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CONSTRUCTING A PROPOSAL AS A THOUGHT: A WAY TO MANAGE PROBLEMS IN THE INITIATION OF JOINT DECISION-MAKING IN FINNISH WORKPLACE INTERACTION

Melisa Stevanovic

Abstract

Drawing on fifteen video-recorded planning meetings as data, and on conversation analysis as a method, I examine the interactional import of the common Finnish practice of constructing a proposal as a thought. As a point of departure, I consider two different types of conditional utterances in which a speaker presents a plan: (1) 'asking conditionals' (*jos* 'what if' prefaced declarative conditionals and interrogative conditionals) and (2) 'stating conditionals' (declarative conditionals). While asking conditionals mark the plan as contingent on the recipient's approval and involve a straightforward request for the recipient to engage in joint decision-making about the proposed plan, stating conditionals are regularly treated as informings about plans in which the recipients have actually no word to say. However, when asking and stating conditionals are prefaced with references to the speakers' thoughts (*mä aattelin et* 'I was thinking that'), the projected responses and sequential trajectories are more open-ended: The participants have the opportunity to share the responsibility, not only for what is to be decided with respect to the proposed plan, but also for what is to be jointly decided upon in the first place. Constructing a proposal as a thought seems thus to be a practice with which participants may enable the symmetrical distribution of deontic rights at the very beginning of joint decision-making sequences.

Keywords: Decision-making; Conversation analysis; Proposals; Reported thought; Deontic rights; Mitigation.

1. Introduction

1.1. *The ideal of symmetrical decision-making*

Proposals are actions that make up a vital part of everyday life. Whether among family members, friends, or work colleagues, much of the common activities take place as a result of people having made a decision on the basis of someone's proposal. Importantly, when people make proposals, they do not decide the matters themselves, nor do they leave them for the others to decide. Instead, they invite others to approve what has been proposed, and thereby, to make the decisions together. Proposals, in other words, project *joint* decision-making (Charles et al. 1997: 685-687; Stevanovic 2012a, 2012b).

Even if proposals can be found everywhere, they are particularly common in those interactions where participants plan future events and activities. Such planning interaction - as a “communicative activity type” (Linell 2009: 201-211) - involves the strong normative expectation that it should be *more than one* participant who has a word to say on the decisions to be made. Hence, in dyadic planning interactions, the participants commonly seek to establish a more or less “symmetrical distribution of deontic rights” (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012) - something that I will also refer to as “deontic symmetry.”

The participants’ orientations to the ideal of deontic symmetry have certain consequences for the trajectories of decision-making sequences. As demonstrated by Stevanovic (2012a), it is usually the *recipient* who is expected to forward the sequence from a proposal to a joint commitment to future action. By leaving this responsibility to the recipient, the proposer may stay assured that the emerging decision is “genuinely” a joint one - that is, the proposer has not been imposing his or her ideas on the recipient.

Even if people have their ways of achieving and maintaining deontic symmetry *during* their decision-making sequences (Stevanovic 2012a), we may ask whether the act of *initiating* joint decision-making about some topic - that is, the act of making a proposal - nevertheless violates this ideal: In a proposal, the most important decision about what is to be jointly decided upon is *not* constructed as a joint one. For example, consider Extract 1. In this instance, the speaker’s proposal is about informing some other people, who are not present in the meeting, about a decision that has been previously established in the meeting.

(1) (RKS1 7:37)
 pitäskö tää ilmoittaa niille.
 should-Q this notify-INF they-ALL
should they be notified on this.

Even if the proposed action (notifying) is most probably something to be done only after the meeting, the utterance also involves a suggestion that something should be done *right now* - namely, joint decision-making about the notifying.¹ The utterance, in other words, embodies a certain attempt to control the agenda of the current interaction. Therefore, even if the speaker implies that she is *not* going to decide unilaterally about the mentioned future action, she nevertheless indicates that she *has already* decided unilaterally that this matter is worth common consideration. In other words, even if a proposal (unlike an order or a command) may not enforce the recipient to acquiesce in the speaker’s plans for some distant future action, it still imposes on the recipient the obligation to get involved in the joint decision-making about this action - here and now.

So, from this point of view, proposals are not free from imposition. While politeness theories (Lakoff 1973; Brown and Levinson 1978 [1987]; Leech 1983; Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003) have emphasized people’s desire to avoid imposition, the term “mitigation” (Fraser 1980) has been used to denote the wide variety of

¹ As pointed out by Houtkoop (1987), there are two essentially different kinds of proposals: While *proximal* proposals suggest that some action be performed in the interaction then and there, *remote* proposals deal with actions that are expected to be carried out sometime in the more distant future (on the distinction between deferred-action and immediate-action requests, see also Lindström 1999; Schegloff 2007). However, my point is that even remote proposals involve an element of proximal proposals: They call for joint decision-making about the more distant future action - now.

practices by which speakers may modify their actions in this regard; these practices include the use of degree modifiers (e.g., *kind of*, *sort of*, *a bit*), distancing techniques (e.g., passive voice), disclaimers (e.g., *I don't know*), modal adverbs (e.g., *probably*, *possibly*), parenthetical verbs (e.g., *I suppose*, *I believe*), tag questions and hedges, as well as the deployment of “indirectness” in general (Clark 1979; House and Kasper 1981; Blum-Kulka 1987; Faerch and Kasper 1989; Fraser 1990; Caffi 1999; Byon 2006; Silverstein 2010; Bella 2011). In this study, I ask whether there are practices by which speakers may mitigate the above-described specific form of imposition involved in their proposals - the immediate pressure that they put on their recipients to engage in joint decision-making about the content of their proposals. In the following pages, I will suggest that one such practice is to construct a proposal as a “thought.”

1.2. References to thoughts in the construction of proposals

In the domain of discursive psychology, one of the key interests has been the relationship between discourse and cognition or the ‘outer’ world and the ‘inner’ mind: How cognitive notions are invoked and oriented to in interaction and how they are used as resources to accomplish various interactional goals (Edwards and Potter 1992; Edwards 1997, 1999; Potter 2006; Hepburn and Wiggins 2007). For example, framing of some talk as a “thought,” an “idea” or an “opinion” has been shown to have an impact on the participants’ orientations to what has been said: While thoughts and ideas can still be changed, opinions implicate a more developed, stable and public attitude towards the matter at hand (Potter and Puchta 2007: 113-115) - while still being somewhat protected from the expectation that they should be justified or proved right (Myers 1998, 2004).

