

The competence in little words

Response patterns in German L2 interaction

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L2 frameworks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, describe expected linguistic abilities at different levels of L2 development. These frameworks, and the assessment rubrics they inform, only peripherally address how L2 speakers *respond* to informings in interaction. Through responses interactants show their understanding of, and stance toward, a previous informing. In question-answer sequences in which a participant requests new information, the response to the answer may additionally reveal the questioning participant's orientation to the answer in terms of its fit with the question. Responses to informings are thus a site of important interactional work. In our paper, we draw on the notion of 'Interactional Competence' and propose a conversation-analytic approach to assessing L2 speakers' responses to elicited informings in German in question-answer sequences. We analyze L2 speakers' use of tokens (e.g., *oh*, *okay*, *wirklich*) in sequentially third position in dyadic, video-mediated everyday conversations with L1 speakers, as, in the turns following the third-position token, participants make visible their understanding of the token. We thereby attempt to describe how competent an L2 speaker's use of a third-position token is. We end our paper by using our findings to make recommendations for language assessment frameworks and rubrics.

Keywords: interactional competence, response tokens, third-position responses, German L2 speakers, assessment, video-mediated interaction

1. Introduction

In second-language (L2) education, frameworks such as the Performance Descriptors for Language Learners developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2017) or the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2018) as well as

assessment rubrics (e.g., for German, the *Goethe-Zertifikat*, see Goethe-Institut, 2021) place importance on foreign-language learners' ability to give and obtain information from interlocutors in interaction, primarily through asking and answering questions. However, the focus of L2 frameworks and assessment rubrics is on the kinds of information L2 learners can *understand* at various levels of development, such as information about friends and family and personal interests. Frameworks and assessment rubrics commonly do not address how L2 learners *respond* to informings, and how L2 learners, in interaction, show their co-participants *how* they understand answers to their questions (e.g., Council of Europe 2018, p. 90).

Interactants' interactional work in response to informings demonstrates that interaction is driven by principles of cooperation and progressivity (Lee, 2013). For example, they acknowledge and accept information (Oloff, 2019), claim and demonstrate understanding (Golato, 2010; Golato & Betz, 2008; Helmer, Betz, & Deppermann, 2021; Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 2007), display changes in emotion (see Golato, 2012), or indicate whether more work is needed to reach understanding (Golato & Betz, 2008).

In our paper, we present an approach to assessing L2 speakers' interactions using Conversation Analysis (CA, see Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974), a data-driven field that uses recordings and transcripts of interaction to analyze in detail the sequential unfolding of interaction from the participants' perspective. We approach L2 interaction through the lens of Interactional Competence (IC), defined as the ability to deploy L2 resources in interaction in context-sensitive ways to accomplish actions recognizably for co-participants (see Hall & Pekarek Doehler, 2011; Pekarek Doehler, 2019). We take as an example the sequential environment of responses to elicited informings, focusing on German L2 speakers' token responses (e.g., with *oh*, *achso* "oh I see", *wirklich* "really"), as response tokens are language specific and participants' orientations to token responses are available in the following turns. Excerpt 1, taken from an interaction between L2 speaker Melanie (MEL) and L1 speaker Thomas (THO) exemplifies the sequences and the sequential position we analyze.

Excerpt 1. Sp19_ich studiere nicht_02:35-02:40

- 1 Q=>MEL: was studierst [du?]
 what are [you studying]
- 2 THO: [^{oo}(ge-)^{oo}]
 [(ge)]
- 3 A=>THO: ä: hm (.) <ich studiere nicht?>
 uhm (.) I'm not in school
- 4 R=>MEL: ach[so=okay.]
 oh [I see okay]

In line 1 (arrowed “Q”), Melanie requests information from Thomas regarding his studies. In line 3, Thomas (arrowed “A”) delivers new information, namely that he is (at the time of recording) not a student, which corrects an assumption underlying line 1. To this Melanie responds to (in line 4, arrowed “R”) with the token combination *achso okay* “oh I see okay.” That is, we analyze the L2 speakers’ token responses to information in *third-position* (see Figure 1, below).

1st position (Q=>): L2 speaker poses an information-seeking question
 2nd position (A=>): L1 speaker responds to question with an informing
 3rd position (R=>): L2 speakers responds with a linguistic token

Figure 1. Schematic Representation of Information-Seeking Question-Answer Sequences With Third-Position Token Responses

We argue that, by scrutinizing the sequential development in the turns following a third-position token response, we can attempt to describe from the participants’ perspective how recognizably and (therefore) competently the L2 speaker responded to the informing. Third-position token responses are thus apt targets for inclusion in CA-informed rubrics which assess L2 speakers’ IC *in interaction*. We seek to contribute to the development of L2 frameworks and assessment rubrics that more adequately reflect natural spoken interaction *and* what learners can actually do in interaction – even at lower levels of L2 proficiency.

We first review research on both IC and language assessment (Section 2) and question-answer sequence and third-position tokens (Section 3). We then provide an overview of our data and the methods of the study (Section 4). In Section 5, we present our analyses of L2 speakers’ third-position token responses to their L1 co-participant’s informing at different levels of L2 proficiency. Finally, in Section 6, we discuss how our study, based on our research findings, can inform an assessment rubric for German as an L2. We conclude the paper with specific recommendations for L2 assessment and for future research (Section 7). In this final section, we refer to the CEFR-based assessment rubric for German used by the *Goethe-Zertifikat* (Goethe-Institut, 2021).

