so>]
   *\textit{raises LH-\ldots-}>
   fig.   #1.2
11 BEN:  [\textbf{pbr}   ][*\textbf{ff}   #(0.5)
   -> *\textit{LH on mouth, shoulders up & down}*
   #1.3 #1.4
12 `\textit{with} #=\textit{MILK}~uhh (0.8)
   ben (0.6 + ~0.2)
   =\textit{looks tw Kerry} =\textit{tw James}
   fig.   #1.5
13 JAM:  ?ha

Kerry expresses discomfort about being recorded while she eats and engages in self-talk about whether to consent to it (“Should I, heigh-ho?”, line 3) followed by a display of grudging acceptance (“who cares”, line 5). Ben orients to Kerry’s self-talk by producing two reformulated versions, one which rephrases her idiom in stronger terms, and one which unpacks the implications of “who cares”, the belief that the video will not be watched again (lines 6–7). Thus, Ben is at this point sounding for Kerry with close reformulations prosodically matched to hers and demonstrating his own understanding regarding the recording situation he is also part of.

Our attention in this paper will be drawn to phenomena like the next animation in lines 10–11. Ben’s contribution above does not receive an acknowledgement; instead, Kerry moves on to disclose an embarrassing situation from the previous day (lines 8–10, spitting all over her computer on camera) closed with a trail-off “so” (Walker, 2012), leaving an unexplicated second part to her account for surrendering to being filmed. The spitting episode had been witnessed by Ben, who appends to Kerry’s talk a non-lexical vocalisation (Keevallik and Ogden, 2020) iconic of spitting (line 11) with a short bilabial closure followed by a transition of fricatives increasing in voicing (impressionistically transcribed as [pbr,v]) and hearably ambiguous with forms of laughter.\footnote{In the next sequence (omitted due to space constraints) Ben repeats the vocalisation in a prosodically upgraded manner accompanied with the forward movement of his cupped hands in front of his mouth towards Kerry. This is taken as evidence of line 10 being iconic of spitting.} The vocalisation is gesturally produced with his left hand towards his mouth, his neck driven forward, and his shoulders raised (Fig. 1.2). This animation is completed with an other-continuation (Sidnell, 2012), the prepositional phrase “with milk” (line 12) grammatically embedded into Kerry’s own formulation, demonstrating his own access to the event. During this latter part of the animation, Ben looks at Kerry (Fig. 1.5), who does not offer any verbal acknowledgement, whereas James does, through laughter.
This excerpt anticipates a number of generalities we will discuss in this paper around the tension between speaking on one’s own behalf and *sounding for others* via animation. The spitting animation is a form of demonstrating instead of describing, creating a “physical analog” (Clark, 2016: 342) of what the animated figure is said to have experienced. In spite of visibly and hearably “doing being” Kerry by demonstrating a behaviour initially retold by her which is used as “raw material” for the animation, Ben’s version comes from his own understanding of the bodily experience coupled with his witnessing of Kerry’s spitting episode, while the sensory experience of spitting and the associated embarrassment belong to Kerry’s own realm.

As a result, Ben’s vocalised and gestural contributions make sense only with reference to Kerry’s prior disclosures, and thus his animation is a selective and creative transformation of Kerry’s description of an action for a different purpose in the here-and-now. This animation happens at a point in which Kerry has disclosed what is treated (although not explicitly) as an embarrassing in a self-deprecating way, something that she is entitled to share from her own perspective and which makes some form of sympathy or support a potential relevant next (Pomerantz, 1984). What Ben’s animation offers, however, is not a minimisation of the negative consequences of the experience to her public social image (Goffman, 1967), but an amplification of it for teasing and entertainment purposes, although on this occasion, it receives a po-faced treatment by Kerry (Drew, 1987).

While other work on similar phenomena describes how co-participants may be recruited to enact parts of a story (Peng et al., 2021; Thompson and Suzuki, 2014) or sound for others during simultaneous activity (Keevallik, 2014; Wiggins and Keevallik, 2020), in this paper we focus on the ways in which co-participants, of their own accord, use animation to sound for co-present others in environments like the one above, where the rights to speak on one’s behalf are highly relevant to one’s own social image (Goffman, 1967). That is, we look at contexts where a participant has disclosed self-deprecating assessments or experiences in serious or humorous ways. We will show how these self-deprecating contributions by A trigger the negotiation of participant understandings of relevant attributes, assessments, and experiences, and how these concerns are addressed via a responsive animation through which a co-participant momentarily sounds for their co-participant (A) or for both (A + B) as a collective.

Our analysis offers a first approach to a previously-understudied kind of responsive animation involving only minimal verbal content: multimodal gestalts (Mondada, 2018) of non-lexical vocalisations and gestural ensembles that may be preceded or followed by their lexical affiliates (Schegloff, 1985). Our multimodal interactional linguistic study demonstrates how the distribution of labour between description/evaluation and demonstration is done by co-participants in these contexts through the transformative, recontextualising (Günthner, 1997), playful, and dramaturgical features of animation to visibly and hearably *sound for others* and thus jointly manage delicate social issues around disclosing self-deprecating attributes and experiences.