Even if conversation analysis and interactional linguistics have not traditionally dealt with cognition, there are, however, several studies in which “thoughts” play a central role. Already Sacks considered the communication of thoughts in his analysis on “first thoughts” (Sacks 1992: vol. 1: 330-331, 787-788, vol. 2: 181-182, 237) - a theme that was later picked up by Jefferson (2004). More recently, there have been several studies on the practices of quoting, which, besides “reported speech,” have also dealt with the phenomenon of “reported thought” (Barnes and Moss 2007; Couper-Kuhlen 2007; Haakana 2007; Kärkkäinen 2012; see also Romaine and Lange 1991; Vásquez and Urzúa 2009). For example, Haakana (2007) has pointed out to the aptness of reported thought as a device for the construction of complaint stories. Then, Kärkkäinen (2012) has shown how the epistemic phrase *I thought* is regularly associated with utterances that involve stance taking of some kind. Moreover, Couper-Kuhlen (2007) has demonstrated how the externalization of inner thought processes can be an effective way for speakers to account for their own past actions. Speakers’ references to their cognitive activities have also been considered in the conversation analytic literature on question design (Lindström and Lindholm 2009). For example, in the context of doctor-patient interaction, patients tend to frame their questions as “wonderings” and “ponderings” to display uncertainty with respect to the act of questioning, its relevance and possible outcome (see also Curl & Drew 2008). Usually, these questions are not supported by the agenda and they enter a field of expertise that in fact belongs to the doctor.

In this study, I will consider the practice of constructing *proposals* as thoughts. Some examples of this practice are given below. In all these cases, two church officials - a cantor (C) and a pastor (P) - are preparing church events.

In Extract 2, the participants are planning a sing event and the cantor proposes that the pastor would play the violin at some point in the program.

(2) (KL 40:11)

01 C: -> tässä *mä aattelin* et jos sä soittasit *viulu*ahhh
 here I think-PST-1 PRT if you play-COND-2 violin
I was thinking that what if you would play the violin here hhh

In the next instance, another cantor talks about her plans on making a poster for an upcoming musical event at church.

(3) (VVYLT 13:55)

01 C: *mä aattelin* et *mä tekisin* iha vaa sitte sen sillä tavalla
 I think-PST-1PRT I do-COND-1 PRT PRT PRT it-GEN in.this.way
I was thinking that I would do it just in this way

02 että, .hhh jollekki:, (1.7) *ki*van väriselle, (0.4) *paperille*
 PRT some-ALL-CLI nice-GEN coloured-ALL paper-ALL
that, .hhh on some:, (1.7) nice coloured, (0.4) paper

The utterances in Extracts 2 and 3 are clear instances of cases in which the whole content of the utterance is framed as being a thought that has previously occurred to the speaker. From this point of view, these utterances can be regarded as instances of reported thought. These utterances are, nevertheless, different from prototypical quotes - demonstrations (Clark and Gerrig 1990) or re-enactments (Sidnell 2006) - which are often spoken with prosodic marking (Couper-Kuhlen 1999; Günthner 1999; Niemelä 2005). In Extracts 2 and 3, no prosodic marking can be observed. Moreover, the utterances in Extracts 2 and 3 differ from “ordinary” quotings also in that the prefatory references to thoughts (*mä aattelin et* ‘I was thinking that’) are not really needed to make the utterances understandable; from the point of view of the grammar and the syntax of the utterances, these references could be removed without making any changes in the form of the utterances. Furthermore, if we take into consideration the fact that, in both cases, the speakers are reporting thoughts that are their *own*, not someone else’s, the phrase *mä aattelin et* ‘I was thinking that’ appears, in any case, quite redundant: The mere act of making a proposal in itself presupposes that some “thinking” (related to the proposal) has already taken place.

To be sure, there is no reason to assume *a priori* that ostensibly redundant interactional events would not have significance for the interaction participants themselves; it is in particular within conversation analysis (Heritage 1984; Schegloff 2007) that researchers have long emphasized the fact that participants can endow all kinds of seemingly irrelevant features of their talk and conduct with relevance. Hence, the self-evident question presents itself: Why do speakers construct their proposals as thoughts?

When people report their thoughts, they talk about something that has taken place in their more or less distant past and which they thus very well know about. From this point of view, the reporting of thoughts has to do with what can be called “epistemics” (Heritage and Raymond 2005; Raymond and Heritage 2006); epistemic issues (*Who knows what?*) are at stake whenever people try to describe how the world is (cf. Searle

1976). Proposals, however, are neither about the past, nor are they about knowledge *per se*. Instead, they are about having an impact in the world through certain future actions and about claiming the right to determine these actions. From this point of view, proposals have to do with what can be called “deontics” (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012); deontic issues (*Who decides about what?*) are at stake whenever people try to determine how the world “ought-to-be” (cf. Searle 1976). The above-described practice of constructing a proposal as a thought involves thus an inherent ambiguity, and this study seeks to shed light on its interactional significance. In what follows, I suggest, and provide empirical evidence for the claim, that this ambiguity has to do with people’s unwillingness to pose rigid constraints on other people’s actions, which embrace also those actions that are supposed to take place in the current interactional encounter - through talk.

1.3. Research questions

In sum, this study seeks to describe (1) *what participants do when they construct their proposals as thoughts*. With the answer to this specific question, I can, afterwards, answer affirmatively to the more generic question discussed above - that is, (2) *whether the first speakers can design their proposals so as to mitigate the pressure that they put on their recipients to engage in joint decision-making*. Finally, on the basis of my findings, I will discuss (3) *how participants’ epistemic and deontic orientations are intertwined in their ways of establishing deontic symmetry*.

1.4. Data and method

The data of this study are drawn from a data set of fifteen video-recorded workplace meetings where pastors and cantors are planning upcoming church events. The data were collected in seven congregations in the regions of several bishoprics of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland. The meetings were dyads ($n=13$) or triads ($n=2$), with fifteen different pastors and ten different cantors. The data were transcribed according to the conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Schegloff 2007: 265-269) and analyzed with conversation analysis (Heritage 1984; Schegloff 2007).