2. Literature Review: L2 interactional competence and its assessment

IC in L2 has been researched within different theoretical and methodological frameworks (e.g., Young, 2011). In the past decade, there has been a growth in L2 IC research grounded in Interactional Linguistics (IL) and CA (e.g., Hall

& Pekarek Doehler, 2011; Pekarek Doehler, 2019; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2015, 2019; Taleghani-Nikazm & Huth, 2010). This research shows that L2 speakers' IC goes beyond the knowledge of formal linguistic forms and skills; it encompasses the "ability for joint action" (Pekarek Doehler 2019, p.30) in an L2, that is, the ability to recognizably accomplish social actions in interaction by employing linguistic, prosodic, and embodied resources in ways sensitive to the local context (see also Hall & Pekarek Doehler, 2011). CA research on L2 IC thus does not only consider L2 speaker's deployment of interactional resources, but also what that deployment reveals about L2 speaker's understanding of the local interactional context, e.g., what the L2 speaker understands a co-participant to be doing in a prior turn.

Previous work has tended to focus on specific features of IC, e.g., turn-design (Pekarek Doehler & Pochon-Berger, 2011), sequential organization (Gardner, 2007), preference organization (Hellermann, 2009), story-telling practices (Pekarek Doehler & Berger, 2018), and repair (Hellermann, 2011). This research shows that, when interacting in an L2, speakers make use of a range of linguistic and embodied resources or "methods" (Garfinkel 1967, p. vii) to accomplish social actions. For example, Pekarek Doehler and Pochon-Berger (2011) illustrate diversification in the French L2 speakers' turn design and methods of practice for doing disagreement at different levels in an L2 French class. While the students in the lower level relied primarily on *yes/no* tokens to do disagreement, the more advanced speakers deployed and combined a diverse range of linguistic resources to do disagreement, such as *yes-but* type constructions and linguistic hedges plus post-agreement accounts. In doing so, the advanced speakers oriented toward the preference for agreement over disagreement.

Previous research has made a significant contribution to our understanding of L2 IC and its development over time by scrutinizing the tight relationship between language forms, interactional practices, and embodied conduct. However, while there is an increasing range of CA-informed materials to teach IC in foreign language classrooms (particularly for German, e.g., Betz & Huth, 2014; Huth, 2006; Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006), work on the assessment of IC is more limited (see Salaberry & Kunitz, 2019). Language assessment is an essential part of language instruction as it provides insights into students' progress and language proficiency. Language instructors require such insights to understand whether they are meeting their teaching objectives. Current studies on IC assessment (predominantly on L2 English) focus on the quality of assessment design and formats (e.g., examiner-led interviews vs. paired/group oral tests, see Galaczi & Taylor 2018; Youn 2015), on defining interactional features (Ducasse & Brown, 2009; Galaczi 2014; May, Nakatsuhara, & Galaczi, 2020) as well as on creating assessment rubrics (Ikeda, 2017; Youn, 2015).

In their discussions of assessment design, researchers (e.g., East, 2020; Galaczi & Taylor, 2018) note that the common structure of earlier oral test formats constrained test-takers. In these earlier formats, examiners pose questions to test-takers; test-takers do not have any opportunity to ask their own questions, or to respond to answers to questions (i.e., in third position) (see Galaczi & Taylor, 2018). Furthermore, test-takers typically have time to both prepare for the test and watch examples of oral exams prior to taking them, rendering their participation in the test less interactional and more performative (Galaczi & Taylor, 2018). Thus, oral assessment was not originally based on the principles of naturally occurring interaction but rather on examiner-led conversations (see East, 2020) and linguistic proficiency (accuracy and fluency, see Roever & Kasper, 2018). German speaking tests, such as *Deutsches Sprachdiplom*, the Goethe Certificate, and The European Language Certificate in German, were similarly designed. However, in the past decade, in recognition of the co-constructedness of interaction and language use, these German speaking tests have been re-designed. Rather than assigning examiner and test-taker roles, these tests have test-takers interact with each other, allowing L2 speakers a broader range of actions beyond answering questions. Yet, interactional features – including third-position responses and similar sequence-based concepts of understanding displays – are still absent from rating scales (Huth, 2021). Instead, rating scales continue to assess grammar, vocabulary, language, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy (the Goethe Certificate, 2021, see also Roever & Kasper, 2018). If we are to assess IC, then it seems crucial to include test-takers' deployment of interactional resources to recognizably perform actions in interaction in assessment rubrics.

Although third-position responses are a site of important interactional work (Lee 2013), few studies on IC assessment focus on L2 speakers' responsive behavior; these studies investigate instead *interactive listening* (Ducasse & Brown, 2009; May et al., 2020), a construct that includes: back-channeling, nodding, smiling, gazing at a co-participant, developing co-participant's ideas in a next-turn, and asking follow-up questions. Because it is conceived so broadly, interactive listening cannot capture the specific interactional work that different responsive behaviors do. For example, in English, an *oh* response to an informing not only claims an increased level of informedness, but also treats the informing co-participant as an adequate informer (see Heritage, 1984). The broadness of *interactive listening* is also reflected in widely used reference frameworks, consisting of language assessment rubrics, such as CEFR and ACTFL (Huth, 2019). CEFR, in its 2018 New Descriptors, newly includes principles derived from interaction research, e.g., "taking the floor (turn-taking)" (Council of Europe 2018, p.102) and different interactional settings (Council of Europe 2018, pp.85–95). But the most recent descriptors reflect a narrow understanding of responding and its

importance in interaction: The New Descriptors solely consider questions (the first-pair part) – typically about opinions and personal information – and their answers (the second-pair part), disregarding any receipt of the answers (i.e., third-position responses; see below for more on the structure of question-answer sequences; see also Barth-Weingarten & Freitag-Hild, this issue). On the other hand, ACTFL (2017) assessment rubrics still view interpersonal communication from a language proficiency perspective and do not include any interactional features, despite calls for more research on developing valid tests to elicit interaction-involved pragmatic performance and on isolating specific criteria for assessing IC (see Youn, 2015).