2. Data and methods

This paper adopts a multimodal approach (Mondada, 2018) to Interactional Linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2001) and Conversation Analysis (Sacks et al., 1974) to the study of a collection of animations initiated in responsive position. A responsive animation has here been widely operationalised as a practice by which a participant in a responsive slot is found to be speaking on their co-participant’s behalf through the provision of a visual or vocal demonstration of a behaviour/process, or the voicing of something/someone described in the prior turn. These responsive animations can be understood to be a coherent response only with reference to the prior turn.

Initially, 66 cases of responsive animations as defined above were identified in 20 hours of videorecorded everyday interaction in different varieties of British, Irish, and American English(es). Data come from two conversational corpora (MCY, Cantarutti, 2018, and MPI/RCE, Rossi, 2011) collected with due ethics approval from the University of York and with informed consent from participants for recording and publication, as well as from unscripted interactions obtained from YouTube channels. A turn-by-turn analysis revealed that responsive animations mostly emerged during tellings, and in particular, in response to a participant’s self-deprecating self-disclosure/self-denigrating humour (24) or after other-deprecation (32), while other cases occurred in response to proposals (7) and announcements (3). To supplement prior work done on animation after self-deprecating turns (Cantarutti, 2020), the first sub-collection was selected for this study. While the social actions and social consequences of the use of these animations are comparable across cases, the collection features great variability in animation design, ranging from extended multi-unit turns to non-lexical and gesture-only renderings. Consistent with the types of the phenomena discussed in other work in this Special Issue, this paper will consider the whole self-deprecation collection but report more specifically on the findings across the 9/24 cases designed as non-lexical vocalisations and/or gestural ensembles, as their minimal form poses interesting yet-unanswered questions that this paper will start addressing and thus lay the foundations for future work.

Transcriptions follow GAT-2 (Selting et al., 2011) and Mondada’s (2018) Multimodal Transcription conventions. Phonetic transcriptions use the International Phonetic Alphabet and the EXT-IPA (Ball et al., 2018). Animations are marked in bold, although it is sustained that the boundaries between animated and non-animated material are functionally fuzzy (Cantarutti, 2020; Ehmer & Mandel, 2021). Multimodal detail is transcribed with greater granularity in the focal sections of the extracts.

The registering, annotation, and analysis of the different multimodal resources involved an overall parametric approach, keeping close track of the temporality and alignment of lexico-syntax, phonetic features, and gestural articulators and trajectories. Phonetic observations were recorded using an initial impressionistic auditory approach (Local and Walker, 2005).
and validated through instrumental acoustic techniques on Praat (Boersma and Weenink, 2022). Visual trajectories, gestural articulators and phases for manual gestures, posture, and gaze (Kendon, 2004; McNeill, 1992) were annotated in ELAN (Brugman & Russel, 2004) with the video on mute, and were later integrated with Praat textgrids in order to determine relevant speech-gesture alignments.

3. Self-deprecation and territorial rights

The cases of animation studied here are deployed in environments where a participant has engaged in a self-disclosure of a self-deprecating kind during the turn prior to the animation, or slightly earlier on in the ongoing activity. In order to understand how the opportunities to sound for others arise in these contexts of self-imposed social vulnerability, let us review what prior studies have posited on these social actions.

Self-deprecation and self-denigrating humour refer to actions with which participants make selective aspects of their own identity relevant in interaction (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998; Visapää, 2021), that is, we take them to constitute forms of self-disclosure. Self-disclosures are understood in the literature as reports of personal information designed to be heard as newsworthy and relevant to current circumstances, "revealing one’s inner self to other people" (Antaki et al., 2005:181) but somehow "over and above what is expected" (ibid., p. 195) for the business at hand.

Self-deprecation in particular refers to a form of negative self-assessment, an interactional way of lowering, humbling or disparaging oneself towards an addressee (Kim, 2014; Speer, 2019). These forms of self-criticism formulated directly or indirectly (Pomerantz, 1984) by participants in interaction have been found to pre-empt or deflect trouble relative to recent actions of their own (Speer, 2019), manage moral issues around their self-presentation (Stohr, 2019; Yu, 2013), and build affiliation in delicate social environments (Childs and Walsh, 2017). Self-deprecation can be done humorously (Schnurr and Chan, 2011), which entails using oneself as the target of mockery (Haugh, 2010, 2014), for example, as a result of an embarrasable (Goffman, 1956; Hepburn et al., 2021). Through these forms of self-denigrating humour, co-participants can disclose their weaknesses and make light of an otherwise conflicitive situation (Jefferson, 1984).

Deploying or responding to self-disclosures of a self-deprecating kind makes a number of issues relevant regarding speakers’ “differentially available” entitlements to an experience (Sacks, 1984:243), and their rights to disclose and assess themselves are negotiated around their respective “territories of experience” (Heritage, 2011). First of all, in order to make an assessment, access to the referent object or experience is required, which can be invoked through their own first-hand experience (Type 1 knowables, Pomerantz, 1980) or via mediated access (Type 2 knowables); they may be part of a single participants’ territory (A-events or B-events, Labov and Fanshel, 1977), or they may be shared across participants (AB events).

