Constituting the listening student: Compliments in Ph.D. supervision

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Abstract

There is a growing body of research on best-practice models, both at the conceptual level and in supervision practices such as instructional activities and giving feedback. Substantial efforts have been undertaken to improve Ph.D. supervision effectiveness in reflecting the teacher/student relationship between supervising professors and their candidates. This paper is about how the relationship is lived and established: the real-time interaction between candidate and supervisor. Video recordings of supervisions are analyzed from a conversation-analytic perspective, following a fairly frequent phenomenon, a rather rough and evident form of assessment: compliments paid to the Ph.D. candidate often in front of an audience of other students and supervisors. For the paper presented here, the leading questions are: What kind of interactional work do compliments accomplish in formal supervision settings? How are they enmeshed in the turn-taking practices? How do they help set the supervision scene, and how do they establish the Ph.D. candidate as a learning subject?

INTRODUCTION

Since Max Weber wrote about 'Science as a Vocation' in the early 20th century, it has been common sense that being an academic is a profession driven by hard work, inspiration, and intellectual integrity. Academic teachers should, according to Weber, confront their students with options and their possible consequences and not with solutions if they want to be teachers rather than demagogues. Weber draws a very formal picture of the relationship between professors and their students, having in mind the encounter between them in the lecture hall when he talks about the plain intellectual integrity that should guide teaching. In many countries worldwide, things have changed, and the relationship between supervising professors and candidates is viewed as more complex and intimate. Substantial efforts have been undertaken to improve Ph.D. supervision effectiveness reflecting the teaching relationship between supervising professors and their candidates. There is a growing body of research on best-practice models, both at the conceptual level and in supervising practices such as instructional activities and giving

feedback.[1] Many scholars are working toward professionalizing Ph.D. supervision as a distinct pedagogical practice. There is consensus across disciplines and countries on the main task of supervision at that level of the academic career: balancing guidance and development of students' autonomy as researchers (Gardner 2008; Nguyen 2016; Torka and Maiwald 2015). Maybe this is another 'dilemma of academic discourse' (Tracy 1997). So, the relationship between candidates and supervisors is taken to be central (Delamont et al. 1997; Nguyen 2016). However, how this relationship is lived and established, that is, the real-time interaction between candidate and supervisor, is not prominently analyzed. Conversation analytic studies have shown (Nguyen 2016; Vehviläinnen 2012) that both supervisor and Ph.D. candidate must keep this delicate balance between autonomy and guidance working. Plain advice is asked for but seldom given (depending on the state of the candidature). Problems are voiced by students and supervisors as well, and assessments in interaction are relatively subtle and rather indirect – Nguyen (2016), for example, shows based on recordings of such supervision situations that the supervisors mainly oscillate between ambiguous/"equivocal" feedback, suggestions, and giving advice. One form of evaluation can be recognized somewhat indirectly, for example, by the fact that hardly any suggestions are made, or objections are raised. Precise evaluations – "That's really great!" – do not occur, at least not in the data material presented in Nguyen's text.[2] Moreover, they are also found in the data material examined here only in particular places.

In this paper, video recordings of supervisions are analyzed from a conversation analytic perspective following a phenomenon that seems to be a rather rough and evident form of assessment, not subtle at all: compliments paid to the Ph.D. candidate often in front of an audience of other students and supervisors. Such personal addressing and evaluation have not yet been studied in great depth for scientific interaction.[3] While the work of Mulkay (1984) sheds light on the ultimate compliment in the science system—the speeches given at the awarding of the Nobel Prize—the embedding of such personal evaluations in everyday encounters between (prospective) scientists and their mentors/supervisors is as yet unclear. In other learning settings, such as school-based classroom research, scholarship is already more advanced. For example, Luhmann (2002, 63-

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[1] These discussions about higher education and the learning environments in the narrower sense are accompanied by solid critique about the changing nature of universities, their character as organizations, and the bad working conditions of those who take the risk of the 'hazard' of an academic career – something Max Weber in his famous talk about 'Science as a Vocation' also mentioned (Krücken and Meier 2006).

[2] In my view, this has to do with the fact that such clear assessments are more likely to be found at the margins of supervision situations. It stands to reason that studies dealing with supervision practices in doctoral relationships do not consider such elements of "preliminary banter." However, conversation analysis has shown that it is at the margins of the actual official occasion, and exciting things can be discovered before the participants get recognizably down to business. For psychiatric admission interviews, for example, Bergmann (1992) has shown that psychiatrists ask questions at the beginning of these interviews so that the potential patients are put in a position of justification from the very beginning.

[3] In doing so, I endorse a pragmatic definition of compliment offered by Mulkay (1984): 'A compliment is a positive evaluation which is expressed about some social actor other than the speaker or about something which is identified with such an actor' (532). Moreover, I would like to add, the person addressed by the compliment is present to receive it.

64) emphasizes that teachers' evaluations of their students' contributions help establish the primitive interaction system 'instruction' in the first place.

Moreover, ethnomethodological conversation analytic research has shown that there is something like a typical interaction sequence that characterizes classroom interaction; it is a tripartite sequence consisting of the teachers' prompts, the students' responses, and the teachers' reactions to these responses (the so-called third move) (Mehan 1979; Gardner 2014). Often this involves evaluation ("Exactly, that's right!"). Although instructional forms continue to change over time, this sequence seems to be relatively stable, and we are always able to recognize instruction as instruction by it. It seems to be the central means of managing turn-taking in the classroom.

Moreover Schegloff (1987), using the example of communication among scientists (during a conference), also pointed out that the organization of turn-taking has significant effects, not only in terms of the chances of actually "having one's turn," but also in terms of what actually comes to mind: '…it is likely that the points participants make in the conference sessions are the survivors of interactional process that cuts more deeply than seeing that some critique that has come to mind cannot be pursued under these circumstances. It is likely to constraint what comes into mind in the first place' (227).