In my data set, there are 297 decision-making sequences that start with a proposal. In these sequences, approximately three out of five proposals include some kind of a reference to the participants’ mental processes (thinking, wondering, pondering, etc.). In about half of these cases, this reference is done in the following way: (1) it *precedes* the actual proposal; (2) it is done in the *past tense*; and (3) it is about the mental process of the *speaker*. In 34 cases, this mental process is “thinking:” the proposal start with the phrase *mä aattelin et* ‘I was thinking that’ or with its variants, such as *mä rupesin aatteleen et* ‘I started thinking that’ or *mä oon aatellu et* ‘I have been thinking that.’ In this paper, I will focus on these 34 cases.

2. Analysis

To be able to show what exactly speakers do when they construct their proposals as thoughts, I will first consider proposals in general, especially those *without* such framing; these cases provide the background against which the interactional functions of *mä aattelin et* ‘I was thinking that’ prefaces can be elucidated.

2.1. The linguistic forms of proposals

In a proposal a speaker prototypically names a course of action suggesting that this be realized (Houtkoop 1987; Meier 1997: 165-181). In this respect, proposals can be seen as some type of directives (cf. Tykkyläinen and Laakso 2009). Importantly, however, the actualization of the proposed future action is presented as contingent on the recipient’s (or recipients’) approval. Sometimes this symmetry of deontic rights arises from the fact that the proposed action is something that the participants are supposed to do together (Couper-Kuhlen forthcoming). At other times, this symmetry is built-in in the participants’ social roles and the larger activity framework - irrespective of who is going to perform the proposed action (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). In any case, this contingency is often encoded in the linguistic form of the proposing utterances; in Finnish, proposals are prototypically declarative or interrogative clauses, in which the finite verb is in the conditional form (Hakulinen et al. 2004: 1561; Tykkyläinen and Laakso 2009).²

In my data collection, there are two forms of conditional utterances that almost always get treated as proposals - that is, the recipients display orientation to the fact that the first speakers have suggested joint decision-making about something that could be done, as well as understanding of the fact that the future event in question is contingent on their approval. These utterance forms are (1) *jos* ‘what if’³ prefaced declarative conditionals⁴ (“what if I would play Bach as the opening music”) and (2) interrogative conditionals (“should we take that first”). In the following pages, these two utterance forms together will be referred to as ‘asking conditionals.’

The situation is somewhat different with declarative conditionals (“I would play Bach as the opening music”). Without the prefatory *jos* ‘what if,’ declarative conditionals present the future event as less contingent of the recipient’s approval as is generally the case with “asking conditionals.” Accordingly, especially in those instances in which speakers make statements about their *own* future actions, the recipients tend to treat their utterances merely as informings about their unilateral decisions. In the following pages, these utterances will be referred to as ‘stating conditionals.’

² Though, in my data, there are also other kinds of utterances (assertions, evaluations, descriptions of past events, or “innocent” questions about facts) that get treated as proposals (cf. Strong and Baron 2004: 50).

³ Because the *jos* prefaced conditional clauses in my data often do not project continuation (*if... then...*), I have usually translated the particle *jos* ‘if’ as ‘what if’ (see Laury forthcoming).

⁴ In Finnish, the *jos* ‘what if’ preface is possible also in combination with declarative indicatives. Thus, because the use of conditionals *per se* can be seen as a mitigating device, we may ask whether the combination of *jos* ‘what if’ and conditional presents an instance of “double mitigation.” In light of my data, the answer to that question appears to be relatively complex. However, to address the issue in detail exceeds the limits of this study.

In the following, I will describe the typical interactional trajectories of those sequences that are instigated by asking conditionals and stating conditionals. In both cases, I will first consider the “plain” instances and, only thereafter, those in which the first speakers’ utterances are prefaced with references to their own thoughts. On this basis, I will then be able to reflect on the ways in which *mä aattelin et* ‘I was thinking that’ prefaced contribute to the kind of actions that are implemented through these two types of conditional utterances.

2.2. Asking conditionals

2.2.1. Requesting joint decision-making

As mentioned before, there are two utterance forms in my data - *jos* ‘what if’ prefaced declarative conditionals and interrogative conditionals - which almost always get treated as proposals - that is, the recipients display an orientation to the first speakers as having suggested joint decision-making about something that could be done.

In Extracts 4 and 5, the first speakers’ utterances have the format *jos* ‘what if’ + declarative conditional. In Extract 4, there are two cantors discussing the next Sunday’s mass. One of the cantors (C1) makes a proposal concerning the order of the music to be performed during the Eucharist (l. 1-2, 4). Subsequently, the other cantor (C2) approves his co-participant’s idea (l. 5).

- (4) (PTM 13:01)
- 01 C1: -> jos siinä ensi laulettais
if it-ESS first sing-PASS-COND
what if we would first sing
- 02 toi ensimmäinen virsi?
That first hymn?
- 03 C2: mm-m?
- 04 C1: kuoro laulais sen @JÄLKEEN@,
choir sing-COND it-GEN after
the choir would sing after that
- 05 C2: .hh käy oikee hyvin
go really well
..hh that’s really fine

Then, in Extract 5, the participants - a pastor (P) and a cantor (C) - have previously been discussing a family mass. In this fragment, the cantor proposes that they would distribute the flyers for the mass in the children’s choir rehearsal (l. 5, 7). In response to the proposal, the pastor displays her agreement with the cantor’s idea (l. 6, 9) and promises to make the flyers (l. 12).⁵

⁵ The particle *ni* ‘so’ at the end of line 7 might be heard as projecting continuation, which may account for the pastor’s somewhat delayed response (see l. 8). In overlap with the pastor’s response, the cantor even seems to start with that continuation (l. 10) - a line of action which is, however, retracted, given the pastor’s overlapping response (l. 9).

