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**« peut-être on peut improviser un peu »: the  
emergence of joint construction of reference during  
a card game situation**

Short title: "Joint construction of reference during a card game interaction"

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Abstract (120 mots max):

Following the methodological approach of multimodal conversation analysis, our study focuses on the emergence of a jointly constructed reference during a card game interaction: the participants need to find a common solution in order to continue their activity. The data collected *in situ* allow us to apprehend the different verbal and non-verbal resources mobilised by the players in order to show that in social interaction reference construction is a joint achievement that involves various types of resources which are temporally finely tuned (among others joint visual attention on the object gesturally put in focus). We also show that once a referent-function association is established and grounded, it can be "activated" later on by using an iconic gesture.

Keywords (4-5):

jointly constructed reference; multimodality; interaction; naturally occurring data.

## **Referential practices in social interaction**

The notion of reference is central in understanding the relations between the world of discourse and the material world and, more extensively, in understanding meaning constitution. Reference has been largely explored within a variety of disciplines and frameworks related to the study of language, such as philosophy of language (e.g. theories of reference such as those elaborated by Frege 1892, Putnam 1975 and others), pragmatics (Grice 1975, Levinson 2000) and linguistics (in particular, the syntax-semantics interface, e.g. Chafe 1976, Krifka & Musan 2012) among others. These different paradigms address the notion of reference through the relations between a particular grammatical form and the (cognitive or mental) accessibility of a particular referent for the recipient. As argued by Apothélos & Pekarek (2003), these approaches focus mostly on written and monological data and thus tend to leave out the situated and social dimensions of language use that add multidimensionality and complexity to the study of reference.

A different approach to reference is offered by the interactionist approach to language use, and this is the perspective that we adopt in the present paper, by situating our study within the theoretical and methodological framework of conversation analysis (CA). Through the study of naturally occurring data, CA shows how social interaction is structurally organised and how participants manage to collaboratively accomplish activities through talk (Sidnell & Stivers 2013). Being an ethnomethodological approach (Garfinkel

1967), CA focuses on interactional practices that are accountable, i.e. publicly displayed and recognized as such by the participants (and, hence, by the researcher). As shown by Mondada, within the interactionist paradigm, the “referent” does not pre-exist to the interaction, but emerges and is being established as the *referential activity* unfolds, through the mobilisation of available resources: linguistic and embodied practices (gesture, gaze, posture, etc.) (2003: 58). Given the collaborative nature of social interaction, reference is collaboratively achieved by the participants (Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs 1986). What are, then, the key elements to the referential activity in interaction? First, “in making reference, whether to a person, place, object, time, or other ontological category, a speaker must select from a variety of lexical and gestural possibilities.” (Enfield 2017: 433). Enfield argues that this selection is shaped by preference (Pomerantz & Heritage 2013), i.e. an optimality of certain interactional choices given the context and the purposes of the social encounter<sup>1</sup>. Research in CA focuses both on ways of referring to particular elements (for instance, person reference Schegloff (1996), Enfield & Stivers (2007)) and on specific linguistic patterns and their role in referential activity (e.g. “you see” Mondada 2003). Work on reference in interaction also accounts for its embodied aspect (Mondada 2012, De Stefani 2010): the speaker’s body fully participates in the establishment of reference as for

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<sup>1</sup> See Sacks & Schegloff 2007 for an example of two preferences for formulation of person reference in English.

instance shown for pointing gestures (Mondada 2007) and gaze (Stukenbrock 2014).

A second aspect relevant to the referential activity in interaction is the recipient design: “a multitude of respects in which the talk by a party in a conversation is constructed or designed in ways which display an orientation and sensitivity to the particular other(s) who are the co-participants” (Sacks et al., 1974: 727). Ways in which a reference is being made to someone or something thus reflects the representations of the speaker about the recipient’s state and their relation (Betz 2015). In a more cognitive, but not CA incompatible, perspective Clark & Wilkes-Gibbs (1986) show that referring to the same object evolves if the participants are required to refer to it several times during the interaction. Similarly, Deppermann (2018) demonstrates how reference to a same driving manoeuvre evolves throughout a session of driving lessons. These studies show that even though a particular linguistic or multimodal expression is intrinsically not intended to express a reference (e.g. is not a noun phrase or a pronoun for example), it does so due to the interactional contingencies.