For the paper presented here the leading questions are the following: What kind of interactional work do compliments accomplish in formal academic supervision settings? How are they enmeshed in the turn-taking practices? How do they help set the supervision scene, and how do they establish the Ph.D. candidate as a learning subject?

DATA AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

The data I draw on comprises video recordings of formal supervision meetings in Germany.[4]

The transcription focuses on the vocal parts and the direction of gaze and reflects the positioning in space, especially regarding the participants' reciprocal concentration. These meetings were diverse, ranging from group settings with several Ph.D. students and supervisors to one-to-one meetings between a student and her or his supervisor. Video recordings were made of three one-to-one encounters between one supervisor and one Ph.D. candidate, twelve situations with three to seven participants, and nine larger groups ('colloquies') with five to eleven participants. Table 1 provides an overview of the sample of care settings recorded – table 2 presents which individuals participated in the study.

		Number of Settings	Number of participants per setting Minimum/Maximum
Format	One-to one	3	2
	Small Groups	12	3/7
	Work Group/Kolloquium	7	5/11
	Plenum	3	10/25
Department	Mathematics and Science		11
	Law, Economics and Social Science		14
Federal State	Lower Saxony		21
	North Rhine-Westphalia		4

Table 1: Sample of supervision settings

		n	%
Sex	Women	40	57.1
	Men	30	42.9
Status Group	Docs	37	52.9
	Postdocs	5	7.1
	Professors (supervising)	13	18.6
	Others	12	17.1
Department	Mathematics and Science	36	51.4
	Law, Economics, and Social Science	34	48.6
Age (Year of survey, Year of birth)	Docs	n = 24; M = 35.5; SD = 8.0; Min = 26; Max = 53	
	Postdocs	n = 4; M = 36.0; SD = 3.7; Min = 32; Max = 41	
	Professors (supervising and others)	n = 6; M = 49.7; SD = 8,8; Min = 41; Max = 65	
PhD context (Multiple answers)	Program	13	41.9
	Project	5	16.1
	Institute/Chair	18	58.1
	External & Others	8	25.8
Duration (year of survey minus start of doctorate)	Docs	n = 33; M = 2.9; SD = 2.0; Min = 1; Max = 8	
Total		70	100

Table 2: Sample of participants

The research team was partly involved in the situations, presented the research project, asked for consent, and sometimes managed the video cameras if necessary. Sometimes, it was possible to observe and follow the discussions. This was only possible in the case of multi-party interactions. The one-to-one meetings were only recorded and not

observed. All this is quite interesting because it makes evident that for (ethnographic) research, multi-party-interactions are more accessible. There is always an audience that watches the spectacle of supervision, and it is easy for the researcher to join this audience and the concerted activity of being an audience. In contrast, in one-to-one interactions, the setting does not help. There is no participation role inherent in the situation that the researcher can use for her or his purpose.

Situations of doctoral supervision, such as what we have in our material, are characterized by the fact that they are official events convened for this purpose, with specific restrictions on the participation possibilities of those present (Heritage 1998). Most notably, there was a strict and uncontroversial orientation of participants to having only one person speak at a time. Commonly, the purpose was to provide feedback on the texts previously submitted by the doctoral candidates or on the talk that the person in question had given. This feedback was given not only by the supervisors but also by other Ph.D. students who were present. The meetings proceeded so that one person always said something about the work. Ph.D. candidates and the others present merely listened to this feedback. The deviating case, which will be presented at the end, shows that compliments can do different interactional work, too.

Thus, these encounters are not conversations in passing but officially scheduled appointments with actors who encounter each other in a specific configuration: as supervisors, as not-yet-finished scientists, as Ph.D. students writing their dissertations.

The available video recordings were transcribed, and elements of the interaction events were examined to see whether they offered clues to structural problems in the organization of interaction. It was noticed that there are regularly unique markings in the situations when new speakers start their speech for the first time. These markings often consisted of small compliments, as the following example (Sequence 1) shows. Gerhard (the supervisor) starts his turn with a compliment to Diana, the Ph.D. candidate who has distributed a paper asking for feedback:

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 1   Gerhard: →((blickt auf den Tisch vor sich und scheint
 2            dort etwas zu bewegen)) ich kann gerne weitermachen
 3            (2.2) ((blickt auf und schaut in Richtung von Diana, die
 4            in seine Richtung schaut)) die kollegin diana weiß ja
 5            dass äh ich ihren schreibstil und wie sie schreibt sehr
 6            (.) mag und das sehr gut ((schaut kurz vor sich auf den
 7            Tisch und hebt den Blick wieder)) lesen kann äh (.) aber
 8            ich sags gerne noch mal .hh [äh
 9   Diana:                              [hh. ((schnaufend durch
10            die Nase))] hmpfhmpf ((leises lachen?)) ((schließt
11            dabei die Augen kurz und schüttelt leicht den Kopf))
12
13   Gerhard: ((schaut vor sich auf den Tisch und kratzt sich am
14            Hinterkopf)) (unverständlich) auch die punkte die sie
15            herausgearbeitet ((schaut in Dianas Richtung)) hat .hh
16            (.) mein=ähm eindruck ich habs äh (0.3) da- zweimal
17            gelesen is .hh (0.5)
18            ((Gerhard blickt vor sich auf den Tisch.
19   Diana:   ((zuckt ein kleines Stück zurück und zieht die
20            Augenbrauen hoch, anschließend lächelt sie))
21   Gerhard: das ähm (.) dass es zwei kapitel sind ((schaut Diana an))
22            in einem
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 1   Gerhard:  ((looks at the table in front of him and seems to move
 2             something there)) I'm happy to continue. ((looks up,
 3             glancing in the direction of Diana, who looks in his
 4             direction) ) our colleague Diana knows that  um  that I
 5             like her style of writing and the way she writes very
 6             much and can read it very well ((looks briefly in front
 7             of him at the table and raises his eyes again))  uh  but
 8             I like to repeat it one more time .hh [uh.