The sequential organisation of self-deprecating experiences and assessments in interaction reveals participants’ concern with making epistemic claims for themselves in terms of rights and primacy (Raymond and Heritage, 2006), displaying how “the thoughts, experiences, hopes, and expectations of individuals are treated as theirs to know and describe” (Heritage, 2011: 6), but also in terms of how they are to be received. The design of participants’ turns reveals the strategies by which they effect their “conversational patrol and defence of information preserves” (Heritage and Raymond, 2005: 34) turn by turn. Issues of epistemic primacy and subordination (Heritage and Raymond, 2005) are interactionally managed by going first or second, and by formatting assessments in downgraded or upgraded ways, which in turn, pose certain restrictions onto recipients.

Being on the receiving end of a (humorously- or seriously-framed) self-deprecating disclosure presents listeners with a number of dilemmas of ownership involving how to “deal with someone else’s experience” (Sacks, 1984: 423). Raymond and Heritage (2006) argue that when engaging with experiences and assessments by others, co-participants need to manage a distance-involvement dilemma: on the one hand, by demonstrating independent access, and on the other, by displaying genuine commitment in a way that avoids an appropriation of the affairs or feelings of others (p. 701). From this perspective, sounding for others as seen above would seem to be a form of violation of other people’s territorial preserves. Nonetheless, in prior work on co-animation (i.e. A-initiated animations continued by B in responsive position, Cantarutti, 2020, 2022), we show how this facilitates affiliation through temporary association (Lerner, 1993), which means that animation as a practice seems to provide participants with a licence to take up and transform co-participants’ experiences. The rest of this paper will provide evidence as to how this also holds true for B-initiated animations, although with different social consequences.

As specified earlier, self-deprecation involves proffering or invoking an assessment. Pomerantz (1984) demonstrated that initial assessments make relevant a co-participant’s agreement or disagreement—the former treated as a preferred action—whereas self-deprecation creates a context where agreeing would entail engaging in co-participant criticism. Therefore, self-deprecation generally projects a disagreement as a preferred-next. Pomerantz describes a number of strategies by which participants offer these forms of disagreement in contiguous position, namely: partial repeats, negations, compliments or recategorizations designed as contrastive assessments, and forms of undermining the validity of the self-deprecation by either presenting the negative attributes as “normal”, or alternatively by criticising the actual activity of proffering them. Agreements with self-deprecating assessments by A, in contrast, tend to be formulated with markers of dispreferance, and may involve downgraded “weak” forms of confirmation, minimal acknowledgements, or silence.

Of specific relevance to our work is the finding that self-deprecation may also be oriented to by special forms of agreement that incorporate “me too” deprecations by a co-participant (Pomerantz, 1984) through second or my-side stories (Arminen, 2004; Pomerantz, 1980; Selting, 2012). Studies of self-deprecating self-disclosures in contexts like medical interaction and police interrogation also found similar orientations (Childs and Walsh, 2017; Sacks, 1992) and have shown how these may be used to normalise a co-participant’s negative experience (e.g. Heritage and Lindström, 1998). From a moral perspective, Stohr
(2019) argues that self-deprecation opens a normative slot for a form of mutual inculcation of virtues and for participants to hold each other accountable for lacking them. By self-deprecating in response to a self-deprecation, participants “restore and affirm equality in circumstances where it has been destabilized” (p. 173). In our collection, as we will see below, animation emerges in contexts of high reciprocity where participants have cemented shared understandings and have normalised their negative attributes and experiences already, but where there may be competing trajectories that need to be managed.

Our work sees self-deprecating disclosures and/or humour as situated actions by which participants assess personal traits and experiences as (potentially) negative, embarrassing, or as in some form of deficit. They may be formulated in a playful or more serious manner, and with different levels of explicitness. The next section will focus in particular on the role of responsive animation in managing the territorial concerns that self-deprecations make relevant for producers and recipients.

4. Animation and the negotiation of (shared) self-deprecating attributes and experiences

We have established that our interest lies in looking at the role of short responsive animations deployed in particular socially-delicte environments where a participant recently engaged in a playful or serious self-deprecating disclosure. We will present three more examples from the collection where participants offer responsive animations designed as multimodal gestalts of non-lexical vocalisations with gestural demonstrations. These animations are selective and creative demonstrations that orient to, transform -and can only be understood with reference to-the co-participant’s self-deprecating disclosures.

While our first example (“Spat”) illustrated this phenomenon in the context of a past situation retold by one speaker that is animated by a second for the entertainment of a third, in a context where all three participants had different forms of first-hand access (as experiencers or witnesses) to the event described, our next cases will offer slightly different contexts and uses of responsive animation. The following two examples exhibit cycles of second stories (Arminen, 2004; Pomerantz, 1980; Selting, 2012; Siromaa, 2012) about past events where both participants’ rights to produce self-deprecations are exercised simultaneously but from their own individual perspectives. In these environments of high reciprocity, the self-deprecations become wallowing ground for both co-participants who demonstrate their understanding of their shared troubles but from the perspective of their own lived experiences. We will reveal how the animation displays their understanding of what experiences felt like or were like for one or both of them. In other words, co-participants may ambiguously be also sounding for themselves while they sound for others in advancing their own animated versions of what other participants have described and which they themselves may have also experienced independently.

