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FACILITATOR'S COMMUNICATIVE ACTIONS

The Facilitator's Communicative Actions to Construct Meetings

in a Semi-Informal Educational Context

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The Facilitator's Communicative Actions to Construct Meetings  
in a Semi-Informal Educational Context

Abstract

The study examines how interactivity is constructed in the course of multi-person interaction in a semi-informal educational context. The audio-recordings of seven meetings of a female discussion club in Belarus and their transcripts serve as interactional data. The club was organized with a goal of providing a platform for females to engage in intellectual discussions in an informal setting. The study takes the communication design approach and uses discourse analysis. The analysis of the audio recordings and the transcripts is guided by the following question: how the participants' use of linguistic and interactional resources contributes to the construction of a meeting. The particular attention is paid to the facilitator's communicative actions to shape interaction and their local context.

*Keywords:* communication design, communicative actions, discourse analysis, discussions, meetings, semi-informal interaction

The Facilitator's Communicative Actions to Construct Meetings  
in a Semi-Informal Educational Context

## 1. Introduction

The study examines how interactivity is constructed in the course of multi-person interaction in a semi-informal educational context, namely, a female discussion club, to enable the interactants to take part in discussions. Researchers (Drew and Heritage 1992; Goffman 1983; Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974) agree that the basic form of interaction is a face-to-face ordinary conversation, but they recognize that this is not the only form. Interactional forms, for example, speech exchange systems in conversation analysis, vary in their characteristics such as the degree of formality (Drew and Heritage 1992). Some of them are formal and scripted (e.g., courtroom interaction), others are informal and unscripted (e.g., family dinner), still some others fall in between (e.g., a meeting). Different forms of talk put constraints on and provide affordances for how interaction unfolds. The meetings under study are of particular interest as they are an emergent form of interaction that differs from ordinary conversation but does not have pre-established formal rules. The participants have to coordinate their actions and co-create meaning while at the same time design the ways of interacting. In this respect, the study focuses on how the interactivity is created with help of interactional resources. Specifically, it explores what communicative practices the facilitator uses to shape interaction.

I take the communication design approach that views communication as an object and a process of design (Aakhus 2007; Jackson and Aakhus 2014). According to the constitutive view of communication, interaction has its own properties and norms. This provides a starting point for understanding communication as communication design enterprise. The design is natural in a sense that it emerges from interaction itself (Aakhus 2007). Interactants coordinate their actions and collaboratively construct interactivity using linguistic and non-linguistic means available for them in interaction. At the same time, they can have ideas about how interaction should unfold to be effective. They use these tools to shape the interactivity in a preferred way and avoid dispreferred ones according to the norms of a certain format.

In the following sections, I will touch upon research on meetings and communication design, describe the data and the methodological aspect of the study, provide the analysis of examples, and, finally, discuss the findings.

## **2. Meetings as Interactional Achievements**

Recently, there has been a shift from using interviews and surveys to applying discourse analytic methods to study meetings. These studies treat meetings as interactional achievements and focus on various communicative practices used to shape group discussions during meetings. Researchers explored an emotional aspect of interaction (e.g., Kangasharju and Nikko 2009; Putnam 2007; Tracy 2007), strategies in decision-making processes (e.g., Sanders 2007), the accomplishment of management in a conversation (e.g., Clifton 2009; Nielsen 2009; Praet 2009; Taylor and Robichaud 2007), disagreement and conflict management (e.g., Aakhus and Vasilyeva 2008; Gillispie and Chrispeels 2008, Kangasharju 1996), and the construction of a meeting (e.g., Boden 1994; Deppermann, Mondada, and Schmitt 2010; Schwartzman 1989; Sprain, Carcasson, and Merolla 2014). For example, Tracy (2007) questions an assumption that the discussion during meetings should be rational and devoid of emotions and argues that expressing feelings at workplace meetings can be as necessary as repressing them, depending on the context and issues being discussed (e.g., issues that participants care about). The combination of therapeutic speech and meeting speech can be an important feature of meetings (Schwartzman 1989). From the employees' perspective, "a good meeting" could involve the expression of emotions, conflict, yelling and so on, while more formal discussions were considered to be "a source of frustration" (Schwartzman 1989, 134), as they did not allow the participants to display their feelings. Sprain et al. (2014), in their turn, illustrate how the experts' moves make an impact on the discussion in public deliberation. While the inclusion of experts in a deliberative activity can be useful as they are able to provide information, to clarify issues, and to correct factual errors, they can also hinder deliberation process by silencing citizen participation. Another aspect of multi-person discussion is that participation framework can be changed at any moment in interaction, depending on the participants' alignments and disagreements with each other (Kangasharju 1996). Kangasharju (1996) argues that team construction in the course of meetings is an interactional matter (i.e., they do not exist prior to meetings) and context-sensitive

