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How to cite this publication

Please cite the final published version:

Emborg, C. (2024). Enduring the silence: High silence tolerance and other tools for promoting topic initiations of a man with autism. *Clinical Linguistics & Phonetics*, 38(9), 857-879.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02699206.2023.2250058>

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Enduring the silence: High silence tolerance and other tools for promoting topic initiations of a man with autism

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Persistent deficits in the ability to initiate social interaction is a core criterion for a diagnosis of autism, and quantitative research shows that children with autism initiate fewer bids for interaction than neurotypical children. This conversation-analytic examination of two interactions between a man with autism, Harry, and two familiar carers will provide insights into the scope of his competences in topic initiation. Analyses of the participants' online management of turn-taking and sequence organization demonstrate that Harry's topic initiations can be facilitated by a high silence tolerance of the interlocutor in initiation-relevant sequential environments. Specifically, Harry initiates more topics, when his conversational partner endures the long silences after possible sequence closure. The analyses underline that Harry does not lack neither competences nor motivation to successfully execute initiations. Instead, it is proposed that Harry's deficits in initiation should be reconceptualized as a difficulty of initiating interaction on neurotypical terms, where the standard maximum silence between turns is approximately one second. Hereby, the study emphasizes that communicative competences of individuals with autism are interactionally managed, emerging in interaction with conversational partners.

Keywords: autism; initiation; interaction; silence; turn-taking; conversation analysis

Introduction

Impaired social communication is a core criterion for an autism diagnosis, along with restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour. The standard references that healthcare providers use to diagnose autism today, *International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11)* and *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, agree that the impairment in communication is manifested by deficits in the ability to initiate social interaction (World Health Organization, 2018; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). ICD-11 formulates it as “persistent deficits in the ability to initiate and to sustain reciprocal social interaction and social communication” (World Health Organization, 2018, 6A02). Likewise, DSM-5 depicts the stereotypical individual with autism as “a person who rarely initiates social interactions, [...] and when he or she does, makes unusual approaches to meet needs only”. DSM-5 also states that individuals with autism who have a less severe communication deficit may have “difficulty initiating social interaction” and “decreased interest in social interactions” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 52).

The results of quantitative research support these claims, demonstrating that children with autism make fewer attempts to initiate interaction than neurotypical children. MacDonald et al. (2006) used a structured assessment protocol to measure initiation behaviours such as gaze shifts, gestures and verbalizations among children with autism and typically developing children, aged two to four. The authors found that the children with autism had severe deficits in joint attention initiation, relative to the typically developing children. More than half of the children with autism used zero or only one of the initiating forms (gaze shifts, gestures, verbalizations), whereas nearly all typically developing children used all three forms. Travis et al. (2001) compared how frequent 7-18-year-old students with autism and mental age matched students with developmental delay initiated social interaction. They used a modified

version of the Early Social Communication Scales (ESCS), a procedure originally designed to measure nonverbal communication skills in young children. The authors found that the children with autism initiated joint attention less than children with developmental delay, a difference that was not mediated by language level. Likewise, Leekam and Ramsden (2006) used a series of play tasks, including items from ESCS, to measure initiating behaviours in preschool children with autism and children with developmental delay. They also found that the children with autism initiated interaction with adults less than half as often as matched children with developmental delay. Jones and Schwartz (2009) made the first investigation of initiation rates among children with autism in naturalistic settings during unstructured conversations with family members. Consistent with previous research, the authors found that typically developing children initiated interaction almost twice as frequently as the children with autism. All of these studies of autistic children's initiation behaviour reflect the fact that adults are largely overlooked in autism research. Thus, our knowledge of the way autistic symptomatology develops, including the deficits in initiation, is very limited.

Although existing literature does provide evidence that children with autism may be less likely to initiate social interaction, what is lacking from these studies is a characterization of the way the interactional difficulty in initiation manifests itself in natural interaction. As Rendle-Short (2014, p. 218) also argues:

Quantification may show that children with autism generally initiate fewer bids for interactions [...] (e.g. Jones & Schwartz 2009), but it is only through detailed analyses of how participants behave in real time that we can begin to understand the interactional difficulties for this group of children.

For the same reason, qualitative research on natural interaction has gained ground within the field of autism, especially in the 21st century. Dobbins et al. (1998) made the first systematic conversation analytic study of an interaction involving an adult with autism. They

found that the adult moved abruptly to new, unrelated topics, and revisited topics addressed previously (Dobbinson et al., 1998). This recycling of topics, often of special interest, has been confirmed by recent conversation analytic studies (Stribling et al., 2009; Emborg, 2022).

However, compared to studies of atypicalities in topic maintenance, the ways in which individuals with autism initiate natural interaction have been subject to little qualitative research. Accordingly, many questions remain unanswered: In which interactional environments do individuals with autism initiate topics for interaction, and when do they refrain from initiating? Are the initiations that do occur designed and placed competently? How do participants, that is both autistic speakers and their interlocutors, manage topic initiation-relevant milieus? A closer inspection of the participants' online organization of real talk-in-interaction is necessary in order to fully explore the autistic competences in initiation.

Micro-analyses of two naturally occurring interactions between a man with autism and familiar carers will seek to provide answers to some of the above questions. More specifically, the participants' initiations will be scrutinized using the conversation analytic method (Stivers & Sidnell, 2013). The focus will be on how the parties manage turn-taking in initiation-relevant sequential environments. Besides approaching a more nuanced and detailed description of the competences in topic initiation of a man with autism, the analyses will show how interlocutors' behaviour can facilitate as well as hinder that individuals with autism initiate new topics. Drawing parallels to Muskett and colleagues (2010), who demonstrate that non-impaired conversational partners are implicated in the inflexible behaviour of children with autism, this paper shows that neurotypical coparticipants can promote topic initiations of a man with autism.

Sequence and topic initiations often overlap, but are analytically distinct and can be empirically independent (Schegloff, 1990). Topic initiations often appear in first sequential

position, but can appear in other positions as well. Likewise, several new sequences can be initiated during the course of a single topic-focused spate of talk (Schegloff, 1990). The aim of this study has been to scrutinize the opportunities and capabilities a man with autism has to initiate new topics in natural interaction. Such topic initiations are particularly relevant after possible sequence closure, for which reason sequence and topic initiations will be shown to be intertwined in the analyses.

The next section provides a brief introduction to the data and participants of the study as well as to its theoretical and methodological basis. Subsequently, single-case analyses of the two interactions are presented based on illustrative data extracts. The final section summarizes the results and discusses the degree to which the conversational partner's orientation to neurotypical norms for turn-taking and sequence organization affects the initiations of the individual with autism.

