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Social Interaction

Video-Based Studies of Human Sociality

Remain in Sight: Displaying Availability as a Bystander Salesperson to (Re-) initiate Talk with Customers

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Abstract

This study examines how salespeople in Japanese bedding retail stores establish interactional space to (re-)initiate sales talk. Using multimodal conversation analysis of video-recorded service encounters, it documents the practice of remaining: salespeople staying at the site of an initial sales pitch—even when unsuccessful. Remaining displays their availability as bystander participants by configuring an object-focused interactional space. The analysis shows that salespeople (1) remain in the area of a failed pitch, (2) adjust their bodily orientation to stand just outside customer focus, and (3) display availability by standing and doing nothing. These practices demonstrate that remaining is not passive but a socio-spatial accomplishment that supports subsequent sales interaction. The findings contribute to conversation analytic research on service encounters by elucidating how “roaming” salespeople enact organizational goals through embodied practices.

Keywords: remaining, multimodal conversation analysis, interactional space, availability

1. Introduction

This study reports on an embodied practice employed by “roaming” salespeople to establish a stable interactional space (Mondada, 2009) with customers as a basis for (re-)initiating talk. A multimodal conversation-analytic investigation of video-recorded service encounters at bedding retail stores in Japan demonstrates that, following an unsuccessful initial attempt to engage customers, salespeople often remain in the area where they first addressed them. This strategy maintains a stable interactional space that can later be utilized for (re-)initiating talk. These findings suggest that what may appear as an ineffective initial sales move—such as an unsuccessful offer to try on a product—can serve as a reasonable interactional step, enabling salespeople to secure the embodied participation framework needed for future re-engagement.

Clark & Pinch (2010) criticized traditional studies of service encounters for beginning analysis only after salespeople and customers have already initiated verbal exchange, thereby overlooking how participants arrive at the point of interaction. Recent developments in multimodal conversation analysis highlight the establishment of interactional space, within which participants can engage in focused interaction (Goffman, 1963), in service encounter openings (Harjunpää, Mondada, & Svinhufvud, 2018; Hochuli, 2019; Mondada, 2022; Mortensen & Hazel, 2014). Achieving joint standing still (De Stefani, 2014) is crucial for organizing this space, as it constitutes a prerequisite for initiating sales talk with customers. This is particularly important given that some customers actively resist direct contact with salespeople and prefer to be left alone (Clark & Pinch, 2010).

By explicating salespersons’ embodied practices for (re-)initiating talk with customers in bedding retail stores, this study contributes to multimodal conversation-analytic research on service encounters, focusing on how salespeople open interactions despite customers’ inclination to avoid engagement. Moreover, the results offer valuable insights for service-encounter studies from a marketing perspective, as there is a limited understanding of how sales talk is initiated.

The study is organized as follows: Section 2 reviews previous research on interactional space and its formation in service-encounter settings. Section 3 describes the data properties and methods used. Section 4 presents the analysis results, and Section 5 discusses implications and concludes the study.

2. Background

Interactional space, defined as “material surroundings in which embodied talk-in-interaction, and more generally social action, takes place” (Mondada, 2013, p. 246), and “the dynamic (re)arrangement of participants’ bodies in the environment, as interaction unfolds” (Mondada, 2024), re-conceptualizes Adam

Kendon's F-formation (Kendon, 1990), the mutual configuration of participants' bodily arrangements in talk. It captures the interactional configuration surrounding participants and the spatial organization of talk-in-interaction (Mondada, 2024), illustrating the reflexive relationship between physical space and the organization of talk. Any socially organized collaborative activity in face-to-face settings requires a space for its execution, making interactional space essential for establishing an embodied participation framework (Goodwin, 2000). This framework shapes the distribution of agency regarding activity participation, constituting a "situated activity system" (Goffman, 1961).

Interactional space is a prerequisite for the opening of talk (D'Antoni et al., 2022; De Stefani & Mondada, 2018; Pillet-Shore, 2018) and is subject to continuous re-arrangement and transformation as talk unfolds (LeBaron & Streeck, 1997; Mondada, 2009, 2011). While much talk-in-interaction stabilizes participants' mobile bodies (Mondada, 2009), interactional space can also be configured in motion. The notion of mobile interactional space (Mondada, 2017), forming the basis for "withs" (Goffman, 1971), elucidates members' efforts in organizing mobile activities like guided visits (De Stefani & Mondada, 2014), grocery shopping (De Stefani, 2014; Hiramoto & Hayashi, 2022), and strolls (Broth & Lundström, 2014). This perspective demonstrates that standing is an interactional achievement, as stopping and stabilizing the body become accountable phenomena in social activities organized in motion (De Stefani, 2014; p.127).

