NEGOTIATING CATEGORIES IN TRAVEL AGENCY CALLS

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1. Introduction *

Analyzing eight phone calls to a travel agency,\(^1\) we observed that participants negotiate the properties of a demand or a product by describing it in alternative ways. The participants have to reach agreement on a description that is both appealing to the customer and within the range of the travel agency. The sales person may try to adapt the customer's wishes by formulating them differently. Such reformulations have orderly, specifiable features and we will describe two such procedures.

For our analysis, Harvey Sacks' work on membership categorization appeared to be very useful (see Sacks 1992a Fall 1964, Spring 1965 / Lecture 6). Sacks describes how people use orderly procedures to 'see' members of categories. He demonstrates how categorization devices are used to constitute social order by making observably correct and appropriate categorizations of persons and their actions. He also shows that these devices provide orderly procedures for the constitution of sequential coherence and the making of socially accountable inferences. In section 3 of the chapter we present a brief characterization of Sacks' work on categorization. In order to demonstrate the relevance of categorization work in sales talk, we first discuss a fragment of a call in section 2. In sections 4 and 5 we describe two methods by which descriptions are negotiated in our data material (the scaling-up operation and attribute transfer). In section 6 we examine an instance of situated collection formation. Categories may be

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grouped together relative to the relevancies of the task at hand and negotiation may take the form of displaying that a category fits into the relevant collection. In section 7 the core of our argument is summarized.

2. The relevance of categorization work in sales talk: an example

In the following exchange the caller has asked the employee of the travel agency what it would cost if a group of eleven persons - six adults and five children - were to book a holiday at a particular apartment complex on the Spanish coast. After the Sales woman mentions a first net total price (line 183 in fragment 1a), the caller inquires about the possibility of reduction for children (lines 184-86). The call taker answers this question negatively by informing the customer that there is no reduction for children on the type of holiday she wants to book (with apartment trips no, there isn't, line 188):

\[(1a) \quad \text{[call Aml]} \quad \text{(simplified translation into English) }^* \]

176 Desk: well when I'm going to calculate the price ()
177 Caller: [m:m]
178 Desk: five hundred eighty-five times eleven[:]
179 Caller: [m:m]
180 0.3
181 Desk: that will be:
182 Caller: [(and-)]
183 Desk: six thousand four hundred thirty-five guilders=
184 Caller: → =er yes and for the children
185 0.5
186 Caller: → so to say er- 'cause is there reduction for children with it or whatever:
187 0.2
188 Desk: with apartment trips no, there isn't
189 (.)
190 Caller: oh yes.
191 Desk: [(er:) reduction for children only applies two up to
192 six year((s old)) twenty percent with hotel: trips]

* The appendix contains the original Dutch versions of the transcripts.
After the rejection of the caller's suggestion, the call taker accounts for this dismissal by relating the matter of reduction for children in several ways to different domains of categorization: accommodation and transport.

* She first informs the caller that *reduction for children only applies up to six year(s old)* [...] with hotel trips, [...] *but it doesn't apply to apartment trips* (lines 191-95). Here the category of the accommodation the caller wants to book is used to account for the non-relevance of a categorical distinction between adults and children. The relevance of price reduction for children is simply presented as a matter of category-bound features of different sorts of accommodation. Moreover, the exclusive attachment of the feature 'reduction for children' to the category 'hotel trips' is treated as something that may be unilaterally defined from the part of the travel world and is put forward as a non-negotiable matter.

* Although the topic of reduction for children could have been closed at this point, the call taker continues to address the subject by asking how old the children are (line 198 in fragment (1b) below). After the caller's answer that there are *three children of eight year(s old)* (line 200), *one of [...] about three* (lines 203-4) and *one of fifteen* (line 208), the employee again concludes that there is *unfortunately no reduction for children* (lines 212-213). The subsequent accounts for that conclusion make clear that the Sales woman now addresses the possibility of reduction for children with respect to the transport costs, cf. *eight year(s old)) need a whole bus seat* (lines 213-15; earlier in the exchange the caller has already informed the Sales woman that they want to travel by bus):
(1b) [call Am1] (continuation of fragment 1a)

188 Desk: with apartment trips no, there isn't
189 (.)
190 Caller: o:h y'es.
191 Desk: \(\rightarrow\) [(e:) reduction for children only applies two up to
192 Desk: six year((s old)) twenty percent with hotel trips
193 0.2
194 Caller: o:h yes
195 Desk: \(\rightarrow\) but it doesn't apply to apartment trips
196 0.5
197 Caller: oh:
198 Desk: how old are the children [at the date of departure
199 Caller: [(e:] [let's
200 see. there are: three children of eight year((s: old))
with it:
201 0.2
202 Desk: eight year((s old)) [;yes,
203 Caller: [yes, hh and e:r there's one of
204 e:r let's see of e:r about three year:(s old)) with it:
205 0.2
206 Desk: y'es
207 0.3
208 Caller: and one of: e:r fifteen,
209 0.4
210 Desk: y'es, hh
211 1.2
212 Desk: \(\rightarrow\) no. (0.2) there e:r is unfortunately er nho reduction
213 \(\rightarrow\) for children with it anymore. \(\cdot\)h[h eight year((s old))
214 Caller: [o:ah.
215 Desk: need a whole bus seat anyway,=*
216 Caller: =yes:y'es
217 Desk: \(\rightarrow\) [(and) they cannot go together e:r
218 for instance two seats- hh or one seat
219 and then two children on it
220 (.)
221 Caller: yes[:yes,
222 Desk: \(\rightarrow\) [\(\cdot\)H\(\cdot\) and: er fifteen year((s old))
223 is an adult person with us:
224 (.)
225 Caller: o:h yes yes- yes of course
The rejection of the possibility of reduction for children and the account for this non-application thus are divided over two separate steps. First the 'accommodation' component of the costs of the trip is addressed and subsequently the part of the price that consists of the 'transport costs'.