Materials and methods

Data and participants

The interactions analysed here are part of a 36-hour data set of video recordings from six Danish care facilities for adults with autism. The six care facilities include activity centres and group homes, of which the autistic participants are residents. All participants gave informed consent prior to recording, and anything that could lead to identification of the participants has been anonymised in transcripts and analyses. The research project is registered on Aarhus University's list of processing activities, cf. the data protection legislation, and the study is

conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2013).¹

The data comprise naturally occurring multi-party interactions in common rooms and two-person conversations in the residents' single-room apartments. In order to prevent the researcher's presence from affecting the participants' behaviour, the carers were instructed to put up cameras whenever they found it appropriate to record interactions. One Zoom Q4 handy video recorder was used in each setting, and this means that, from time to time, some participants are not visible in the recordings. However, the talk of these participants is predominantly audible. Video recordings have been imported to CLAN (MacWhinney, 2000), and the interactions have been transcribed according to Hepburn and Bolden's (2013) conventions and Mondada's (2019) conventions for multimodal transcription.

Micro-analyses of two interactions will be provided in this article. They involve 'Harry' (all names are pseudonyms), a man with autism, and two carers, 'Anne' and 'Lilly', respectively. Limited ethnographic information about the participants is available. From the data, we can tell that Harry turns 50 during the period of data collection, and that he has been a part of the activity centre in which the recordings are made for many years. We know that he is diagnosed with autism, but no new diagnostic or functional assessments were undertaken for the purpose of this investigation. The data reveal that Harry is verbally competent, able to speak in full sentences and maintain quite complex conversation. On all recordings, he is wearing noise-cancelling headphones. Anne and Lilly are in the pedagogic team around Harry in the activity centre. He spends weekdays in the activity centre, where both collective and

¹ The project started before the Research Ethics Committee at Aarhus University was established, and therefore, it was not an opportunity to make an application. Thus, the requirement for the ethics committee's approval was waived.

individual activities are planned for him and other adults with autism. Moreover, Harry is a resident of a group home that works closely together with the activity centre.

The two interactions examined in the current study take place in Harry's room at the activity centre, Harry sitting on a bean bag and the carer sitting on Harry's bed, facing him. In both interactions, Harry and the carer in question take part in a recurring activity referred to by the participants as *snakketid* 'talk time', where Harry has the opportunity to talk tête-à-tête with one of the carers in his team. In both cases, the carer turns on the camera, takes a seat on Harry's bed, and conversation is initiated. Even though the settings of the two interactions are very alike, Harry's difficulty in initiation manifests itself very differently. It will be argued that important insights into Harry's scope of competence can be found in these differences.

Analytic approach

The methodological approach to data is Conversation Analysis (CA). CA is a qualitative method which seeks to investigate human communicative behaviour through recordings and transcriptions of naturally occurring interaction. The overarching aim of CA is to investigate the stable practices that members of society use to organize meaningful conduct in conversation (Pomerantz & Fehr, 1997).

The most fundamental assumption in CA is that interactions are sequentially organized. This means that every turn at talk imposes conditions for the subsequent one, and at the same time shows a particular understanding of the conditions imposed by the preceding utterance (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Stivers, 2013, p. 191). Moreover, a 'simple systematics' of turn-taking (Sacks et al., 1974) secures that the interlocutors alternate the speaker and listener roles by establishing a set of rules for when a turn may be complete, and who can or must talk next.

Initiating new topics in interaction requires an awareness of where the conversation is going, and an understanding of when something new is relevant. Not only does the initiator need to ensure that the new topic does not interrupt an ongoing one, the initiation also has to be carefully timed to the online turn-by-turn talk. A delayed initiation increases the risk of losing the floor to another participant, and alternatively, an awkward silence might emerge. Initiating too soon may lead to overlapping talk. Thus, turn-taking and sequence organization are fine-grained interactional mechanisms that are closely intertwined with the art of performing topic initiating actions. Investigating the participants' turn-taking and sequence organization allows us to begin to understand how Harry's interactional difficulty in initiation manifests itself during real-time social interaction.

Furthermore, CA underlines the cooperative character of interaction. Besides examining Harry's competences, the conversation analytic approach allows us to consider the initiations as locally and collaboratively managed social activities, organized by Harry as well as his conversational partners. This means that

the participant with autism is no longer regarded as the source of conversational trouble. Difficulties that arise in talk are seen to proceed from particular structural patterns, which once identified can be avoided or modified (Dobbinson et al., 1998, p. 115).

This article will approach problems with initiating new topics as a phenomenon that emerges and unfolds *between* the participants in the course of interaction. Specifically, the article argues that the interlocutors' conduct in initiation-relevant environments is crucial for Harry's displayed competences in initiation.

Analyses and results: Two single cases

In this section, single-case analyses of two interactions between Harry and the care staff will be provided. The analyses will focus on how the participants' different management of turn-taking and sequence organization in the two interactions facilitates Harry's initiations to different extents.

Harry and Anne: Harry as a non-initiating participant

First, two fragments from Harry's conversation with the carer Anne will be presented. It will be demonstrated how Anne, throughout the interaction, positions herself as the initiating, topic-eliciting party who furthers progressivity, whereas Harry mainly participates by responding to Anne's questions.

Generating a first topic

Prior to extract 1, the opening sequence of the conversation has just reached a closing, and an environment occurs in which a first topic can be generated. Anne elicits such first topic from Harry, *har du noget du gern vil fortælle mig Harry*, 'do you have something you would like to tell me Harry' (line 1). This topic-initial elicitor is designed to "elicit a candidate topic from the next speaker whilst being mute with respect to what the topic might be" (Button & Casey, 1985, p. 4). Despite the yes/no interrogative format of Anne's topic-initial elicitor, an elaborated answer is the preferred response from Harry. He is expected to provide a report of a newsworthy event that could generate a first topic (Button & Casey, 1984, p. 167). The format 'do you have something you would like to tell' displays an institutionalized approach to the conversation, the purpose of which is to get Harry to talk. Harry promptly delivers the requested topicalizable item via a positive assessment of his recent 'September trip', *jamn=vi havd en go: (2.1) en go å en go septembertur* 'we had a good a good and a good September trip' (lines 2-5):

Extract 1 | Harry-Anne

1 Anne: har du noget du gern vil fortæll: mig [harry,]=
do you have something you would like to tell me Harry

2 Harry: [jamn]=
well

3 =vi havd en go:
we had a good

4 (2.1)

5 Harry: en go å en go septembertur=
a good and a good September trip

6 Anne: =i havd en go septembertur,
you had a good September trip

7 (0.4)

8 Harry: jaer_=
yes

Although Harry's response to Anne's topic-initial elicitor is carefully timed to a transition relevance place in Anne's talk, an overlap occurs, because Anne recompletes her turn (lines 1-2). The long pause² in Harry's turn (line 4) is an intra-turn silence, not occurring at a transition relevance place, and is not to be talked in by Anne (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 715). Accordingly, Anne lets Harry finish his projected turn (lines 2-5), latching a receipting request for confirmation onto his turn completion: =i havd en go septembertur, 'you had a good September trip' (line 6). Through the receipt, Anne accepts the suggested topic, about which Harry is obviously more knowledgeable, and provides an opportunity for Harry to elaborate. In the following, however, it will be shown that Harry does not, on his own initiative, provide any elaborations on the initiated topic.