In this paper, we seek to describe L2 speakers' responses to co-participants' informings. As we already discussed (see Figure 1), we analyze sequences in which an L2 speaker poses an information-seeking question, receives an answer to their question, and then responds to the answer with a response token or token combination. To inform L2 assessment of IC, we focus on the participants' orientations and *in situ* interpretations of these third-position token responses. By analyzing third-position tokens such as *oh*, *okay*, and *wirklich*, we hope to contribute to the development of context-sensitive assessment tools for L2 speakers' IC (see Pekarek Doehler, 2019). In the following section, we review research on question-answer sequences in interaction, the role of third position, and the sequential features following third position that will play a role in our analyses.

3. The study's focus: Question-answer sequences and third position

In our paper, we focus on how L2 speakers of German use tokens in sequentially third position in response to a common but specific kind of informative turn: answers to information-seeking questions. Question-answer sequences are a kind of adjacency pair (see Schegloff, 2007, p.13), a sequence built out of at least two turns in which a first-pair part (or FPP) from one participant makes relevant a fitted second-pair part (or SPP) from another participant. In the case of the current paper, an information-seeking question FPP (commonly fronted with a question word, e.g., *What do you study?*) makes relevant an answer from another participant (Schegloff, 2007). While minimal adjacency pairs, consisting of only an FPP and an SPP, are common, there are several ways in which interactants can expand an adjacency pair following the SPP (Schegloff, 2007). Sequential expansions can either be minimal or non-minimal.

Expansion occurs in sequentially third position (i.e., the position after the SPP). In question-answer sequences, the questioning interactant can use the third

position to indicate their orientation to the answer.¹ For example, it is in third position that an interactant can index a change of state,² such as now-understanding (Golato, 2010; Golato & Betz, 2008; Heritage, 1984) or disappointment (Couper-Kuhlen, 2009; Golato, 2012). A minimal expansion proposes sequential closure; in the case of information-seeking questions, sequential-closure indicates that the questioning participant has recognizably marked the answer as sufficient (Heritage, 1984; Thompson et al., 2015). If a minimal expansion fails to close the sequence, then a non-minimal expansion ensues (Schegloff, 2007).

With information-seeking questions, non-minimal expansion commonly occurs if the questioning participant does not recognizably claim understanding, marks the answer as insufficient, or indicates some trouble with the answer (i.e., initiates repair; Schegloff et al., 1977). In either case, the questioning participant signals to their answering co-participant that more work is needed to reach understanding. An interactant can also treat an answer as particularly newsworthy by responding with a newsmark (e.g., *really?*), thereby topicalizing and inviting further talk on the answer (Jefferson, 1993, p.3; see also Schegloff, 2007, pp.155–158; Thompson et al., 2015).³ By scrutinizing the talk following a third-position response, we as analysts can describe both how a questioning interactant orients to and understands the answer *and* what their co-participant understands the questioning interactant to be doing in third position.

Although tokens are not the only option interactants have when responding in third position in question-answer sequences, they are a common resource for doing so across languages (see Heinemann & Koivisto, 2016; Thompson et al., 2015). Third-position tokens are language-specific, that is, each language has its own set of lexically and functionally diverse tokens with which to respond in third position (Heinemann & Koivisto, 2016). Even if tokens formally exist in several languages (e.g., *oh*, *okay*), their interactional functions differ across those languages; for example, while interactants respond to informings with *oh* in English to claim they are now more knowledgeable or informed (Heritage, 1984), in German interactants respond with *oh* to index a change in emotional state, such

1. Answers, of course, are not the only possible SPPs after a question; a responding interactant can give a non-answer response (e.g., grounds for why they cannot answer the question as asked) or (seldomly) no response.

2. Or a change in one's "locally current state of knowledge, information, orientation or awareness" (Heritage, 1984, p.299).

3. It is important to note, however, that a third-position response is not required to close a question-answer sequence. In other-initiated repair sequences, for example, it is more common for the sequence to close without a third-position response (Kovisto, 2019).

as surprise or empathy (Golato, 2012). German has a variety of linguistically and functionally distinct tokens with which interactants can respond to informings: e.g., with *achso*, a participant claims understanding of new information (Golato, 2010; Golato & Betz, 2008), and with *okay* participants demonstrate understanding of the information in the previous turn without claiming any specific degree of knowledgeability (Helmer et al., 2021; Oloff, 2019). When used together, *achso okay* marks change of epistemic state and claims understanding of the new information in the previous turn and does not lead to expansion (Oloff, 2019).

While the body of research on L1 speakers' response token use is substantial, and interactants respond to informings most frequently with particles (Thompson et al., 2015), there is little research on L2 speakers in this regard. In a previous study, Taleghani-Nikazm (2019) analyzed third-position tokens in dyadic video-mediated interactions between L2 speakers of German. While the L2 speakers produced third-position tokens (thereby orienting to third position as the sequentially relevant spot to show their understanding), their choice of token did not match those of L1 speakers in similar sequences. However, the L2 speaking interaction partners, who had a similar repertoire of third-position tokens in German, did not hold each other accountable for the choice of token. Our study builds on this work by analyzing L2 speakers' use of third-position tokens in interactions with L1 speakers of German.