The first of these examples features friends Jon and Dan exchanging stories about their orthodontists. Jon initiates a telling about his own experience with orthodontic treatment (lines 2–6), which is followed by a sequence of incremental like-experiences shared by both participants, with mutual recognitional displays (lines 7–17) designed with “oh-prefaced” forms of agreement -i.e. markers of epistemic upgrading that reveal epistemic independence and primacy (Heritage and Raymond, 2005)-, with which both Dan and Jon uphold their own independent access to the experiences described.

Excerpt 2.1. MCY02BAR “London look”

02 JON: <<cr> my ortho”DONtist was s:O "WEIRD. {.)o”KAY,>
03 so i wEnt to "SEE her for "MAYbe: “ah (1.0)
04 “THREE years? = "MAYbe a bit ‘LONGer?
05 like {.) fo:x LIKE? "TRAIN tracks, =
06 and then re”TAINer(s) and s[tUff; ]=
07 DAN: [<<l,p>’YEAH, >]
08 DAN: [”TRAIN trA:cks] O:H ["yEah yeah ’YSAH]
09 JON: [ruhm:: . ] [i “HAVE-
10 JON: i i had ‘FULL on ”TRAIN track[s; = <<sty> ’FRONT a:nd ”BOTTom,>]
11 DAN: [i “hAd the ”FU:LL ]
12 <<all> and thEres: (.) did you (Also) have those
13 e”LASTic> ”BANDs; = be”TWE:EN the::
14 JON: ’O:::h ”YE:::AH
15 DAN: <<all> youre like i :”cAnt? open my ”MOUTH,
16 [they its] ”GREAT.] ”h haha
17 JON: [’O:::h ”YE:::AH ]

By this point, these competing yet converging my-side descriptions have featured abundant overlapping talk and formatting of resources. After a lapse (line 18), both speakers produce simultaneous starts (lines 19–20) of new assessments, Dan assessing himself ironically as a result of the dental treatment, Jon assessing the appearance of his teeth specifically. Dan introduces a new element in their shared list (line 23), a gap between his teeth, which he repeats in the clear with the addition of “too”. Dan’s description of the gap (line 23) is demonstrated gesturally, produced with a crunched facial expression and his right index finger tapping his mouth repeatedly (see Figs. 2.1–2–7). This gestural demonstration contributes to the salience of the gap as topicalised for joint discussion. Jon’s trajectory of talk changes direction after Dan’s mention of the gap between his teeth to offer confirmation of this as another shared feature, done through a new marker of epistemic independence: a second upgraded assessment (“nice”, line 25 > “lovely”, line 24).
Excerpt 2.2. MCY02BAR “London look” (Gesture delimitation: * = Dan, + Jon)

18  (0.8)
19  DAN: [i lOoked? B:EAUtiful,]
20  JON: [i hAd dis:’GUSTing ] tEeth for a ‘WHILE,
21  DAN: [<<all> #(and/i had) a *nIce> #="GAP"] *
       *RH up tw teeth*
       =crunched face->
     fig. #2.1 #2.2
22  JON: [ its `Like you ~GET ]
23  DAN: = (I #*** # had a nice) #="gAp #*`TOO.#* = (it `was.)
       * ->*
       *
       (RIF taps against teeth x4)
       jon +looks up @Dan
     fig. #2.3#2.4 #2.5 #2.6 #2.7
24  JON: `A:::h = i had a `LOVEly gap;

As the next form of characterisation of his my-side description of the gap, Dan offers a media reference: the “London look” (line 25), a slogan from a Revlon commercial featuring a model with a gap between her front teeth. Media references are said to create possibilities for the negotiation of identities (Sierra, 2019), and in this case, a feature that is presented as negative (a gap between the teeth) is playfully associated to glamour, in keeping with prior joint assessments also done in ironically positive ways. The reference and its associated attributes are underspecified for the co-participant to take up in recognition. In Dan’s case, recognition is recruited with a right index finger repeated pointing gesture towards Jon, and with raised eyebrows and fixed gaze onto him (Figs. 2.8–2.12) with post-positioned laughter particles, with Jon producing his own form of laughter in response (line 26).

3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RbeOl4swxo&ab_channel=RimmelLondonUS.
Excerpt 2.3. MCY02BAR “London look” (Gesture delimitation: *◇ = Dan, + ● Jon)

25 DAN: (h)ad the*\'LON *Don *lock.0*hehe hehe *
dan *RIF up *quick point fw *point *point back to home*
0raised eyebrows-------------*

26 JON: u::hm
27 #m?h* h*h*

28 (0.9) (animated demonstration)
#+(0.2) #+(0.4) +(0.2)
jon +raises L/RH +LH tw face/RH fw +R/L fists tw face