Utilizing the question-answer sequence to promote Harry's participation

In the subsequent stretch of talk, the 'September trip' is topicalized. Throughout extract 2, a recurring sequential organization is observable, as the now established topic consistently progresses via question-answer sequences initiated by Anne:

Extract 2 | Harry-Anne

1 Anne: =i havd en go septembertur,

² Silences are here classified as either pauses, gaps or lapses (Sacks et al., 1974). 'Pauses' are intra-turn silences, which do not occur at transition relevance places. 'Gaps' occur after a turn has arrived at a transition relevance place and before the beginning of a next turn. 'Lapses' are extended gaps, where no one self-selects.

- you had a good September trip
 2 (0.4)
 3 Harry: jaer=
 yes
 4 Anne: **=å der var i i ↑tyskland;**
 and you went to Germany
 5 Harry: det var vi=ja.=
 we did yes
 6 Anne: =der var i i tyskland=ja
 you went to Germany yes
 7 (0.2)
 8 Harry: [som] sædvanligt
 as usual
 9 Anne: [hvor]
 where
 10 Anne: som sædvanligt.=
 as usual
 11 Anne: **=er i det hver år harry**
 do you go every year Harry
 12 Harry: JAER=
 yes
 13 Anne: =°*jaer*°=
 14 Harry: =som regel jaer.
 usually yes
 15 (.)
 16 Anne: **·th=å hva var i ude å lave harry;**
 and what did you do there Harry
 17 (0.4)
 18 Harry: vi var ud: å se sårn lidt forskelligt.
 we went out to see like different things
 19 (.)
 20 Anne: jaer?
 yes
 21 (0.2)
 22 Anne: **ka du huske nogen af tingene;**
 do you remember some of the things
 23 (1.3)
 24 Harry: en stor ↑dyrepark
 a big animal park
 25 (.)
 26 Harry: blandt andet
 among other things
 27 Anne: **·thåuh DET lyder os spændende**
 that sounds exciting too
 28 (0.3)
 29 Harry: JAER
 yes
 30 Anne: **hvaffor nogen dyr var der der;**
 which animals were there
 31 (0.6)
 32 Harry: der var bladt and blandt andet ↑ulve
 there were wolfs among other things
 33 (0.2)
 34 Anne: u:::ha £↑DET lyder spændendef
 oh that sounds exciting
 35 (1.2)

36 Anne: **å hva var der mere h_{arry}=ka du h_{usk} d_{et}?**
 and what else was there Harry do you remember that
 37 (0.2)
 38 Harry: der var sårn l_{id} der var sårn s flere forsk_{ellige}=
 there was like there were like many different kinds
 39 Anne: =+m::?
 anne +slow nod-->
 40 (1.3)+
 anne -->+
 41 Anne: **å hvor lang tid var det i var af sted;**
 and for how long was it you were gone
 42 (0.4)
 43 Harry: fra m_{andag} til t_{ors}[dag]
 from Monday to Thursday
 44 Anne: [m_{an}]dag til t_{ors}dag

Anne pursues the topic by continuously requesting information (lines 16, 22, 30, 36, 41) or

requesting confirmation (lines 1, 4, 11) regarding Harry's trip. Harry responds to her requests in second position, either by informing (lines 18, 24-26, 32, 28, 43) or confirming (lines 3, 5, 12). Finally, Anne receipts Harry's answers (lines 6, 13, 20, 39, 49) or assesses them positively (lines 27, 34) in third position, providing possible sequence closure (Schegloff, 2007). Thus, during extract 2, Anne strongly utilizes the progressivity of question-answer sequences to generate topic-oriented talk and push forward the interaction (Stivers & Robinson, 2006).

After Anne's sequence-closing thirds (Schegloff, 2007), initiation of new sequences is relevant. In other words, the participants have equal opportunities to initiate talk after third position, either by continuing the ongoing topic or by introducing a new topic. However, gaps and lapses often emerge in this sequential position (lines 7, 21, 28, 35, 40), whereupon Anne asks yet another question regarding Harry's trip. The silences after possible sequence closure vary from two tenths of a second to 1.3 seconds, after which Anne pursues further talk. Thus, Anne evidently attempts to minimize the gaps, and by self-selecting she prevents longer lapses from developing.

Micro-analyses of the question-answer sequences throughout extract 2 may help us to understand how the interaction progresses with Anne as the primary initiator and Harry as the

responding party. After Harry's delivery of the requested topicalizable item (extract 1, lines 2-5), three requests for confirmation follow (lines 1, 4, 11), which provide Harry with the opportunity to tell more about the trip. In each case, however, Harry merely confirms. In the first case, *=i havd en gø septembertur*, 'you had a good September trip' (line 1), the opportunity arises for Harry to elaborate after his confirming *jaer* 'yes' (line 3). However, Anne latches another request for confirmation onto his turn, *=å der var i i ↑tysklandç* 'and you went to Germany' (line 4), providing minimal space for Harry to take the turn. Obviously, Harry has epistemic primacy over the trip, because he participated, but even though Anne is less knowledgeable, her declarative request for confirmation, *=å der var i i ↑tysklandç* 'and you went to Germany' (line 4), indicates that she already has epistemic access to some information about the trip (Heritage, 2013). Harry confirms (line 5), and Anne's receipt in third position (6) constitutes a possible sequence closure.

The opportunity to initiate a new sequence arises after Anne's turn completion. After a minimal gap of 0.2 seconds (line 7), an overlap occurs because of Harry and Anne's simultaneous starts. Anne's *hvor* 'where' (line 9) projects another question, whereas Harry comments on the frequency of their Germany trips (line 8). Anne lets this information form the basis of her next request for confirmation, *er i det hver år harry* 'do you go every year Harry' (line 11). Harry confirms (line 12), Anne receipts (line 13), and Harry finally modifies his confirmation, *=som regel jaer*. 'usually yes' (line 14).

Once again, Anne leaves only a micro-silence (line 15) for Harry to elaborate or initiate something new before producing yet another question, this time a 'telling question' (Thompson et al., 2015) that seeks an expanded report on Harry's trip: *·mth=å hva var i ude å lave harryç* 'and what did you do there Harry' (line 16). However, instead of a telling, Harry provides a general description composed by a single turn-constructive unit, *vi var ud: å se*

sårn lidt forskelligt. ‘we went out to see like different things’ (line 18). After two micro-silences (lines 19, 21), Anne holds Harry accountable for providing an elaborated report by asking him to be more specific: *ka du huske nogen af tingene* ‘do you remember some of the things’ (line 22). Although Anne requests a list of information (‘some of the things’), Harry responds with one single piece of information, *en stor dyrepark* ‘a big animal park’ (line 24), yet orienting to the preference for a list established by Anne by adding *blandt andet* ‘among other things’ (line 26). Anne receipts with a positive assessment of the trip to the animal park (line 27), and after Harry’s display of agreement (line 29), Anne asks yet another telling question regarding the animal park: *hvaffor nogen dyr var der der* ‘which animals were there’ (line 30). In Harry’s response, *der var bladt and blandt andet ulve* ‘there were wolfs among other things’ (line 32), the use of ‘among other things’ indicates that he once again orients to Anne’s question as preferring a list of animals, and that he, by mentioning only ‘wolfs’, does not meet this preference. After Anne’s positive evaluation of the received information, *u:::ha £DET lyder spændende* ‘oh that sounds exciting’ (line 34), the sequence has reached possible closure.