Because of their language-specificity and their potential consequences for subsequent talk, third-position tokens may be a suitable target for assessing interactional competence, particularly in interactions between L1 and L2 speakers. In our analyses of L2 speakers' use of third-position tokens, we rely on the sequential unfolding following third position to describe what co-interactant likely understand the token to be doing (e.g., claim understanding of the answer, mark the answer as newsworthy). By focusing on sequential unfolding after the target turn, we also hope to provide an example for how L2 educators can approach assessing their own students' use of third-position tokens as part of their IC.

4. Data and method

The data for this study come from a corpus of approximately 55 hours of recorded dyadic video-mediated TalkAbroad interactions between L2 and L1 speakers of German. TalkAbroad is a video conferencing platform (<https://talkabroad.com/>) that allows L2 speakers to practice interacting with L1 speakers. In our data, the TalkAbroad partners are German L1 speakers who are typically also university students. The age of most of the L1 and L2 speakers ranges from 18–25 years of age, except for one L2 speaker who was 65. The TalkAbroad conversations in our cor-

pus were recorded in a course-related assignment in the second and third semesters of a German language class (A1-B1.1. CEFR levels) at a large university in the American Midwest. Students were asked to meet their L1 conversation partner, get to know them, and discuss questions related to course topics (e.g., sports, entertainment, modes of transportation, etc.). In all instances, L1 and L2 speakers were informed about the video recordings and gave their written consent for the use of the data for research purposes. The recordings were made automatically by TalkAbroad and stored on their servers. We were given access to the recordings by TalkAbroad after receiving participant consent. Figure 2 provides our view of the recorded interaction, which is different from the participant's view. Figure 3 illustrates the L2 speaker's perspective and we can see that the interface includes a chat tool and a summary of the assigned prompt, in addition to the video.



Figure 2. The researcher's view of the TalkAbroad recordings

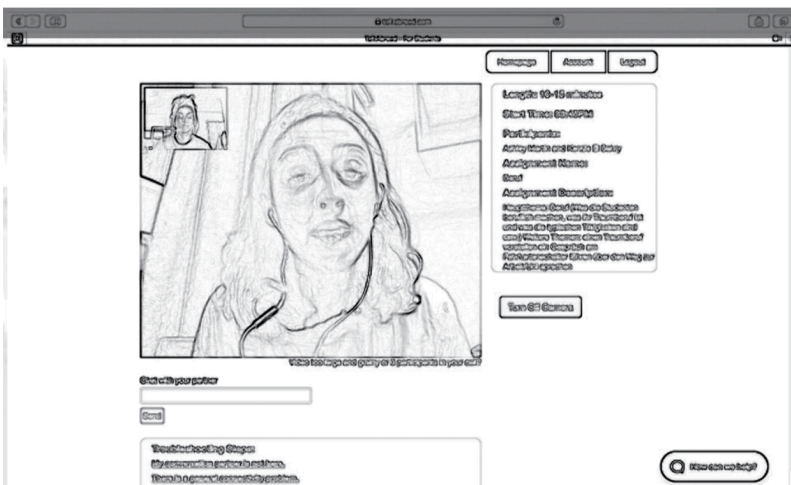


Figure 3. The L2 speaker's view of TalkAbroad interface

The L2 speakers prepared questions on a specific topic to ask their L1 counterparts; the L1 speakers only saw the specific topic shortly before the start of the conversation. However, while the roles of L1 and L2 speakers are relevant for these conversations, there were no external constraints on what each participant did; for example, both the L2 and L1 speakers asked and answered questions throughout and receipted answers in third position. The data collection for this study consists of 40 cases of L2 receipts of informings in third position with a token (see Figure 1). It is the third-position token responses that are our focus. Our analyses concentrate on the sequential placement (see Heritage, 1984), the ‘fittedness’ and ‘recognizability’ of the receipt – two elements central to the study of IC (see Pekarek Doehler, 2019).

We analyzed relevant segments using CA (Sacks et al., 1974). CA approaches interaction as a co-operative achievement between co-participants and takes a participants’ perspective in its analyses of spoken interaction. This means describing what participants publicly do in interaction and how they orient to their co-participants’ productions (Hutchby & Woofitt, 2008; Sacks et al. 1974; see also the introduction to this special issue).

The spoken data were transcribed using Jefferson’s (2004) transcription conventions. Relevant multimodal features, e.g., gaze, gesture, posture, nodding, were transcribed using Mondada’s (2019) conventions. Idiomatic English translations appear below original transcript lines in italics.