 9   Diana:                                         [hh. ((puffing
10             through her nose)) ((soft laughter?)) ((closes her eyes
11             briefly and slightly shakes her head))

12   Gerhard:  ((looks in front of him on the table and scratches his
13             head slightly)) (unintelligible) also the points she has
14             worked out ((looks in Diana's direction)) .hh ( .) my=um
15             impression, I um (0.3) read it twice there. .hh (0.5)
16             ((Gerhard looks in front of him on the table) )

17   Diana:    ((jerks back a little and raises her eyebrows, then
18             smiles))

19   Gerhard:  that um (.) that there are two chapters ((looks at
20             Diana)) in one
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Sequence 1

This particular form of the preceding compliment can be found in many places in our material. Speakers take the floor in this form and directly address the Ph.D. student in an almost overly clear manner. The doctoral candidates themselves react minimally at best, like Diana in lines 9 - 11, who limits herself to non-verbal signals of reception.

In order to infer which 'problems' (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, 290; Berger and Luckmann 1991, 38) are solved by this, such compliments, including their sequential environment, i.e., the action moves before and those immediately following, were removed from the transcript and gathered as data. This was done across the transcribed material and resulted in a collection of sequences, showing how following speakers begin their first speech move in Ph.D. supervision situations and how others respond to them. The sequences presented below are examples taken from this collection. However, they do not represent a pattern of any kind. At the end of the analysis, a somewhat deviant case is presented.

ASSESSMENTS AND COMPLIMENTS IN INTERACTION

Such compliments and positive person-addressing at the beginning of a more extensive evaluation of the person can, of course, be used to mitigate subsequent awkward and socially dispreferred action moves (Golato 2005). For example, a positive evaluation or compliment may be associated with the rejection of an offer. This simultaneously indicates that this rejection is socially dispreferred. This also makes it easier to realize more rejecting or disagreeing action moves, such as giving possibly negative feedback. Complimenting is a crucial practice to maintain social solidarity (Pillet-Shore 2015). This practice is also found in our material and usually occurs before any subsequent substantive feedback on the doctoral project. The Ph.D. student present is addressed directly, and the following feedback is usually given as 'unidirectional feedback activity' (Duitsman et al. 2019, 581). On the other hand, dialogical feedback activities, in which the doctoral student responds directly to the feedback in terms of content, hardly ever occur.

However, the sociologically interesting thing about compliments is that complimenting genuinely presupposes presence, perceptibility, and mutual knowledge of it. It is realized for someone present. Similar to a greeting or an insult, it is a form of addressing and makes a reaction to it immediately conditionally relevant. The compliment is an event that 'occurs during co-presence and by virtue of co-presence' and is built up in situations with the 'behavioral materials' that are ready for interactants — 'glances, gestures, positioning, and verbal statement' (Goffman 2005, 1). The addressed person is thus put on the spot, but this is ambivalent in the case of the compliment, as we will see below. In my paper, I argue for first considering the very fundamental fact of presence as the central framing, the 'little social system maintained through interaction' (Goffman 1956, 268), which dissolves when the penultimate person leaves the situation. It is about what can only happen in a situation and is situational (Goffman 1983, 3) in the strict sense. We are otherwise accustomed to using other framings—for example, from which categorical affiliation the compliment is made or in which hierarchical relationship the two participants stand to each other or even what the content of the compliment is, what or who is addressed with it.

In contrast to other evaluations with which doctoral candidates are sometimes confronted in the course of their work on their research project (such as the final review of

their work or written comments on submitted texts), which are often text-based, the compliment is not produced somewhere and received in another place at another time. Instead, the consequences of a compliment occur directly on the spot and are visible and audible to everyone present (not only the person addressed). A response from the person addressed is immediately required. The question of 'face-work,' that is, face-saving or face-threatening, which is always involved, has been discussed at length by Goffman (2005), particularly the double mission in which members are on the move. Not only do they take care of their own face-saving, but they also always take into account the face of the counterpart so as not to unnecessarily harass him or her and thus not to endanger the stability of the encounter and the situation. Such upstream compliments can also be read through the Goffmanian lens as contributing to the pacification of the situation. They help both the person addressed and the person realizing the compliment to both speak out and accept potentially face-damaging statements. With this sociological classification, one has already gained some ground over a purely didactic rationale ('Always start with something positive. Then the criticism can be better accepted!'). However, I think that there is more to be gained.

The significance of such upstream compliments—if we look at it from an interactional structure point of view—goes even deeper. To this end, I will examine the question based on conversation analysis.

COMPLIMENTS FROM A CONVERSATION ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

Against this backdrop, fundamental ethnomethodological and conversation analytic work has pointed to some challenges that compliments imply for encounters, mainly when multiple people are present. For example, Pillet-Shore (2015) assumes that compliments belong to a broader category of supportive actions that sustain and express solidarity. In particular, Golato (2005) also points out that what a compliment means depends on the larger sequential context of an interaction. For example, compliments might be placed before a rejection in order to defuse the situation. Recent developments in conversation analytic research on compliments focus primarily on institutional contexts and consider the multimodal aspects of complimenting (e.g., the use of looks). However, there is also research on complimenting on social media (Placencia and Eslami 2020), where self-praise seems to be frequent and less problematic than in face-to-face encounters.

I would like to particularly draw on Anita Pomerantz's (1978; 1984) and Harvey Sacks' (1992) works, as both have been concerned with what compliments mean in terms of presence and interaction. In particular, the work of Pomerantz has been and continues to be foundational to further work dealing with compliments/reactions to compliments in interactions. Sacks' reflections, on the other hand, are less well-known.