Particularly interesting in the second step is the fact that the reasons the Sales woman gives for the non-applicability of reduction for children are partially different. Following the caller, she partitions the group of children into different age groups and treats these groups in a specific way by relating them each to a different domain of the travel business (lines 213-19, respectively 222-23). In lines 213-15 the Sales woman says that children of eight years old need a whole bus seat. She explains this further by stating that they cannot share one seat (lines 217-19). Subsequently she simply states that fifteen year((s old)) is an adult person with us (line 222-23).

In the case of the fifteen years old the Sales woman does something that is comparable with the way she previously accounted for the applicability of reduction for children on the accommodation part of the costs. She legitimates the rejection by the delivery of an explicit, unilateral definition of what is an 'adult person' for the travel agency. However, in the case of the eight years old the employee accounts for the rejection by giving a functional description of the way children of this age might be distributed over bus seats. Instead of the formalist, definitional treatment of the applicability of reduction for children on both apartment trips and the transport costs of fifteen year old persons, the account for the non-applicability is now presented as the result of everyday reasoning about a category-bound feature of children of a particular age group, i.e. their capacity of seatsharing.

One may conclude that in these fragments the Sales woman uses three methods to account for the non-applicability of reduction for children.

* In the first method, the relevance of the category 'child' is made dependent on the
applicability of the category 'hotel trip', i.e. on the applicability of one specific member out of another collection of task-relevant categories. The fact that reduction for children is not a possible trait of this particular category from the collection of accommodation describing categories explains why reduction does not apply. It is only through the selection from the situation-bound collection of categories for different kinds of accommodation {hotel, apartment, ...} that the relevance of the category 'child' can be determined.

* In the second method it is not the relevance of the category 'child' that is at issue, but the applicability of this category. The feature of being 15 years old is treated as a sufficient condition to determine the inappropriateness of the category 'child' for an individual of this particular age. So, the accounting is accomplished by formulating a rule of category application which establishes the inappropriateness of the category 'child' for a person who is fifteen years old (who is an adult person with us). Contrary to the former method of accounting, a particular feature of one of the members of the group of customers is treated as a basis for category-exclusion, independent of its relation to other collections of situation-bound categories.

* In the third method it is again the relevance of the category child that is under discussion: here the feature of 'not being able to share seats' is used as a sufficient condition to determine the non-relevance of the category 'child'. As opposed to the unilateral definitions and rules used in the first two methods, here the non-consequentiality of category incumbency is the result of situated everyday reasoning. Whereas the first two methods of accounting explain the non-applicability of reduction for children by membership exclusion from particular categories (15 year old persons are not a 'child', it is not a hotel trip), the third method blocks the applicability of reduction by attribute-specification of a subset of the members of the category 'child' (cf. Jayyusi 1984, p.28).

All these different accounts for the non-applicability or the non-relevance of the category 'child'
have at least two things in common: (a) they are all triggered by the use of the term 'reduction for children' in a specific sequential position (after the Sales woman mentions the total price); (b) different features of persons of a particular age or that age itself are made relevant dependent on the category or task to which they are related. The accounts display a way of reasoning about the applicability or the relevance of the category 'child' relative to domains of category use that are specific for the organization the caller has called (is it a hotel trip, or an apartment trip; is the person in question able to share his bus seat with someone else with another member of the relevant category). The rules of category application are specific for this organization and are unilaterally defined by it (persons of fifteen are adult persons for us).

It is also remarkable that the customer - at least at the level of what she displays explicitly - accepts and agrees with these situation-bound methods of categorization and the ways they are accounted for. In other words, there seems to be asymmetry in the possibilities the participants have to classify persons of a certain age at that particular point in the exchange. Incumbents of the category 'customer' do not have the same rights to determine how categories from the stage-of-life (child, adult) device may be applied as an incumbent of the complementary category of the relational pair <customer, sales person>.

3. Theoretical background: Sacks' work on categorization

The preliminary observations in the former section show that the examination of categorization work of participants is relevant for the analysis of negotiations in at least some kinds of sales talk. They also suggest the usefulness of conversation analytic and ethnomethodological work on categorization. Especially Harvey Sacks' work on membership categorization devices (Sacks 1972a/b) and the way Jayyusi (1984) elaborates central aspects of the apparatus developed by Sacks, has been conducive for the analysis we develop in this paper.

Sacks' analysis of membership categorization devices (MCDs) is a detailed attempt to spell out the informal logic that the members of a culture use to describe persons and the way this logic is intertwined with sequential organization. MCDs are modelled as collections of categories plus rules of application. The use of a category in a particular context locates at least one collection of categories of which that category is a member - e.g. the use of the category
label 'child' may identify a *stage of life* collection of categories including children, adolescents, adults and elderly people. In selecting a particular category a speaker displays an orientation to a set of application rules that not only govern the contextually appropriate pairing of population members and collection members, but also provide guidelines for methodical everyday reasoning.

Contrary to the hierarchies constructed in lexical semantics (e.g. Cruse 1986), collections of categories may be assembled on a basis other than a taxonomic one. Which set of categories constitutes a collection, or what is oriented to as the relevant device may be the result of situated and task-oriented interactional work of conversationalists. Categories are grouped together relative to the relevancies of the task at hand (cf. Jayyusi 1984: p.82). Schegloff points to the possibility of *classes whose co-members are grouped together for a single attribute, and hence may be a class for a single (or limited range of) topic* (Schegloff 1972: p.124). The grouping of categories in a collection is thus observably provided for in the talk itself; e.g. the relevant collection in the case of the discussion of the category 'child' in the fragment above seems to be confined to the pair <child, adult>.