5. Analyses of interaction: L2 learners’ third-position response tokens in informing sequences

The analysis of L2 speakers’ third-position tokens is presented in four sections ordered from L2 speakers’ lower to higher levels of IC: in Section 5.1, we analyze an L2 speaker’s use of *okay* – a token that exists both in English and German (Couper-Kuhlen, 2021; Helmer et al., 2021; Oloff, 2019) – to demonstrate how the sequential unfolding of an informing sequence and the talk following a third-position token makes visible how the L2 speaker orients to the informing and whether this orientation is recognizable to the L1 co-interactant. In Section 5.2, we then show how sequential closure following an L2 speakers’ use of a third-position token combination such as *oh + okay* demonstrates the speaker’s recognizable indexing of a change of state, specifically a claim of understanding of the new information. Section 5.3 illustrates how an L2 speaker uses a combination of tokens similarly to L1 speakers of German, namely *achso okay*, also indexing an epistemic change of state by claiming understanding of the new information and closing the question-answer sequence without expansion. With these initial

analysis sections, we also show how sequential closure following a third-position response token allows for the assessment of L2 IC in the context of receipts to informings. Finally, in Section 5.4., we provide an analysis of an L2 speaker's use of a token in third position that invites more talk, the newsmark token *wirklich*. In our conclusion, we discuss the comparability of different third-position tokens and their implications for L2 assessment. Below (Table 1) is a summarized tally of token types and their use by L2 speakers at different levels in our data. Please note that only selected sections in the data where L2 speakers used tokens in the third position were transcribed and analyzed.

Table 1. Overview of collection of third-position response tokens from L2 speakers

CEFR Levels (# of semesters)	A1.2 (2 semesters of German)	A2.2 (3 semesters of German)
# of L2 speakers	5	8
Hrs of data from which third-position tokens were selected	2.5 hours	4 hours
# of third-position tokens analyzed	5	26
Tokens used by L2 speaker	<i>okay, o:kay okay, oh okay, oh kay ja ja, ah</i>	<i>ah, aha, oh, oh okay, oh oh okay, oh oh oh oh okay, oh cool, oh cool cool, oh wow, oh gut gut, oh ohja okay, ach, achso, achso okay, wirklich</i>

5.1 Looking for recognizability in sequential unfolding: Third-position *okay*

Our first excerpt comes from a conversation between Luke (LUK), L1 speaker of German, and Helen (HEL), L2 speaker. Helen is in her second semester (A2 level) of German. In line 1, Helen asks Luke what his favorite movie is. We focus on Helen's *okay* in line 6.

Excerpt 2. Sp19_Lieblingsfilm_01:37-02:08

- 1 Q=>HEL: uh was ist dein lieblingsfilm.
what is your favorite movie
- 2 A=>LUK: mein lieblingsfilm? äh ich hab[e] zwei, u:hm ich würde=
my favorite movie uh I hav[e] two uhm I would
- 3 HEL: [ja]
 [yes]
- 4 A=>LUK: sagen-der erste ist uh *fight club?*=
say the first is uh fight club
 *--]-*****

5 (0.5)

6 R=>HEL: #ok#↑ay.#
#2-#--3-#

7 LUK: kennst du fight club?
do you know fight club

8 (0.2)># (0.2). #
hel #slight nods#

9 LUK: >ja?< +u::nd a:h +>der zweite< ist exit through the
yeah and uh the second is exit through the
luk +gaze up, down+

10 gift shop.
gift shop

1: slight head tilt tw screen and raised eyebrows
2: slight head tilt back
3: slight downward nod, eyes close

Helen's wh-question (line 1) presupposes that Luke has *one* favorite movie. However, in line 2, before answering Helen's question, Luke addresses this presupposition, as he has two favorite movies. In line 4, he produces the name of the movie *Fight Club* with rising intonation 'try-marking' (see Sacks & Schegloff, 1979) it to check Helen's recognition of the movie. Note that Luke's embodiment, i.e., the slight head tilt towards the screen accompanied by small eyebrow raising, supports Luke's seeking confirmation. Following a 0.5-second pause (line 5), Helen produces the free-standing response token *okay* (Couper-Kuhlen, 2021; Oloff, 2019), with falling intonation, accompanied by nodding (line 6). In German, interlocutors use the response token *okay* with falling intonation to accept some prior informing without claiming any specific degree of knowledgeableability (Oloff, 2019, p. 216). In line 7, Luke orients to Helen's *okay* as an acceptance (but not a claim of recognition); instead of producing the projected second movie name, he initiates repair with a polar question, thereby still pursuing knowledgeableability/recognition of the movie from Helen. In response to Luke's polar question, Helen nods, indicating that she does recognize *Fight Club*. We observe that by using the token *okay*, Helen attempts to claim understanding (Heritage, 1984; Schegloff, 2007, p. 37). In lines 9–10, Luke produces the second projected movie title. Thus, while Helen's *okay*, a token that regularly appears in German in third position as a response to informings (Oloff, 2019), is sequentially fitted, it does not recognizably index Helen's recognition of the movie title *Fight Club*.

5.2 Third position *oh* + *okay*: Minimal expansion after a third-position token combination

In Excerpt 2, we saw that in an information-seeking question-answer sequence, an L2 speaker may use a token to respond to an informing without recognizably

10R=>CHE: +0::h. (.) [**okay.**]
 cha +large nod, then multiple slight nods->

11 KAT: [entfernt]
 [away]

12 CHE: *okay. + *
 ----->+

13 KAT: genau.
 exactly⁴

14 und (.) ich (.) wohn abe:r (.) nicht meh:r (.) da- h
 and (.) I (.) *don't live (.) there (.) anymore h*

((Kat continues to explain that she has moved from Leipzig
 to a small city in Hessen for her studies))

In her answer (line 2) to Chelsea's wh-question (line 1), Katrine produces *Deutschland* "Germany" and *Überraschung* "surprise" (line 3) with laughter, marks her answer as self-evident and, thus, laughable. During Katrine's *Überraschung* (line 3), Chelsea begins nodding; this nodding continues in Katrine's turn in line 4, in which Chelsea neither affiliates with the laughability in Katrine's answer (e.g., by laughing herself) nor it orients to the self-evidence of the answer. In line 5, Katrine first produces the confirmation token *genau* "exactly" (Oloff, 2017), then gives the more serious and specific answer *aus Leipzig* "from Leipzig" to Chelsea's question.