At this point, Harry could provide further information related to his trip or change the topic. Instead, a 1.2-second lapse (line 35) occurs, whereupon Anne self-selects, leading to a reiteration of the previously described sequential organization. In Anne’s next turn, she makes further efforts to expand the previously requested list of animals: *å hva var der mere hurray=ka du husk det?* ‘and what else was there Harry, do you remember that’ (line 36). As Harry’s answer, *der var sårn lid der var sårn s flere forskellige* ‘there was like there were like many different kinds’ (line 38), does not provide any further information, Anne moves on to a ‘specifying question’, which seeks a single, specific piece of information (Thompson et al., 2015): *å hvor lang tid var det i var af sted* ‘and for how long was it you were gone’ (line

41). Prior to this question, yet another long lapse arises (line 40). Harry now responds unproblematically by delivering the specific information that has been requested (line 43).

To sum up, Anne's 'telling questions' are initially designed to give Harry the floor by requesting expanded reports. However, Harry responds with single turn-constructive units that provide single pieces of information or overall descriptions. Pursuing further talk from Harry, Anne immediately changes her question design to prefer single, specific pieces of information, which is probably easier for Harry to respond to satisfactorily. Throughout the extract, Anne self-selects as soon as prior sequences reach possible closings and longer lapses are arising.

Thus, Anne evidently orients to minimization of silences after possible sequence closure. Her behaviour corresponds to Jefferson's (1983) claim that a 'metric' exists (for ordinary, neurotypical interaction, that is) in which a 'standard maximum' of tolerable silence is approximately one second. Later quantitative studies in silence length have confirmed this finding. In their research on Dutch, Swedish and Scottish English interactions, Heldner and Edlund (2010, p. 563) show that 70% to 82% of all inter-turn silences were shorter than 500 ms, and 82% to 95% of all inter-turn silences were shorter than 1000 ms. A gap around 200 ms was the most common silence (Heldner & Edlund, 2010, pp. 563-564). Their review of gap durations across different languages according to the literature (e.g., Beattie & Bernard, 1979 on English, Campione & Véronis, 2002 on French, ten Bosch et al. 2005 on Dutch, and Weilhammer & Rabold, 2003 on German, Japanese and English) illustrates similar tendencies. However, as noted by Hoey (2020, p. 16), these studies of gap duration are often insensitive to different kinds of inter-turn silences, that is whether the turn prior to the gap constitutes a sequence closure, implicates determine range of next actions, or restricts range of next speakers. Hoey (2020) has described how inter-turn silences where nothing in particular

is projected to occur “can be problematic if they disrupt what should be an unbroken flow of talk” (Hoey, 2020, p. 61). Anne orients to minimization of such gaps and lapses for which there is neither a determinate next action or next speaker. This orientation is probably also linked to the activity the participants take part in, *snakketid* ‘talk time’, which is organized for sustained talk-in-interaction (Hoey, 2020, p. 62). The carer’s orientation to minimization of silences after sequence closure will be further discussed in the last section of this paper.

Interrogation or interaction?

Extract 2 illustrates how Anne persistently positions herself as the initiating party, who asks Harry questions after possible sequence closure. Harry overwhelmingly participates on Anne’s initiative, responding with as little information as possible. One might argue that Harry has several chances to initiate talk after possible sequence closure. Since he does not, the data may appear to provide evidence of Harry’s “failure of normal back-and-forth conversation”, “decreased interest in social interactions” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 52) and in particular of his “limited initiation of social interaction” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 52).

But ascribing Harry’s lack of initiations solely to an underlying deficit caused by his autism is probably a too limited way of conceptualizing his conduct. Even though Anne’s continuous questions in all probability are designed to prompt Harry’s engagement in the interaction and to prevent dispreferred long lapses from developing, the sequential organization that the questions impose can be said to restrict Harry’s participation in the interaction.

The constant reiteration of the question-answer sequence generates a structure similar to the one in police-suspect interview interactions (Haworth, 2006; Heydon, 2005; Stokoe &

Edwards, 2008), giving the impression that Harry is ‘put on the spot’. In police interviews, one participant is also “prescribed the role as questioner and the other that of respondent, combined with [...] unequal power relations between participants” (Haworth, 2010, p. 172). As alluded to above, the interrogation-like style is affected by the institutional setting in which the conversation between Harry and Anne takes place: Not only is the conversation asymmetrical in the sense that one interlocutor is diagnosed with autism and the other a professional, the purpose of the interaction is to get Harry to talk about his life in the activity centre. It can be presumed that this institutional context and the professional goals involved have intensified Anne’s use of questions in order to push forward their interaction.

To sum up, Anne utilizes the question-answer sequence to get Harry to talk about a topic chosen by himself. However, by doing so, she provides few opportunities for Harry to participate beyond the role as answerer. Anne’s behaviour ends up placing interactional limitations on the type of turns Harry can take and the extent to which he can participate in their interaction. Comparing the above data with an interaction between Harry and another carer, Lilly, reveals interesting insights into Harry’s abilities to participate mutually in social interaction. In the following, it will be argued that Harry’s competences in initiation are highly influenced by the parties’ management of turn-taking and sequence organization.

Harry and Lilly: Harry as a competent initiator

This section will provide analyses of two fragments from an interaction between Harry and the carer Lilly. As previously portrayed, this conversation is comparable with the interaction between Harry and Anne in several ways. However, as will be evident, one distinctive difference is that Harry appears as a competent participant who initiates topicalizable material in the conversation with Lilly. The following analysis argues that Lilly’s high silence

tolerance and management of sequential environments in which initiations are relevant facilitate Harry's initiations.