For Sacks (1992), compliments are a delicate matter because they make inescapable social sortings. He discusses this in terms of how the compliments given to one person present themselves to the other people present—that is, to those who hear the

compliment but are not being directly addressed. Just because a person present in a multi-party conversation is addressed extraordinarily with a compliment and is thus singled out, one cannot assume that nothing relevant happens for the others present. Other people very likely analyze such sequential exchanges, in which they are not directly involved, for their relevance for themselves. According to Sacks, this analysis is not only sequential ("Do I have to answer now?"), focusing on a question on which conversation analysis is mainly focused. The analysis also focuses on the categories used in the compliment or on activities pointing to a particular category.

> 'That is to say, you use the categories involved in the classification of B to see how you stand by reference to those categories. You then use how you stand to find out what he's done to you' (Sacks 1992, 101).

In this sense, compliments also do something to those present whom they do not explicitly address. They have the potential to cause social collateral damage.

> And if someone can find that nothing is being done to him, then that is one way in which you can be producing a 'safe compliment' (102).

Therefore, such safe compliments constitute a kind of reference or 'courtesy' to the other attendees because they do not make them look bad. The fact that such compliments are sometimes meaningless is a price that must be paid. They may be such positive addresses that do not apply to any other attendee. For example, in a committee, the (male) chairman may well emphasize that it is particularly welcome to have a female representative in the company—when all the other employees are men. This does not say very much, and it is also strange for the woman addressed, but the person in question is clearly emphasized without the male attendees present having to feel threatened or excluded as a result. So there is an art of choosing an exact personal address like a compliment so that other attendees are not offended by it. That becomes particularly clear if one imagines the reverse case: Someone receives a compliment in front of an audience that might also apply to everyone else: 'It was nice to have somebody with a sense of humor in the room,' or 'It was nice having somebody smart around,' at which point others might say 'Well what about me?' (Sacks 1992, 598).

What Sacks is elaborating here is that compliments can also prove problematic, especially in multiparty interactions. Because while, on the one hand, they pay respect to the 'face' of a single person (Tracy 2011), they may (if inappropriately chosen) offend others who might also categorize themselves as 'smart.' In his view, one solution is offered by precisely 'safe' compliments that are noncommittal and do not implicitly categorize other attendees (599). Compliments, i.e., positively addressing a person, or something that can be attributed to that person, are, according to Sacks, a way of sorting and classifying the members of the social world without always having to be explicitly stated.

Anita Pomerantz (1978; 1984) emphasizes another problem that compliments bring to the interaction. However, she looks primarily at the reaction that a compliment elicits in the person addressed. She found in her material that while compliments make a reaction by the addressed person conditionally relevant, this reaction is then strangely ambiguous. Compliments must be accepted, as a response is required, but this does not seem to be easily realized. Her material included everyday conversations in which the person receiving the compliment was present. Based on the reactions to compliments she analyzed, she elaborated a fundamental tension in which recipients of compliments find themselves. She writes:

> The productions of compliment responses are sensitive to the cooperation of multiple constraint systems. One preference system is that of supportive actions, that is, responses that legitimize, ratify, affirm, and so on, prior compliments. A second constraint system is that of self-praise avoidance (Pomerantz 1978, 106).

However, this tension between self-praise avoidance and simultaneous preference for approval in social actions is not a normative, abstract construct and is not just an assumption from the outside. Instead, it shows up on the surface of concrete linguistic utterances because compliment responses[5] exhibit a specific form. In form and content, they lie somewhere between the entire agreement and acceptance of the compliment versus disagreement and rejection. Thus, responses to compliments indirectly refer to the dilemma of avoiding self-praise on the one hand and the preference for agreement on the other. Recipients of compliments accept them in some way, signaling, for example, that they have heard them but do not necessarily explicitly agree. However, they do not reject them either. Pomerantz, therefore, speaks of the 'in-between-ness of compliment responses' (1978, 81). Using empirical examples from everyday conversations, she shows what solutions to this dilemma might look like: Recipients can indicate in their linguistic or non-linguistic response that they accept the compliment as such, but do not entirely agree with the evaluation implied in the compliment, and "downplay" it in their response ("It's not that great"). They may also change the reference point of the compliment in their reaction to it by passing it on to others ("My sister helped me") or, most importantly, by returning it ("You look good too!"). Thus, in this indirect way, by analyzing reactions to compliments, one can see, as in a mirror, what compliments mean for the possibilities of action in a situation: Compliments—even though they may be meant "nicely"—are not so easy to handle interactively. They may offend other attendees, and they put their addressees in a quandary—what should they honestly say as a response?

Such compliments, with which speakers begin their speech directed at the Ph.D. candidate, frequently occur in our material. In the following, I will use selected sequences to

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[5] The term 'compliment responses' has in the meantime become a standard term in research and is primarily studied cross-culturally comparatively and with a view on gender differences. Some articles in the *Journal of Politeness Research* offer an excellent overview.

show how compliments play out in doctoral supervision situations, especially when considering the resulting possibilities for action on the part of the Ph.D. candidates.