(5) (PM 19:10)

- 01 C: ja ↑lapsikuorohan nyt tulee
and child.choir-CLI PRT come
and now the children's choir will come
- 02 seuraavan kerran vast kaheskymmenes,seittämäs
next-GEN time-GEN PRT twenty.seven-ORD
to the rehearsal for the next time only
- 03 päivä, (0.4) .hhhhh [[harjotuks]iin että (.)
day rehearsal-ILL PRT
on the, (0.4) .hhhhh [twenty-sev]eth so (.)
- 04 [↑nii joo,]
[↑that's right yea,]
- 05 C: -> et jos sillon vois jakaa ↑ni[ille] niit
PRT if then 0 can-COND share they-ILL they-PAR
so what if one could then give the[m] those
- 06P: [joo.]
[yea.]
- 07 C: mainoksii ni,
advertisement-PL-PAR PRT
advertisements so,
- 08 (0.4)
- 09 P: joo[o.
ye[a.
- 10 C: [ni,
[so,
- 11 (.)
- 12 P: joo mä teen niille,
PRT I make-1 they-ILL
yea I'll make for them,

In Extracts 6 and 7, the first speakers' utterances have the interrogative conditional form. In Extract 6, the participants talk about the time of their next meeting together. Immediately after the pastor (P) has displayed his acceptance of the cantor's (C) idea, the participants enact the decision by writing it down (l. 2).

(6) (RKS2 42:48)

- 01 C: oisko vaikka kymmene[ltä.]
be-COND-Q PRT ten-ABL
could it be say at ten o'clock.]
- 02 P: [joo,]
[yea,] ((C and P are writing.))

In Extract 7, the participants try find a solution on how to end the next Sunday's mass. Even if the pastor's response to the cantor's proposal (l. 1-2) is less than enthusiastic (l. 4, 6) and, even more, followed by a long pause (l. 7), subsequently, however, the participants make the decision about the matter and write it down (l. 8).

(7) (VM 20:49)

- 01 C: pitäskö mei'n sittenki ottaa (.) benedicamus

- should-Q we-GEN after.all take-INF benedicamus (latin)
should we after all take (.) the Benedicamus
- 02 ja tää? loppuvirt^{enä}
and this as the Closing H^{ymn}
- 03 (1.5)
- 04 P: n:o nii.
we:ll yea.
- 05 (0.6)
- 06 P: sillai päästään eroon,
in.that.way get-PASS rid-ILL
that's how we get rid of it,
- 07 (4.0)
- 08 C: otetaan toi sinne.
take-PASS that there
let's take it there. ((C and P are writing.))

Even if *jos* 'what if' prefaced declarative conditionals and interrogative conditionals seem thus to project the emergence of new decisions, this does not mean that the recipients would necessarily need to *approve* the first speakers' proposals - even if an approval can be seen as the preferred response to a proposal (Houtkoop 1987). New decisions emerge also when the recipients - for one reason or another - reject the first speakers' proposals. This is what happens in Extract 8, in which the pastor's proposal is about leaving a certain part of that Sunday's Gospel unread and letting the choir sing that part (l. 1-2).

- (8) (VM 11:10)
- 01 P: -> jos jättäis ton::: poi:s
PRT if 0 leave-COND that-GEN away
what if we would skip tha::t
- 02 ja sen laulais_{kin}: ↑kuo:::[ro,]
and it-GEN sing-COND-CLI choir
and it would be sung by the ↑cho:::[ir,]
- 03 c: [ei] kuoro oo paikalla.=
NEG choir be present
[the] choir is not there.=
- 04 P: =no ei oo.
PRT NEG be
=okay it isn't.
- 05 (0.3)
- 06 P: no ei laula?
PRT NEG sing
okay it won't sing?
- 07 (0.3)
- 08 P: voi voi,=
PRT PRT
too bad,=

The pastor's proposal is delivered in the form of a *jos* 'what if' prefaced declarative conditional (l. 1-2). The cantor responds by mentioning an inescapable problem with the pastor's idea (l. 3). This is followed by the pastor's disappointed responses (l. 4, 6, 8), which indicate her orientation to the fact that the matter has now been settled - even if her proposal was rejected.

In Extracts 4-8, the participants, in one way or another, started joint decision-making right after the first speakers had articulated their proposals. This gives support to my earlier claim about direct proposals imposing the recipients the obligation to engage in joint decision-making about what has been proposed. However, Extract 9, in which the recipient does *not* get involved in joint decision-making along the lines proposed by the first speaker, offers even more substantial support for the claim. In this case, the participants - a pastor (P) and a cantor (C) - have just started their meeting and the cantor makes a proposal concerning the opening hymn of the next Sunday's mass (l. 1-2).

(9) (M5SHLT 0:13)

01 C: -> oisko toi kristus valo valkeuden
 be-COND-Q that HymnName
 would that Jesu joy of man's desiring be

02 hyvä siihe alkuun.
 good it-ILL beginning-ILL
 good for the beginning.

03 P: mto (0.3) >katotaanko< (0.4) jos
 look-PASS-Q if
 mto (0.3) >shall we look< (0.4) what if

04 mä haen nää ensin <↑nää tekstit>=
 I look up these first <↑these texts>=

05 C: =okei.
 =okay.

The recipient displays a clear orientation to what would be normatively expected of her - that is, to start discussing the hymn proposed by the cantor. Through her counter-proposal (l. 3-4), she, however, resists this requirement and suggests that the participants postpone the decision-making to a slightly more distant future.

In sum, all that has been said in this section implies that asking conditionals (*jos* 'what if' prefaced declarative conditionals and interrogative conditionals) convey a request for the recipient to engage in joint decision-making - now. Even if these first speakers' utterances suggest that the decisions about the proposed, more distant, future actions are to be made collaboratively, the decisions about what is to be decided upon are not constructed as joint ones.

2.2.2. Decreasing the pressure to engage in joint decision-making

Against this background let us now consider those asking conditionals that are prefaced with a past tense reference to the speaker's own thoughts.

In Extract 10, a pastor (P) and a cantor (C) have been planning a singing event. Just previously, the pastor has asserted how this particular event would be essentially

different from the other music events that they are planning for the summer: This time the question would be really about people singing together, instead of merely listening to musical performances. From this point of view, the cantor's next turn, in which she proposes that the pastor would perform a violin piece in the event (l. 1), appears somewhat problematic. The proposal has the form of a *jos* 'what if' prefaced declarative conditional and it starts with the phrase *mä aattelin* 'I was thinking that' (l. 1).