The role of carer withdrawal in collaboratively generating a topic

Harry opens the conversation with Lilly via a news announcement about his mother visiting him soon. When this topic is brought to closure about 40 seconds later, Lilly inquires for a news report from Harry on how he thinks it is going in the activity centre, *hvordan synes du ellers det går på a se* 'how do you else think it is going at AC' (extract 3, line 1). From this point, the overall topic about Harry's life in the activity centre is collaboratively generated, and Lilly's withdrawal enables Harry to initiate a related sub-topic:

Extract 3 | Harry-Lilly

- 1 Lilly: **hvordan synes du ellers det går på a se**
how do you else think it is going at AC
- 2 (.)
- 3 Harry: **·hhhh jamen det går: sådan fin nok,**
well things are going like fine enough
- 4 (0.2)
- 5 Lilly: **det går fin nok**
things are going fine enough
- 6 (.)
- 7 Harry: **JÅ**
yes
- 8 Lilly: **↑jā**
(0.2)
- 10 Lilly: ***deu da* ↑dejligt,**
that was lovely
- 11 (0.2)
- 12 Harry: **jā.**
(0.2)
- 14 Lilly: **·hja:h,**
yes
- 15 (1.5)
- 16 Harry: **>det går godt< ja.**
things are going well yes
- 17 (.)
- 18 Lilly: **°m:°.**
- 19 Harry: **å vi ↑havd en god dag i tirsdags**
and we had a good day last Tuesday
- 20 Lilly: **°vi ↓havde en god dag i↓ ↑tirsdags ja↑°**
we had a good day last Tuesday yes
- 21 (0.9)
- 22 Lilly: **°det havd: vi°**
we did

23 Harry: det havd: vi ja=
 we did yes
 24 Lilly: =·hjah
 yes
 25 (2.6)

As opposed to the opening question posed by Anne, *har du noget du gern vil fortælle mig Harry*, ‘do you have something you would like to tell me Harry’ (extract 1, line 1), Lilly’s ‘telling question’ (Thompson et al., 2015), *hvordan synes du ellers det går på a se* ‘how do you else think it is going at AC’ (line 1), constitutes a conventional way of generating a new topic. The format appears less institutionalized and could be found in interactions between ‘equal’ peers as well.

Lilly’s itemized news inquiry (Button & Casey, 1985, p. 9) opens up to the telling of any news related to Harry’s life in the activity centre. Harry orients to this projected relevance by providing an assessment which is pertinent for beginning a topic: *·hhhh jamen det går: sådan fin nok*, ‘well things are going like fine enough’ (line 3). The prolonged *går*: ‘are going’ and the downgraded positive assessment, *sådan fin nok*, ‘like fine enough’ are trouble-implicative (Jefferson, 1980; Lindström & Heinemann, 2009). Moreover, the initial breathing and the use of the discourse marker *jamen* ‘well’ project that his answer will be non-straightforward (Pedersen, 2015). In third position, Lilly provides the sequential opportunity for Harry to tell more (Button & Casey, 1985, p. 14), namely by repeating his trouble-implicative assessment with rising intonation, *det går fin nok* ‘things are going fine enough’ (line 5). The practice of repeating Harry’s talk to indicate that his prior turn is topicalizable for further talk was used by Anne (extract 1, line 6) as well.

A dissimilarity, however, can be found in the carers’ management of Harry’s subsequent confirmations. When Harry merely confirms (line 7), not immediately treating his assessment as a topic for further talk, Lilly receipts (line 8) and positively assesses his evaluation, **deu da* †dejligt*, ‘that was lovely’ (line 10). Harry agrees (line 12), but still does not add further

topic-oriented talk. By means of the ingressive particle *·hja:h*, ‘yes’ (line 14), Lilly shows that she regards the local assessment sequence as possibly closed, thereby treating the shared understanding that has been reached on this topic as sufficient (Steensig et al., 2021). After the possible sequence closure, there is a 1.5-second lapse (line 15), during which both participants have the opportunity to self-select for next speakership.

To sum up, Harry does not immediately treat Lilly’s itemized news inquiry as “news generational” (Button & Casey, 1985, p. 9). His general assessment strictly meets the request for an assessment which is built into Lilly’s inquiry, but does not address the relevance of telling the latest news (Button & Casey, 1985, p. 12). This behaviour is comparable with the one found in the interaction with Anne, where Harry also responds with as little information as possible despite Anne’s requests for expanded answers. By initially failing to treat Lilly’s turn as a topic-generating move, one could claim that Harry works against collaboratively generating new topics for conversation.

However, Lilly persistently awaits Harry’s continuation, and after the above-mentioned lapse (line 15), Harry reformulates his positive evaluation (line 16) and produces a topicalizable elaboration: *å vi ↑häv*d* en god dag i tirsdays* ‘and we had a good day last Tuesday’ (line 19). Harry hereby orients to Lilly’s prior turn as “news generational” (Button & Casey, 1985, p. 9). Remarkably, this orientation only becomes detectable because Harry is offered plenty of time and several chances to talk after possible sequence closures. Harry’s elaboration comprises a positive assessment of a bus trip he recently went on, which strengthens his initial positive evaluation and downplays the projected trouble attended in the “trouble-premonitory” response (Jefferson, 1980).

Lilly’s withdrawal after her itemized news inquiry is vital to Harry’s opportunities to competently and mutually collaborate on the production of a new topic. After Harry’s initial

assessment and the ensuing space of non-talk, Lilly could have initiated a question-answer sequence to prompt further talk from Harry, as was done by Anne in extract 2. However, Harry's initiation of the topicalizable elaboration leads to a more than two-minutes conversation on the bus trip.

In summary, extract 3 illustrates how a new topic is interactionally generated in the interaction between Harry and Lilly. Lilly requests a news report, or she asks a 'telling question', which prefers an elaborated answer. Despite Harry's initially reluctant behaviour, Lilly does not request further information or initiate another topic. Instead, she brings the local assessment sequence to closure and withdraws, leaving a – from a neurotypical viewpoint – dispreferred long lapse. However, this silence promotes Harry's initiation of a new conversational topic.

High silence tolerance as a tool for facilitating Harry's initiations

In extract 4, the topic about the bus trip reaches a closing, prior to which the interlocutors move stepwise around different circumstances related to the trip. From a neurotypical perspective, the lapses that transpire after possible sequence closure (lines 9, 11, 15, 17, 21, 48, 50, 52, 54) are unusually long. At this point, there is no designated next speaker, which means that both participants have the opportunity to self-select (Sacks et al., 1974). Without exception, the long silences, during which Lilly gazes intensely at Harry, result in Harry's initiation of either sub-topics (related to the bus trip) or new topics. Extract 4 hereby clearly demonstrates that Harry's abilities to participate and initiate are interactionally managed:

Extract 4 | Harry-Lilly

- 1 Lilly: så: det godt man kan skiftes til det=ik↑å
then it is good one can take turns to go right
- 2 (0.2)
- 3 Harry: det er det ja.
it is yes
- 4 (.)
- 5 Lilly: så i alle sammen (.) får mulighed for at komme med,