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

As has already been shown based on Pomerantz's work, somewhat ambiguous reactions to compliments are expected, i.e., no explicit approvals and no rejection of the compliment. What does this look like in the case of Ph.D. supervision situations? What do Ph.D. candidates feel called upon to do when another person addresses them with a compliment? First, it becomes apparent that the reactions of Ph.D. candidates to a compliment addressed to them tend to be minimal and that the others present do not react to it at all, as in the following example:

```
1   Eva:        ((an Petra gerichtet, denn diese schaut sie an))
2               also ich fand dein expose super wirklich (.) also
3               sehr interessant und ich hätte nie daran gedacht
4               dass (.)  kommunikation so weit kommen kann so sagen=
5   Petra:      =hmhm
6   Eva:        mit dem kapitel? (.) hab ich (1) leider diese anregung
7               nicht gefunden=also es is klar ein kapitel wo du alles
8               strukturieren willst schreiben musst und so weiter .h
9               äh: irgendwie weiß ich nich jetzt was du  mit die nen
10              feldnotizen feldmemos feldberichte (unv.) (.) äh brüche
11              und feldphasenberichte am ende machst weißt du?
12  Petra:      hmhm


1   Eva:        ((addressing Petra, who is already looking at her)) well
2               I thought your exposé was super really very interesting,
3               and I would never have thought that communication could
4               get this far so to speak=
5   Petra: →    =um um
6   Eva:        with that chapter? (.) unfortunately (1) I haven't found
7               this inspiration=well it is clear it is a chapter
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Sequence 2

Here, it becomes obvious that Petra, as the addressee of the praising remark, feels addressed ('um' and eye contact, line 5) but merely reacts to this compliment with a reception signal. Neither indicates that she accepts the compliment as such (then she would probably have said 'thank you') nor that she agrees with its content. However, she does not reject it either; instead, she shows that she has heard it but that for her, it is not a separate issue. She does not treat Eva's utterance as a separate topic but as the beginning of a longer word contribution (Pillet-Shore 2018). The other participants in the colloquium behave similarly; they do not follow up with their own evaluations—something that is otherwise common and easy in everyday conversations (Pomerantz 1984)—but

become, as it were, the silent audience of the exchange between Eva and Petra. The compliment as such is not thematized ('nice of you to say that') but almost passed over.

Moreover, through the way Eva realizes her compliment, the rest of those present are not co-categorized, for Petra is here clearly addressed as a person, through gaze and by explicit reference to her specific exposé[6]. Eva does not emphasize Petra's general ability to write an exposé (something that the others may also be able to do), but Petra has written exactly this one exposé very well. Moreover, Eva clarifies that she is not making this assessment based on an external, possibly contentious standard but that she is making a personal judgment of taste based solely on her own reading experience with the text. In this respect, it is not likely that anyone will disagree with her, for she is entitled to have this experience (Sacks 1992, 243). The others may not share it, but it is undeniably her experience. So we can see that Eva is maneuvering quite complexly here and that the other attendees, even if they say nothing, definitely play a role in the compliment. Nevertheless, this does not change anything for Petra, who was addressed with the compliment; she merely indicates that she heard something ('um').

To return to sequence 1: There, one can observe a similar development of the interaction. Gerhard begins his contribution with a compliment to Diana.

```
 1    Gerhard: →((blickt auf den Tisch vor sich und scheint
 2             dort etwas zu bewegen)) ich kann gerne weitermachen
 3             (2.2) ((blickt auf und schaut in Richtung von Diana, die
 4             in seine Richtung schaut)) die kollegin diana weiß ja
 5             dass äh ich ihren schreibstil und wie sie schreibt sehr
 6             (.) mag und das sehr gut ((schaut kurz vor sich auf den
 7             Tisch und hebt den Blick wieder)) lesen kann äh (.) aber
 8             ich sags gerne noch mal .hh [äh
 9    Diana:                              [hh. ((schnaufend durch
10             die Nase))] hmpfhmpf ((leises lachen?)) ((schließt
11             dabei die Augen kurz und schüttelt leicht den Kopf))
12
13    Gerhard: ((schaut vor sich auf den Tisch und kratzt sich am
14             Hinterkopf)) (unverständlich) auch die punkte die sie
15             herausgearbeitet ((schaut in Dianas Richtung)) hat .hh
16             (.) mein=ähm eindruck ich habs äh (0.3) da- zweimal
17             gelesen is .hh (0.5)
18             ((Gerhard blickt vor sich auf den Tisch.
19    Diana:   ((zuckt ein kleines Stück zurück und zieht die
20             Augenbrauen hoch, anschließend lächelt sie))
21    Gerhard: das ähm (.) dass es zwei kapitel sind ((schaut Diana an))
22             in einem
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[6] By exposé is meant here a text form that contains a formulated plan for the doctoral project, i.e., the research question, the methodology, the theoretical framework, and considerations about the procedure and possible problems and results. In other words, a detailed answer to the question: What do I intend to do, and how do I want to approach it?

```
1    Gerhard:    ((looks at the table in front of him and seems to move
2                something there)) I'm happy to continue. ((looks up,
3                glancing in the direction of Diana, who looks in his
4                direction) ) our colleague Diana knows that   um   that I
5                like her style of writing and the way she writes very
6                much and can read it very well ((looks briefly in front
7                of him at the table and raises his eyes again))   uh   but
8                I like to repeat it one more time .hh [uh.

9    Diana:                                           [hh. ((puffing
10               through her nose)) ((soft laughter?)) ((closes her eyes
11               briefly and slightly shakes her head))

12   Gerhard:    ((looks in front of him on the table and scratches his
13               head slightly)) (unintelligible) also the points she has
14               worked out ((looks in Diana's direction)) .hh ( .) my=um
15               impression, I um (0.3) read it twice there. .hh (0.5)
16               ((Gerhard looks in front of him on the table) )

17   Diana:      ((jerks back a little and raises her eyebrows, then
18               smiles))

19   Gerhard:    that um (.) that there are two chapters ((looks at
20               Diana)) in one
```

Sequence 1

In this and other multi-party conversations, it is always a question of who will say something next about the text presented by the Ph.D. candidate. In this respect, there are always new starts within the encounter. This is also the case here. Gerhard looks from the document lying on the table in front of him up to Diana, who also makes eye contact. He addresses her in the third person as 'colleague Diana' as if she already knew that he liked her writing style and could read her texts very well.