Service encounters—primarily face-to-face interactions between salespeople and customers—are a key site for investigating interactional space, as the economic outcomes of personal selling depend on the success of these interactions. Typically, customers and salespeople start at a spatial distance within the store, necessitating that salespeople approach customers to configure an interactional space conducive to personal selling. Recent studies adopting a multimodal conversation analytic perspective have focused on the opening phase of encounters, examining how interactional space is configured to initiate talk between participants (Harjunpää, Mondada, & Svinhufvud, 2018; Hochuli, 2019; Mondada, 2022; Mortensen & Hazel, 2014). Harjunpää, Mondada & Svinhufvud (2018) analyzed how salespeople display maximum availability to customers to facilitate verbal interaction. Displaying availability (Heath, 1982) is crucial, as it encourages customer engagement and enables salespeople to present themselves as service providers (Harjunpää, Mondada, & Svinhufvud, 2018; Jakonen, 2020; Mortensen & Hazel, 2014), thus supporting task-oriented service exchanges. This highlights the importance of actor categorization (cf. De Stefani & Mondada, 2018; Mondada, 2009; Mortensen & Hazel, 2014) during the opening phase of service encounters.

In many self-service stores selling convenience goods, staff position themselves at counters, service desks, and cash registers. In contrast, retail stores selling shopping and specialty goods see salespeople roaming the store to engage in

personal selling. Consequently, the interactional spaces for sales pitches lack predetermined areas; their configuration is flexible, situational, and negotiable. Most conversation-analytic studies have focused on the former scenario, while this study contributes by illustrating how "roaming" (Clark & Pinch, 2010; p. 143) salespeople establish interactional spaces through embodied moves and mutual coordination with customers to conduct sales pitches.

The shop floors of retail stores selling shopping and specialty goods contain objects affecting interactional space and participation, such as products, samples, and advertisements. These items can become focal points in joint purchase decisions, with interactional spaces configured to facilitate object-focused interaction (cf. Hindmarsh, Fraser, Heath, Benford, & Greenhalgh, 2000; McNeill, 2006).

3. Materials and Methods

Approximately 880 minutes of video-recorded service-encounter interactions involving 8 salespersons and 75 customer groups were analyzed to examine how "roaming" salespeople initiate conversations with customers. Data were collected from two directly managed retail stores of a long-established bedding brand in western Japan. The study also includes interview data from 8 salespersons with varying levels of experience in the company. All participants provided consent to be recorded and have been pseudonymized in this study. Interview data indicate that salespeople are highly motivated to encourage customer trials, as these are considered as one of the Key Performance Indicators for the company.

The video data were analyzed using multimodal conversation analysis and transcribed according to two systems: vocal resources (Jefferson, 2004) and multimodal resources (Mondada, 2018). The transcription presents three lines: the original Japanese in Romanized script (upper line), a word-for-word gloss (middle line), and a free translation (lower line). Diagrams illustrate participants' spatial configurations during instances of remaining-in-place. To enhance readability, the relevant portions of the transcript containing the target phenomenon are enclosed in square boxes.

4. Results

4.1 Remain in sight

The analysis presents a typical case where a salesperson remains in the area where she addressed customers. Sales talk by salespeople often fails. In Excerpt 1, the salesperson—initially behind the counter (Fig.1.1)—invites customers to try the mattress in line 02 (Fig.1.2). This offer elicits a non-granting response in line 05; the customer responds with *hai arigatougozaimasu* ("Yes, thank you")

but does not attempt to try the product. The second attempt in line 06 indicates the salesperson's recognition that her initial offer did not produce an immediate granting response.

Excerpt 1.

01 CUS1: *#(...) ga ooi*

SP a lot

(There are) many (...)

sal >>approaches the cus1->

cus1 >>examining the product(s) ->

cus2 >>examining the product(s) ->

fig #fig.1.1



Figure 1.1

02 SAL : *\$yoroshikattara (*0.2)+o+hi%ki itashi #%+ma%su nde%*

if.you.like lay do HNR then

If you like (we will) lay it so

\$lks at cus2->

*->*stops*

+..+points at the bed+->

cus2 %turns head%---%,,,,,,,,,,%

fig #fig.5.2



Figure 1.2

03 (0.2)

04 SAL : ¥hu+huhuhu/huhu

>-+

¥take a slight step to right

05 CUS2: [hai (0.2) >arigatougozaimasu<

yes thank you

[Yes, thank you

06 SAL : nankai shite itadaite *mo (.) >yoroshii desu node<\$#

many times do BNF even as.you.like CP then

>We may do it< (.) as many times as you like

-> \$gz at the shelf->

cus2 *moves fwd->

fig

#fig.1.3-1.4



Figure 1.3

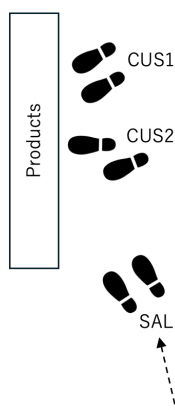


Figure 1.4

07 (#0.5)+ (0.5)#

sal +steps back->

fig #fig.1.5 #fig.1.6



Figure 1.5



Figure 1.6

08 CUS2: *kocchi wa (0.3) kocchi wa*

this TP

this TP

(Is) this...