An example of a rule of application which also proved to be relevant for the present analysis is the rule which Sacks called the *consistency rule*. According to this rule categories may be interpreted as 'second items' (cf. Sacks 1992a: 150 ff.): *if you can hear a second category as coming from the same device as the first, than hear it that way.* 6 Thus the use of the category 'adult' in the above fragment (line 223 in fragment (1b)) accomplishes in that particular context the instruction that it is to be interpreted as coming from the collection {child, adult} and not from a collection such as {juvenile, adult}, which might be relevant in talk on, for instance, income policy or delinquency.

MCDs also deliver a basis for making accountable inferences. Categories carry with them clusters of related features. Not all these features have the same relation to their category, nor do they have to be exclusively associated with only one category from a particular collection. Some features may be criterial or - in Jayyusi's terminology - *constitutive* for the determination of category membership. Others may be expectable or *category-bound*, as Sacks called it. 7 The relevance of other features may have to be established in the discourse itself. The selection of a category or the assertion of category-bound or category-relevant features 8 allows
for situated inferences with respect to the relevancy and applicability of other associated features.

Moreover, conversationalists may negotiate the relation a feature has to a category, as is demonstrated in the discussion of fragment (1a/b). Such negotiations may not only result in the exclusion of a population member from a category. Jayyusi (1984) analyzes how discussion of categorization may also lead to phenomena such as the blocking of possible inferences, the transfer of attributes to other categories, the transition from one category to another one, or the methodical transformation of the definition and scope of categories.

Sacks’ work has given an initial impetus to a very promising kind of ‘empirical semantics’ - that is to say, to an analysis of the procedures that enable conversationalists to produce sense as a situated, methodically ordered and interactionally based achievement.

The work on MCDs is about ways of talking about persons. In this paper we will try to show how Sacks’ work is also useful for the analysis of the methods by which the members of a culture talk about non-human entities. In this particular case, we look at the practices that caller and call taker use to describe the trip the caller wants to make. We analyse how negotiation takes place by two kinds of category transition: the ‘scaling-up operation’ (section 4) and ‘attribute transfer’ (section 5).

4. Category transition by the ‘scaling-up operation’

As noted in the introduction, customer and employee have to agree upon a description that fits both the wishes of the former and the possibilities of the latter. However, callers are not equally precise in describing their wishes. On some occasions a caller may have a precisely circumscribed idea of the holiday; on other occasions he may be less precise. Call takers, on the other hand, may also be vague about what the agency has to offer, even if the caller is able to deliver a precise characterization of a holiday. Therefore, the participants have to solve the problem of finding a description that satisfies the interests of both parties.

In section 4 and 5 we shall look at a negotiation of which the outcome is unclear. In the closing phases of the call the customer promises to discuss the proposals made by the employee; she does not decide on a particular holiday and perhaps she will not call back. The
'unsuccessfulness' of the call yields rich material for the investigation of negotiations on categorizations - possibly precisely because of the problems customer and employee have to cope with in finding a description that satisfies both parties. We discuss how the agency employee deals with restrictions of the assortment of the travel organization in a case in which it is only partially compatible with the wishes of the caller.

In fragment (2a) the Sales woman asks a mother who is calling on behalf of her daughter where in Italy this daughter wants to go (line 108). The mother answers that her daughter has a preference for Venice and Florence (lines 110-11) and adds a formulation of a consequence of this preference: so [...] it should be situated in the vicinity (line 113). The Sales woman then translates this consequence by saying then you get something on the Adriatic coast (line 117):

\[(2a) \text{ call Zw1} \]

\[
\begin{align*}
108 & \text{ Desk: } * \text{ and er where she- where in Italy did she want to go to: } \\
110 & \text{ Caller: } \text{ what she 's talking about mostly that is er } \\
111 & \rightarrow \text{ Venice and Florence. that 's where she would like to go to.=} \\
113 & \rightarrow \text{ so yes, } \cdot hh \text{ it should be situated in the vi[city er } \\
114 & \text{ Desk: } \text{ it should be si- [in the vicinity } \\
115 & \text{ Caller: } \text{ s } \\
116 & \text{ Desk: } \cdot hh \text{ yes: and then you get Florence } \\
117 & \rightarrow \text{ yes then you get something on the Adria:tic coa:st } \\
118 & \text{ 0.4 } \\
119 & \text{ Caller: } \text{ yes,}
\end{align*}
\]

By translating the criterion 'in the vicinity of Venice and Florence' into 'something on the Adriatic coast', the Sales woman does not select a city in between Venice and Florence; neither does she provide the name of a region between these two cities, nor the name of a region adjacent to one of these cities, nor, for that matter, the name of a region including one of them. Instead the possibilities are moved into a far more eccentric direction: to a non-adjacent zone below and beside these cities. In other words, the destination of the travel is dislocated.

This dislocation is made possible by the addition in the vicinity the customer made to
her description of the destination. The employee uses the margin provided by this reformulation as a resource to treat a rather large vicinity as an appropriate destination. We shall call this operation the 'scaling-up operation'.

However, a consequence of such an up-scaling is that the customer must be willing to 'stretch' her desires in such a way that the offer of the agency is still compatible with them. It is not until the Sales woman refers to actual towns in the scaled up region that the customer starts to negotiate the acceptability of this relocation. The following data extract shows this negotiation and the accounts the Sales woman gives. These accounts provide for some indications about the possible rationality behind the scaling-up operation.

(2b) [call Zw1] (call taker just consulted some documentation material)

Fragment (2b) opens with the mentioning of a city which is located about one hundred kilometres south of Ravenna, Cattolica 9 (line 169). When the caller subsequently makes the comment that this is rather far from there (line 170), the Sales woman mentions Ravenna as a next possibility, a city which is slightly more concentric to the line Venice-Florence. However, she also adds a remark from which one might infer that this is not an appropriate alternative (line 173 but there are no-). 10 After the mentioning and the subsequent discarding of Ravenna, the Sales woman proposes a third alternative: Rimini then is closest (line 174). Rimini is still situated at a
considerable distance from Florence as well as Venice and it is at least less concentric than Ravenna. Of the possibilities of the travel organization, however, this seems to be the best compromise which the Sales woman has to offer to meet the wishes of her customer.