Katrine produces the place name *Leipzig* with rising intonation, 'try-marking' and thereby making relevant from Chelsea a claim (or disclaim) of recognition of the place reference (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979). Chelsea makes no claim of recognition (e.g., with *okay* or *uh huh*), instead shifting her gaze away from Katrine and quietly repeating the place name in line 6. While repeats of place references *can* function as claims of recognition (Heritage, 2007), the inaudibility of Chelsea's repeat combined with the brief gaze away from Katrine indicate that, although Chelsea has correctly heard the place reference, she does not recognize it.

In response to Chelsea's non-recognition, Katrine repairs (see Schegloff et al., 1977) the place reference *Leipzig* by providing Chelsea with different information about the city (rather than, for example, moving onto some next matter, such as her current place of residence, see line 14). In line 7, she labels Leipzig as a city (*eine Stadt*) and refers to the larger geographic region in Germany in which Leipzig is located. In response, Chelsea nods and produces *uhuh* (line 8) claiming merely receipt of prior turn but not demonstrating understanding of her co-participant's talk. This contributes to the minimal expansion of Katrine's turn (line 9): she continues and gives the time it takes to travel between Leipzig and (the more recognizable) Berlin as a further description of Leipzig's geographic

4. See Betz et al. (2013, p.141).

location. In line 10, Chelsea responds to the informing, specifically, Leipzig's distance from Berlin, with the change-of-state *oh* and an additional *okay*.

In German, an *oh* with falling intonation (such as the one Chelsea produces) has been shown to index disappointment or sadness (Golato, 2012) – an unlikely emotion to have in response to information on the driving time between Leipzig and Berlin (line 9). However, Chelsea's *oh* + *okay* turn in line 10 is, in terms of sequential placement, to some degree fitted: First, it is produced in a position after a (possible) repair solution from a co-participant. Second, *oh* is a token that responds to new information and indexes a change of state (albeit, an emotional one) in German in third position (Golato, 2012). Confirmation tokens (e.g., *genau* or *eben* "exactly"), which also appear in responsive positions, would be decidedly less fitted in this context, as they do not index changes of state in German (see Betz & Deppermann, 2018; Oloff, 2017). Third, in using *oh* with *okay*, Chelsea is still displaying both that the information Katrine has provided is new (with *oh*) and that she (Chelsea) has understood Katrine's informing (with *okay*, see Helmer et al., 2021).

Finally, and most importantly, Katrine treats Chelsea's response turns (lines 10 and 12) as a claim that the trouble with *Leipzig* has been repaired: Katrine closes the repair sequence with the confirmation token *genau* "right." In line 14, she moves on to explain where she currently lives; that is, Chelsea has for Katrine *recognizably* claimed that she (Chelsea) now understands where Leipzig is. Therefore, despite choosing a particle (*oh*) that indexes in German an emotional change of state rather than an epistemic one, by producing a change-of-state token to respond to an informing in combination with another token (*okay*), Chelsea *recognizably* claims now-understanding in line 10.

5.3 Third position *achso okay*: A third-position token and sequential closure

In Excerpt 4, we have another case of an L2 speaker combining *okay* with another change-of-state token to respond to an informing. Here we meet Melanie (MEL), a student in a third-semester German-language course (B1.1 CEFR level), and Thomas (THO), an L1 speaker of German, again (see Excerpt 1). In Excerpt 4, they are getting to know each other. In line 1, as part of this topic, Melanie asks Thomas what he is studying. Our focus is Melanie's *achso okay* in line 4.

in L1 interactions commonly leads to sequential closure rather than more work being done on the answer, e.g., through repair (Helmer et al., 2021; Oloff, 2019).⁵

In the previous sections, we analyzed the sequential unfolding following L2 speakers' use of third-position tokens to index a change of state in response to an answer to an information-seeking question. When recognizably done, indexing a change of state in question-answer sequences with a third-position token commonly leads to sequential closure and a move to other/next matters, as the token treats the answer as sufficient; this is the case for Chelsea's *oh okay* in Excerpt 3 (line 10) and Melanie's *achso okay* in Excerpt 4 (line 4) (see Heritage, 1984). However, if a speaker's third-position token does not recognizably claim understanding, the co-interactant may initiate repair to do more work on the answer; this is the case following Helen's *okay* in Excerpt 2 (line 6). We argue that the sequential unfolding following a third-position token – i.e., whether there is sequential closure or expansion through repair – is useful in determining how recognizable an L2 speaker's use of a third-position token is and can be employed in L2 assessment. Based on the following sequential unfolding, we can thus conclude that Chelsea's *oh okay* and Melanie's *achso okay* are more interactionally competent instances of third-position receipts than Helen's *okay*.

Speakers may also use their third-position response to do something in addition to claiming a change of state, e.g., *inviting* further talk. Our last data excerpt illustrates such an instance.

5.4 Third position *wirklich*: Inviting sequential expansion

Speakers may use their third-position response to both index a change of state *and* invite relevant sequential expansion. Let us consider Excerpt 5, the first interaction between L2 speaker Jacob (JAC), a student in his third semester (B1.1) of German, and L1 speaker Thomas (THO). For this interaction, Jacob prepared questions on the topic of sports for Thomas. In line 1, Jacob asks his first question: *spielst du ein sport?* “do you play a sport?” Our focus is on Jacob's *wirklich* “really” in line 13.