- (10) (KL 40:11)
- 01 C: -> tässä mä aattelin et jos sä soittasit viulu^uhhh
 here I think-PST-1 PRT if you play-COND-2 violin
I was thinking that what if you would play the violin here hhh
- 02 P: mm,
- 03 (1.0)
- 04 P: [°joo,°]
 [°yea,°]
- 05 C: [#jonku] keväisen#,
 [#some] springlike#,
- 06 (2.0)
- 07 P: joo.=
 yea.=
- 08 C: -> =semmonne mulla oli ajatuksissa [siitä.]
 that.kind.of I-ADE be-PST thought-PL-INE it-ELA
 =this is what I had in mind about [it.]
- 09P: [niin.]
 [yea.]
- 10 (0.4)
- 11 P: itseasiassa, (0.6) se on (.) varmaan
 actually it be probably
actually, (0.6) it will (.) probably be
- 12 semmonen tilaisuus johon hyvin, (0.2)
 that.kind.of event which-ILL well
the kind of event in which for example, (0.2)
- 13 sopii vaikka joku sibeliuksen romanssi
 suit PRT some ComposerName Romance
some Romance of Sibelius would be well-suited

The pastor's immediate response to the cantor's proposal is quite minimal: Only a minimal acknowledgement token *mm* (l. 2), a whispered *joo* 'yea' after a relatively long pause (l. 3-4), and, after the cantor's free constituent (l. 5) and an even longer pause (l. 6), another, more clearly articulated *joo* 'yea' (l. 7). Thereafter, the cantor produces an utterance that looks like a replication of the cantor's earlier proposal (l. 8) and thus like a classic attempt to pursue a more adequate response from the recipient (Pomerantz 1984). However, while the most stereotypical response pursues in this kind of a sequential environment would probably be something like "so what do you say?", "what do you think?", "would you do that?" this particular response pursue is done in a different way: It is constructed as an *assertion* about the speaker's prior thoughts - just

like the initial proposal. In this respect, the cantor's utterance can also be heard as summarizing what has been said before - something that would allow the sequence to come to an end (cf. Drew and Holt 1995).

Interestingly, in his subsequent response, the pastor slightly sidesteps the actual focus of the cantor's proposal, that is, the question whether he would play violin or not. Instead of the particle *joo* 'yea', the pastor responds to the cantor's utterance with the particle *nii* 'yea' (l. 9), which indeed treats it more like an assertion of a fact than like a proposal to be approved (about the differences between the Finnish particles *joo* and *nii*, see Sorjonen 2001). After a short pause (l. 10), the pastor begins to reflect on the nature of the music event in question and consider *the kind of violin pieces* that would be well-suited to the situation - as it were, independently.

In other words, in Extract 10, both the first speaker and the recipient displayed a somewhat mitigated orientation to an immediate need of the recipient to engage in joint decision-making in the exact terms defined by the first speaker. Besides, it seems that the first speaker's way of constructing her proposal as a thought allowed her to return to the matter of "thinking" again, after the proposal as such had not managed to generate talk about the topic. As pointed out by Arminen (2005: 169), "proposals involve a goal, which transforms the interaction into a project that becomes accountable in terms of its success." However, by constructing her proposal as a thought the cantor "played safe" with respect to the possibility that the decision-making sequence would after all be abandoned. By pursuing the recipient's response through an utterance that could also make sequence-closure the next relevant interactional event, she minimizes the threat that such an event would cause to the participants' faces (Goffman 1955).

In Extract 11 we may observe the same pattern. In this instance, two pastors (P1 and P2) discuss the Mother's Day mass. One of the pastors (P1) carries the main responsibility for the mass; it is her task, for example, to ask people to assist in the event. The other pastor (P2), however, makes a proposal concerning this particular matter (l. 5-6, 9). The proposal has the form of an interrogative conditional and it is prefaced with a reference to the speaker's thoughts ('I started thinking,' l. 1). In this case, between the prefatory reference to thoughts and the actual proposal, there is also an account for the proposal (l. 2).

(11) (HM2 3:41)

01 P2: -> *mä rupesin aatteleen sitä että*
I started thinking that

02 *ku se on äitienpäivä.*
since it is the Mother's Day.

03 (0.3)

04 P1: *mm-m? =*

05 P2: *=et olisko joku isä siinä °ollu°*
 PRT be-COND-Q some father it-INE be-PPC
=so would some father be °there°

06 *av[ustam]assa.*
as[sisti]ng.

07 P1: *[mm:,]*

08 (1.5)

- 09 P2: ainakin [ninku] miespuoli°sta°.
 at least [like] a ma°le°.
- 10 P1: [nii,]
 [yea,]
- 11 (.)
- 12 P1: Reijo Beck?

As in Extract 10, also here the recipient's response to the first speaker's proposal is quite minimal (l. 3-4, 7-8). After the first speaker (P2) has slightly modified his original proposal (note the shift from a father to a male in general), which is probably designed to make the proposal appear more attractive to the recipient (there are more males than fathers), the recipient responds with the particle *nii* 'yea' - something that acknowledges the fact that an idea has been presented, but yet avoids displaying any commitment to the proposed future action (Sorjonen 2001). Thereafter, the recipient (P1) makes a suggestion about the specific person that could be asked. While the recipient thereby forwards the proposed plan, at the same time, she slightly sidesteps the actual focus of the first speaker's proposal: Instead of approving the first speaker's idea about *having* a father/male to assist in the mass, the recipient starts to consider the possible *persons* that could be asked to assist. Hence, also here the participants display a somewhat mitigated orientation to an immediate need of the recipient to engage in joint decision-making in the terms of the first speaker.

In both Extract 10 and 11, there is some kind of delicacy involved in the first speakers' proposals: In Extract 10, the proposal might have challenged the recipient's prior talk and, in Extract 11, it could have been heard as an intrusion into the recipient's domain of deontic authority (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). The first speakers' choices to construct their proposals as thoughts might thus be related to the first speakers' understandings of their proposals *per se* as being somehow problematic. What would support this idea is the fact that, in my data, the practice of *accounting* - something that has been regarded as an indication of the speakers' anticipation of problems with their proposals (Houtkoop 1990) - sometimes co-occurs with the practice of constructing proposals as thoughts. However, this is not always the case; for example in Extract 10 no account for the proposal is given. Moreover, there are many proposals involving long accounts, which are, however, not prefaced with any reference to the speaker's thoughts. Therefore, we may need to specify further the particular *kind* of problemacy that the first speakers might anticipate in those situations in which they draw precisely on the practice of constructing their proposals as thoughts and not on the practice of accounting for their proposals.