29 DAN: #<<k::ih*
jon +R/L fists hit tw face +retraction tw home
◆crunched face
◆showing teeth

30 ◆shshi ◆hi
dan ◆raises RH tw Jon ◆

31 JON: <<cr> i HAM#mer and;#+(0.6) +
jon +RH up + LH down & RH up one hit+
dan ◆nods◆

32 DAN: "yeah?"
33 JON: <<l, p> "SCREWdriver;>

34 (0.7)
35 JON: ((lip smack)) u::hm
36 but "L1Terally, (0.4)
37 Every single "TIME; (.)
38 i went to "SEE this Ortho`DONtist;
39 Every "S::INGLE time,
40 (1.3)
During a moment of lack of verbal activity after the media reference, Jon raises his left hand towards his face, scrunches his nose and opens his mouth. He then holds his right hand up in a fist some distance away from his left hand and approximates it to his right hand, emulating a hit (Figs. 2.13–2.17). This hand gesture is iconic of a hammer hitting a carving tool and acts like a metaphorical representation of the gap between the teeth, as if created by these tools, then followed with a shorter hitting gesture and the post-produced lexical affiliate “hammer and screwdriver” (lines 31, 33; Figs. 2.18–2.19). Jon’s facial expression also takes up the crunched face and open mouth configuration used earlier by Dan in his introduction to the gap. Whether by accident or not, Dan produces a form of laughter that begins with a velar ejective sound [k:] (line 29), which is timed to Jon’s hitting gesture, making for an appropriate vocalisation to accompany it.

Jon’s demonstration of understanding and creative reconstruction of the tooth gap description initially raised by Dan is therefore done through a metaphorical gestural demonstration followed by its lexical affiliate, which in itself is also an independent creative and metaphorical but verbal representation of the gap between the two front teeth. It is not clear to the analyst whether any nuances present in the media reference by Dan have been duly taken up by Jon, but Dan’s response celebrates Jon’s representation of affairs nonetheless. The gesture is a moment where co-participants’ my-side descriptions and assessments converge into the shared business of dealing with a single participant’s contribution, whose attributes and experiences are sounded for by another. As in other cases in the collection, this brief moment of mutual appreciation happens before either disengagement or a topical shift, and this occurrence of animation before the resumption of a telling is also a feature of our next example, where second stories are equally at play.

Our next excerpt demonstrates a similar phenomenon but shows how sounding for someone else who shares one’s own attributes or experience can also be a form of sounding for their own selves as part of the same collective. This example comes from a different kind of social context and medium, as it is a conversation during an online convocation event held via a streaming platform for the class of 2020 at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in the US.4 The speakers are two graduate celebrities: a comedian (Trent) and a musician (Alan), accompanied by one of the graduates and the University President, whose microphones are on mute.

Trent retells his experience as a young undergraduate in awe of the number of students on campus outnumbering the population of his small home town (lines 36–40). Alan aligns and offers a second story, also comparing his native town population to that of one of his crowded classes (lines 41–48; 50–52) before adding another experience to their list of small-town-boy discoveries upon starting university: his first ever encounter with a lift at a school and a two-tiered fountain, both accompanied with co-speech gestures (56–59). These descriptions are closed with the imprecation “I swear to God” (line 59), playfully orienting to his disclosed life experience deficits as unbelievable or extraordinary.

Example 3.1 YTHatsOff “Mind blown” (Gesture delimitation: ’Alan, + Trent)

```plaintext
36 TRE: And im ¬LIKE- (0.4)
37 you could fitt the entire popu`LAtion,
38 of my: to:wn `WATer brook;
39 insI:de the Uni`VERSity.
40 <[all]> like thAts how many `STudents there wAs.
41 ALA: one of my first `CLASSES was `ENGLISH;
42 a ↑THOUSand (in xxxx) In the `u:ih (0.4)
43 in the big `LEcTure hall; ¬
44 = in: the: the `Arts building, (0.4)
45 ↓iat the `TIME; = <<all and it was:>> (.)
46 ↓thInk there was a ROUND
47 tsts it was mOre than (.). pEtty ↑HARbour.
48 <[l]> it was: the popu`L[Ation was;]> (0.3) of Of my
49 TRE: [hahaha ]
50 ALA: `English `COUrsE. (.). `DEFinitely my ¬my (0.3)
51 s:: psYch a `THOUSand course;
52 was `b[igger than pEtty] ↑HARbour' (0.3)
53 TRE: [hehehe ]
```

4 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A497e63wUuA.
Trent’s response to this telling involves a non-lexical vocalisation evocative of a slow explosion (line 60) beginning with a long bilabial closure separated with a long fricative release (impressionistically: [pː]; see Fig. 3.1). This is accompanied with an extended gestural trajectory starting with the fingers of both hands in contact with the head, and then verbally followed by a long period of rounded labiodental friction as the arms slowly extend away from the head and to the sides, with the fingers separating until both palms are open (Figs. 3.2–3.4). As in our prior example, the gesture is reminiscent of a media reference, a meme on social media inspired by a satirical TV show5 that is normally used to refer to “mind-boggling” experiences. Indeed, the gesture and vocalisation are followed by a lexical affiliate (line 61), the standalone assessment “mind-blown” that is attributed to the subject (cfr. implications of having used “mind-blowing” as an external assessment of the experience) with no further grammatical contextualisation. Every aspect in the design of this response could be seen to be in excess for a mundane university experience, but they match the sense of mock awe conveyed in the stories by both participants, as does Alan’s own “honest to God”.