5. Melanie's *achso* – a German token combination that claims understanding and integration of new information (Golato, 2010; Golato & Betz, 2008) in line 8 also does not lead to sequential expansion; in the next line Thomas mentions his work as a language teacher. A full analysis of Melanie's *achso* in line 8 is, however, outside the scope of this paper.

affirmative one (Heritage, 2010). In line 7, Thomas responds to the wh-question by stating that he currently works out at a gym;⁶ Thomas produces the last lexical item in line 7 with rising intonation, making relevant for Jacob to (dis)claim recognition of *Fitnessstudium*. Jacob confirms recognition with a nod and smile in line 7. Also, in line 7, Thomas produces a further TCU, stating *ich liebe american football* “I love american football,” thereby giving a second answer to Jacob’s question from line 4. In line 9, Jacob responds to this further TCU with *okay* and a smile in line 9. In partial overlap with Jacob’s *okay*, Thomas details his experience with American football in Germany (lines 8 and 10). After a micropause, Thomas utters a lengthened *ähm* “uhm,” both projecting more talk, (potentially) marking a search for (and topical move to) another favorite sport of his (see Schegloff, 1979).

In line 13, before Thomas can produce more topical talk, Jacob utters the newsmark *wirklich* “really” with rising intonation. Newsmarks Jacob’s *wirklich* is a confirmable, i.e., a turn “that make[s] relevant a confirmation or disconfirmation” (Betz et al., 2013, p.138) and thus at least a minimal expansion of the question-answer sequence. And, as we can see, a sequential expansion follows: In line 14, Thomas first confirms with a single *ja* and a double falling-intoned *jaja* (see Barth-Weingarten, 2011), then produces more talk on the topic of American football in Germany, including the position he played (line 15), a positive assessment (lines 15–16), and American football teams in Germany (lines 16–17). This sequence closes in line 18 when Thomas asks Jacob *was is dein Lieblingssport* “what’s your favorite sport” in return.

Note that following Jacob’s *wirklich* (line 13), Thomas asks Jacob explicitly if he understood his answer but instead produces additional details about his experience with American Football in Germany (lines 15–17). In so doing, he demonstrates his orientation to Jacob as now informed about his favorite sport and the duration of his experience with it. Moreover, Jacob’s confirmable *wirklich* makes confirmation relevant (Imo, 2011) and thereby gives Thomas the interactional space to produce more new information regarding his American football career. That is, with the token *wirklich* in third position, Jacob does more than claim a change of state: He uses it to *invite* expansion. With our analyses, we attempted to capture different levels of IC development by focusing on their third-position response to their L1 co-participants’ answers in informing sequences. We analyzed a) how the L2 speaker’s third-position token made visible their orientation to their L1 speaker’s answer and b) how the L1 speaker recognized/oriented to the

6. While in North American varieties of English the noun ‘sport’ typically refers to (potentially) competitive physical activities (e.g., soccer, figure skating, swimming), the German *Sport* can also refer to non-competitive physical activity, such as working out at a gym.

L2 speaker's third-position token. We observed that L2 speaker's third-position turns can consist of one token such as *okay*, a token combination such as *oh okay* or *achso okay*, which proposes sequence closing; we also demonstrated that a newsmark token such as *wirklich* invites more talk and thereby expands the sequence. Because newsmark tokens, such as *wirklich*, make relevant expansion rather than closure, their recognizable use constitutes a different kind of IC than do the third-position response tokens we analyze in Sections 5.2–5.4. Based on this, in the next section, we discuss how a focus on sequential development can inform an assessment rubric for German as an L2 – the *Goethe-Zertifikat*.

6. Discussion: Assessing L2 German interaction: *Goethe-Zertifikat*

Let us take a look at the assessment rubric for speaking of A2 German from *Goethe-Zertifikat*, a German certification test based on the CEFR (Goethe-Institut, 2021, p. 42). For the speaking portion of the exam, test-takers complete two interaction tasks (*exchanging personal information* and *making and executing plans*) and one production task (*telling a story about one's own life*) (Goethe-Institut, 2021, p. 3). In the interaction tasks, test-takers interact with other examinees in dyadic conversations. The assessment rubric for all the three tasks, however, is the same. Table 2 shows the translation of the most recent version of the speaking rubric.

As can be seen in Table 2, there are three main assessment criteria for the speaking test: task completion, language, and pronunciation. The interaction tasks are explicitly assessed solely with regard to within task completion and divided into two parts – interaction and register. Interaction is assessed as fitted or occasionally fitted and register is assessed in terms of how adequate the register is for the situation and the listener. The assessment criteria for interaction in the section task completion are therefore generic, not specifying any linguistic resources that learners can use to accomplish the different speaking tasks. The language section, similarly, primarily assesses the spectrum of words and grammatical structures that the test taker uses, and assesses how fitted and differentiated they are. This section also includes mastery, which is further divided into vocabulary and structures. It is also important to note that terms such as 'fitted' and 'differentiated' – which appear throughout the *Goethe-Zertifikat* rubrics – are not defined.