Important for the present analysis is the conclusion that one of the obvious reasons why the Sales woman relocates the travel destination is that this company does not seem to have a travel destination available which fits more concentrically. The necessity of relocation motivates the scaling-up operation. By describing the domain within which the travel destination may be found with a category from a collection of categories for geographical entities of a much larger scale than the cities mentioned initially, the Sales woman has created an intermediate level by which the transition can be made to other collections of city-names which only a very benevolent observer would still call 'in the vicinity'. Through the extension of the search domain the Sales woman has created a latitude that allows for a possible overlap between the range of the agency's assortment with the preferences of the customer.

The employee is bound to the more or less 'absolute and categorical restrictions' of the assortment of the organization she works for. Within the borders of the current conversation, these restrictions constitute the more or less 'objective' limits of the proposals she is able to make. In response to that, the wishes, preferences or demands of the customer are treated not only as 'subjective' criteria, but also as criteria that might be modified, adapted, extended or enlarged. The employee works towards creating an overlap between what the agency has to offer and the wishes of the customer by interpreting the description of the destination in such a way that it falls within the agency's assortment.

5. Category transition by attribute transfer

In the previous paragraph we discussed one method by which the Sales woman achieves transition to another category. In this paragraph we will describe another method: attribute transfer.

In the interaction discussed in the previous section, the caller opens the talk by asking about a brochure of coach trips to Italy (cf. line 1 in fragment 3a):
Within an extended repair sequence that is occasioned by troubles with the identifiability of a particular travel brochure (cf. lines 2 and 4-6 respectively in 3a), the employee asks what kind of trip the caller wants to go on (cf. line 30 in 3b):

In response to and consistent with the employee's question, the customer now modifies the description of the object she is interested in from a *brochure of coach trips to Italy* to a *teenager trip*. The questioner reacts to this answer by confirming that 'she' (I, not we) has *very nice travel brochures for teenagers*. Thereby, she not only continues to make 'travel brochures' the current topic of the talk, she also modifies the description of the object the caller inquires about in two ways:

(i) from *trip* to *travel brochure* ('reis' to 'reisgids', line 33-35);
(ii) from *teenager trip* to *very nice travel brochure for teenagers* ('jongerenreis' to 'hele leuke reisgids voor jongeren').

The way the modifier 'teenager' is reformulated (from *teenager trip* to *travel brochures for teenagers*) affects the status that is assigned to this specification. In Dutch, a speaker has the
possibility to build a compound noun construction such as 'teenager travel brochure' ('jongeren-reis-gids'). However, the Sales woman does not use this possibility. Instead she postpones the 'teenager'-part of the description, presenting it as a subsequent prepositional noun phrase. This formulation practice deprives the category label teenagers of the functional equivocality it has in the description 'teenager travel brochure'. In the latter case 'teenagers' does not only specify the class of intended recipients of the brochure, but also the agent of the holidays listed in it. In a description such as travel brochure for teenagers the 'agent' aspect of the meaning of teenagers has disappeared. Moreover, the class of intended recipients is only hinted at after having described the type of the brochure.

This difference will turn out to be relevant. When a speaker describes an object through a series of three nouns, the speaker still categorizes the object as an exemplar of a 'type' that is designated through the ordered collocation of these three descriptors. By decoupling the specifier 'teenager' from the ordered series of 'type descriptors' and moving it to a postponed prepositional phrase, the Sales woman removes the type-constitutive effect of this component. She somehow reduces its role to an additional characterization of the group of intended recipients. Instead of a category-constitutive feature of travel brochures the property 'addressed to teenagers' is presented as a category-relevant feature of this class of brochures.

A considerable part of the negotiations between customer and Sales woman is acted out through such 'minor' changes in the description of criteria. Through these changes the parties may eventually arrive at an acceptable characterization of the travel arrangements. In the course of the interaction, the configuration of components that is used to assemble a descriptor changes by substitution, modification or reordering the hierarchy of its parts.

Each party makes a particular, specifiable contribution to the accomplishment of such modifications and each party plays a specific role in it. The Sales woman not only has to find out which descriptions are acceptable for the customer. She also has to adapt them to the options that are available in the agency's assortment. She modifies the descriptions the customer uses into other, somehow related descriptions. One of the ways she may accomplish this is by first determining which attributes of a category are the most relevant for the customer. She then may try to find another category that offers a reasonable degree of overlap with the attributes of the customer's category. Overlap of attributes allows for the transition from one to another category.
In the following fragment, later in the same exchange, the Sales woman proposes a shift in categories and accounts for it by articulating the transferability of category attributes:

\[(4) \text{[call Zw1]}\]

65 Desk: → but: e:r it should specifically be a teenager trip,
66  'cause you [know it-] [often is:.
67 Caller:      [well: that 's not necessary e:r [(fe- ]
68 Desk:    when you go for example to Italy
69       → and [you just take a e:r shuttle ((trip:)), you know
70 Caller: [yes,
71 Desk: so that me[ans hh e:r the transport back and forth:
72 Caller:  [yes:
73 Desk: → and over the:re e:r accommodation either an apartment
74  or a hotel: ·h[h you know then: there will be of course also
75 Caller: [yes,
76 Desk:  a lot of young people am[:ngst ((them)) of course right?=
77 Caller:  [ye:s
78 -> so that [doesn't make any difference
79 Desk:  [·:h [ri:ght so those real ·:h you know where
80       → those e:r excursion trips [you know which ev- hh
81 Caller: [yes,

In line 65 the Sales woman asks the customer whether it 'specifically' has to be a *teenager trip*. Here the modifying category *teenager* is brought up for discussion. The customer answers with *well: that 's not necessary e:r* (line 67). Thus she - possibly reluctantly - accepts that the Sales woman's discussion of the category. The Sales woman subsequently reformulates the category 'teenager trip' by proposing a new category: *a shuttle ((trip))* (line 69). She then tells her customer that there *of course* will be 'a lot of young people' amongst the travellers on a trip characterized by this list of features (lines 74-6).