(i.e., any single move can change the participants' stance towards each other). Participants use different interactional resources (e.g., turn completion, nonverbal means, repetitions of what the other participant said) to build alliances and oppositions.

Of special interest is communicative actions of a party (e.g., a moderator, a facilitator, a chairperson) who is in charge of a meeting (e.g., Barske 2009; Black and Wiederhold 2014; Kangasharju 1996; Clifton 2009; Pomerantz and Denvir 2007; Sprain et al. 2014). For example, Pomerantz and Denvir (2007) identify two types of the chairperson's communicative work, namely, facilitative chairing and deferential chairing. In the former case, the chairperson's actions are aimed at engaging all the participants in a decision-making process and encouraging them to contribute to the discussion. In the latter, the chairperson is oriented towards the participants' views and gives up his attempts to sanction them for inappropriate (in their opinion) actions. Interestingly, the deferential chairing was enacted when the participants resisted the chairperson's moves. According to the researchers, the chairperson's style "appeared to be tailored to both the organizational setting and to the interactional issues that emerged in the meeting" (p. 47). An important point that Pomerantz and Denvir make in this respect is that the chairperson's authority is not fixed, and their role enactment is context-sensitive and constantly negotiated in interaction, as their performance depends on the participants' reactions. In a similar vein, Kangasharju (1996) points out that the procedures of institutional talk (namely, a turn-taking system) can be negotiated and altered in the course of the meeting, especially when the role of the chairperson is not clearly defined. While ordinarily it is a chairperson who allocates turns during the discussion, the lack of explicit discussion of the chairperson's role in regard to this matter allowed the participants to alter the participation framework and to select the next speaker themselves.

Third parties make different moves to shape interaction. For example, facilitators can identify issues as contentious (Sprain et al. 2014), use the strategy of editing or reframing (i.e., providing a summary of what is said) to redirect interaction, when disagreement arises between the participants (Black and Widerhold 2014), and sanction the participants for inappropriate conduct (Pomerantz and Denvir 2007). Pomerantz and Denvir (2007) indicate two features of the chairperson's sanctioning actions, namely, 1) sanctioning as official interactional business when the chairperson explicitly indicates inappropriate behavior (e.g., asking the participants to speak

one at a time) and 2) sanctioning as embedded within other interactional business (e.g., selecting next speaker). In the latter, the conditionally relevant action would be to ratify or not to ratify the chairperson's selection of the next speaker rather than to ratify or resist their critique. Thus, this off-record intervention puts constraints on the participants' resistance of the chairperson's sanctions. Researchers also note different factors that influence the third parties' interventions such as institutionally expected enactments of time and the relations between participants (Black and Wiederhold 2014). For example, facilitators of public deliberation may intervene if they think that disagreement occurs too early during the discussion (Black and Wiederhold 2014).

### **3. Communication Design**

Communication design takes place when there is an intervention into an activity "through the invention of techniques, devices, and procedures that aim to redesign interactivity and thus shape possibilities for communication" (Aakhus 2007, 112). Design work, in this respect, can be observed in different forms such as making interventions in health campaigns (Harrison 2014), creating a learning space (Thompson, Steier, and Ostrenko 2014), crafting interaction in public deliberation (Sprain et al 2014), status meetings (Barbour and Gill 2014), presidential debates (Vasilyeva 2016), and managing disagreement in dispute resolution settings (Aakhus 2003; Vasilyeva 2015, 2017; Harrison 2014).