It is crucial to note that, when experiencing a failed attempt, the salesperson neither withdraws from initiating talk nor merely passes by the customers. Instead, she maintains her position and bodily orientation toward them (Figs. 1.3–1.4). Customer 2 occupies the interactional space the salesperson aimed to establish in line 08 by asking a question about the product he is examining. Notably, Customer 2 does not use attention-getting or attention-monitoring techniques—such as summonses (Balantani & González-Martínez, 2025), pointing gestures, or addressee-gaze monitoring (Stukenbrock, 2020)—to re-engage the salesperson. He relies solely on the proximal deictic expression *kocchi* (“this”), presupposing the salesperson’s perceptual access to the referent and indicating no need to secure or confirm her attention for the (re-)initiation of talk.

Remaining at the location is not merely staying put; it represents a finely coordinated embodied achievement by the salespeople. To establish an embodied participation framework, salespeople must continuously display their availability (Heath, 1982) to customers. In Excerpt 1, after offering the opportunity to try the product in line 02, the salesperson steps slightly to her right (line 04), positioning herself as a bystander (Goffman, 1981) who, while not participating as a ratified participant, remains available for assistance. Her availability is also expressed through her embodied posture of simply waiting (cf. Svinhufvud, 2018) —doing nothing more than standing, relaxing her arms, and refraining from engaging in other tasks.

Maintaining this position may require the salesperson to rearrange her standing. In Excerpt 1, as Customer 2 moves forward to examine another similar product, the distance created by the salesperson decreases (Fig. 1.5). This prompts the salesperson to step back, thereby sustaining the embodied participation framework that enables her to continue in a bystander role (Fig. 1.6).

In service-encounter settings in retail stores, defining the term "bystander" is complex. The two customers in this excerpt do not directly interact; instead, they focus on the product they are examining, creating a triangular embodied participation framework involving both customers and the product. To be a bystander, the salesperson must also look at the product while orienting her body toward the customer(s) rather than directly at them (Fig. 1.3). This requires a redirection of the salesperson's gaze trajectory (line 06); she initially directs her gaze toward the customer when addressing him in line 02. Customer 2's use of the proximal deictic expression *kocchi* ("this") without attention-getting practices in line 08 further illustrates this point: he assumes the salesperson is already attending to the same object.

A modified version of McNeill's (2006) "instrumental F-formation" enables object-focused interaction among participants (Hindmarsh et al., 2000). The salesperson positions herself at a distance from customers, examining the product. As De Stefani (2014) argues, object-focused interactional space allows for varying distances between human actors and objects. Customers are inclined to examine products directly—especially those with notable material properties (McCabe & Nowlis, 2003), such as bedding goods. In contrast, salespersons, who do not engage in immediate direct exchange but seek to demonstrate their availability, tend to maintain a relatively greater distance from customers.

Remaining in sight of customers is, then, what salespeople orient to achieve in order to configure a common interactional space for (re-)initiating talk. As shown in Excerpt 1, to remain, salespeople tend to position themselves one step outside the immediate focused interaction and redirect their gaze toward the products, thereby taking on a bystander role.

Excerpt 2 provides another example. Before Excerpt 2 begins, the customer approaches a shelf to examine the product(s). This creates an opportunity for the salesperson to initiate a sales talk with her. The salesperson slowly approaches the shelf and utters *irasshaimase* ("welcome"), as if semi-broadcasting it to the shop floor rather than directly targeting the particular customer (line 01).

Excerpt 2.

01 (2.4#)

sal >>approaches the cus1->

cus1 >>examining the product(s) ->

fig #fig.2.1



Figure 2.1

02 SAL : **irasshaimase.*

welcome

Welcome.

**lks at cus1->*

03 $(1.0)^{(2.5)} * (3.2) * (0.5)$

sal -> ^ stops walking

sal. -> **lks at another customer*lks at cus1->*

04 SAL : *yoroshikere+ ba o+tameshi# mo ita+dake ma+su node douzo.*

if.you.like try also can HNR then please

If you like, you may also try it out, please.

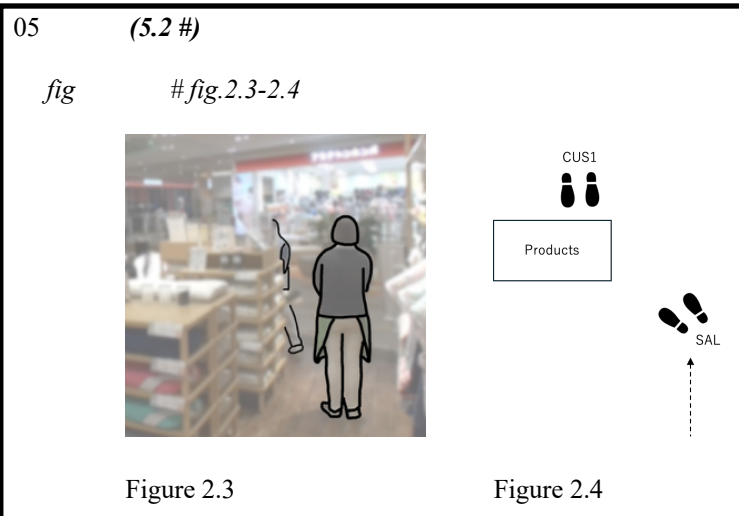
+...+points-----+,,,,,,,,,,,,,+,

fig

#fig.2.2



Figure 2.2



06 SAL : *okyakusama no okonomi no (0.5) sh-sozai ni (0.2) awasete takasa wo#*

customer L preference L material with adjust height OP

fig

#fig.2.5



Figure 2.5

07 CUS1 : *↑hu:::n*

hmm

↑ Hm:::m

08 SAL : *choosei sasete itadaku oodaa makura de gozaimasu ne.*

adjust do BNF custom-made pillow CP HNR FP

This is a custom-made pillow, and we can adjust the height to match the material of your preference.