The data we present in this paper are not from institutional assessment, and thus may differ from the *Goethe-Zertifikat* speaking exam in terms of task and interactional context. However, since the *Goethe-Zertifikat* is still used for assessing interaction tasks, we focus on the ways in which interaction is assessed in the above shown rubric. Based on our analyses of information-seeking question-

Table 2. A2 German speaking assessment rubric adapted from the Goethe-Zertifikat

	A	B	C	D	E
TASK COMPLETION					
language function	fitted	often fitted	occasionally fitted	rarely fitted	
interaction	fitted	often fitted	occasionally fitted	rarely fitted	contributions to conversation
register	adequate for the situation and the listener	largely adequate for the situation and the listener	partially adequate for the situation and the listener	not adequate for the situation and the listener	unratable
LANGUAGE					
spectrum/range vocabulary structures	fitted and differentiated	often fitted	occasionally fitted	rarely fitted	
mastery vocabulary structures	occasional mistakes which do not impair understanding	several mistakes which do not impair understanding	several mistakes which impair understanding to some extent	several mistakes which significantly impair understanding	expression continuously inappropriate
PRONUNCIATION					
sentence melody syllable stress individual sounds	some deviations which do not impair understanding	systematic deviations which do not impair understanding	deviations which partially impair understanding	strong deviations which significantly impair understanding	not longer understandable

answer sequences, we argue that the criteria in the rubric do not sufficiently reflect what interactants commonly do in interaction, namely signal to their co-participant *whether* they have understood the sought-for information and *how* they understood it. Furthermore, by using the same criteria for monologue-production tasks (i.e., telling a story) and interaction, the assessment rubric fails to capture the additional work participants must do to meet the local sequential demands of/in interaction, especially when we understand interaction as a co-operative accomplishment between participants.

Therefore, we recommend that the *Goethe-Zertifikat* shift to assessing interaction separately from other speaking tasks. Furthermore, we recommend that the assessment criteria for interaction reflect research and findings on German interaction, exemplifying linguistic resources that test-takers at different levels could use in the accomplishment of the interaction tasks, and use sequential analyses of everyday interaction to determine the recognizability of learners' L2 conduct. For example, the interaction task 'exchange of personal information' could assess:

1. the presence or absence of third-position responses (e.g., tokens) to answers in informing sequences;
2. the range of response formats (e.g., variety of tokens, token combinations, combinations of tokens and assessments);
3. the fittedness of a response format to a specific context (e.g., recognizability of a claim of understanding for a co-participant).

Including more specific and descriptive criteria will more accurately assess test-takers in terms of the interactional activity they are engaged in and better reflect how test-takers use German outside of the assessment context. While it is crucial to include such criteria in rubrics, it is equally important to train test-raters to understand and use them during speaking tests. Rubrics with CA-informed criteria can help test-raters avoid subjective judgments and negative ratings of test-takers' lack of independent initiative to engage in a conversation (see Sandlund & Greer, 2020). In addition, they provide an opportunity for pinpointing specific IC features as areas of improvement for test-takers. At the same time, if confronted with detailed clarification of their IC *in situ*, test-takers will be prepared to see the importance of IC in real-time conversations and to take features such as third-position responses into consideration when preparing for their next speaking test.



7. Conclusion and implications

While L2 assessment rubrics are becoming more sensitive to the complex and context-sensitive demands of interacting in an L2, they continue to remain largely underspecified when it comes to fundamental interactional features. This may lead to testers underestimating what L2 speakers can do. By analyzing German L2 speakers' non-elicited everyday spoken interactions, our paper demonstrates an approach to assessing IC using L2 speakers' everyday interactions. It also shows – we hope – that L2 speakers, even with limited linguistic resources, regularly and recognizably index the receipt and acceptance of new and revised information. In Sections 5.1–5.3, we showed how the presence and type of sequential expansion following a third-position tokens can reveal co-participants' understanding of it

(with expansion by checking recognition and providing additional information in 5.1 and sequential closure in third position in 5.3). Tracing recognizability in co-participant conduct in next turns, we argue, is an important tool for determining how interactionally competent an L2 speaker's token response was. In Section 5.4, we demonstrated that sequential expansion following a newsmark such as *wirklich* can also be evidence of increased IC. Because newsmark, when recognizably deployed, have different sequential consequences than other third-position receipt tokens that make relevant sequential closure, they constitute different (but related) kinds of IC, and ought to be treated separately in L2 assessment.

Detailed analyses of spoken interaction, particularly those from a CA/IL perspective, can inform approaches to assessment and rubrics by more accurately capturing what L2 speakers do in interaction when, e.g., responding to new information in solicited informings. What our analysis cannot account for, however, is the lenience that L1 speakers can show L2 speakers in their interactions; that is, L1 speakers may hold L2 speakers less accountable for using grammatical forms and lexical items (including response tokens) differently from L1 speakers of the language. It could thus be the case that the L1 speakers are doing more work to interpret and recognize what L2 speakers are seeking to accomplish with their third-position response tokens than they would with other L1 speakers. More research is required to investigate such L1-L2 leniency and the ways in which L2 speakers are (not) held accountable for patterns in responding that are ambiguous, insufficient or in other ways differ from what L1 speakers do. Our paper presents analysis-based recommendations for frameworks and rubrics in one interactional context: the management of informings. Recommendations for other interactional contexts – from managing other actions that can be done with questions, such as requests or offers, to managing larger sequences such as story tellings or navigating the openings and closings of conversations – as well as descriptors and assessment criteria for different levels of L2 competence will be matters for future research.





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Publication history

Date received: 17 November 2020

Date accepted: 26 August 2022

Published online: 28 February 2023