When speakers account for their proposals they inevitably mitigate their claims of deontic authority in the domain of the proposed future actions; if someone has the power simply to determine future actions, no accounts are needed (Lukes 1978: 639-640; Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). But then again, accounts make proposals sound even more persuasive and insistent than before - especially in terms of what should happen *next*. That is, even if the recipients are not forced to accept the accounts that would support the proposed ideas, the recipients are still subject to pressure to engage in joint decision-making about the matter. Accounts do not mitigate this pressure in any way, but, on the contrary, may even intensify this pressure. It is precisely this matter

- 13 C: eli et[tä o]ppilaat pääsis,
 PRT PRT pupil-PL come-COND
 so tha[t th]e pupils could,
- 14 P: [joo.]
 [yea.]
- 15 (0.5)
- 16 P: oma projektisa.=
 own project-POSS
 that's another project.=

In response to the cantor's report of her thoughts (l. 1-4, 7), the pastor displays his in-principle acceptance of their content: He acknowledges the realization of the cantor's idea as possible ('that could be.' l. 6; 'ye:a,' l. 8). Even if the pastor's response involves no actual commitment to future action (cf. "yea, let's do that"), it is in line with the reporting nature of cantor's initial turn. Thereafter, however, perhaps encouraged by the pastor's positive reactions, the cantor goes on specifying the particulars of her thoughts, thus inviting the pastor to engage in a more detailed discussion about the matter (l. 9-10, 13). The pastor, however, rejects the kind of invitation: He states that the question is about "another project" (l. 16) - something irrelevant from the point of view of the participants' "current project" (the church event for the school children). Thereafter, the participants turn the discussion back to its original track (not shown in the transcript).

Previously in the episode from which Extract 12 is drawn, the cantor has several times invoked new topics for discussion but the pastor has each time claimed primary rights to determine the agenda of the meeting. Hence, in Extract 12, the cantor's choice to frame her current idea as a thought might reflect her willingness to play safe this time. This might have indeed worked out had she not started to elaborate on her idea that eagerly.

In sum, *mä aattelin et* 'I was thinking that' prefaced asking conditionals seem to be associated with interactional trajectories different from those without such prefacing; they do not impose joint decision-making on the recipients that strongly. Hence, I argue that, in these cases, the first speaker's choice to construct her proposal as a thought is related to her anticipation of problems that might emerge would s/he directly impose joint decision-making about the subject matter of the proposal on the agenda of the current interaction. Of course, these problems might also have something to do with the proposed actions *per se*; it could be that, precisely because the proposed actions are problematic, the first speakers do not want to impose decision-making about these matters on the recipients. From this point of view, the functions of the practice of constructing proposals as thoughts may overlap with the functions of the practice of accounting for proposals (Houtkoop 1990). Nevertheless, from the point of view of agenda-management, it is specifically the practice of constructing proposals as thoughts which seems to be relevant: Unlike accounting, this particular practice enables the first speakers to reduce the pressure that they put on the recipients to engage in joint decision-making.

2.3. Stating conditionals

2.3.1. Informing the recipient about one's unilateral decisions

Proposals are not the only way in which people may talk about future actions. Sometimes people simply inform each other about something that they have already decided. These kinds of announcements are often made through utterances in which the finite verb is in the *indicative* form (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). This is not always the case, however; sometimes people announce their decisions through utterances in which the finite verb is in the *conditional* form. These 'stating conditionals' could, in principle, be heard as marking the actualization of the speakers' plans as somehow contingent on the recipients' reactions. However, especially in those instances in which the speaker is talking about some future actions in which s/he him/herself is involved, the recipients tend to treat the decisions about these actions as already established. This can be seen in the recipients' ways of responding to these utterances: They respond only minimally, if at all.

In Extract 13, the cantor tells the pastor about her plans concerning the music in an upcoming church event (l. 1-2). Thereafter, despite the lack of any response by the pastor, the cantor initiates a new topic (l. 3).

- (13) (MT 32:58)
- 01 C: lauluryhmä vois la- ottaa muutaman laulun,
vocal ensemble can-COND take-INF a.few-GEN song-GEN
the vocal ensemble could si- select a few songs,
- 02 (0.3) täällä ja, (0.8) mth näitä ja,<
(0.3) here and, (0.8) mth these and,<
- 03 .hhh sitte o- oisko se mahollista et
PRT be-COND-Q it possible-PAR PRT
.hhh then wo- would it be possible that

In Extract 14, the cantor describes her plans for an upcoming confirmation class (l. 1-2). Thereafter, even if the pastor responds only minimally (l. 3), the cantor moves on to a new topic (l. 4).

- (14) (RKS1 6:42)
- 01 C: mää jatkaisin heiän kans vaikka
I continue-COND-1 they-GEN with PRT
I would continue with them let's say
- 02 virskirjan historialla kaks tuntia.
Hymnal-GEN history-ADE two hour-PAR
with the history of the Hymnal for two hours
- 03 P: mm.
- 04 C: .hh ja (.) sitten
.hh and (.) then

In Extract 15, the pastor explains the way in which the speaking turns in an upcoming musical event have been allocated between her and another church worker (l. 1). The cantor's whispered response (l. 3) conveys her understanding of the plan as well as her quiet judgment of the plan as comprehensible. Notably, however, the cantor does not attempt to participate in the decision-making about the matter. Instead, she treats the

actualization of the mentioned future action as independent of her approval of it. Again, as in Extracts 13 and 14, the first speaker treats the recipient's response as sufficient and initiates a new topic (l. 5).

(15) (VVYLT 1:46)

01 P: *mä oisin näissä, (1.2) neljässä muussa sitten,*
I be-COND-1 these-INE four-INE other-INE PRT
I would be in these, (1.2) four other (slots) then,

02 (0.6)

03 C: °aivan.°
°**exactly.**°

04 (2.0)

05 P: .hh mut sit
.hh but then

In sum, in Extracts 13-15, the recipients did *not* treat the first speakers' turns as genuine proposals that would have invited their participation in the decision-making about the mentioned future actions. Instead, the recipients seemed to interpret the first speakers' utterances as informings about some ideas and plans in which the recipients had actually no word to say.