09 CUS1:

/n:::n

ITJ

[Mm:::n

The salesperson moves forward and stops at a position where she can address the customer while monitoring the customer examining the product. Notably, she stands slightly apart, with a shelf partially obstructing their visibility (Fig. 2.1). After determining the appropriate moment to speak, she begins her sales offer in line 04, leaning forward and pointing to the product with her left hand (Fig. 2.2). This posture enhances mutual visibility, creating a shared interactional space. However, her attempt proves ineffective as the customer ignores the offer (line 05). Facing the challenge of encouraging the customer to try the product, the salesperson remains in the area and retracts her forward posture (Figs. 2.3–2.4). She indicates her availability by standing just outside the customer’s immediate interaction while remaining a potential speaker—acting as a bystander. Unlike the previous excerpt, where the customer initiated talk, in Excerpt 2, the salesperson utilizes the interactional space: she steps forward again, leaning in (Fig. 2.5) to (re-) initiate a sales dialogue about the product’s features (line 06). Similar to the earlier fragment, she references the product without specifying it, indicating her assumption that both she and Customer 1 know which product being discussed.

Before analyzing another aspect of remaining-in-place, it is necessary to explain how salespeople initiate contact with customers. As noted in Excerpt 2, salespeople typically approach customers who are examining products. Excerpt 3 illustrates this timing.

Excerpt 3.

((Bunanotte in lines 01, 10 refers to the product’s brand name))

01 CUS1: *bunanotte da yo*# # =

name CP FP

(It is) Bunanotte=

>>points fwd->

sal >>approaches cus1->

fig #fig. 3.1 #fig.3.2



Figure 3.1



Figure 3.2

02 SAL : =>*irasshai*<**mase*::

welcome

=>We::l<come

cus1 *turns to *cus2*->

03 (0.5)

04 CUS1: (*kore*)=

this

(This one)=

05 SAL : =\$>*douzo*. *< +*ota*+*meshi mo* +(0.5)+ #*de(h)*^*ki(h)* *ma(h)su(h)* *no(h)de(h)*

please try also can HNR then

=>Please.< You (0.5) *ca(h)n* (h) *al(h)so* (h) *try* (h) *it* (h) *out*.

\$lks at cus1->

->**stops*

+...+*points fwd*----+,,,,,,+

cus1

^turns to *sal*->

fig

#fig.3.3



Figure 3.3

06 (0.2)

07 CUS1: *aa hai*.

ITJ yes

Ah, yes.

08 SAL : ↑*ha:i. zehi*

yeah please


↑ Ye:s. by all means.

09 &(0.7)\$#(4.3)

sal &steps back slightly

sal ->\$gz at the shelf->

fig #fig.3.4-3.5



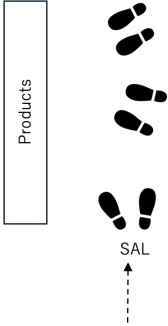


Figure 3.4 Figure 3.5

10 SAL : *bunanotte wa kouhanpatsu: desu ne.*

name TP high-resilience CP FP

Bunanotte is a high-resilience (pillow).

The customer in line 01 refers to the product Bunanotte both vocally and through embodied conduct: while pointing to the shelf with his index finger, he tells his partner, “This is Bunanotte” (Fig. 3.1). Joint attention to the product is achieved through his combined vocal and non-vocal reference, as shown in Fig. 3.2.

At this moment, it becomes publicly observable that their bodily orientation toward the product, along with the interactional space configured through the embodied organization of their participation framework, has stabilized. Meanwhile, the salesperson, near the counter, monitored the situation and, upon recognizing the appropriate moment, approached them to initiate talk (Fig. 3.3). The content of the talk initiated by the salesperson directly relates to the product the customers examined: in line 05, she offers them the opportunity to try it on while simultaneously pointing to it with her left hand.

During product examinations, customers’ bodily orientation stabilizes, serving as a resource for configuring an interactional space to initiate talk. The products being examined provide topical resources that salespeople can utilize. Consequently, salespeople often seize this opportunity to engage customers.

When the salesperson (re-) initiates talk, the topic remains the Bunanotte product previously discussed. After an unsuccessful attempt to offer a try-on (line 08), she steps back slightly, redirects her gaze toward the shelf, and orients her body toward the customer(s), signalling her availability as a bystander

salesperson (line 09; Figs. 3.3–3.4). Following a short interval, she re-initiates talk about the product by describing one of its properties (line 10). Thus, the opportunity for salespersons to re-initiate sales pitches while remaining in the area where they initially addressed customers depends on customer engagement in examining products.