Finally, there are actional aspects to reference in interaction. As a matter of fact, referential activity co-occurs with all the other activities and actions that take place in a particular social encounter (Deppermann & Haugh 2022). Furthermore, referring in interaction is related to the emergence of social

categories by referring to people and identities (e.g., Schegloff 2007a, Whitehead & Lerner 2009, Piccoli & Chernyshova 2018).

This quick overview addresses the main topics of research in CA that involve reference in different types of situations. In this paper, we pursue the discussion on referential activity in interaction by focusing on referential practices in a card game interaction. In what follows, we first present our methodology and data. Then, we examine the card game situation and consequently present two different referential practices that we have selected from the data, supported by the multimodal analysis of two excerpts: the multimodal joint construction of a material referent, and the joint construction of a non-material referent's function.

## **Methodological approach and data description**

### **Methodological approach**

Our analytical approach is inspired by conversation analysis (Sidnell & Stivers 2013) and interactional linguistics (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting 2017), two closely related micro-analytic approaches to social interaction. Within these methodological frameworks, data under study is *naturally occurring*, i.e. recorded (audio and / or video) in its spontaneous context of production. Multimodal conversation analysis and interactional linguistics focus on the variety of the employed resources: speech, prosody, actions (of the participants or in context), gazes, gestures, postures, mimics, etc.

Within this theoretical and methodological framework, the fine-grained analysis aims to show how participants manage the joint construction of their interaction through permanent adjustments, and in particular *what* they are doing at each moment, and *how* they are doing it. As Schegloff (2007b: 8) puts it, the starting point of the analysis is not the outcome action, but the “observation about how some bit of talk was done” in order to answer the question “What does that bit of talk appear designed to do?”. The analyst thus relies on *accountable* evidence of the emergent actions, such as they are shown to be interpreted by the participants themselves. Furthermore, the analysis is *sequential*, which means that the chronological order of actions and their initiative or responsive nature are taken into account.

As we already have mentioned above, the multimodal nature of social interaction requires an analysis that considers the variety of the resources that participants mobilise when *displaying* what they are doing in this particular situation. Talk is, of course, an important resource, and the linguistic practices are almost always relevant for the analysis. However, the study of social activities such as games clearly require focus on other means that carry out actions: for instance, gestures, gazes or the manipulation of objects (e.g. Mondada 2019).

Given this complexity, and in order to give access to the data, the collected data is systematically transcribed following a transcript convention (in our

case, Groupe ICOR (2013)<sup>2</sup> and the lightened multimodal transcription conventions elaborated by Mondada (2018)<sup>3</sup>). The postural and gestural aspects of interaction, as well as gaze, are hence also transcribed, and illustrated through frozen frames of the video.

To describe in detail a particular phenomenon or practice, CA practitioners focus either on one single occurrence of the practice (*single case study*, Schegloff 1987), or constitute a “collection” of the understudy phenomenon across their data (Schegloff 1993): a dataset presenting the same action and / or the same formal resources (linguistic, multimodal) in a same sequential environment. For the present paper, we opted for the latter, by constituting a collection of ten excerpts, in which we could report referential activity.

### **Data description**

Between 2012 and 2021, within various projects on gaming interactions, we have recorded different gaming activities which represent in total 28 hours of gaming data (16 hours of board/card game sessions and 12 hours of video game sessions). In this paper, we focus particularly on one card game session, recorded in 2015 for a total duration of about 36 minutes. The situation involves two participants: Alice and Jeanne. They are both native Spanish speakers, and students in Lyon (France), interacting in French.