The Sales woman asserts the occurrence of sufficient members of the kind of people ('a lot of young people') that is constitutive for the kind of trip the customer is looking for ('teenager trip') in another type of trip (a 'shuttle trip'). She accounts for category transition through the mention of a degree of reasonable overlap between the classes of members referred to by each category. In the present case, this transition appears to be successful, -- see the customer's
response in line 78 (so that doesn't make any difference).

The attribute 'young traveller' is downgraded with respect to its category-defining status. This was also the case with the shift from 'teenager trip' to 'travel brochure for teenagers'. In both cases an attribute is changed from a defining, constitutive attribute, to relevant, self-evident, but nevertheless non-defining, non-constitutive property. We shall call this type of modification reduction of attribute status. The off record reduction of attribute status facilitates the transition to an other category.

It is worth noting that the Sales woman provides yet another account for the plausibility of category transition. She contrasts the alternative option 'shuttle trip' with the category 'excursion trip' by differentiating between the types of participants that take part in it. Shuttle trips -- of course -- have a lot of young people whereas excursion trips are populated by older people (lines 79-81). The plausibility of the shuttle trip is enhanced by opposing it with a type of trip that lacks the criterial attribute. The transition to an alternative description of the product the customer is looking for is doubly accounted for.

6. Category-boundness and task-related collection formation

In section 3 we already introduced Sacks' consistency rule. It states: 'if you can hear a second category as coming from the same device as the first, than hear it that way' (cf. Sacks 1972a). The consistency rule insightfully describes a pervasive mechanism that participants orient to when selecting categories or while interpreting them. Consider, for instance, the fact that the Sales woman eventually uses city names --- Cattolica, Ravenna and Rimini --- to propose alternative destinations (see fragment 2b in section 4). The Sales woman's decision to select categories from a collection of Italian city names is the result of an orientation to the consistency rule. The customer previously characterized her destination in terms of city names and now the employee too uses city names to propose alternative destinations. She does not select names from, for example, collections of region names, tourist beaches or apartment complexes. The categories selected to describe alternative destinations come from the same collection as the one used by the customer.

The orientation to consistency principles guides category selection in effective and
subtle ways. Compare, for instance, the interaction in fragment 2a (see section 4). A remarkable feature of this episode is that the participants immediately agree that the residence of the daughter should not be located in Venice or Florence itself but in the vicinity of these cities. There are obviously reasons known to both of them - though not necessarily identical for both - why a stay in these cities is not an option. Indeed, later on in the exchange the Sales woman says something from which one could infer why this is so:

(5) [call Zw1]

180 Desk: * Venice is way up the North. over there you do have excursions organized which go there=
181 Caller: ·yes,
182 Desk: ··hh you know i- but then: it still is:-
184 she really wants to go there more offten. or not
185 0.7
186 Caller: w[ell:
187 Desk: → ['cause there are of course no holidays to-
188 → at [least no e:r [trips to you know
189 Caller: [(n:)noh. (n:)no: I know that no
190 (.)
191 no: but she wants to- yes, well, have seen it
192 for once in her life

In lines 187-188, the Sales woman explains why she asked whether caller's daughter wants to visit Venice more than once during her holiday (line 184): because there are of course no ... trips to this city. This does not mean there is no such trip to Venice but that her agency does not offer such trips. The mother understands this too -- as is clear from her response: no I know that (line 189). Interestingly, the Sales woman corrects herself substituting holidays by trips: there are of course no holidays in- at least no e:r trips to ... (line 187-188). 'Holiday' appears to differ relevantly from 'trip'. The latter category is treated as fitting better to the task at hand. The displayed preferredness of 'trip' over 'holiday' is consistent with the way the customer initially has described the trip she is looking for:
The caller not only informs the call taker that she wants to go to Italy, but also that she wants to go by bus (line 1, extract 3a) and that it should be a teenager trip (line 33 in 3b). By describing her demand this way, the customer provides information that allows for category-bound inferences. The category 'teenager trip' not only specifies the class of agents of this type of travel, but has also the category-bound feature that it is inexpensive. Likewise, the category 'coach trip' excludes more expensive ways of transport. The categories that are used to describe her demand trigger the inference that the caller wants a cheap trip. All members of the collection of candidate trips have to satisfy this criterion, regardless of whether the defining characteristic is the type of agent (teenager trip) or the type of transport (coach trip).

The orientation to this criterion also accounts for the substitution of 'holiday' by 'trip' in the self-correction in lines 187-188 of extract 5. A holiday in Venice is an expensive product and does not fit with the level constraints that are implied by the collection-formation criteria.