How discussions are designed can be consequential for the dialogue quality. For example, in status meetings design features included concerns for the audience and structured turn-taking (Thompson et al. 2014). While the participants could shift between listening to the representatives of other plants and having a conversation among themselves, the routinized order of turn-taking to share information allowed the participants to make their contributions at appropriate moments. The sitting arrangements (i.e., leaders sitting at a large table in the middle of the room while other attendees sitting in the chairs lining the walls), in their turn, were made in accordance with different roles of attendees and with the aim of facilitating the hierarchical flow of information. Among other aspects of design that can facilitate interaction are identity construction and face concerns management (Vasilyeva 2015, 2017). This can be seen, for instance, in the work of mediators. Mediators manage interaction between the disputants by promoting institutionally appropriate identities (e.g., parents and collaborators in custody

mediation) (Vasilyeva 2015) and constructing their interventions in a way that would keep the disputants in the frame of mediation activity without threatening their face (Vasilyeva 2017).

At the same time, features of communication design can have negative consequences for how interaction unfolds. For example, when experts are included in public deliberations, they are expected to provide information and to answer participants' questions. However, a poor design of public deliberation allows the experts to intervene without being invited by the facilitator and to take over the dialogue (Sprain et al. 2014). The experts may shift the focus of dialogue activity from substantive issues of policy to correcting factual errors, which hinders the discussion development. According to Sprain et al. (2014), this problem can be prevented if the facilitators manage interaction in a better way and control when experts can contribute to the discussion. Another design issue is related to the role enactment. Sprain et al. argue that it is not enough to tell the experts that "their role is to clarify terms and resolve fact disputes" (p. 163); they "should be trained to listen for when the group disagrees about consequential facts or definitions" (p. 168) and be used to help the participants when they are stuck. In a similar vein, Vasilyeva (2016) illustrates how a poor design of multi-party interaction in the course of an election debate creates an opportunity for conflict emergence. Some aspects of communication design that were challenged by the debaters were lack of rules in regard to time allocation for responses, which resulted in the debaters' unequal participation; the fact that it was the moderators who asked questions, so these questions were treated as the moderators' attempts to show the debaters in a negative light. Another feature of the communication design that contributed to a conflict situation was the presence of two moderators, as they created an opposing party to the candidates instead of performing their role of neutral facilitators of dialogue activity.

#### **4. Data and Method**

The study uses the method of discourse analysis. The audio-recordings of seven meetings of a female discussion club in Belarus and their transcripts serve as interactional data. The transcripts include talk in Russian and its translation into English. In the transcripts, pseudonyms are used to ensure the participants' anonymity. The seven meetings under study constitutes one series of encounters. Each meeting lasted approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes and focused on a new topic. The first meeting was an introduction to the series, where the participants discussed their expectations in regard to the club discussions, collaboratively created the list of topics to



discuss during their meetings, and had a discussion over the material the organizer presented. The consequent meetings addressed the following topics: creativity, humor, health (two meetings), human brain, and the quality of life. The number of participants varied for each meeting (from five to seven participants). The person whose idea was to organize this club assumed the role of facilitator. She also contributed to the meetings in her capacity of an ordinary participant.

The author attended the meetings. While the author has ethnographic knowledge of the encounters, the analysis focuses primarily on the discursive features of interaction. The close analysis of the audio recordings and the transcripts is guided by the following questions: how the participants' use of linguistic and interactional resources contributes to the construction of a meeting. The particular attention is paid to the facilitator's moves to shape interaction and their local context.

## **5. Data Analysis**

In this section I will analyze how participants collaboratively frame their meetings as a particular type of interaction, and what communicative actions the facilitator performs to construct these meetings.