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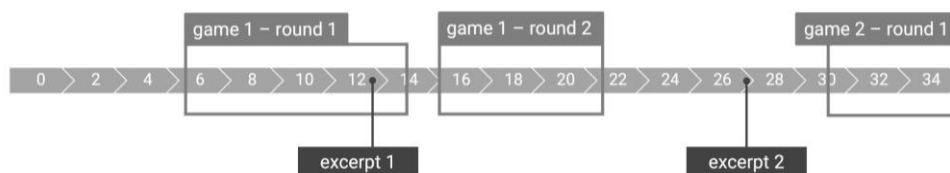
<sup>2</sup> Groupe ICOR (2013). Conventions ICOR. Laboratoire ICAR, UMR 5191, accessed on 20th of December 2021. <http://icar.cnrs.fr/corinte/conventions-de-transcription/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.lorenzamondada.net/multimodal-transcription>



In this session, they play two card games: “from one to twelve” and “*calzón sucio*”, (see below for some elements of rules). They use Italian cards that are not appropriate to play the two games, usually played with French cards. The players therefore adapt the rules of the games and negotiate a joint *ad hoc* interpretation of certain cards.

In the timeline (see Figure 1), we present the game activity’s chronological organisation to situate the two excerpts chosen for this paper among a collection of ten excerpts in total. The first game “from one to twelve” is played two times (rounds 1 and 2 respectively on the timeline), whereas the second game “*calzón sucio*” is only played once at the end of the recorded encounter. Even though the main reason for this interaction is to play card games, between and during the game rounds (i.e. the game playing *per se*) the participants engage in different parallel activities, more or less related to the game playing: game rules explanation<sup>4</sup>, game round debriefing, serving and drinking tea and chatting. The two excerpts chosen for this paper occur respectively at the end of the first round of game one, and during the rule explanation sequence preparing the first round of game two.



<sup>4</sup> For more details on “rules talk” in interaction see Zinken et al. (2021).

*Figure 1. Timeline of the game activity's organisation, each portion of the timeline represents two minutes of the recording.*

Finally, some elements of the rules of the played games are necessary to complete the data description. Game one is empirically called “from one to twelve” by the participants. In this game, the player must always have 10 cards in their hand and draw a card from the deck during their turn, discarding another one afterwards. The goal is to build up a collection of 10 cards of the same suit “colour” faster than the opponent.

Game two is called “*calzón sucio*”. In this game the player must draw a card from another player's hand during their turn and discard all pairs of cards as soon as they find them. The goal is not to end up with the joker which has no pair.

In what follows, we examine the two excerpts in the presented order. Through our analysis, we aim to show (1) how different multimodal resources are used to construct a reference, (2) how reference is achieved collaboratively by both participants and (3) how the reference constitution participates to the construction of epistemic authority (both players are alternatively expert and novice in the two games).

### **Joint construction of reference and function association**

Let us examine the first excerpt. It occurs at the end of the first round of the game “from one to twelve”. At the beginning, Alice (the novice, on the left) and Jeanne (the expert, on the right) are realising that they cannot finish the

game because the last card that one player is missing is in the other player's hand.

**(1): Excerpt 1 – Joint construction of a material referent**

01 JEA donc euh moi je vais pas gagner/ (0.4) c- (0.5) euh:: jusqu'à que  
**so uh I'm not going to win (0.4) c- (0.5) uh until**  
 02 tu jettes ma carte  
**you throw away my card**  
 03 (0.3)  
 04 ALI ((rire)) [((rire)) <((en riant))oui::> ((rire)) ]  
**((laugh)) ((laugh)) <((laughing))yes > ((laugh))**  
 05 JEA [et tu vas pas le jeter: n'est-ce pas .h et il n'y a]  
**and you're not going to throw it away right .h and there's**  
 06 pas de joker donc euh je vais pas gagner  
**no joker so uh I'm not going to win**  
 07 (0.4)  
 08 JEA t` as vu/  
**did you see**  
 09 ALI ah d'acc[ord ]  
**ah okay**  
 10 JEA [donc euh moi je] pense que ça: c'était bien pour la  
**so uh I think that it was good for the**  
 11 première fois  
**first time**  
 12 ALI hm hm  
**hm hm**  
 13 JEA on déjà on connaît déjà les: les règles  
**we already know the rules**  
 14 (0.7)  
 (0.7)  
 15 ALI #1 .H #2 on peut #3 utiliser un #4 joker/ #5 aussi/  
**.H we can use a joker as well**