Example 3.2 YTHatsOff “Mind blown” (Gesture delimitation: “Alan, +H = Trent)

5 The meme originated from this scene: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I2kXG0zFaAM&ab_channel=MemeFountain.
The assessment is oriented to with a smile and a nod by Alan. Trent then offers a second instance of “mind-blown” (line 62) prosodically upgraded through sound lengthening and with a different gestural configuration (closed eyes, and a movement down of the head; Figs. 3.5–3.8) while Alan repeats his reference to the two-tiered fountain and his interjection “honest to God” (lines 63, 64), in forms of mock wonder.

Trent follows this second rendering of “mind-blown” with another assessment (“crazy”, line 66) but unlike the prior one, it is ascribed to the experience and not the experiencer. This assessment is also functionally ambiguous as to whether it is Trent’s so final appreciation of the story on his own behalf, or one that can be used to sound for Alan, but also for himself in their shared small-town-boy identities. Trent then produces an accented and loud “and”, used to resume his own telling but presented as in addition to the experience disclosed by Alan, appending this new story to the jointly-constructed list of university first impressions by small-town boys.

In this case, the collective experience is composed as a list of individual my-side stories, as in the “London Look” excerpt. The playful media references convey in short and effective ways some of the attributes and assessments that are being negotiated in ways that are for co-participants to recognise and, if treated as appropriate understandings, to even celebrate. What is more, as in “London look” above, by the time the animation is produced, the shareability of co-participants’ experiences has already been established. The responsive animation provides an embodied means to represent a shared experience and tick off the relevant affiliative concerns in this slot, although it is used also as a resource for resumption of one’s own second (or third) story (cfr. “pro-forma” affiliation, Weatherall and Keevallik, 2016). The animation is a short fleeting demonstration of understanding that appears to be designed “in excess” for the current situation and with ostensive levels of other-attentiveness. Like second stories, which amplify shared experiences (Arminen, 2004), so do these responsive animations by offering these visually- and vocally-noteworthy products staged for both co-participants to see, agree on, and negotiate as heightened moments of co-involvement before moving on. Because of this, these animations also interactionally mitigate the subsequent exit from a co-participant’s story to effect the interactional return to one’s own independent experience.

Our examples so far have showcased some of the different forms of variation in the way the animated content is designed and whose territories it is encroaching on. Our first example (“Spat”) featured B sounding for A based on something physically experienced by A, to which B and C were witnesses. It also showed how participant B can in more ambiguous ways also use animation to
subscribe to A’s concerns as their own (e.g., “A: who cares”, B: “who gives a shite, who’s gonna see it again”). Our second example (“London Look”) showed B sounding for A when demonstrating understanding of a playful attribute proposed by A based on something (the gap between the teeth) experienced by both independently, and in a similar vein, the “Mind-blown” example offers an assessment that can in fact be used by B to sound for A and A + B in their similar but independently experienced small-town-boy feelings. In all these cases, something in A’s self-deprecation is taken up, negotiated and appropriated by A and B in different ways, and offered by B in animation before the resumption of a previously-suspended order of business or a shift onto a next stage.

Our final example of animation adjacent to self-deprecating contexts differs from the previous ones in analytically-interesting ways. First, it does not reflect a past shared experience; instead, it is part of a subgroup where one of the speakers announces an upcoming situation and discloses their worry about an outcome that may have a negative effect on their social image. In responsive position, B takes up the worrying disclosure and proposes an imaginary playful outcome to the described situation, which is followed by an animation of such scenario. However different, the next example also shares common features with prior cases: A makes a self-deprecating disclosure, B shares a similar experience, and a component from one of the self-deprecating scenarios is taken up in animation by one of the participants through a non-lexical vocalisation and gestural demonstration before resumption of a prior order of business. This final example will provide further evidence as to how animation can creatively provide ways for a participant to appreciate but also to manage a co-participants’ attempt at encroaching on their territory.

The final excerpt (cfr. analysis in Keevallik and Ogden, 2020) shows friends Rachel (right) and Laura (left) discussing the heat of the sun and their fear of uneven sunburn on their skins. Laura announces her hope for a tanned back but expresses her concern about getting a hairline (lines 3–4), that is, an untanned area where the hair touches the skin. At this point where a marker of mild sympathy could have been made relevant, Rachel subscribes to Laura’s wishes to get tanned (lines 5–7), recycling some of the linguistic components of Rachel’s turn, namely the “I hope I get X” formulation, while specifying her own independent concern of an uneven tan on her arms.

**Excerpt 4.1 RCELAKE “Tan” (Gesture delineation: * Laura, + Rachel)**

As a response, and in the same way Laura projected her second-story-like worry, Laura now takes up Rachel’s “I feel” and uses it to express her concern that the hairmark is indeed in the making (line 8). These independent mild worries are also embodied independently, with both participants being simultaneously involved in gazing at and touching the bodily areas of concern (Figs. 4.1–4.4). As in the prior two examples, co-participants format-tie their second contributions creating forms of resonance (e.g. Siromaa, 2012) between each my-side contribution in a context of high reciprocity.