2.3.2. Inviting the recipient to engage in joint decision-making

In light of our analysis in the previous section, let us now consider those stating conditionals that are prefaced with a reference to the speaker's thoughts. As in Extracts 13-15, also in the following instances the speakers talk about future actions in the realization of which they themselves play the main role.

In Extract 16, the participants - a pastor (P) and a cantor (C) - have previously agreed that the cantor will make the poster for an upcoming musical event at church. The cantor's declarative conditional utterance concerns the specific way in which she would do the task (l. 1-2, 4-5). In this case, however, the declarative conditional utterance is prefaced with a reference to the speaker's prior thoughts ('I was thinking that,' l. 1).

(16) (VVYLT 13:55)

01 C: *mä aattelin et mä tekisin iha vaa sitte sen sillä tavalla*
I think-PST-1 PRT I do-COND-1 PRT PRT PRT it-GEN in.this.way
I was thinking that I would do it just in this way

02 *että, .hhh jollekki:, (1.7) kivan väriselle, (0.4) paper[ille]*
PRT some-ALL-CLI nice-GEN coloured-ALL paper-ALL
that, .hhh on some:, (1.7) nice coloured, (0.4) pape[r]

03P: [juu?]
[yea?]

04 *ja (.) et, (.) ehkä sit se ois vaan*
and PRT perhaps PRT it be-COND PRT
and (.)so, (.) probably then it would just be

05 C: ninkun nä[in hh]hhh .thhh

- PRT like.this
 ↑like th[is hh]hhh .tchh
- 06 P: [juu.]
 [yea.]
- 07 (.)
- 08 P: <se käy ↑aivan hyvin.>
 It go totally well
 <it is ↑totally fine.>

The recipient's response is quite different from the recipients' responses in Extracts 13-15. In this case, the pastor (P) responds by displaying her full approval of the cantor's plan: The particle *joo* 'yea' (l. 6), which is spoken in overlap with the cantor's turn, is produced with a relatively strong emphasis. Also the subsequent turn of the pastor, which lexically conveys her acceptance of the cantor's idea, is spoken with prosodic salience: With a slow speech rate and a wide pitch movement on the word *aivan* 'totally' (l. 8). By displaying her approval of the cantor's proposal that strongly, the pastor implicitly suggests that the actualization of the cantor's idea has indeed been contingent on her approval.

In Extract 17, the participants discuss the upcoming bishop's visitation. Just previously, they have considered the moment when the bishop arrives at the church. Then, at the beginning of the fragment, the pastor (P) presents his plan of giving the congregation's gift for the bishop - the Hymnal of the City Church - at this very point in the event (l. 1-3). As in Extract 16, the first speaker's declarative conditional utterance is prefaced with a reference to the speaker's thoughts.

- (17) (PTM 4:35)
- 01 P: -> mää ajattelin että jos mää muistan niin
 I think-PST-1 PRT if I remember-1 PRT
 I was thinking that if I remember so
- 02 mää antasin sen .hh sen kaupunginkirkon
 I give-COND-1 it-GEN it-GEN city-church-GEN
 I would give him that .hh that Hymnal
- 03 virsikirjan .hh hänelles ↑SIInä.
 hymnal SG3-ALL in.there
 of the City Church .hh ↑THEre.
- 04 (.)
- 05 C: ↑no niinpä.
 exactly.
- 06 P: ku sitä on vähän hassu antaa
 PRT it-PAR be little awkward give-INF
 because it's a little awkward to give it

((4 lines removed, during which there is an interruption caused by the pastor's cell phone.)))

- 11 P: vähän hankala antaas sitte (1.2) päätökseks
 little tricky give-INF PRT end-TRA
 a little tricky to give it (1.2) at the end
- 12 ku ei muillekka anneta °mi[tään°]
 PRT NEG others-CLI give anything
 because the others are not given any°thi[ng either°]

- 13 c: [niin] ja
[yea] and
- 14 sittenhän ne vois käyttää sitä iinä sitte,
then-CLI they can-COND use-INF it-PAR then PRT
then they certainly could use it there,

The cantor's response conveys her appreciation of the pastor's plan ('exactly.' l. 5). But even if it is spoken with a relatively strong emphasis (cf. Extract 15: l. 3), it is still not treated as sufficient by the pastor who, subsequently, through a turn at talk that is formatted as an account (note the turn-initial *ku* 'because,' l. 6; cf. Houtkoop 1990), pursues a more ample response from the cantor (l. 6-12).⁶ Afterwards, the cantor indeed offers a more substantiated approval of the pastor's plan: She presents a further reason for why that plan would be good (l. 13, 14).

Our analysis of Extracts 16 and 17 suggests that, in connection with those declarative conditionals in which the speakers talk about their *own* future actions, the references to the their prior thoughts seem change the interactional import of the utterances: These appear to make relevant the recipients' approval of the presented ideas. In this way, they invite the recipients to engage in joint decision-making with the first speakers. This is in line with what has been pointed out in the discursive psychological literature on the use of mental categories: The framing of some plan as a "thought" implies that it can still be changed (Potter and Puchta 2007: 113-115), which certainly encourages (but does not impose) joint decision-making about the matter.

In sum, references to a speaker's thoughts seem to function quite differently in connection with 'asking conditionals' (*jos* 'what if' conditionals and interrogative conditionals) and 'stating conditionals' (declarative conditionals). Indeed, when it comes to the capability of an utterance to invite the recipient to engage in joint decision-making, the references to thoughts appear to work in totally opposite directions in these two types of cases:

When an asking conditional is prefaced with a reference to the speaker's thoughts, the recipient's pressure to decide about the matter is *decreased*: The first speaker's utterance can be heard less like a proposal, and more like an assertion about something that has been occupied the speaker's thoughts lately. Then again, when a stating conditional is prefaced with a reference to the speaker's thoughts, the recipient's pressure to decide about the matter is *increased*. Even if the utterance is about the speaker's own future actions, which - at the first sight - might appear as something to which the recipient has no word to say, the framing of such an utterance as a thought suggests that the matter at hand does not, after all, belong to the domain of the speaker's sole deontic authority, but it is something on which the participants may - and should - decide together. In other words, the reference to the speaker's thoughts guides the recipient to treat the utterance as a proposal.