16 (0.5)  
 17 JEA .tsk mais #6 oui/ bien sûr mais comme euh il n'y a pas de joker  
**.tsk oh yes of course but as uh there is no joker**



18 ALI #7a ah: #7b mais peut-être #7c euh on #8a peut improviser #8b un peu: #9a ça  
**ah but maybe uh we can improvise a little bit this**

img #7a #7b #7c #8a #8b #9a



19 #9b [peut #10 être #11 euh le joker ]

**can be uh the joker**

20 JEA [okay don- donc euh donc] on va l'utiliser oui: si je je

**okay so- so uh so we'll use it yes if I I**

img #9b #10 #11



21 pense que ce sera ça va nous [nous aider okay bon]

**think it will be it will help us okay well**

22 ALI [donc oui: hm hm oui]

**so yes hm hm yes**

One reason for this situation is the absence of a joker card in the card pack.

The first mention of this absence, produced by Jeanne (l. 5-6), explains why they cannot finish the game in its current state and that it is necessary to interrupt the game in progress. Then, the players negotiate a solution by designating one card as the joker for the rest of the game (l. 13-22).

This extract points to two interesting aspects of reference construction in interaction. First, both players participate jointly in the reference construction by using and combining different multimodal resources. As we will see, gazes and gestures are used alongside verbal resources to resolve the problem. Second, reference construction (in the sense of practice of referring to

something) and the construction of meaning (in the sense of assigning a particular function for the purposes of the interaction) are closely related. In this extract, the players need to find a referent (a card) to which they can attribute a particular function (being 'the joker').

The negotiation starts with Alice taking a card from her hand to illustrate her proposal to use a joker in order to solve their problem (l. 15). By taking the card on the top of those she holds in her hand (#2-3) and by lifting it up a few centimetres (#4-5), she does not draw Jeanne's attention to this particular card. Moreover, since Alice does not make any verbal reference to the card she is now holding up, we can assume that it has been randomly chosen and is meant to illustrate the general idea of using a joker, i.e. a *trump* card. By *un joker* 'a joker' Alice hence refers to the function of being a trump, without assigning this function to the card she holds up. Jeanne objects the suggestion and repeats that there is currently no joker in the card pack (l. 17). The referent of *joker* in *il n'y a pas de joker* 'there is no joker' is a card that holds this explicitly assigned role. We can here see how a same linguistic form (*joker*) is differently interpreted by the two participants: a function *vs.* a material card. In reaction to Jeanne's rejection, Alice reiterates her proposal by taking a particular card that she designates as a potential joker (l. 18-19). The need to jointly establish the referent of *joker* thus becomes relevant in order to pursue the problem resolution. For this second proposal, Alice now looks for the card she wants to designate as a trump by turning her gaze towards the table (#7a),