- 5 so you all get the opportunity to go
(1.2)
- 7 Harry: det: godt man kan skiftes til det
it is good one can take turns to go
- 8 Lilly: °det er det°
it is
- 9 (4.4)
- 10 Harry: jaer
yes
- 11 (2.4)
- 12 Harry: **å det gik** ↑godt med at være sammen med torben
and it went well with being together with Torben
- 13 (0.2)
- 14 Lilly: °det: +dejlignit + å høre_°
that is lovely to hear
lilly +small nod+
- 15 (1.5)
- 16 Lilly: ·hja
yes
- 17 (3.1)
- 18 Harry: **så det: jeg glad for jeg kan fortsæt med_**
so I am glad that I can continue with that
- 19 (0.2)
- 20 Lilly: det ka jeg godt forstå
I can understand that
- 21 (5.1)
- 22 Harry: ((smacks his lips))
- 23 (0.2)
- 24 Harry: **det gør jeg:**
I do that
- 25 (1.9)
- 26 Harry: **forår å efterår**
spring and autumn
- 27 (0.3)
- 28 Harry: **det: sådn det er.**
that is how it is
- 29 (.)
- 30 Lilly: +°mm° +
lilly +nodding+
- 31 (.)
- 32 Harry: efterår å forår.
autumn and spring
- 33 (.)
- 34 Lilly: °to gange om året_°
twice a year
- 35 Harry: ja,
yes
- 36 Lilly: ·mjharh
yes
- 37 (0.3)
- 38 Harry: to gang: om året=
twice a year
- 39 Lilly: =°mm,°
- 40 (1.2)
- 41 Lilly: °det: en go aftale.°
that is a good arrangement

42 (.)
 43 Harry: det er det_
 it is
 44 (.)
 45 Harry: [det: en] rig- det er en rigtig god aftale=
 it is a real- it is a really good arrangement
 46 Lilly: [°m:..°]
 47 Lilly: =°hjaer°
 yes
 48 **(4.3)**
 49 Harry: ((clears throat))
 50 **%(4.5)** %
 harry % licks his lips,
 looking at Lilly, swallows%
 51 Harry: jaer;
 yes
 52 **(1.8)**
 53 Harry: ((clears throat))
 54 **(1.0)**
 55 Harry: **å så: der næst %næste (.) jeg har hørt det: det:**
 and then there is next I have heard it is it is
 56 **næste lørdag der: det der,**
 next Saturday there is that
 57 (0.8)
 58 Harry: **arrangement hvor vi ser**
 event where we look at
 59 (0.8)
 60 Harry: **hvor vi ser billeder fra vores septembertur.**
 where we look at pictures from our September trip
 61 (0.2)
 62 Lilly: ja?
 63 Lilly: det: når i har pårørendedag
 that is when you have relatives day
 64 Harry: det: når vi har pårørendedag ja.
 that is when we have relatives day yes

When extract 4 begins, the participants positively assess the arrangement where the individuals from the activity centre take turns to attend the bus trips (lines 1-8). The possible sequence closure in line 8 makes relevant either a post-expansion or initiation of a new sequence. However, during an extended 4.4-second lapse (line 9), both participants refrain from speaking. Harry receipts in third position (line 10), and yet another long lapse emerges (line 11). Once again, Lilly could have filled the silences with talk, but instead she awaits, providing interactional space for Harry, who ends up initiating a new sequence and sub-topic with the news announcement, *å det gik ↑godt med at være sammen med torben* ‘and it went well with being together with Torben’ (line 12).

Lilly produces a conditionally relevant assessment (Pomerantz, 1984; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973) of Harry's evaluative news announcement (line 14), and after a 1.5-second lapse (line 15), Lilly uses the ingressive *hja* 'yes' (line 16) to emphasize that she will not add more to the sequence, thereby suggesting its closing (Steensig et al., 2021). Once again, a lapse, this time 3.1 seconds long (line 17), promotes Harry's initiation of a new assessment sequence, *så det: jeg glad for jeg kan fortsæt med* 'so I am glad that I can continue with that' (line 18). In second position, Lilly acknowledges his assessment (line 20), indicating the possible closing of a two-turn sequence.

After an extended 5.1-second lapse (line 21), Harry initiates a turn that informs about the frequency of his participation in the bus trips, *det gør jeg: (1.9) forår å efterår* 'I do that spring and autumn' (lines 24-26). Lilly receipts the information by rephrasing *forår å efterår* 'spring and autumn' as *to gange om året* 'twice a year' (line 34), a rewording that Harry again receipts by repeating it (line 38). Lilly expands the sequence with a positive assessment of this arrangement, *det: en god aftale* 'that is a good arrangement' (line 42), and Harry agrees (line 43) and upgrades the assessment (Pomerantz, 1984), *det: en rig- det er en rigtig god aftale* 'it is a real- it is a really good arrangement' (line 45). Because the initial part of this upgraded assessment overlaps with Lilly's receipt (line 46), Harry uses repair mechanisms to deal with the turn-taking error. More specifically, his cut-off and restart after the overlap demonstrate subtle turn-taking competences. By repairing the turn-taking trouble, Harry also exhibits a fine-grained sensitivity to the temporality of interaction and an awareness of the preference for one party talking at the time (Sacks et al., 1974, p. 706). Lilly ingressively receipts once again (line 47), making relevant sequence closure, and thus, initiation of something new.

The subsequent 4.3-second lapse (line 48) suggests that neither of the parties will self-select for speakership. After Harry has cleared his throat (line 49), another 4.5-second lapse develops (line 50), during which Harry licks his lips and swallows, possibly projecting a turn initiation. But Harry solely produces a *jaerç* ‘yes’ (line 51), followed by additional long lapses (lines 52, 54) and another clearing of his throat (line 53). It appears that Harry systematically uses this particle and clearings of his throat to fill in the silences after possible sequence closures, thereby orienting to the extraordinarily extended lapses as dispreferred.

Eventually, Harry changes the topic. Although still related to the overall topic about Harry’s well-being in the activity centre, he now moves from the bus trip, a past event, to a coming event: *å så: der næst næste (.) jeg har hørt det: det: næste lørdag der: det der, (0.8) arrangement hvor vi ser_ (0.8) hvor vi ser billeder fra vores septembertur.* ‘and then there is next I have heard it is it is next Saturday there is that event where we look at where we look at pictures from our September trip’ (lines 55-60). Harry orients to the topic shift by prefacing his turn with *å så* ‘and then’, indicating that his subsequent turn will constitute another element on the list of events that add up to the general positive update he initially gave on his life in the activity centre (Heritage & Sorjonen, 1994).

Extract 4 illustrates that Harry *is* capable of introducing topicalizable material when prior sequences and topics have reached possible closings. He initiates a range of new (sub-)topics, designs his initiations in competent ways, and, by moving around stepwise, he even exhibits a sensitivity towards the relatedness of different topics. The prolonged lapses that emerge after possible closings result in Harry initiating related talk. Thus, the data indicate that Lilly’s high tolerance towards silences in initiation-relevant environments promotes Harry’s initiations. Lilly’s embodied behaviour during the silences, gazing intensely at Harry without lowering her eyes, emphasizes her expectation that Harry will take a turn-at-talk.