### **5.1 Framing a meeting**

The participants frame their meeting as a type of an educational setting. At the beginning of the first meeting the organizer of the club explains her vision of these meetings in terms of their content and ways of communicating (i.e., to have intellectual discussion and to develop rhetorical skills), and what is expected of each participant, namely, to give a presentation on the topic selected for a specific meeting. At the same time, the organizer invites the participants to share their expectations from these meetings. The themes that arise from this discussion are having "intellectual hunger", experiencing lack of communication of quality (i.e., a profound discussion of serious topics), seeing thought process as a product of communication, and seeing each other as teachers the participants can learn from. In this way the participants frame their meeting as a collaborative learning activity. They also build the trajectory of meetings as intellectual discussions by selecting particular topics to discuss. However, these expectations were quite general. It was not specified, for example, how to do presentations or what content

would be appropriate for discussions. This led to some problems later in the meetings, which will be demonstrated in the following section.

## 5.2 Facilitator's communicative actions

The analysis of the meetings indicates that the facilitator plays a very active role and performs a range of actions, which may be divided in two major categories: organizing matters and interaction management. The former is related to organizing and conducting meetings in general, while the latter focuses on managing interaction during discussions.

5.2.1. Organizing Matters. As for this category, the facilitator performed a variety of actions, for example, announcing new participants, asking the participants to introduce themselves and state their goal of joining the club, soliciting suggestions about topics to discuss and time to meet, managing time, and conducting voting (e.g., at the beginning of the first meeting, the participants voted on topics to cover in the course of meetings), which is illustrated by excerpts 1 and 2.

In excerpt 1, the facilitator asks everyone to introduce the material they are going to present, announces a new participant, and asks everyone to introduce themselves.

(1)

1F: *Давайте мы (.) кто что подготовил. И у нас (.) есть новый*  
Let's (.) who prepared what. And we have (.) a new

*человек, Алина.*  
person, Alina.

2?: *Мхм*  
Mhm

3F: *Я ее пригласила лично,*  
I invited her myself,

4?: *Мхм*  
Mhm

20 turns omitted

25F: *Да [вайте мы]*  
L[et's]

26A: *[Давайте] да [представимся]*  
*[Let's] yes [introduce ourselves]*

27F *[познакомимся] (так) (.) Ты Алина*  
*[get acquainted] (so) (.) You Alina*

*про себя расскажи. Мы каждый тоже назовет- как себя зовут*  
*tell about yourself. Each of us will also say- their names*  
 28 (.)

29A: *Меня зовут Алина*  
*My name is Alina*

30 (.)

31?: *xxxx*  
*hhhh*

32 (.)

33F: *Ну в чем твой интерес в участии,*  
*Well what's your interest in participation,*

18 turns omitted

52F: *Мхм*  
*Mhm*

53 (.)

54F: *А самих встреч которые XXXX<sup>i</sup>*  
*And/But the meetings themselves that are XXXX*

55 (.)

56A: *Ну у меня ожидание (.) э расширить наверное*  
*Well my expectation is (.) uh to expand probably*  
*свой кругозор...*  
*the scope of my knowledge...*

4 turns omitted

61F: *Предлагаю всем- всем остальным ( ) в тему*  
*I suggest all- all the rest ( ) in line with the theme*  
*представляться какой-нибудь свой (0.2) ( )*

should introduce themselves some their (0.2) ( )

*анекдот или шутку xxx рассказать (ну чтоб)*  
 funny story or joke hhh to tell (well so that)

*представиться*  
 to introduce themselves

In turn 1, F suggests sharing the material everyone prepared (“Let’s”). Then she announces a new participant (“and we have a new person”) and introduces her (“Alina”). In turn 3, F explains how A joined the club. In the omitted turns, F and A collaborate on narrating how they met, which is a deviation from the activity of introduction. In turns 25 and 27, F makes a move to bring the interaction back on track by suggesting that the participants should introduce themselves, which partially overlaps with A’s similar action (turn 26).