The tendency of salespeople to initiate talk while customers examine products is further demonstrated when they withhold or adjust their attempts once customers cease product examination (these instances are not related to the remaining-in-place practices discussed here). In Excerpt 4, the salesperson monitors the customer to determine the appropriate timing for initiating talk (Fig. 4.1).

Excerpt 4.

01 (4.0)#

sal >>approaches the cus1->

cus1 >>examining the product(s) ->

fig #fig.4.1

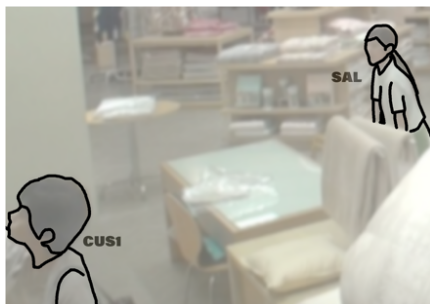


Figure 4.1

02 (2.1*)#(1.0)

cus1 >--, *turns head-->

fig #fig.4.2



Figure 4.2

03 SAL : *irasshaima**#se:^:::#

welcome

We::lcome.

->,,,^passing by the cusl->

cusl ->*

fig #fig.4.3 #fig.4.4



Figure 4.3



Figure 4.4

When the customer touches the product, the salesperson approaches her; however, the customer withdraws her hand and reorients her upper body (Fig. 4.2). Recognizing the lost opportunity to initiate talk, the salesperson instead says *irasshaimase* (“We::lcome”) rather than delivering a sales pitch (Fig. 4.3) and alters her walking trajectory to pass by the customer (Fig. 4.4).

We examined cases where salespeople exhibit their availability as bystander salespersons by positioning themselves at a greater distance from products than customers and redirecting their gaze from customers to products. The availability of salespeople as interlocutors can be secured more flexibly than in the three previously examined fragments. In Excerpt 5, the salesperson approaches customers from behind (Fig. 5.1), offering the opportunity to try on the product without revealing her appearance (line 02; Fig. 5.2). Recognizing that the customers are unlikely to try the product at this time (lines 03–04), the salesperson remains behind them, looking at the product while positioning herself so that Customer 2 can perceive her presence in his peripheral vision (Fig. 5.3). Similar to previous fragments, the salesperson initially looks at Customer 1 when addressing her (line 02) and then redirects her gaze toward the product (line 03).

Excerpt 5.

01 (#3.6)

sal >>approaches the customers->

cus1 >>examining the product(s) ->

cus2 >>examining the product(s) ->

fig #fig.5.1



Figure 5.1

02 SAL : *\$yokattara otameshi deki masu node#:*.

if.you.like try can HNR then

If you like you can try it out so:

sal \$lks at cus1->

fig #fig.5.2



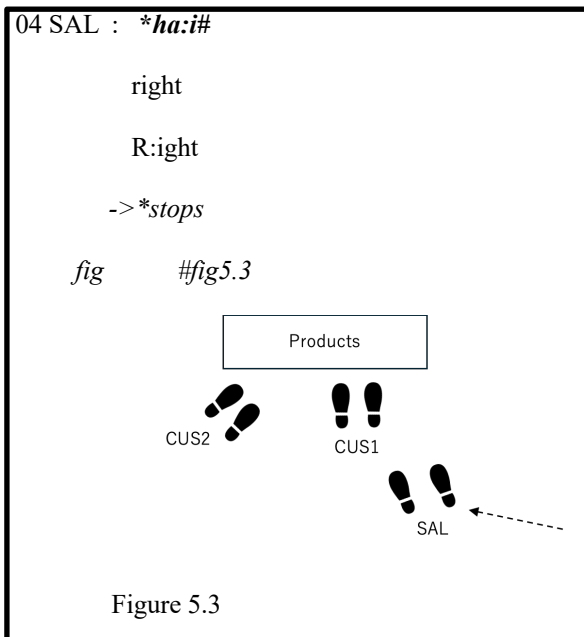
Figure 5.2

03 CUS1: *ha\$*

yes

Yes

sal ->\$gz at the shelf



05 (0.6)

06 CUS1: *<nenrei> na+n desu kedo#*,

age CP HNR but

(Could you tell me the target) age (for this product?)

+lks back->

fig *#fig.5.4*



Figure 5.4

07 SAL : *%hai.*

yes

Yeah.

%moves fwd->

08 (0.4+)

cus1 >,,,,,,+

Excerpt 6.

01 (#3.9)

sal >>approaches the customers->

cus1 >>examining the product(s) ->

cus2 >>examining the product(s) ->

fig #fig.6.1



Figure 6.1

02 SAL : *\$yokattara makura iroiro: (.) otameshi *ga deki masu node#*=

if.you.like pillow various try SP can CP then

If you like, you can try out a variety (.) of pillows=

\$lks at cus1->

-> *stops

fig

#fig.6.2



Figure 6.2

03 CUS1: *=hai*

yes

=Yes

04 SAL : *hai. moshi osagashi desi tara +zehi.*

yes if looking.for CP then please

Right. If (you are) looking for (something) then please.