That individuals with autism may need longer silences in natural interaction than the ‘standard maximum’ of approximately one second is supported by prior research on turn-taking asynchronies in autism. Dobbins et al. (1998) showed that an adult with autism had lengthy silences both within turns and between turns. Thurber and Tager-Flusberg (1993) have also noted that in conversations involving people with autism, silences between speakers’ turns are asynchronous, resulting in disjointed and arhythmic talk. Both studies suggest that lengthy intra-turn silences (here defined as pauses) can be caused by cognitive difficulties, as they may reflect word searches (Dobbins et al., 1998; Thurber & Tager-Flusberg, 1993). Ochs et al. (2004, p. 162) propose that prolonged inter-turn silences at transition relevance places (here defined as gaps or lapses) may “be due to distraction or a desire to ignore or withdraw from the interaction at hand”. Another explanation might be that some individuals with autism generally have a longer reaction time latency, meaning that individuals with autism process auditive and visual stimuli slower than neurotypical people. This may cause problems with timing in conversation and could call for a higher silence tolerance among conversational partners.

Later, it will be discussed whether the “limited initiation of social interaction” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 52) of some individuals with autism can be caused partly by conversational partners orienting to the neurotypical preference for minimizing gaps when interacting with people with autism.

Managing initiation-relevant sequential environments

Other features than Lilly’s high silence tolerance may have contributed to Harry’s successful initiations in this interaction. One practice recurrently used by Lilly to indicate that she regards the shared understanding that has been reached on a matter as sufficient, and thus, that

something else can be initiated, is her use of the ingressive *ja* ‘yes’ (and varieties of *ja* ‘yes’) (Steensig et al., 2021).

Moreover, the way in which the participants arrive interactionally at possible closings of prior topics, provides several opportunities for Harry to initiate new topics. In the following, two of Harry’s initiations from extract 3 (line 3 and lines 55-60) will be examined. More specifically, the course of talk leading up to these initiations will be scrutinized, as it is argued that the possible closings of prior topics are underlined sequentially.

In both cases, assessing sequences initiated by Lilly emphasize that the prior topic has reached a possible closing. Harry agrees with Lilly’s positive assessments by repeating (and upgrading) them. Lilly then receipts in third position, after which long lapses occur, the duration of which is more than 4 seconds. In both cases, Harry breaks the silence with a receipting *jaer* ‘yes’ in fourth position, re-occasioning the relevance of sequence completion after the sequence was already treated as complete (Hoey, 2020, p. 69). Harry’s *jaer* ‘yes’ thus locates the interaction “as past the conclusion of a previous course of action, but not yet at the beginning of a next one” (Hoey, 2020, p. 90). In Hoey’s words, “[w]ith this practice, participants in lapse environments provide a minimal “something” where “something” is due, and no more than that” (Hoey, 2020, p. 69). Yet another lapse of more than 2 seconds then emerges, whereupon Harry finally introduces a new topic (see table 1 for an overview). [table 1 here]

In summary, assessing sequences as well as sequence closing and sequence recompleting receipts underline the closing of the prior courses of action, thereby also implying that initiation of something new is now relevant. This sequential organization makes environments for new topics mutually recognizable to the participants, and offers Harry several rounds to

provide such initiations. Along with Lilly's high silence tolerance, this management of initiation-relevant sequential environments strongly encourages Harry's initiations.

Discussion

This paper analyses two naturally occurring interactions between Harry, a man with autism, and two familiar carers, Anne and Lilly. Both interactions exemplify what the participants refer to as 'talk time', the purpose of which is to let Harry talk to a carer about his life in the activity centre.

Seen in isolation, micro-analyses of the interaction with Anne verify the claims that individuals with autism may have "decreased interest in social interactions" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 52) and in particular that they exhibit "limited initiation of social interaction" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 52). Harry initiates few sequences and topics in this conversation, and he speaks primarily on Anne's requests. Gaps and lapses develop when initiation is relevant, and Anne, who seeks to minimize the silences, unceasingly asks Harry new questions, probably in an attempt to increase his participation.

The interaction with Lilly, on the other hand, illustrates that Harry is able to competently initiate topicalizable material at sequentially relevant places, and even by means of stepwise moves from topic to topic. Extended lapses develop after possible sequence closures in this interaction as well. The difference is, however, that Lilly endures those silences and refrains from initiating new topics in order to minimize them. Without exception, her withdrawal promotes Harry's competent introduction of new material. Consequently, Harry becomes the primary initiating party in the conversation with Lilly. Specifically, Harry succeeds in initiating almost twice as many (sub-)topics per minute in the interaction with Lilly as in the one with Anne (see table 2).

The correspondence between Harry's topic initiations and the carers' silence tolerance is reflected in table 2. As is shown, Anne's silence tolerance seems to be around the standard maximum of approximately one second (Heldner & Edlund, 2010; Jefferson, 1983). If Harry has not initiated talk after 1.01 seconds on average, Anne does. On the other hand, Lilly gives Harry 4.59 seconds on average to introduce new topics. [table 2 here]

These findings suggest that a high silence tolerance of the coparticipant is an important tool in promoting Harry's initiations. Moreover, the participants' management of initiation-relevant sequential environments also seems to facilitate Harry's initiations. More specifically, environments for new topics are made mutually recognizable, as possible closings of prior courses of talk are underlined sequentially, and Harry is offered several rounds to initiate.

The dyadic context of the investigated interactions mediates the effect of the silences. The participation framework, where the participants sit gazing at each other with no other activities available than mere talking, underlines the silences as lapses in interaction, and not silences due to the participants' engagement in multiple activities.

It must be concluded that Harry does not lack neither competences nor motivation to successfully initiate new topics. Instead, the analyses propose that Harry's deficits in initiation can be reconceptualized as difficulties initiating interaction on neurotypical terms, where the standard maximum silence is approximately one second. Abandoning the neurotypical preference for minimizing gaps and lapses evidently facilitates a higher frequency of Harry's initiations. By recurrently clearing his throat in initiation-relevant sequential environments and using the particle *ja* 'yes' to recomplete prior sequences, Harry orients to the continued relevance of talk and the preference for minimizing silences, despite not yet being ready to initiate anything himself (Hoey, 2020, p. 62).