The participants thus orient to a locally established and collaboratively maintained rule for category selection: a member of the collection of candidate trips has to satisfy the criterion that it is cheap. Apart from the destination criterion, the collection is grouped together for the single attribute of being cheap. The co-selection of the categories used for describing destinations is guided by situated considerations with respect to the task at hand. The criterion for grouping categories into a consistent collection is provided for in the talk itself. It enables the participants to describe and negotiate descriptions of destinations in reciprocally intelligible and accountable ways by orienting to a categorization device that is implicated by the local production of 'fit' between category features. (Cf. Jayyusi 1984: 81 ff.)
The orientation to situated criteria of collection formation also accounts for the way the customer is persuaded to consider 'regular' trips instead of 'teenager trips'. In the phase of the call in which the participants move from teenager trips to normal trips (see section 3), the Sales woman suggests that the prospect might look at another, regular travel brochure for the same money:

(6) (call Zw1)
81 Desk: → · h b [ut for the same money- you can
82 Caller: [yes,
83 Desk: also say well I take another travel brochure
84 which maybe does have something nice of Italy
85 in it · hh [a:nd
85 Caller: [(yes)
86 0.3
87 Desk: from a regular travel brochure,
88 0.2
89 Caller: yes, yes, yes,

The expression 'for the same money' is equivocal in Dutch. It may mean 'for the same price' as well as the more general 'it makes no difference'. Although most of time it is used in its non-literal, metaphorical sense, it should also be heard literally in its current environment. In the literal sense it says that a shift to 'regular trips' has no financial consequences. Part of the strategy through which the employee accomplishes the shift from 'teenager trips' to 'regular' trips is by articulating that trips from a regular travel brochure do not have to be more expensive. The negotiation thus takes the form of showing that trips from the alternative brochure may fit into the relevant collection of categories.
7. Summary remarks

We have examined how negotiation in sales talk is, at least partially, accomplished by negotiating alternative descriptions of the product. The participants explore collaboratively whether they can reach agreement about a description that satisfies both parties.

In the final part of the chapter, we showed how the participants orient to a categorization device they assemble on the basis of a criterion for collection formation that is locally provided for in the course of the talk itself. It enables them to locate and ongoingly build the collection from which the categories are chosen for describing the customer's demand. A category's acceptability depends on its displayed suitability for collection membership.

The negotiation takes the form of describing the product in alternative ways. We examine two descriptive practices through which the participants work towards transition from one description to another: the 'scaling-up' operation and the operation of 'attribute transfer.' We analysed how the Sales woman tried to relocate the customer's destination in order to be able to offer her a trip. By stretching -- 'scaling-up' -- the area that reasonably includes the customer's destination, she prepares a transition to an alternative category out of the collection of city names.

With the operation of attribute transfer we described how the Sales woman convinced the customer that she might as well take a 'shuttle-trip' instead of a 'teenager-trip' because the former category also has the attribute 'young people'. The assertion of attribute overlap ratifies a transition to another type of trip. The transition is facilitated by reduction of attribute status.

Negotiation may take the form of finding accountable ways for describing things alternatively. The categorization devices that are used for this may be assembled in the course of the talk itself. The participants exploit the methods used for collection formation as a resource for both accomplishing and accounting for category transition.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX: Original Dutch transcripts

(1a) [call Am1]

176 Desk: no[u als ik de prijs ga uitreken[e () vijfhonderd
177 Caller: [m:tm
178 Desk: vijfentachtig maal elf[
179 Caller: [m:tm
180             0.3
181 Desk: dat is dan:
182 Caller: ["en-"]
183 Desk: zesduizend vierhonderd vijfendertig guld[e-
184 Caller: →ehj[ah \hspace{1em} and voor de kinder\hspace{1em}
185             0.5
186           → zeg maar eh- want is 'r kinderkorting bij "of zo":
187             0.2
188 Desk: bij appartementsre:i:zen \hspace{1em} niet \hspace{1em} nee:
189             (.)
190 Caller: o:h "j\hspace{1em}
191 Desk: → [(a:) kinderkorting geldt alleen twee tot en
192 met zes jaar twintig procent bij hotel:re:i:zeh
193             0.2
194 Caller: o:\hspace{1em}
195 Desk: → maar: appartementreize nie\hspace{1em}t
196             0.5
197 Caller: "o\hspace{1em}

(1b) [call Am1]

188 Desk: bij appartementsrei:zen ↓nieft ↓nee:
189  (.)
190 Caller: o:h °jah.
191 Desk: → [(a:) kinderkorting geldt alleen twee tot en
192 Desk: met zes jaar twintig procent bij hotel↓rei:zeh
193  0.2
194 Caller: o:[h jah
195 Desk: [maar: appartementreize nie↓t
196  0.5
197 Caller: °o↓h
198 Desk: hoe o↓h zijn de kinder↑[eh [op vertrekdatum↑um
199 Caller: [e : [↓ h [ev[e kijken.
200 Caller: d↓r zijn: drie kindere van achat ja↑ar: drbij↑:
201  0.2
202 Desk: acht jaar:[ "jah,
203 Caller: ↑j:iah, hh en e↓h d↓r is één van e↓h
even kijkeh ↓hoor van e↓h ongeveer drie jaar: d↑rtbij↑:
204  0.2
205 Desk: j↓iah
206  0.3
207 Caller: en één van: e↓h ↓vijftien,
208  0.4
209 Desk: j↓ah, ·hh
210  1.2
211 Desk: → nee. (0.2) daar e↓h zit helahasheh gheehn
212 → kinderkorting meer bij. ·h↓h achat jaar hebbe
213 Caller: ["o:ah.
214 Desk: sowieso 'n hele busplaats noːdig,="
215 Caller: "jah↓↓h
216 Desk: → [(en) die kunne niet bij elkaar e↓h
217 bevoobeeld twee stoeleh· hh of één stoel
218 en dan twee kindere d↓r ↑op
219  (.)
220 Caller: "jah↓jah,
221 Desk: → [·h[[ ] en: eh vijftien jaar
222 is 'n volwassen iemand bij ↓ons:
223  (.)
224 Caller: o↓h jah "ja\ _jah natuurlijk.
225 neg dat is: eh inderdaah↓d ↓zhoh heh ·hi:hh

227  ↓jah "dat is: inderdaad zo.
228  Desk:  (dus u krijgt echt elf keer
229  Caller:  vijfentachtig guldeh
230  Caller:  [vijfentachtig guldeh [mɪm

(2a) [call Zw1]

108  Desk:  en eh waar ze- waar in Italië wilde ze naar toe gaan:
109   (...)
110  Caller:  waar ze 't meest over heeft dat is e:h
111  Desk:  → Venetië en Florence. daar wil ze graag naar toe.-
112  Caller:  dus jah, ·hh [ 't zou daar in de buurt eh moete
113  Desk:  ['t moet dar- in de buurt moete
114  Caller:  zijn: ['t zo
115  Desk:  zijn: [jah dan krijg je Florence
116  Caller:  ja: en dan krijg je iets aan de adra:tische kuːst
117  0.4
118  0.3
119  Caller:  jah.