+steps back slightly->

05 CUS2: *ha:i*

yes

Ye:ah

06 (2.1)+#(28.0)

sal ->+

fig #fig.6.3-6.4



Figure 6.3

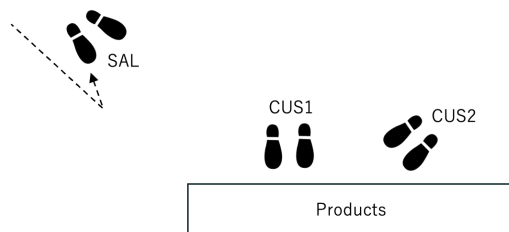


Figure 6.4

07 SAL : *ichio makura no hou ga tei chuu kou san dankai no takasa ga aru node,*

well pillow L one SP low medium high three level L height SP exist then

08 : *meyasu to naru makura no takasa wo kochira no sokuteiki de*

guideline as become pillow L height OP this L measuring device with

09 : *sokutei wo (0.2) sasete itadaite masu ne.*

measure OP do BNF CP FP

Well, the pillows come in three height levels—low, medium, and high—

so we measure (0.2) the guideline pillow height with this measuring device.

The salesperson moves to the right side of the customers while finishing line 02 (fig. 6.2) and steps back slightly to assume the role of a bystander as the sequence is brought to completion (lines 04–05). This position enables the salesperson to observe both customers and products (Figs. 6.3–6.4). After waiting about 30 seconds to gauge the timing for engagement, the salesperson decides to (re-) initiate a sales talk about the measurement system (lines 07–09).

The five fragments examined share a common feature regarding the interactional space established by remaining visible to customers: re-initiated talk focuses on the products the customers are examining. However, this space can also be used to initiate talk that is not directly related to the products. In Excerpt 7, the salesperson approaches the customer and, in line 02, offers her the opportunity to try on the product while remaining in the same spot where she engaged with the customer (Figs. 7.1–7.2).

Excerpt 7.

01 (1.5)

sal >>approaches the customers->

cus1 >>examining the product(s) ->

02 SAL : *\$yokattara (.) otameshi mo itadake masu node okyakusama*

if.you.like try also can CP then madam

If you like (.) (You) can try it out then, madam

\$lks at cus1->

03 (1.0)*#\$(1.1)

sal -> *stops

sal -> \$gz at the products->

fig #fig.7.1-7.2



Figure 7.1

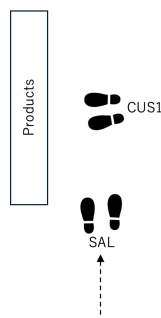


Figure 7.2

04 SAL : *\$zehi yoko ni naru dake demo natte mite*

please lie down as become only even become try

Please, do try just lying down, even for a moment.

-> *\$lks at cus1* ->

05 (0.3) *\$(1.5)*

sal \$gzs at the products ->

06 CUS1: *chirashi kita no koko deshita kke.*

flyer come L here CP_PST QP

Was it here that the flyer came from?

07 (1.0)

08 SAL : *hai, ano: Minagawa no <de>su/: yone.*

yes well name L CP FP

Yes. U:h, it was from Minagawa's, [right.

09 CUS1: *[ee (.) ee*

yes yes

[Yeah

After the salesperson's second attempt (line 04), the customer inquires about the advertisement she received (line 06). In this fragment, the customer utilizes the interactional space to (re-) initiate talk about a topic other than the products themselves.

In response, the salesperson quickly approaches the customer to address the question (line 08). This exemplifies foregrounding, as discussed in Excerpt 5, where salespersons transition from bystanders to ratified participants by rearranging their bodily configurations.

4.2 Being avoided

Customers may, at times, avoid interaction with salespeople to engage in individual or group decision-making. In such instances, they may dissolve the interactional space by leaving the setting.

Excerpt 8 illustrates customers avoiding (Mondada, 2022) the salesperson. In this fragment, the customer stands near the boundary between the inside and outside of the store, observing the product. This prompts the salesperson to guide him into the store and encourage him to try on the product (line 02).

Excerpt 8.