After a gap, as Laura begins her turn while looking towards her left shoulder (line 11), Rachel produces a competitive incoming (French and Local, 1986) with higher pitch and volume (line 12) resulting in Laura surrendering her turn and returning her gaze to Rachel with a smile. Rachel embeds a prepositional phrase into Laura’s syntax (format-tying to line 8) that projects a particular playful description of what the hairmark would look like (lines 12–13; cfr. “with milk” in Excerpt 1), which entails a negative consequence for Laura’s looks. Syntactically, this is an other-continuation (Couper-Kuhlen and Ono, 2007), but it is formatted with a pronoun anchored in Rachel’s own perspective as an observer (“with curly bits just marked onto your back”). Rachel is thus co-opting the expression of concern by Laura somehow subversively (Bolden et al., 2019), teasing Laura through a candidate description of the hairmark.

The telling/showing work in Rachel’s own turn is distributed vocally and visually: while describing the hairmark verbally, she is gesturally demonstrating the location and shape of what it could look like. This is done with her two hands towards her
shoulders, and her thumbs marking round movements towards her back, while gazing at Laura fixedly and smiling (Figs. 4.5–4.7). Laura’s gaze is also fixed on Rachel throughout. Fixed gaze patterns onto a co-participant in all our examples have appeared in contexts adjacent to animations, akin to what is described for gaze in recruiting co-tellers (Thompson and Suzuki, 2014), and they seem to contribute to the presentation of cheeky, improper, or smart contributions as something to be recognised (e.g. the media reference in “London look”, or the unspoken continuation of the trail-off “so” in the “Spat” example) and appreciated.

Excerpt 4.2 RCELAKE “Tan” (Gesture delimitation: *Δ Laura, + Rachel)

09 (0.9) 10 LAU: (lip smack)) 11 and [[<<f>>:¬THESE are (really) >]} 12 RAC: [wi #+with <<h> CUR§+ly ¬BI¥petition ] 13 rac +L arm up, IF extended tw shoulder 14 +LH touches L shoulder 15 +raises R arm IF extended tw R shoulder 16 fig. #4.5 #4.6 17 #*just [[<<f, :-)> ¬mar¥ked onto your [+-'BAΔ:CK?>>] 18 rac +IF L&R circular moves x2+ 19 *looks @Rac 20 Δraises RH IF 21 fig #4.7 22 23 LAU: [hihi ]
In response and after a brief display of laughter, Laura offers her own animated version of Rachel’s proposed scenario (lines 15–16): she squints her eyes, and draws two semicircular trajectories in the air, whose peaks are accompanied with alveolar lateral clicks (Figs. 4.8–4.10, Fig. 4.12), iconically representing the "curly bits." The sequence is closed with "boom" (line 19), an interjection not matched prosodically to the prior animation, and thus more likely to be treated as a form of non-animated closure to the playful segment (cfr. "crazy" in excerpt 3.2).

This example matches others in the collection where the public admission of mild worry or lack of confidence by one of the participants about a future outcome triggers a co-participant proposal of a playful transposition of the described situation into an absurd scenario. This is followed by an animation of an aspect of these fictional scenarios, often responded to and expanded in co-animation (Cantarutti, 2020). While in some cases these negotiations happen entirely through animated turns, in the prior example the co-participants are distributing the description/demonstration work among themselves, with Laura producing an animated version of Rachel’s proposed scenario, and thus appropriating it in co-creating it.

Because the animation is presented in a new light and medium and from a particular perspective, it recontextualises the self-deprecation into "something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (Goffman, 1974: 45). The transformation from an exchange of light worries in the here-and-now into a playful moment of shared imagination involving fiction offers a form of "relaxation" of the constraints in dealing with a co-participant’s territorial entitlements, as the events have not yet happened. What is more, because animation as such "loosens the bond" between the real-life individuals and the animated figures (Goffman, 1974: 541), it constitutes a licence for participants to engage in delicate forms of teasing self and others in ways that need not be taken at face value (Holt and Clift, 2006).

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6 The spectrogram shows background noise from the fountain and the people sitting close by to the speakers.

7 It is acknowledged that it is not clear what “boom” means, except for its role as a sequence-closing element. Urban Dictionary defines “boom” as “an exclamation used to define/draw attention to an excellent outcome”. If this was the intended use, then it could support Laura’s own displayed rights to project her own playful outcomes after Rachel’s teasing proposal, although it can also be a celebration of a good joke.
In summary, our analysis of the whole collection and in particular of our featured examples reveals how these A-initiated-deprecations create opportunities for co-participants to negotiate understandings around the attributes and experiences related to such forms of deprecation. These deprecating actions offer raw material for what will eventually be transformed into animation for a fleeting moment of joint appreciation of these shared understandings, but also, where relevant, of shared experiences, before any previous order of business is resumed, or a new one started.