(2b) [call Zw1]

168  Desk:  eːh naar: Italië. 'dat moest dus
169  Desk:  → bevoorbeeld Cattolica ↓ik noem zo maar eerst even:
170  'n eːh:- ["n:-
170  Caller:  [ja maar dat ligt daar vrij: òver: vandaan:
171  ↓gelooft ik
172  Desk:  [mːjah 't dichtste bij: is de-
173  Desk:  ↑jah Ravennah, maar daar worden geen- ·hh jah
174  Desk:  → Riminiː; is dan 't dichtste bij: ðè
175  Caller:  ("mː"
176  Desk:  ·hh [jah
177  Caller:  [toch Riminiː;
178  0.3
179  Desk:  Riminiː; ·hh want jah je zit dus eigelijk eːh (...)
(3a) [call Zw1]

1 Caller: → ·hh heeft u ook 'n: gids van busreizen naar Italië en dan: moet 't zijn de tee (.) reizh. kan ↑dat
2 0.8 Desk: tee TE r e
3 1.4 en wat- wat moet dat zijn voor ↑afkorting.

(3b) [call Zw1]

30 Desk: want wat voor soort reis wilde u ma:k[e[h
31 Caller: → ·hh= [nou 't gaat (aan) principe eigenlijk om
32 → 'n jongerenreizs:([g:] [en: e:h [(‘naar Ita-)
33 Desk: ↑[ja]:h=[ ↑'k heb wel:
34 ↑hele leuke reisgidsen voor jongereh:,

(4) [call Zw1]

65 Desk: → maar: e:h 't moete:h spec‘iaal 'n jongerehreizs zijn, want w(eet je wat 't wel:- [vaak is:. [en: e:h (fe-)
66 Caller: ↑[no: dat hoeft niet e:h [(fe- )
67 Desk: als je bijvoorbeeld naar Italië gaat en [u neemt gewoon 'n e:h pendelreis= is:-hè
68 Caller: ↑[jah,
69 Desk: dus dat be[tekent ·hh e:h 't vervoer heen en trug:.
70 Caller: ↑[jah:
71 Desk: → en daar: e:h accomodatie hetzij 'n appartement of 'n hotel: ·h[h hè dan: zit daar dus natuurlijk
72 Caller: ↑[jah,
73 Desk: → ook veel jongelui daar[tygse:h ↓natuurlijk hè=
74 Caller: ↑[ja: wel:
75 * ↑[en: dat [maakt nie uit
76 Desk: ↑[·hh ↓hè: dus die echte ·h[e:h weetje waar je dus meer oudere mense meehebt. eh dat zijn dus die e:h excursiereizeh ↓hè die dus el- ·hh
77 Caller: ↑[jah,
(5) [call Zw1]

180 Desk: * Venetië is helemaal in 't noordeh. daar worden
181 Desk: wel: excursies dan: naar toe gemaa\(\uparrow\):kth=
182 Caller: =jah,
183 Desk: \(\cdot\)h hè i- maar dan: is nog wel:-
184 ze wil 'r echt \(\uparrow\)va:ker toe. "of nie\(\downarrow\):t
185 0.7
186 Caller: n\(\ou\):
187 Desk: \(\rightarrow\) [want daar zijn natuurlijk geen vakanties na-
188 Desk: ten\(\minste\) geen e:h \(\reizeh\) naar toe \(\hat{\th}e\)
188 Caller: \(\rightarrow\) [("n:)neeh. \(\nee\): dat weet ik. \(\nee\).
189 (.)
190 \(\nee\): maar ze wil dat-
191 jah, toch wel 'n keer gezien hebbeh

(6) [call Zw1]

81 Desk: \(\rightarrow\) \(\cdot\)h m\(\hat{a}\)ar voor 't zelfde geld- kunt
82 Caller: \(\rightarrow\) [jah,
83 Desk: u ook zeggeh nou ik neem 'n andereh reisgids
84 waar misschien wel iets leuks van Italië
85 instalat \(\cdot\)h \(\{\en\):
85 Caller: \(\rightarrow\) [("jah)
86 0.3
87 Desk: uit 'n gewoneh reisgids,
88 0.2
89 Caller: jah, jah, jah,
ENDNOTES

1. Our data consist of the transcriptions of 8 phone calls to a travel agency. The recordings were made by employees of the travel organization itself in three branches in three different Dutch cities. The aim of their recordings was to obtain materials for an internal examination of the effectiveness of telephone calls with customers. The call takers knew their conversation was recorded; the customers were not informed of this.

Five of the transcribed conversations lasted between 5 and 10 minutes; the other three were relatively short (between 1 and 3 minutes). Not only because of the restricted size of our corpus, but also because of the limited time we had to prepare the current paper, our analysis has to be regarded as a preliminary exploration of the richness of this kind of material.

4. One may ask how it is possible that the employee at one moment asks how old 'the children' are and thus is able to refer unproblematically to such a group of persons, whereas a few moments later she declares that one of the individuals so characterized cannot be classified as such. Obviously, the same categories may be used with different senses on different occasions, or, to be more precise, these categories are submitted to different rules of application on different occasions. Moreover, not only the ways in which a selection of a specific sense is accomplished, but also how such a variation in selection methods is accounted for, may vary across occasions.