But then again, what is common for the references to the speakers' thoughts (*mä aattelin et* 'I was thinking that') both in connection with asking and stating conditionals is that they are associated with more open-ended responses and sequential trajectories than would be the case without them; participants are given the opportunity to share the

⁶ The pastor's decision to go on talking in lines 6-12 might be due to the pastor interpreting the cantor's utterance in line 5 as a mere back-channeling response, not as a content-related response (Yngve 1970: 574; Duncan and Niederehe 1974; Orestrom 1983). Whatever the case might be, the pastor displays an orientation to his plan as something that makes relevant the recipients' approval of it.

responsibility, not only for what is to be decided with respect to the proposed plan, but also for what is to be jointly decided upon in the first place. Constructing a proposal as a thought seems thus to be a particularly convenient practice to manage the earlier-discussed problems with deontic symmetry in the initiation of joint decision-making.

3. Conclusions

In this paper, I have sought to describe (1) *what participants do when they construct their proposals as thoughts*. I have suggested that the interactional import of this particular practice is somewhat different in connection with different kinds of conditional utterances that are frequently used for talking about future actions. In connection with ‘asking conditionals’ (*jos* ‘what if’ prefaced declarative conditionals and interrogative conditionals), the prefatory references to thoughts function primarily to decrease the pressure on the recipients to engage in joint decision-making: The recipients are given the freedom to enter into the process “voluntarily.” In this way, first speakers can suggest deontic symmetry in terms of the participants’ rights to make meta-decisions about decision-making. Then again, in connection with ‘stating conditionals’ (declarative conditionals), the prefatory references to thoughts convey that the speakers’ plans can still be changed (Potter and Puchta 2007: 113-115) - also with respect to the recipients’ views. In so doing, the first speakers can invite the recipients to engage in joint decision-making about something that otherwise would appear as the first speakers’ unilateral decisions.

As pointed out earlier, proposals do not enforce the recipients to accept the first speakers’ plans and ideas, but they nevertheless impose on the recipients the obligation to get involved in the joint decision-making about the matter at hand. This has made me ask (2) *whether the first speakers can design their proposals so as to mitigate the pressure that they put on their recipients to engage in joint decision-making*. With the knowledge about the interactional import of the practice of constructing proposals as thoughts, I can now answer affirmatively to this overall question: As I have argued above, the practice of constructing a proposal as a thought is an interactional device by which participants can mitigate precisely the type of imposition associated with proposals and the initiation of joint decision-making. When the first speaker’s proposal is constructed as a thought, it is not left for him or her alone to decide whether or not joint decision-making about some matter has been instigated. Instead, the participants are given the possibility to share the responsibility for the emergence of their decision-making sequences - at their very inception. As demonstrated in this paper, it is precisely when the recipients display some degree of independence in their responsive turns (cf. Raymond 2003; Heritage and Raymond 2005; Raymond and Heritage 2006; Stivers and Hayashi 2010; Heritage 2011) - a common response after the first speaker has constructed his or her proposal as a thought - that such shared responsibility is especially clear.

On a more abstract level, this paper has contributed to understanding of (3) *how participants’ epistemic and deontic orientations are intertwined in their ways of establishing deontic symmetry*. As demonstrated by the forms of proposals discussed in this paper, deontic symmetry can indeed be seen as a result of fine balancing between these two different types of orientations. When speakers preface their unambiguously recognizable proposals (asking conditionals) with *mä aattelin*, they mark their

utterances as being not only about decision-making but also about knowledge; even if the utterances are about future actions, the speakers are actually merely reporting their thoughts about these actions - something to which they certainly have primary epistemic access. Then again, when speakers preface their informings about their unilateral decisions (stating conditionals) with *mä aattelin*, they mark their utterances as being not only about knowledge but also about decision-making; even if the speakers have epistemic authority with respect to their plans, the implication is that the decisions about these plans are yet to be made - by the participants together. It is thus precisely the ambiguity between epistemics and deontics in the first speaker's utterance (see Givón 2005: 149, 171-177) which allows the participants to construct the deontic dimension of their interactional sequence together.

Even if the ideal of symmetrical decision-making, or deontic symmetry, is especially clear in the "communicative activity type" (Linell 2009: 201-211) of planning interaction, it is also more generally associated with people's tendency and desire to avoid imposition (cf. Lakoff 1973; Brown and Levinson 1978 [1987]; Leech 1983; Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003). Because people usually do not want to be heard as that type of persons who try to control the behavior of others, they are motivated to mitigate those of their actions that could be perceived as problematic in this respect (Clark 1979; Fraser 1980, 1990; House and Kasper 1981; Blum-Kulka 1987; Faerch and Kasper 1989; Caffi 1999; Byon 2006; Silverstein 2010; Bella 2011). From this point of view, it is quite obvious that the practice of constructing a proposal as a thought is one of those devices by which participants in decision-making may reduce the imposition-related unwelcome implications of their actions. Without changing the basic force of the proposal, this practice makes it possible for the first speakers to display sensitivity to the recipients' respective competencies, identities and entitlements (on "rapport management," see Spencer-Oatey 2000, 2002); the first speakers may suggest joint decision making about some topic without yet making their recipients accountable for their possible omissions in this regard. Thereby, the practice of constructing a proposal as a thought is clearly not only about managing the local interactional tasks but also, and fundamentally, about managing social relations.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Transcription Conventions

.	pitch fall
?	pitch rise
,	level pitch
↑↓	marked pitch movement
<u>underlining</u>	emphasis
-	truncation
[]	overlap
=	latching of turns
(0.5)	pause (length in tenths of a second)
(.)	micropause
:	lengthening of a sound
hhh	audible out-breath
.hhh	audible in-breath
#	creaky voice quality
°	whisper
@	other change in voice quality
mt, tch, krhm	vocal noises
<word>	slow speech rate
>word<	fast speech rate

Appendix B: Glossing abbreviations

PL	plural
1, 2	person
0	zero person
GEN	genetive
PAR	partitive
ESS	essive
TRA	translative
INE	inessive
ELA	elative
ILL	illative
ADE	adessive
ABL	ablative
ALL	allative
INS	instructive
ACC	accusative
COMP	comparative
INF	infinitive
COND	conditional
IMP	imperative
CLI	clitic
Q	question clitic
NEG	negation
PASS	passive
PST	past tense
PPC	past participle
PPPC	passive past participle
POSS	possessive suffix

Singular, third person, nominative, active and present tense are forms that have been considered unmarked. These have not been glossed.

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