01 (3.1)

sal >>approaches the customers->

cus1 >>examining the product(s) ->

02 SAL : *\$naka de yokattta*ra tame+shite (0.2) mite kudasai#*

inside at if.you.like try try please

If you like try it out inside.

sal \$lks at cus1->

->+stops

cus1 *turns head

fig

#fig.8.1

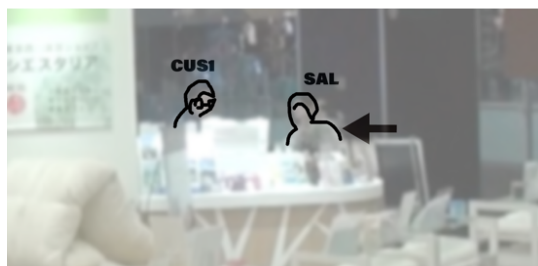


Figure 8.1

03 (1.0)

04 \$# (0.6)%#

sal ->\$lks at the products

cus1 %leaves the place

fig #fig.8.2 #fig.8.3



Figure 8.2

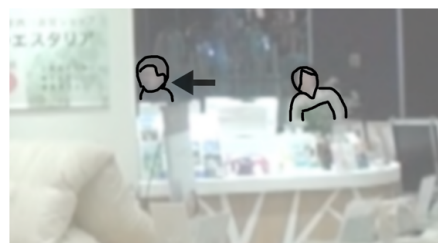


Figure 8.3

Figure 8.4

Still, even in cases of customer avoidance, remaining in sight can be effective as it signals the salesperson's availability. Customers who initially leave may return and use the salesperson's presence to ask questions, as illustrated in Excerpt 9.

01 (5.7)

sal >>approaches the customers->

cusl >>examining the product(s) ->

02 SAL : \$yokattara otameshi mo *deki masu +node% okigaru ni#.

if.you.like try also can HNR then feel.free P

If you like, you can try it out, so please feel free.

\$lks at cusl->

->%stops

cusl *turns head->

cusl +nod

fig #



Figure 9.1

03 \$(2.5)#&(1.5)
sal &steps back slowly->
cus1 \$turns back and leaves the place
fig #fig.9.2-9.3



Figure 9.2

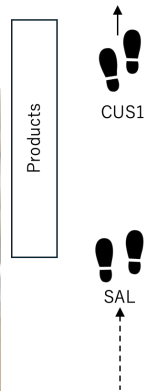


Figure 9.3

04 (5.0)@(1.8)#
cus1 @returns to the place quickly->
 #fig.9.4



Figure 9.4

05 CUS1: *ano* (0.7) ()
 well
 Well (0.7) ()

06 SAL : *a, gozai masu yo::*.

ITJ have HNR FP

Ah, (we) have (it).

In this fragment, the salesperson leans forward to make an offer in line 02 (Fig. 9.1), which fails as the customer quickly turns to her companion and leaves (Fig. 9.2–9.3). In contrast to the previous case, where the salesperson became unavailable, the salesperson here steps back slightly and remains present. This effort to stay available pays off when Customer 1 returns to the spot where she previously stood (line 04; Fig. 9.4) and poses an inquiry (line 05).

Remaining available sometimes requires bodily rearrangement, as customers who left to avoid the encounter are now in motion. In Excerpt 10, two customers, accompanied by their young child, examine pillows on the shelf.

Excerpt 10.

((Minagawa, in line 06, refers to the name of the shop's brand, whereas Hoomudoo, in line 08, designates another retail store.))

01 (2.2)

sal >>approaches the customers->

cus1 >>examining the product(s) ->

cus2 >>examining the product(s) ->

02 SAL : *\$>yoroshikattara< otameshi mo (0.5) deki *masu node.*

if.you.like try also can HNR then

If you like (you) can try it out then.

\$lks at cus1->

-> *stops

03 CUS1: *[hai]*

yes

[Yeah]

04 CUS2: *[hai]*

yes

[Yeah]

05 # (1.5) * + (1.0) % (4.0) # * (1.4) % #

sal +adjusting the direction of posture to follow cus1 and cus2->

cus1 %walks fwd-----%stops

cus2 *walks fwd-----*stops

fig #fig.10.1-10.2 #fig.10.3 #fig.10.4-10.5



Figure 10.1

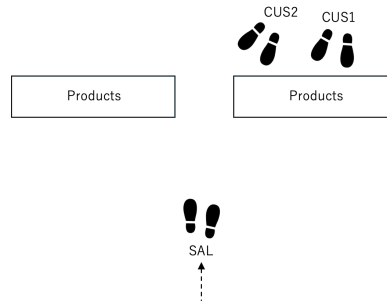


Figure 10.2



Figure 10.3



Figure 10.4

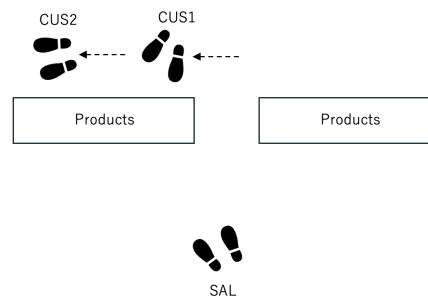


Figure 10.5

06 CUS1: >nanka< mukou no uriba ni mo, Minagawa no (0.4) mono ga

well over L section P too name L product SP

07 : attan desu kedo=

exist HNR but

>Like< over at the (other) section, (there) also were (0.4) Minagawa's products=

08 SAL : =aa *Hoomudoo san no*=

ITJ name HNR L

09 CUS1: =*hai*.

yes

Yes.

10 SAL : *desu ka? hai hai hai*

CP QP yes yes yes

Ah, (at) the Hoomudoo (store)? Yes, yes, yes.