Also noticeable in this particular case is the fact that the sales woman does not say anything about the three year old child. The functional account she gives for the eight year old children might not hold for this child. Without discussing this type of child she simply concludes that her client has to pay full amounts for all members of the group (cf. lines 228-30). The client does not object to this.


4. Price announcements may constitute distinctive sequential slots in sales talk. Pinch & Clark (1986: 171 ff.) e.g., describe how price announcements constitute 'Sales Relevance Places' in the sales routines of market pitchers. That is to say, in this type of sales talk they establish a point where buying actions occur.

5. Differences in the distribution of rights to apply categories in specific, situated ways also account for the use of institutional participant categories such as 'customer' and 'Sales woman'. These characterizations appear to be 'procedurally consequential' in the present context (cf. Schegloff 1991). For example, the fact that the call taker speaks of 'us' when she tells the caller that fifteen years old count as 'adults' in her organization (see line223 in fragment (1b)) is not accidental. The call taker stresses her membership of the organization that defines this distinction precisely on a point where the everyday and the institutional use of the category is distinguished.
6. Jayyusi gives the following 'relevance version' of the consistency rule: *If the hearable task or concern at hand can be fulfilled or accomplished by following a first category with a second drawn from the same device, then do so* (Jayyusi 1984: 81).

7. Originally, Sacks (1972a) has described the relation of category-boundness only with respect to activities (category-bound activities). Jayyusi (1984) proposes an extension to category-bound features (p.35 ff.)

8. The distinction between category-relevant and category-constitutive features is also based on Jayyusi (1984).

9. Cattolica is at least 200 kilometres south of Venice and about 150 south-east of Florence.

10. The fact that call taker does not finish the comment in line 173, but withdraws its completion before she has explicitly said that 'there are no trips to Ravenna' probably is a methodically motivated withdrawal. There are no trips to Ravenna would have meant that her firm does not cater for trips to Ravenna. The call taker might avoid the delivery of information that would allow for the making of inferences pertaining to restrictions or deficiencies of her company.

11. In the original Dutch version the participants use the word "jongeren" which is etymologically related to the English 'youngsters'. However, in Dutch 'jongeren' is normally used to refer to adolescents and young people up to twenty, twenty-five. 'Teenagers' thus might be a partially appropriate equivalent.

12. This persistence in making the 'travel brochure' the primary topic might be encouraged by an equivocality in the talk of the caller. In line 33 it is unclear whether the caller only says 'teenager trip' or was about to say 'teenager travel brochure' (compare the 'g' that follows 'trip': it might be the initial consonant of the Dutch word for 'brochure': "gids"). In the latter case the caller might have been doing a 'leakage'-self-correction (cf. Jefferson 1987): without actually saying 'teenager travel brochure' she gives a cue that works as a recognition point of the planned-but-observably-withdrawn delivery of the noun for 'brochure'.

13. The change from *teenager trip* to *travel brochure for teenagers* ('jongerenreis' to 'reisgids voor jongeren') is a change in descriptive format. The new primary specifier *travel* pushes away the original agent-specifying noun *teenager*:

\[
\text{teenager trip } \rightarrow \text{ travel brochure for teenagers}
\]

- from an \([\text{agent-type specifying noun}_1 + \text{class noun}_1]\) format to a format with the form of a \([\text{subject specifying noun}_1 + \text{class noun}_4 + \text{target-specifying prepositional noun}_1\text{ phrase}]\).

The rationale behind this kind of displacement might be that in the case of multiple pre-specification of
nouns describing reading material (such as 'brochure') the subject-describing specifier usually requires the position of primary specifier (thereby downgrading the range of the other competing specifications). 'Travel teenager brochure' sounds strange, whereas 'teenager travel brochure' seems to be more natural from a common sense perspective.

Note also that when the category \textit{teenager} specifies \textit{trip} it is characterizing teenagers as the agents of the activity formulated in the head; however, when \textit{teenager} specifies \textit{travel brochures}, it rather seems to characterize the target group of the brochure. So depending on which category is made the head of the description, the feature 'teenager' is 'transformed' with respect to its semantico-pragmatic implications.

14. In such a series of three nouns the first functions as a kind of secondary specifier, the second as the primary specifier and the third as the head that describes the set of objects of which the foregoing specifiers cumulatively delineate a more restricted subset. Starting 'backwards' from the head, each following specifier delineates a smaller subset of the subset delineated by the foregoing specifier.

15. In the question 'should it \textit{specifically} be a \textit{teenager} \textit{trip}' (lines 65-66 in extract 4), the Sales woman makes the specifying category \textit{teenager} to the problematic item by the use of the adverb 'specifically' and contrastive stress on \textit{teenager}.

16. The Sales woman subsequently clarifies the category \textit{shuttle trip} (and you just take a shuttle trip, you know, that means the transport back and forth and over there accommodation, either an apartment or a hotel, lines 69-74). The clarification is not only a 'practical translation' of the category just proposed (cf. Jayyusi 1984: p.96 ff.). As a translation it also might have a function in the interactional constitution of an expert/lay-relation between called and calling participant. By observably taking a 'didacticizing' stand to the terminology she uses the Sales woman displays herself as the professional, the insider who knows what this expression amounts to. Meanwhile she puts the caller in the complementary position of an outsider to whom these terms are not familiar.


18. The analysis in section 6 differs from the version as published in Firth (ed.) 1995. In the Firth-book, we propose the principle of \textit{level consistency}. It was thought as an extension of Sacks' consistency rule. When I (hm) prepared the manuscript for *.PDF conversion, I realized that (a) the current data do not need such a concept, and (b) that we mixed up culturally standardized collections of categories and collections of categories that are grouped together for the occasion. I re-analysed the data in terms of the latter type of collection formation.