The autistic difficulty in initiation of social interaction may result in a higher burden on interlocutors to begin topics for conversation, but it is debatable whether conversation partners' use of questions to push forward the interaction is beneficial. Generally, questions are a powerful tool that impose certain agendas, and the conditional relevance they establish pressures the recipient to fulfil the role as answerer (Steensig & Drew, 2008; Stivers & Enfield, 2010). In Sacks' words (1995 I, p. 54), "[a]s long as one is in the position of doing the questions, then in part they have control of the conversation." The extensive use of questions by interlocutors who talk to people with autism has previously been noticed. Dobbinson et al. (1998, p. 129) claim that the questioning style is highly facilitating, as it involves the participant with autism in the talk. Likewise, Rendle-Short (2014) argues that conversational partners' initiation of adjacency pairs such as question-answer sequences provides 'interactional scaffolding' for children with autism, who find it "easier [...] to respond to a FPP [first-pair part] rather than initiating their own FPPs" (Rendle-Short, 2014, p. 238). Even though the question-answer sequence certainly offers 'conversational predictability' and may increase the participation of the individual with autism, the quantity of turns made by the individual with autism must not be valued higher than the quality of the interaction as a whole. Jones and Schwartz (2009, p. 439) draw the same conclusion, namely that "asking questions is not enough":

Presumably this finding indicates that families of children with autism should ask more questions [...] to increase the rate of responding from their child. On the surface, this conclusion may have some face validity. Asking questions facilitates the initiation of an interaction and necessitates a response, typically verbal. [...] What questions do not do, however, is facilitate the social nature of communication because a discrete answer to a question from the child with autism often ends the interaction.

Thus, even though Anne's continuous information requests in all probability are designed to prompt Harry's engagement, they provide few opportunities for Harry to participate beyond the role as answerer of her questions (Zimmerman, 1998). In other words, Harry responds competently to Anne's incessant interrogation, but paradoxically, this also retains him in the role as a non-initiating party and precludes him from bringing up his own issues.

In a study of aphasic conversation, Burch et al. (2002) show how it increased an aphasic man's turn constructions in both length and content, when his wife was trained to leave silences at points for possible topic change, instead of launching test questions. Similarly, test questions have been shown to limit the structure and content of talk by people with aphasia, as well as limiting opportunities for exchange of news (Beeke et al., 2013). Even though Anne's incessant questions are not test questions per se (Anne seems to be largely unknowledgeable about the information she requests), the interactional consequences of using questions as a practice to scaffold the impaired person in joining in a conversation appear to be similar to those of test questions.

If Anne's motivation for asking questions is to invite Harry to contribute to conversation, we must acknowledge the possibility that she is "making conversation" for the camera (and hence, the researcher) (Beeke et al., 2013, p. 801). However, Anne does not demonstrate this behaviour elsewhere in the data. This suggests that she is rather prompting Harry's participation due to the institutionalized activity they take part in, where certain professional considerations are in force. Prior conversation analytic work has dealt with the practices of practitioners when promoting client participation in various institutional settings. Antaki and colleagues (2007) describe staff members' practices used to solicit talk of intellectually impaired people, one of the most common being the asking and pursuing of questions. The authors acknowledge the dilemmas of the care staff related to the use of such

practices, on the one hand seeking to allow the impaired coparticipant to talk freely, and, on the other hand, facilitating or even shaping their talk in order to serve institutional interests. The present study contributes to our understanding of professionals' practices and their interactional consequences. Those mechanisms probably also go beyond the case of autism.

The analyses provided here underline that Harry's participation is managed interactionally. The difficulty of initiating social interaction does not solely emerge from underlying, intrapersonal deficits within the individual with autism. Rather, the competences have been shown to also depend on the interlocutor's local management of turn-taking and sequence organization. Considering the above points, the study does not claim that individuals with autism do not have difficulties with initiation. Instead, it confirms that those areas of social interaction can be challenging for people with autism. But the study also argues that the challenge is interpersonal, emerging and unfolding in the course of turn-by-turn social interaction.

Finally, this study of autistic interaction demonstrates some of the preferences working in neurotypical interaction as well. As opposed to the preference for minimizing gaps between one speaker and a selected next speaker, we know little about how lapses after possible sequence closure are treated by participants in interaction. The analyses complement Hoey's (2020) work on how lapses are organized and managed in natural interaction.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Jakob Steensig for his valuable feedback on this paper. John Rae also made very insightful comments to an early version of the paper. Moreover, the paper has benefitted from reviews by anonymous reviewers of *Clinical Linguistics & Phonetics*. Finally, I wish to thank all the people who have agreed to let me record their interactions and, thereby, made this research possible.

Disclosure statement

The author reports no conflict of interest.

Biographical note

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Tables

Table 1: Sequential environments leading to Harry's initiations

Actions	Lines 1-12	Lines 41-60
Lilly assesses	så: det godt man kan skiftes til det=ikrå	°det: en go aftale.° that is a good arrangement

	then it is good one can take turns to go right [...] så i alle sammen (.) får mulighed for at komme <u>med</u> , so you all get the opportunity to go (1.2)	
Harry agrees with Lilly's assessment	det: <u>godt</u> man kan <u>skiftes til</u> det it is good one can take turns to go	det <u>er</u> det_ it is (.) det: en rig- det er en <u>rigtig</u> <u>god</u> <u>aftale</u> = it is a very it is a very good arrangement
Lilly receipts	°det <u>er</u> det° it is	·°hjaer° yes
+4.0-second silence	(4.4)	(4.3) ((clears throat)) (4.5)
Harry: <i>jaer</i>	<u>Jaer</u> yes	<u>jaer</u> ;
+2.0-second silence	(2.4)	(1.8) ((clears throat)) (1.0)
Harry initiates new topic	å det <u>gik</u> <u>godt</u> med at være <u>sammen med torben</u> and it went well with being together with Torben	å så: der <u>næst næste</u> (.) jeg har hørt det: det: <u>næste</u> <u>lørdag</u> der: <u>det</u> der, (0.8) <u>arrangement</u> hvor vi <u>ser</u> (0.8) hvor vi <u>ser</u> <u>billeder fra vores septembertur</u> . and then there is next I have heard it is it is next Saturday there is that event where we look at where we look at pictures from our September trip

Table 2: Topic initiations^a in the interactions with Anne and Lilly

Coparticipant	Total length of interaction, including silences (in minutes)	Topic initiations by coparticipant	Topic initiations by coparticipant per minute	Topic initiations by Harry	Topic initiations by Harry per minute	Average duration of silences ^b prior to Harry's initiations
Anne	6:43	19	2.83	7	1.04	1.01 seconds
Lilly	9:22	4	0.43	18	1.92	4.59 seconds

^aTopic initiations are here defined as the initiation of a “a string of successive utterances [...] “about” the same “thing” (Schegloff, 1990, p. 55). Topic initiations include initiations of subordinate topics, which introduce new aspects of prior, superior topics. Thus, a single topic may involve several sub-topics, all of which are included in the number of initiations above. The number of topic initiations was measured multiple times in order to secure intra-rater reliability. However, whether a turn constitutes a topic initiation or not is indeed up to interpretation.

^bAll silences that 1) appear after possible topic closure, and 2) come before a given topic initiation have been added up. That is, if a possible topic closing turn is followed by a 0.2-second silence, then another possible topic closing turn, and finally a silence of 0.4 seconds, the duration of the gap prior to Harry’s subsequent initiation has been regarded as lasting 0.6 seconds. Silences were measured in CLAN in seconds and tenths of seconds. All vocalizations like sighing and clearing one’s throat were counted as speech (i.e., not a silence).