After the new participant states her name (which is redundant, as F has already introduced Alina and specifically asked A to share some information about herself) and a pause, F makes a move to advance the activity by asking A to elaborate on her interest in participating in the meetings (turn 33). In the omitted turns, A explains how she started attending other events F organized and her interest in doing that.

F’s actions indicate that she does not find A’s response satisfying. F minimally acknowledges A’s response (turn 52) and after a pause, she repeats her question in a more specific way (i.e., what is her interest in attending these meetings) starting with the conjunction “a”. This conjunction can be translated as “and” or “but”. On the one hand, it creates contrast with what A said. On the other hand, it is done in a more mitigated way in comparison with the disagreement marker “но” (“but”). In the omitted turns A provides a type-conforming response and explains what her interest is.

In turn 61 F addresses the rest of the participants and suggests a specific form of introduction, namely, including some joke to connect this activity to the topic of the meeting (i.e., Humor). Thus, this example illustrates how the facilitator takes an active role in shaping participation, even in a more or less trivial activity of introduction.

Excerpt 2 is an example of how the facilitator manages a meeting in regard to time keeping.

(2)

1A: ...можно я ещё вот тут (0.2) быстренько так. (0.2) Меня просто  
...can I also well here (0.2) quickly so. (0.2) I am simply  
очень интересуется вот (.) э  
very interested well (.) uh

2F: Девочки, у нас мало времени. [Шесть часов.]  
Girls, we have little time. [Six o'clock.]

3A: [Я ( )]  
[I ( )]

[лучше потом.]  
[better later.]

5?: [( )]

6A?: Да хорошо  
Yes good

7N: Я- обменяемся и:-  
I- we will exchange a:nd-

8F: Если- если:- да. (0.2) Если это не очень важно будет  
If- i:f- yes. (0.2) If it is not very important  
всем, потому что мне нужно будет в шесть [пятнадцать]  
for everyone, as I will have to at six [fifteen]

In this episode A makes an unsuccessful attempt to ask a question related to the previous presentation (turn 1). Her moves suggest that she treats her own action as an imposition. First, she makes a move that appears to be asking for a permission to perform an action ("Can I"). As there was no conditionally relevant action performed, A makes a move to minimize an imposition by indicating that she is not going to take much time ("quickly"). When this attempt fails again, she provides an account for performing an action ("I am simply very interested"). The delays in the response production signal that it might be dispreferred. Indeed, F does not give a go-ahead. She does that in an indirect way. F does not produce a conditionally relevant

response (that is, granting a permission or denying it). Instead, she brings in time constraints, which can be understood as an account for not giving the go-ahead. At the same time, F addresses all the participants in her move rather than A who initiated the sequence, which serves as a warning for everyone. N and A align with F's action by agreeing to discuss the question later. In turn 8, F intervenes while N's move is still in progress and after restarts expresses agreement with the participants' decision. However, after a short pause, she makes a concession ("If it is not very important for everyone"), which indicates her orientation towards the participants' interests and gives an opportunity to them to continue the discussion in case they consider the issue to be important. However, immediately F brings in the time constraints again, thus limiting the chance of this happening. In this episode, F appears to deal with the tension between her personal interests (i.e., to finish the meeting on time as she has to leave) and the other participants' interests (i.e., to continue discussion of a certain issue). At the same time this interaction highlights F's status. As Schwartzman (1989) notes, meeting arrivals and departures, as well as scheduling a meeting in the course of another one, can display one's status, as, for example, it shows "whose time takes precedence in setting a meeting" (p. 121). Here, F's leaving means the end of the meeting, which indicates the importance of her presence.

5.2.2. Interaction Management. In regard to managing interaction during discussions the analysis shows that the facilitator performs such actions as acknowledging the participants' comments, soliciting feedback on presentations, criticizing (either the material participants present or the way a presentation is done), asking for clarification, and suggesting the order of presentations, to name a few.

For example, in excerpt 3 the facilitator initiates a new dialogue activity, that is, a decision-making process to decide on the order of presentations.