Interestingly, he addresses her in front of the others as a colleague—not only his colleague but also that of the others. Thus, in this sense, he indicates that the other attendees are connected and belong to one category, namely as colleagues. From this group, he now singles out Diana in a positive way. The compliment is safe in some ways because it is based on his personal experience with her texts; who could say anything against it? However, at the same time, the compliment is difficult for the others: What does he think of their writing style?

Nevertheless, the compliment only meets with a visible and audible response from Diana. If possible, her reaction is even more restrained than Petra's in sequence 2, perhaps even dismissive. She snorts loudly in and out, closes her eyes, thus briefly cutting off the connection with Gerhard, and shakes her head. Her reaction indicates that Gerhard has put her in a predicament– not only because of the compliment, but also because he is praising her in front of others in the same category. She merely indicates that she has heard him, accepts the compliment acoustically, so to say, but does not agree at all.

In another case, in a one-on-one supervision situation where only the supervisor and the doctoral student are present, the doctoral student (Bea), on the other hand, accepts the compliment as such.

```
1    Ida:  .hh du kannst übergänge schreiben man weiß genau warum das
2             jetzt als nächster teil eigentlich [kommt
3    Bea:                                        [mh]
4    Ida:  .hh das äh erklärt sich (0.4) total (.) ne also .hh  da glaub
5          ich kannst du dich ganz tiefenentspannt    [zurück]lehnen
6    Bea:                                             [okay]
7    Ida:  .hhh=
8    Bea:→=danke=
9    Ida:  =was (.) mir durch den kopf gegangen is (.) äh
```

```
1    Ida:  .hh  you can write transitions one knows precisely why this is
2          actually coming now as the next [part]
3    Bea:  [um]
4    Ida:  .hh that  um   explains itself (0.4) thoroughly (.) no really
5          .hh I think you can sit
6          [back] and be deeply relaxed
7    Bea:  [okay]
8    Ida:  .hhh=
9    Bea:  =thanks=
10   Ida:       = what went through my mind (.) um
```

Sequence 3

Bea reacts in line 9 with the 'appreciation token' (thanks) (Pomerantz 1978, 83) to the praise of her supervisor. She thus indicates that she has heard the compliment and accepts it as such and that she agrees with it—even if implicitly. However, the compliment still does not become a subject of further discussion; rather, the content negotiated in it (Bea writes well) does not provide any additional material for conversation. Instead, Ida only begins 'properly' now. In contrast to the first sequence, it becomes clear that the compliment itself is riskier compared to the one made by Gerhard. For Ida notes that Bea is generally capable of writing transitions. That means that she has the ability to do so and has not only demonstrated it accidentally about a text. She also no longer ties the compliment back to her own reading experience but trusts herself to make a general judgment. It becomes clear that here there is no need to consider anyone who is listening in. It remains, however, with the prelude character that the compliment has as in the first sequence. For Bea limits herself to accepting the compliment.

An introductory orientation toward the prelude character of such compliments or praise at the beginning of a new speech is also shown by the following transcript excerpt, which deviates at first glance.

```
 1   Hilde:      das find ich aber also s find ich auch ich find das
 2               auch gut also ich fand das jetzt sehr sehr gut.
 3               diesen text zu haben .h um da auch so dein gedanken
 4               und ((blättern)dein äh überlegungen erstmal
 5   Rika:       hmhm
 6   Hilde:      folgen zu können.? .h u:nd) das is ja sozusagen auch
 7               der erste ja der erste zugang sich dann auch übers
 8               schreiben nochmal herzustellen
 9               [dass man mal so die gedanken noch mal]
10   Rika:       [irgendwie ja ne? hmhm?]
11   Hilde:      zu verdichten die beschreibungen zu verdichten .hh
12               genau ich habe mir das jetzt auch noch mal
13               ((blättern))ausgedruckt hab das jetzt hier so n
14               bisschen kommentiert [an paar stellen
15   Rika:                            [hmhm?
16   Hilde:      [.hhh
17   Rika:       [°super°
18   Hilde:      die äh: hmm:: was mir da augefallen is an dem text,
19   Rika:       .hh
20   Hilde:      .hh n
21   Rika:→      vielleicht noch bevor wir jetzt da star(ten)
22   Hilde:      [ja?
23   Rika:       [zum transkript.
24   Hilde:      ja,
```

```
 1   Hilde:      but I think well I also think that I also think that's
 2               good well I found it very very good to have this text now
 3               .h to have your thoughts and (scrolls) your reflections
 4               for now
 5   Rika:       um um
 6   Hilde:      to be able to follow them↑ .h and that is so to speak
 7               also the first yes the first access which can also be
 8               established through writing
 9               [that one can again the thoughts]
10   Rika:       [somehow yes, or? um um]
11   Hilde:      condensing condensing the descriptions .hh exactly I have
12               now also commented on it a bit here [in a few places.
13   Rika:                                           [um um?
14   Hilde:      [.hhh
15   Rika:       [°super°
16   Hilde:      uh:: what struck me about the text,
17   Rika:       .hh
18   Hilde:      .hh
19   Rika:→      maybe even before we start now
20   Hilde:      [yes?
21   Rika:       [concerning the transcript
22   Hilde:      yes,
```

Sequence 4

In this one-on-one supervision situation between the Ph.D. student (Rika) and the professor (Hilde), they discuss a text that the Ph.D. student submitted before the interview. The sequence begins when the text itself becomes a topic of conversation for the

first time. Hilde praises that she found it 'very, very good' to have this text available. At line 20, Hilde stops speaking and thus avoids an overlap by letting Rika continue speaking. Rika, before they 'start,' brings in another question about the transcript. This is interesting because this insertion clarifies that she has heard Hilde's general positive statement about the text as a start, as something that precedes the actual topic. It is obviously clear to her that Hilde has not gotten to the point yet, and it is not really her own turn either. However, she intervenes once again. Probably at the last possible point, she slows Hilde down and steers the conversation in another direction. In the end, this sequence also shows how strongly the participants understand such compliments only as a beginning and not as their own contribution to the content.