Our examples collectively show how responsive animations can be used as brief closure devices but with highly salient, memorable, and “overdone” forms of design that condense multimodal activity in inescapably visible ways. In moments that feature heightened reciprocity built of slots of my-side contributions, the self-deprecation does not pass unnoticed, it is amplified and transformed into an object of joint attention and appreciation in ways that are creatively metaphorical or iconic. Because of their playful framing, they allow for flexibility as to what can count as a suitable representation of the experiences and assessments negatively disclosed. While engaging in playful animation technically means agreeing and subscribing to a participant’s self-criticism, it also entails introducing levels of exaggeration, imagination, or absurdity that underplay any seriousness that may be imbued on the action of piggybacking on someone else’s self-deprecation. The animation provides a second opportunity to point to and appreciate something together playfully and memorably in an other-attentive way before leading towards the closure of ongoing exchanges of my-side tellings and either launching the next order of conversational business, or transitioning back again into a single participants’ own realm.

5. Concluding remarks

In this study we described the previously understudied practice of responsive animation, one of the ways in which participants, in responsive position, sound for others, “doing being” them momentarily while also ambiguously animating themselves as part of a collective. We specifically zoomed in on animations designed as depictive non-lexical vocalisations and gesture ensembles followed or preceded by their lexical affiliates. We analysed the deployment of these animations in responsive slots in contexts where territorial concerns regarding knowledge, experience, and rights to assess are being negotiated, that is, during the production of playfully- or seriously-framed self-deprecatings disclosures.

In our collection, participants introduced disclosures that involved negative self-assessments and/or experiences invoking (past or potential) embarrassables or personal deficits of some kind. Prior studies have determined that these actions tend to make affiliative responses relevant that reject or minimise the deprecatings elements by normalisation, disagreement, or sympathy, or alternatively, via agreement in ways including second stories.

Our study shows how the self-deprechating framing of past negative happenings may engender sequences of my-side tellings and second stories where participants incrementally build lists of shared but independently-experienced events, which leads to the cementing of their joint understanding as to what common deprecating attributes and assessments are being disclosed. Our research contributes to our understanding of these delicate social contexts by demonstrating that where experiences are shared in general ways, animation offers an opportunity for (mutual) appreciation and creative characterisation of what embodying or witnessing such experience is like. This is done by momentarily shifting from the reciprocal exchanges of independent my-side contributions into the joint engagement with one single participant’s own proposal or experience, a temporary form of other-attentiveness shaped as a brief animation.

Disclosures of uncertainty or potential embarrassment about future events result in co-participants offering an absurd or alternative scenario where the self-deprecating attributes are heightened for mutual appreciation and play. The creation of fictional scenarios seems to offer opportunities for greater joint involvement, generally at the expense of the self-deprecating speaker who may become the target of a tease. However, they also enable these targeted participants to exercise their territorial rights via a new animation that provides new versions of the proposed scenarios and figures based on what their co-participants initially offered. Animation in these contexts allows A to set the rules as to how the playful characterisation of their own figure is to be done.

Irrespective of this difference across past and future scenarios, after the mutual negotiation of experiences and perspectives, and using the disclosure as raw material, co-participants engage in in forms of creative and transformative animations that make use of the potential of all multimodal channels for their representation. These animations are part of a dynamics of distribution of labour between showing and telling, a form of distributed agency (Enfield, 2017) between participants, with one offering a described attribute or experience that the other turns into a demonstration, but one introduced from their independent yet shared perspective, making these animations sometimes ambiguous forms of sounding for another and sometimes also for oneself as part of a collective.

While based on a small number of cases due to its infrequency in our corpus, this initial study on the kind of minimal responsive animations that bear little or no lexical content is innovative in showing how even short animated contributions can condense high levels of visually- and hearily-salient activity that is generally treated as interactionally successful and may be even celebrated by co-participants. Notwithstanding the affiliative moments and joint play that these animations allow, they are also used by co-participants to regain control of the ongoing activity and continue delayed or previously co-opted trajectories of ongoing interactional projects. These responsive animations can, nonetheless, also facilitate subversive forms of appropriation of the experiences of others for teasing purposes in ways that may not be fully appreciated by the originally self-deprecating participants.

In terms of preference concerns around responses to self-deprecations, our study contributes an important finding by showing how instead of minimising or disagreeing with the deprecating evaluations, animators do not allow these negative
experiences and assessments to pass unnoticed; instead, they amplify them for joint attention and appreciation. While animation as such is not introduced with markers of dispreference, by its very dramatical and playful nature in “loosening the bond” between the real-life person and the animated figure it acts like a safeguard against potential offence. While the deployment of these animations may be sanctioned through forms of subtle disattending (Mandelbaum, 1991), in our collection they are mostly accepted by participants through displays of agreement or mutual laughter. Animation is also a practice that ostensively checks the necessary “affiliative recipient response” box before the reins of the current interactional activity can be regained by the animating participant, reminiscent of other “pro-forma” forms of affiliation that “make a show of other-attentiveness” (Weatherall and Keevallik, 2016:167).

Our work has therefore presented a first empirical approach to minimal animations as responsive practices that co-participants use to sound for others in a specific delicate type of social activity. Further research is needed into the role of responsive non-lexical vocalisations and gestural ensembles, but our work here has set up the foundations to further demonstrate how animations designed as short but memorable interventions in responsive position allow participants to momentarily blur the boundaries between themselves and others to relish in each other’s inadequacies in playful, creative and transformational ways.

References

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