reaching out to grab the card (#7b), holding it up higher above the cards in her hand than she did for the illustrational card (#7c) and turning it around several times (#8a-8b). In addition to the physical efforts Alice makes to draw attention to the card she now chose, she also refers to it with the deictic pronoun *ça* ‘this’, explaining that *ça peut être le joker* ‘this can be the joker’. Thus, she now proposes a particular card as a referent to associate the function ‘being the joker’ to. This second proposal is accepted by Jeanne (l. 20-21). The end point of this excerpt is the joint agreement on the new referent of *joker*: a card selected from the pile of cards and explicitly designated as being a trump. As we have already highlighted, this referential activity is multimodally accomplished, and the two proposals formulated by Alice follow a two-stage evolution. Let us now examine these aspects more closely. Firstly, in line 15, Alice accompanies her proposal by a hand gesture, taking one card out. According to McNeill’s (2005) description of up to five possible gesture phases, 1) preparation, 2) pre-stroke-hold, 3) stroke, 4) post-stroke-hold, 5) retraction, we break down Alice’s hand movements in distinct phases. Although McNeill’s description is based on gestures and not on object manipulations as in our case, we consider the approach relevant for our analysis because the movements of the participant carry meaning and can therefore be considered as gestures<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Gestures are defined as "actions that have the features of manifest deliberate expressiveness" (Kendon 2004: 15).

In the beginning of her first proposal, Alice is holding her cards with both hands (#1). She then accomplishes a quick pointing gesture (#2) before the preparation-phase of another upcoming gesture which consists of her taking the first card in her hand (#3). She then briefly flaps this card (#4), at that moment she produces the noun *joker*. This movement corresponds to a gesture's stroke and here coincides with the word referring to the function of the card. While doing the flapping movement, Alice directs her gaze towards her cards. As a result, Jeanne is following Alice's gaze and looks at the cards in Alice's hand (#4). During the next phase, the static, suspending post-stroke-hold (#5), the gaze directions of the two participants change: Jeanne is still looking at Alice's cards while Alice is looking at Jeanne. She no longer orients to the referent but to her co-participant, displaying that her focus of attention has changed. The gaze orientation and the post-stroke-hold continue during the silence of 0.5 seconds and the beginning of Jeanne's next turn. Jeanne then, by changing her gaze orientation towards Alice and by confirming (*mais oui* 'oh yes'), displays her understanding of Alice's change of gaze orientation from the cards to her: as a request for confirmation and an expectation of agreement. This confirmation leads to the retraction of Alice's gesture (#6): she puts the card back in her hand and looks at her cards again. Alice's second proposal, (l. 18) starts with taking another card on the table. During the preparation of the gesture, her gaze is oriented toward this card (#7a). She looks at the card for a rather long time which allows Jeanne to

follow her gaze (#7b). Alice still keeps looking at the card that is now in her hand (#7c). Thereby both players construct a joint attention to the candidate joker before verbally referring to it.

The following stroke is divided in two parts: i) Alice rotates the card from one side to the other several times (#8a, #8b) when she proposes to ‘improvise a little’;<sup>6</sup> ii) she then accomplishes a brief card flapping movement (#9a, #9b) which accompanies *ça peut être* ‘this can be’ in overlap with Jeanne’s turn. During the stroke, the participants are both focused on the card taken by Alice (#8a, #8b, #9a). The demonstrative gesture, the gaze directed towards the card and the deictic *ça* ‘this’ are combined to ensure intersubjectivity concerning the referent.

Only at the end of this step Alice reorients briefly her gaze toward Jeanne (#9b) and then back to the card in her hands. Moreover, there is a brief post-stroke-hold, announcing the end of Alice’s turn and a new request for confirmation and indicating that Alice is waiting for Jeanne’s reaction as she does not let the card, and therefore the topic at hand, down. During the post-hold-stroke, Jeanne accomplishes a pointing gesture while also doing, with the same hand, an open hand palm upwards gesture (#10; Holler 2010). This gesture prepares in a certain sense the following agreement (l. 20). Jeanne looks toward Alice, but the gaze is not reciprocal. The sequence ends with

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<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed analysis of creativity and improvisation in referencing, see also Virtanen (in this book).