The sequences shown illustrate the interactive effect of such preceding compliments in different formats of Ph.D. supervision, what work they accomplish.

An attendee – the Ph.D. candidate – is initially addressed in a very concrete way. The reaction of the addressed person remains minimal; he or she does not take the floor but instead treats it as a lead-in to a long speech by the respective speaker and not as a substantive topic of his or her own. Other attendees, if any, also keep a low profile. This is also made possible by hedging the compliment – for example, by referring to one's own experience and implicitly avoiding categorizing the other attendees. The compliment itself, the positive evaluation of a submitted text or person, does not become an issue. The other Ph.D. candidates or supervisors (if present) also orient themselves to the fact that the speaker will make further comments. No one takes the floor. This element helps stabilize the interaction tableau: A new speaker takes the floor, and the remaining participants again become the audience. This minimizes who is considered as the next speaker, namely only the Ph.D. student. At the same time, it is ensured that she will answer relatively minimally. In this respect, we are dealing, in many cases, with a group setting (several Ph.D. students and supervisors) and not with a group discussion. Instead, they are two-party conversations in front of an audience. The preceding compliments make a central contribution to establishing this order because they silence the recipient and the others rather than making them talk, and they establish a dyad. Incidentally, this is true regardless of whether the person complimenting is a professor or another Ph.D. student. It is always followed by a somewhat more detailed appreciation of the submitted work sample.

Compliments make a particular reaction of the addressed person expectable. However, this reaction can and will most likely be minimal, and the right to speak falls back on the complimenting participant. We know this from everyday conversations, and it is also found here in this institutional context of Ph.D. supervision, where it becomes more intensified. The possible ways to embed such a compliment in the ongoing conversation are blocked to participants in the Ph.D. context. They can neither return the compliment to the supervisor (e.g., "Yes, your writing style is also great") nor share it (e.g., "Thank you, but I also have to thank my sister who actually wrote the text"). Also, to reject it outright is not an option because one would then question the competence of the complimenting person to give such an evaluation. This is also an essential factor, as to reject

it outright would also mean questioning one's own competence. So, any way you slice it, in a sense, such compliments silence the persons addressed rather than make them talk (because: what should they say?) and maneuver them into a predicament. This informal element thus contributes to constituting the Ph.D. students even more as recipients.

Moreover, this happens –for example, in a colloquium where several people give feedback – repeatedly and, if necessary, every time a next speaker says something about the Ph.D. proposal for the first time. Such compliments may be well-intentioned; they may be intended to soften the critical remarks that follow and to make moments of crisis more bearable. However, through their inherent tension, they also cement the position of Ph.D. students as recipients. They have a social side effect, that is, the silencing of Ph.D. candidates. Furthermore, this is not trivial because it can have real consequences for what happens in supervision situations.

DEVIANT, INFORMAL CASE

Finally, I would like to talk about a sequence that we recorded by accident. The sequence came from a meeting of Ph.D. students with their supervisors and the postdocs employed by the program. Posters on each doctoral project were positioned in four places in one room, and small groups discussed them. There was no order of discussion or moderation within the groups. After a discussion period of 20 minutes had elapsed in front of each poster, people moved to the next poster. The sequence begins when the official poster feedback and Q&A session is over, and the group is waiting in front of the poster of Ph.D. student Abigail to move on to the next poster presentation.

```
1   Chris:     ((looking at the poster the whole time))
2   Abigail:   ((looking into the room, waiting).hhh .hhh.)
3   Erik:      I like your cards
4   Abigail:   ((smiling at him) [°maps°)((turning to her poster))
5   Eric:                        [your  [maps
6   Finja:                              [yeah=
7   Finja:     =yeah me too it's really good here
8   Erik:      yeah (that's/ it's)super clear
9   Abigail:   ((still looking at her poster) I can´t I can´t take
10             responsibility) ((she goes on explaining the colors on
11             her maps and the difficulties for color blind people,
12             very difficult to understand on the tape))
```

Sequence 5

The small group participants and Abigail, who has presented the poster, are no longer looking at the poster at this point but have already oriented themselves in other directions. Then Erik takes the floor. His statement 'I like your cards' (line 3) refers to an object visible to all (a picture on the poster), but Abigail is also addressed personally with this compliment: 'your cards.' Erik does not appear here as an expert on graphic