The salesperson approaches the customers to make an offer (line 02) and stabilizes her body to display availability (Fig. 10.1–10.2). Contrary to her expectation, the customers stop examining the product and leave, avoiding the encounter and moving on (line 05; Fig. 10.3). As the customers move forward, displaying availability requires bodily rearrangement. The salesperson follows their trajectory, adjusting her posture in accordance with their movement (Fig. 10.4–10.5), which enables her to receive the customer's inquiry in line 06.

5. Discussion

Establishing an interactional space is crucial for salespeople, as it allows for initiating sales talk with customers through embodied participation. This study documents a practice wherein salespeople configure interactional space to (re-) initiate talk with customers, pursuing their institutional goals. Salespeople remain at the spot where they encouraged customers to try products or engaged in other sales-related talk, signalling their availability as bystander salespersons and creating an object-focused interactional space for conversation. This established interactional space can be utilized in various ways during the service encounter. Salespeople can use it to provide additional product information (Excerpts 2, 3, 6), while customers can inquire about the products (Excerpts 1, 5) or discuss unrelated matters (Excerpts 7, 9, 10).

The analysis reveals the calibrated properties of the practice. First, salespeople remain at the location where their initial sales pitch was made, even after a failed attempt. Second, upon facing failure, they adjust their position slightly outside the focused interaction between customers and products, orienting their bodies toward both, thereby presenting themselves as bystanders to the encounter. Third, by simply standing, salespeople signal their availability as service providers. These features indicate that remaining visible to customers is not merely standing still but represents a socio-spatial practice through which salespeople achieve job-related outcomes.

The results support previous findings regarding the dynamic, socially organized, and interactionally negotiated nature of configuring interactional space in service encounters. Due to their default activity mode of mobility, salespeople must establish accountability for approaching customers and anchoring their bodies in specific locations. Stabilizing interactional space requires displaying availability to (re-)initiate talk. This embodied effort to show availability has a reflexive relationship with presenting themselves as bystander salespersons. Once an interactional space is provisionally stabilized by remaining in place, it remains open to ongoing reconfiguration through bodily adjustments. Furthermore, the findings align with recent studies in various institutional settings (Balantani & González-Martínez, 2025; Hoey, 2023), demonstrating that (re-)initiating talk is integral to workplace practices that facilitate practical tasks.

While previous multimodal conversation-analytic studies on service encounters have focused on interactions at counters, service desks, and registers in self-service retail stores, this study explores how roaming salespeople, whose default mode is mobility, initiate sales pitches by establishing interactional spaces. The analysis indicates that the interactional space for object-focused interaction is crucial for salespeople in initiating pitches. Uneven distances between products and the two parties (customers and salespeople) enable salespeople to present themselves as available bystanders. More generally, this underscores the significance of *positioning* within the interactional space in assuming specific roles within the embodied participation framework. The salesperson's positioning on the shop floor, in its reflexive relationship to the embodied participation framework, facilitates task-oriented actions such as supplementing product information or responding to customer inquiries.

The analysis in this study begins with the observation that most salespeople's initial attempts fail to prompt customers to try products, at least in terms of immediate responses. However, these failed attempts are not in vain, as the analysis of service-encounter interactions demonstrates. Thus, the findings provide an empirical account of the "good organizational reason for bad sales pitches" (cf. Garfinkel & Bittner, 1967), specifically the organizational rationale for the recurrence of salespeople's failures.

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Declaration of interest statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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Appendix A. Transcription conventions

Conventions for transcribing talk

.	Pitch fall
?	Pitch rise
,	Level pitch
↑	Upstep in intonation
↓	Downstep in intonation
<u>word</u>	Stressed word
[]	Beginning and end of overlapping speech
=	Latching of turns
(0.5)	Pause (length in tenths of a second)
(.)	Micropause
:	Lengthening of a sound
hhh	Audible out-breath
.hhh	Audible in-breath
(h)	Within-speech aspiration, usually indicating laughter
#	Creaky voice quality
<word>	Slower pace of speech
>word<	Faster pace of speech

Conventions for embodied conduct (Mondada, 2025; p.111)

* *	Descriptions of embodied actions are delimited
+ +	between two identical symbols (one symbol per participant) and are synchronized with corresponding stretches of talk.

- *---> The action described continues across subsequent lines until
- >* the same symbol is reached.
- >> The action described begins before the excerpt's beginning.
- >> The action described continues after the excerpt's end.
- Action's preparation
- Action's full extension is reached and maintained.
- ,,,," Action's retraction
- fig The exact moment at which a screenshot has been taken is
- # indicated with a specific sign showing its position within turn at talk and with a figure number on a separate line.

Appendix B. Notes on Abbreviations

Abbreviations used for the interlinear glosses in the transcripts:

- BNF Beneficiary marker
- CP Copula
- EMP Emphasis marker
- FP Final particle
- HNR Honorific marker
- INJ Interjection
- N Nominalizer
- OP Object particle
- QP Question particle
- QT Quotative particle
- SP Subject particle
- TP Topic particle