Alice retracting her hand (*le joker* ‘the joker’; #11). Jeanne’s next turn (l. 20) starts with an agreement *okay* (‘okay’), followed by the explicit expression of the decision *donc on va l’utiliser* (‘so we will use it’). Jeanne thereby confirms both the choice of the referent and the attributed function: the card held by Alice is now a valid joker in the game. Both participants are finally looking at the card in Alice’s hands. Alice keeps the “joker-card” in her hands, with the rest of her cards, without replacing it on the table. Jeanne then takes the card from Alice’s hand. She thereby integrates the joker into the game.

The analysis of this first excerpt allows us to make several observations relevant to the referential activity at stake. First, when using the form *joker*, the participants do not refer to the same thing. This divergence in the reference attribution (a material card vs. a function of a trump) becomes relevant, as displayed by Alice’s second proposal. Second, in order to resolve this divergence, participants actively mobilise gaze, gesture and object manipulation. This multimodality anchors the joint selection of a referent in the *hic et nunc*. Finally, the referential activity is treated as essential by the participants in order to continue the game session.

Our second excerpt (2) shows how the two participants construct jointly a non-material referent and its function. Jeanne and Alice are engaged in a sequence of explanations about the rules in the second game “*calzón sucio*”, just before the beginning of the game round. This time, the game is proposed by Alice.

**(2): Excerpt 2 - Joint construction of a non-material referent's function**

01 ALI tu peux trouver une autre option/ (0.5) euh:: avoir un autre  
**you can find another option (0.5) uh have another**  
 02 couple/ (0.2) et jeter (1.0) et #12a c'est possible en même temps  
**pair (0.2) and throw (1.0) and it is possible at the same time**  
 img #12a



03 #12b (0.2) avoir le joker #13 (0.2) donc euh le joker #14 ça veut dire  
**(0.2) to have the joker (0.2) so uh the joker it means**  
 img #12b #13 #14



#12b



#13



#14

04 #15 <((en español)) calzón sucio>  
 <((in Spanish)) calzón sucio>

img #15



#15

05 JEA hm hm  
**hm hm**

06 ALI et tu peux: (0.7) euh hm (0.3) .tsk essayer euh ou: je sais pas  
**and you can (0.7) uh hm (0.3) .tsk try uh or I don't know**

07 attendre que l'autre personne (0.7) #16 prend la carte ((rire))  
**wait that the other person (0.7) takes the card ((laugh))**  
img #16



08 JEA okay:  
**okay**  
09 ALI parce que si tu as le joker ça veut dire que tu as perdu  
**because if you have the joker it means you have lost**  
10 .h: le jeu et tu as le <((en espagnol))calzón sucio>  
**.h the game and you have the <((in Spanish))calzón sucio>**

In this excerpt, Alice produces another reference to the *joker*, in a different way: she refers to a joker card but this time without manipulating a material object in her hands. She represents the referent by a gesture (l. 1-5). The absence of the material referent (the card) in the immediate environment is not treated as problematic by the participants. Alice, first, defines the joker's name: *ça veut dire calzón sucio* ('dirty underpants')<sup>7</sup> (l. 3-4). Definitions in interaction are situated, they occur at a specific occasion, in a specific (sequential) environment (e.g. Greco & Traverso 2016). By associating *calzón sucio* to the previously introduced function of a joker (though in the previous game), Alice relates her explanations to previously negotiated and established functions. She then illustrates the function of the referent in this particular game: *tu peux euh hm essayer ou je sais pas attendre que l'autre personne (0.7) prend la carte ((rire))* 'you can uh hm try or I don't know wait for the other person (0.7) to take the card ((laugh))' (l. 6-8). By drawing the

<sup>7</sup> The name is assigned here through metonymy: *calzón sucio* names both the loser of the game and the card that makes one a loser. By extension, it also refers to the game itself.

previously established joker card (#16), she links the function of *calzón sucio* to this card, in other words, she attributes the joker function of the new game to this referent. Additionally, she simultaneously draws the joker card at the very moment when she explains this part of the joker's function (1.7). Drawing the card and holding it also relates the different explanation turns. The explanation sequence is closed with an explanation of the consequences of drawing the joker card: *parce que si tu as le joker ça veut dire que tu as perdu le jeu* 'because if you have the joker, it means that you have lost the game', related to the game's (and the joker's) name: *et tu as le calzón sucio* 'and you have the *calzón sucio*' (1. 9-10).