representations but as an everyday person who evaluates "from the gut" something he directly perceives (representing the poster). He also does not take the object of evaluation apart analytically but formulates the compliment as a personal judgment of taste. Abigail smiles at him in response, from which one cannot yet conclude that she has understood him (loud background noises accompany the conversation). He has her attention, in any case. Only her minor correction 'maps' makes it clear that she has indeed understood him. Erik confirms with 'maps yeah' that this is what he means. Abigail's reaction shows that she has understood his statement, but she does not receive it as a compliment but as something in need of correction and a reference to the poster. This is also what she turns to in the process. The contact and the focus of the two on each other are now established, however. Through the second evaluation that Finja contributes ('me too,' line 8), the compliment becomes visible as such again, and at the same time, Finja joins in the inter-action. Through this complimenting, which Erik and Finja realize successively, a mutual focusing among the three is established, which did not exist before. Subsequently, a con-versation develops, which revolves around the poster and the color scheme of the illus-tration. Abigail also participates. The following picture 1) illustrates how Abigail is en-gaged in explaining the map on her poster to those standing around her after Erik and Finja have addressed her maps.
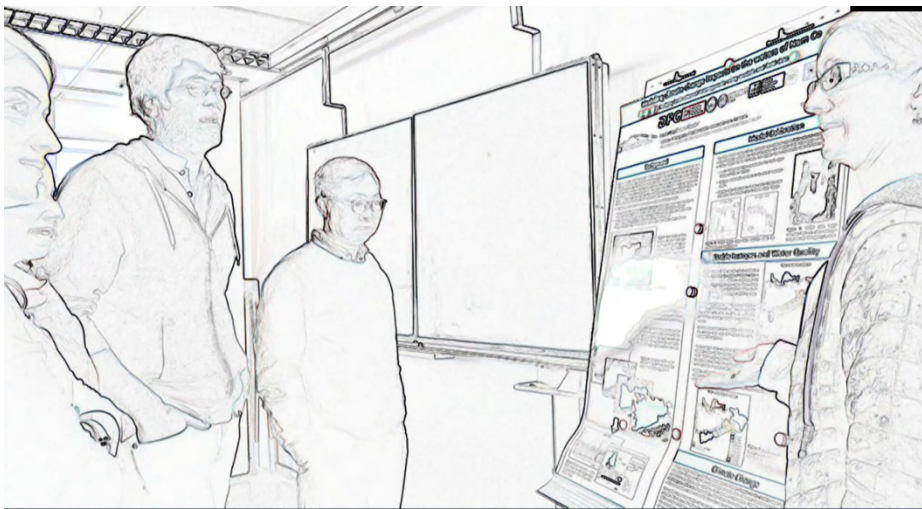
Picture 1

The sequence comes from a more informal conversation that follows the actual poster presentation. The latter is already finished at the time in question. Erik does not have the formal right to speak but uses the pause that does not 'belong' to anyone. He starts with a compliment, and, as one can see, the exchange can be restarted by a compliment that can reestablish a focus among the participants. A first compliment, which is com-plemented by a favorable second evaluation ('same evaluation,' Pomerantz 1984, 57)

(others could have quickly joined in), leads to the constitution of a focused interaction and gives an impetus to the following conversation. Thus, this sequence deviates significantly from what was evident in sequences 1 to 3 – others feel invited to follow up on the compliment, and a joint conversation is opened. The 'local sensitivity' (Bergmann 1990) of conversations, the possibility of making anything and everything in the situation a topic, and using it as fuel for the interaction, can thus unfold or be used by the participants. This built-in mechanism, which everyday conversations carry in comparison to institutional conversations and ensures that they can be pushed further and further even without an official agenda and collection of topics.

SUMMARY AND OUTLOOK

The role of specific interaction sequences in the situational organization of teaching/learning interaction has been studied in depth in conversation analysis. It has even identified a specific sequence form that is characteristic of classroom interaction. Research on feedback, whether in classroom interaction or academic or vocational education, has also addressed the issue of favorable or beneficial interactive formats. One specific format for feedback that Duitsman et al. (2019) address, for example, is also found in the present Ph.D. supervision situations. It is a format in which people speak in only one direction ('unidirectional feedback activity,' 581). The introduction to the feedback to the Ph.D. student often uses a 'curtsy' to the person and their specific performance, a compliment, followed by a minimal response from the Ph.D. student. We do not find dialogic feedback activities as Duitsman et al. (2019) also describe.

However, identifying a specific sequence format can, in my opinion, only be the first step in analyzing supervision situations in the Ph.D. context. The key question is actually what problems such elements can solve within the interactional organization. Compliments may be meant nicely and make it easier for the respective speaker to address critical points in the sequence. However, situationally, they also have social side effects. They make minimal reactions of the addressed persons very likely and limit their possibilities to react, and they have implicit effects on other attendees. They also set up an asymmetrical dyad. Moreover, they thereby continue to secure the complimenting person the right to speak. They keep the other person in friendly check, one could also say. The Ph.D. candidates are constituted as recipients and not so much as co-creators of the scientific discourse. Such preceding little niceties thus impact the scientific discourse, the social form in which one learns to do research. They constitute the Ph.D. candidates as in need of supervision because they initiate phases of interaction in which the balance between guidance and autonomy swings in the direction of guidance.

However, as the deviant example (sequence 5) has shown, this does not necessarily have to be the case. An expected next move in compliments is also a follow-up evaluation (Pomerantz 1984) by other attendees. In our material, however, this only happens when the right to speak is organized in a self-governing way, and others do not have to wait until the right to speak is handed over to them by the person moderating or by agreed

order but can respond 'spontaneously.' The condition of informality (Heritage and Greatbatch 1991) is, thus, central to this. Such a follow-up assessment can then also re-initiate another conversation in the group and give it a thematic impetus. Even everyday evaluation sequences, such as compliments, would have added content value for the supervision situation. Social events in Ph.D. supervision situations would thus approach the conversation, become more mundane, and shed the corset of formal interaction schemes (cf. Bergmann 1990). The scientific discourse in which research-learning took place would thus become freer, but at the same time, it would be more fragile and endangered.

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TRANSCRIPTION SYSTEM

The transcription combines the systems of Jefferson (2004), Schegloff (n. d.) and Selting et al. (2009).

Overlap

[ ]	overlaps and simultaneous speech
=	direct connection of new speaker contributions or segments (latching)
:	Elongation

Pauses

(.)	Micropause, estimated to be about 0.2 sec. in duration
(0.5)	Measured pauses of about 0.5 sec. in duration

Reception signals

hm yes no	monosyllabic signals
hm_hm ja_a	two-syllable signals

Events

((coughing))	language-accompanying para- and extra-linguistic actions
((...))	omission in the transcript

Accentuation, intonation and pitch

?	rising high
,	medium rising
-	consistent
;	moderately falling
.	falling