(3)

1F: *...нам нужно определиться как мы-* (0.4) *Вита. у тебя*  
*...we should decide how we -* (0.4) *Vita. you have*

*(какая-то) в этом плане теория [( )]*  
*(some) theory in this respect [( )]*

2?: *[хаха ]*  
*[haha ]*

3?: [хахаха]  
[hahaha]

4?: [хахаха]  
[hahaha]

5A1: ( [ ] )  
( [ ] )

6N: [Может] ты ее [сразу ]  
[Maybe] you it [at once ]

7F: [(Надо же)] с концептуальных  
[(We should)] with conceptual  
[ (идей) ]  
[ (ideas) ]

8V?: [Кхе ]  
[Khe ]

9F: начи[нать ]  
to sta[rt ]

10V: [(Мне) (х)] (ка (х) жется) (формальность) ( )  
[(To me) (h)] (it see(h)ms) (a formality) ( )

не знаю. Но я могу ( ) пред[ставить ее пытаться] хаха  
don't know. But I can ( ) [try to introduce it] haha

In turn 1, F starts a move that appears to be an invitation for all the participants to get involved in a collaborative activity of decision-making in regard to how to proceed (“we should decide how we”). F, however, abandons the move and after a pause directly asks one participant about the material she prepared, which can be interpreted as an invitation to start the discussion with this participant’s presentation. The participants react with laughter. In response, F gives an account why V should present first, that is, starting with more conceptual ideas (turn 7). V slightly resists the suggestion but agrees to present.

This example illustrates that while the facilitator frames decision-making as collaboration, she actively shapes the trajectory of the discussion in a particular way, that is, starting with theories and moving to more specific aspects of the topic. At the same time, the

facilitator's deontic authority<sup>ii</sup> to do that is downgraded. When a person exercises their deontic authority, they do not have to provide any reason for their decisions (Stevanovic and Peräkylä 2012). In this episode, however, the facilitator's action is challenged. Laughter can accomplish a variety of things in the course of the meeting. For example, it can be used to create a positive atmosphere and solidarity, to reduce tension in a difficult situation, and to close a topic in a way that shows mutual understanding (Kangasharju and Nikko 2009). In this particular episode, the facilitator treats the participants' laughter as a display that her action is seen as problematic. She provides an account for her decision, thus mitigating her authority claim.

In the following episode, the facilitator makes moves to shape the discussion in terms of the content and the participants' actions. This conversation takes place during the sixth meeting. The discussion topic was Health. Prior to the excerpt Alina presented ten ways to stay healthy, based on the article she read.

(4)

1A: ...Это что было про десять правил хххх .хх °( ) статью ( )°  
 ...That is what was on ten rules hhhh .hh °( ) article ( )°

2(.)

3F: У меня есть (.) комментарий по этой статье  
 I have (.) a comment on this article

4?: ( )

5F: Но (.) для меня эта статья (.) \$в женском журнале\$ (.)  
 But (.) for me this article(.) \$in the women's magazine\$ (.)

десять

ten

6A?: Да,  
 Yes,

7F: способов как стать лучше (.) то есть дл- я не вижу  
 ways how to become better (.) that is f- I don't see

системы. в таких материалах. Они такие (.) каждый человек  
 a system. in such materials. They are such (.) every person

может написать десять вещей которые- условно говоря  
 can write ten things that- conditionally speaking



*это очень*  
it is very

8 (.)

9A: *Н[о она да] она очень та[кая]*  
B[ut it yes] it is very much like [that]

10F: [( )] [то ] *есть она ничего нового-*  
[( )] [that] is it anything new

*ну мне например не с[каза]ла ну совершенно ничего*  
well to me for example didn't [say] well nothing at all

°( )°  
°( )°

11A: [Мхм]  
[Mhm]

12A: *Нет я ее просто нашла: и (.) как бы она мне вот как-то так*  
No I simply found it and (.) like it to me well somehow

*всё просто в принципе (.) а: (0.2) плюс-минус для меня*  
all is simple basically (.) ah: (0.2) plus or minus for me

*это (0.2) систематизирование как-то (.) ну (.)*  
this (0.2) systematization somehow (.) well (.)