In this excerpt, the joint construction of a referent becomes particularly observable through the participants' gestures and gazes, especially in lines 2-4. Additionally, the two players draw on their (established) construction of the referent and its function in excerpt (1) to construct a non-material referent and a related function. As in excerpt (1), we propose a detailed multimodal analysis of these turns. In a first step, we identify four main gestures: 1) preparation gestures; 2) first iconic gesture; 3) transition gesture; 4) second iconic gesture.

During a rather long preparation (0.9 seconds), Alice accompanies her turn *c'est possible en même temps* 'it is possible indeed' (1.2) with an open hand gesture (#12a). While continuing the turn with *avoir le joker* 'having the joker', she takes an imaginary card (#12b). She then produces a first iconic

gesture (#13) which represents the joker card without a real card in her hand.

This gesture is held for about 1.9 seconds.



*Figure 2. Iconic hand gesture*

With the iconic gesture (see Figure 2), Alice simulates at the same time an artefact in the game (*i.e.* a card) and a particular gaming action/constellation (possessing/drawing the joker card). The gesture is produced simultaneously with the beginning of her follow-up construction, after a 0.2 second pause. It includes four steps represented by the four screenshots: i) a stroke of the iconic gesture by maintaining the exact form of the hand (#13a), ii) a brief rotation of the hand (#13b), iii) a second stroke of the iconic gesture through flapping movements (#13c), iv) the holding of the iconic gesture in a static way (#13d).

The iconic gesture is followed by a brief open hand palm upwards gesture, a sort of transition, which accompanies the pursuit of the turn (*ça veut dire* ‘it means’ #14). This transition leads to a second iconic gesture, different from the first one (#15). The second iconic gesture which represents the shape of an underpants (*i.e.* *calzón* in Spanish) can be decomposed into three steps: i)

preparation of the gesture with both hands opening and parting sideways (#15a), ii) stroke slightly downwards with both open hands (their palms facing each other) and without changing the finger positions (#15b), iii) retraction with both hands holding the cards (#15c). Through this gesture, Alice depicts an artefact - underpants (i.e. a *calzón*) - that locally illustrates the joker's name. Globally, from a strategic point of view, it indicates the game's name and the metaphorical consequences of possessing or drawing the joker.

The analysis of this second excerpt shows that the joint construction of a referent's function before the beginning of a game is essential for the participants. They must agree both on the referent of the "joker" in this new game as well as on its function. The excerpt reveals a systematic correlation between the stroke of the two iconic gestures and the nouns that are used to indicate the referent *joker* and "*calzón sucio*" (#13, #15). At these two moments, Jeanne's gaze is oriented toward Alice, enabling her to *see* the iconic gestures (Goodwin & Goodwin 1996, Nishizaka 2000). The successive repetition of iconic gestures highlights the importance of the joint construction of reference: Jeanne also needs to *see* the referent (at least in an iconic or represented way). Thus, the hand movements give the rhythm and facilitate the development of joint attention (Balantani & Lazaro 2021). Finally, the use of the noun *joker* in this second excerpt evolves. Alice directly introduces *le joker* 'the joker' (l. 3, 9), using the definite determiner and

thereby pointing out the identifiability of the referent: due to the multimodal referential practices, the reference to the card designated as a joker in excerpt (1) becomes part of the shared information. The previously jointly constructed referent is treated as salient in the *common ground*<sup>8</sup> and is immediately available to the participants.