*собрано (.) я бы сказала (.) вот и поэтому как-то*  
it is put together (.) I would say (.) that's why somehow

*(она) так (.) свое простотой и понра°вилась°*  
(it) so (.) I liked its simp°licity°

13: (0.6)

14F: *Но: (.) у меня просто проблема почему- ну почему я*  
Bu:t (.) I simply have a problem why- well why I am

*критична к такому материалу (0.2) Я не исключаю что у*  
critical of such material (0.2) I don't rule out that for

*других это ну- у нас (.) было дискуссионный клуб заявлено*  
others it is well- we (.) declared a discussion club

*да (там/то) нужно (.) как-то подискутировать*  
yes (there/then) it is necessary (.) to discuss somehow

*но: мне например всегда такие разрывочные десять способов*  
 bu:t for me for example always such separate ten ways

*как стать умнее, десять способов как улучшить свою*  
 how to become more intelligent, ten ways to improve one's

*жизнь, для меня они не работают. .х Я не вижу*  
 life, for me they don't work. .h I don't see

*в этом системы. (.) Я не вижу в этом каких-то глубинных*  
 a system in that. (.) I don't see any in-depth

*принципов кроме того что гуляйте больше, занимайтесь*  
 principles in that except that you should walk more, do

*спортом, .х ну это все знают .х [(чтобы) ]*  
 sports, .h well everyone knows this .h [( in order)]

15N: *[Но не все] делают.*  
 [But not everyone] does.

16?: ( )

17F: *Ну да. Но что почитает лишний раз то он будет и делать.*  
 Yes indeed. But what one reads one more time, one will do.

*(.) То есть мне важно понять какую-то ну*

*(.) That is it is important for me to understand some well*

*возможно (0.2) в чём:- (.) в чём смысл вот этих ещё десять*  
 probably (0.2) wha:t- (.) what is the point of these ten

*раз мне там сто первый раз повторить*

*times more to me there one hundred and first time to repeat*

*это ещё раз*

*this once again*

18 (0.2)

19A1: Ам

Um

20F: *не поможет мне. (.) Но я говорю про себя. Может быть*  
 won't help me. (.) But I'm talking about myself. Maybe

*кому-то поможет вы расскажите. Поделитесь этим.*

*it will help someone you tell. Share this.*



The episode starts with F expressing criticism of the presented material. There is a delay in performing this dispreferred action. F produces her action after a short pause (turn 2) and a preface (turn 3). In turns 5, 7 and 10, F expresses criticism of the information, pointing out such features as its simplicity and lack of the connection between the pieces of information as drawbacks. F starts with the disagreement marker “but” creating a contrast between her own and the participant’s views of the article. She compares the article A presented with those published in women’s magazines (turn 5), which can mean that the article is not very intellectual. In turns 7 and 9, she makes argument to support her position (i.e., there is no system in the presented points; the article can be written by anyone; it does not contain any new information (note that F upgrades her criticism from “didn’t say anything new” to “nothing at all”), which indicates the low quality of the presented material from F’s point of view.

A makes moves to resist F’s actions (turns 10 and 12). In turn 10, on the one hand, A expresses agreement in regard to the article features F enumerated. However, the use of “but” at the beginning of the utterance signals her disagreement with F’s view of the material as “not worthy”. In turn 12, A expresses disagreement with F’s action. A provides an explanation why she selected the article, that is, stating its simplicity as an advantage in contrast to F’s view, framing it as a personal appeal.

F makes another oppositional move (turn 14). She starts with the disagreement marker “but”, directly indicates her action as criticism (i.e., “I’m critical of such material”), and restates the negative features of the information (“separate ten ways how to become more intelligent”). F mitigates her criticism by connecting it to her personal experience (“but for me”; “I don’t see”; “for me they don’t work”), admitting that others may have a different view (“I don’t rule out that for others...”), and bringing in the format of the meeting (“we (.) declared a discussion club yes (there/then) it is necessary (.) to discuss somehow”).