### **The joint construction of reference as multimodal work**

The fine-grained study of two excerpts of interaction *in situ*, involving the same players in an opposite knowledge position, has allowed us to describe in detail the referential work carried out by the participants. First, we have shown that the construction of reference in interaction is a joint achievement of all participants and that it is an emergent practice which is context-related and negotiated between the participants. As already pointed out in CA oriented research, participants do not refer to a pre-existent referent (in our excerpts: a joker card) but construct it jointly and step by step. Referential activities and function assignation are thereby closely related: in excerpt (1) the two players jointly identify one materially present card to which they attribute the function of a joker; in excerpt (2), they activate the function of a non-material referent, representing it with an iconic gesture (handshape).

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<sup>8</sup> In this paper, we adopt the less formal approach of the common ground, in line with our theoretical and methodological framework. By common ground, we intend information relevant to the background knowledge of the participants (Clark 1996), but also information jointly constructed as the social interaction unfolds (Clark & Brennan 1991). This definition of the common ground comes close to what is called “immediate common ground” in literature focusing on information structure (e.g., Krifka & Musan 2012; Berio, Latrouite, Van Valin, Vosgerau 2017).

Thus, throughout the interaction, the status of the *joker* as an element of the *common ground* evolves: while at the beginning of excerpt (1) the chosen card is a ‘new’ element which needs to be *grounded* (Clark & Brennan 1991; Deppermann 2015) as referent for the *joker*, the referent is already ‘given’ in excerpt (2) - and the reference can therefore be “activated”, in the sense of “locally made relevant”. Figure 3 shows this evolution: in excerpt (1), one card is selected by taking it from the hand and putting it in the focus of attention through flapping movements whilst simultaneously a function (*joker*) is associated to this card. The transition from the undetermined (*un joker*) to the determined noun phrase (*le joker*) displays the process of *grounding*. Once the referent-function association is part of the common ground, it can and needs to be activated if it becomes relevant in interaction. This is visible in excerpt (2), where the referent is activated through an iconic gesture and the determined noun phrase (*le joker*).

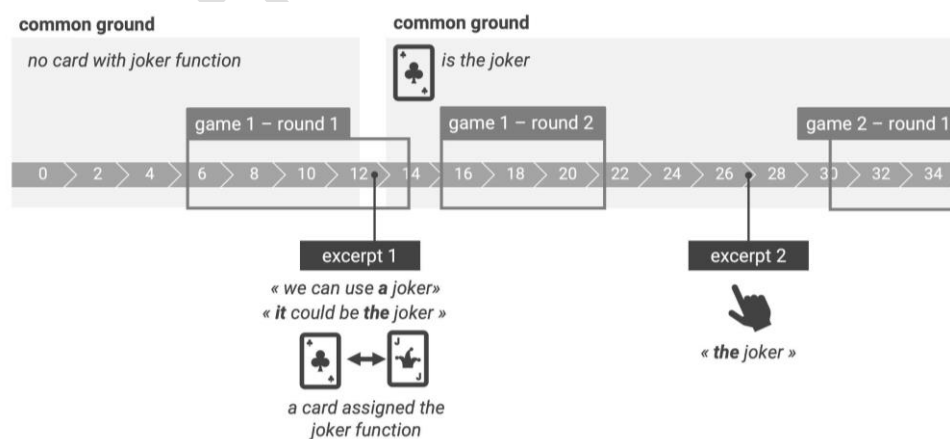


Figure 3. The evolution of the informational status of the playcard referent



Through the study of the joint reference construction, we can thus account for the joint construction of situationally relevant shared knowledge and grounding processes.

Second, our study gives evidence that reference construction in interaction is a multimodal accomplishment where a diversity of resources is deployed and mobilised simultaneously. The analysis has revealed: i) the temporal convergence between the production of the "problematic" word (in our case the *joker*) and the climax of the gesture (i.e. the stroke); ii) the search for a joint attention with an alignment of gazes for the joint construction of references (i.e. reference as collaborative work); iii) the correspondence between the gesture and the "type" of reference (material vs. non-material referent and non-iconic vs. iconic gesture).

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