In turn 15, N makes a strong oppositional move; it overlaps with F’s move, starts with “but”, and is placed immediately after the statement N disagrees with. This move, however, does not challenge F’s position on the quality of the presented material but raises an issue with F’s statement “everyone knows this”. While F argues that the separate actions A enumerated in her presentation lack a systematic organization and “in-depth principles”, N highlights the

discrepancy between knowledge people have and their actions (“everyone knows this” versus “but not everyone does”). Thus, N’s move opens a possibility to shift a discussion in a different direction.

F’s moves, however, curtail this shift. At the beginning of turn 17, F acknowledges N’s statement by expressing partial agreement (“yes indeed” followed by “but”) and then after a short pause again questions the validity of the information expressing her personal preference in regard to information, that is, understanding the deep meaning of it (turns 17 and 20). F does not add any information but repeats her argument (“it won’t help me”) (turn 20). After a pause F mitigates her oppositional move by framing it as her personal view (“but I’m talking about myself”) and invites those who have a different experience to share it.

In turn 21, N performs an oppositional move. N produces a strong disagreement with F without any delay (“No”) and then mitigates it by framing her statement as a personal view (“I think”). At the same time N emphasized the word “helps” stressing each syllable, thus adding strength to her disagreement. In contrast to F’s personal statement (“it won’t help me”), N makes a general one (“I think that it helps”), which is challenged by F (turn 22).

F makes a number of moves to frame the discussion as an exchange of personal experiences. Here, her interventions are focused on what is an appropriate way of making contributions. F starts with an indirect intervention and moves to a more direct one. In turn 22, F checks if N is sharing her own experience (“that is [specifically] you”); in turn 25, F states it as a rule (“We speak [for ourselv]es.”); and in turn 28, F interrupts N (the beginning of her turn overlaps with N’s move when it didn’t reach its possible completion point), and directly addresses N and asks her again to talk about herself.

N complies with this request (turn 29). In the omitted turns N expresses her view on the importance of simple things in our life that can help us to stay healthy.

In turn 57, F revisits her criticism of A’s presentation. This time, she brings in the framework of the meeting to support her point of view, namely, to discover new concepts and new deep meanings. The intervention is mitigated by expressing agreement with N’s previous statement (“I agree that simple things “), expressing uncertainty (“but the goal- sort of”), and making restarts (“but the goal- sort of- our goal- well sort of ou- our- (.) our meetings”).



5N: Я- я так ( ) несколько там книг читала. То то то,  
 I- I so ( ) read a few books there. That that that,  
 выбрала это. Э ну (их)- (.) ну вот (.) читала ещё  
 selected this. Uh well (them)- (.) well here (.) read also  
 [э священный ( ) через священный огонь]  
 [uh sacred ( ) through the sacred fire]

6A1: [Просто в этот раз (я- для меня )]  
 [Simply this time (I- for me )]

7F: [Давайте] каждый- (.) [каждый прогов]орит- проговорит что  
 [Let's] everyone- (.) [everyone will s]say- will say what

8A?: [( )] [( )]

9F: для него важно чтоб было на встрече, какого  
 for him important what should be at the meeting, what  
 качества информация, ну и (.) для себя, и для  
 quality of information, well and (.) for oneself, and for  
 других.  
 others.

10(.)

11A1: Для меня в этот раз когда я готовилась было важно не  
 For me this time when I was preparing it was important not  
 просмотреть даже какое-то видео или что-то прочитать,  
 even to watch some video or read something,  
 .х а именно пересказать это. То есть ну я в этот раз  
 .h but just to retell this. That is well this time  
 специально делала пометки чтобы как-то ну рассказывать  
 I made notes on purpose so that somehow well tell  
 [(вот) больше]. А  
 [(here] more]. And/but

12F: [( ) тоже]  
 [( ) too]

13F: ( )

14A1: *И я поняла вот слушая сегодня ну как бы*  
 And I understood now listening today well sort of  
*выступающих .х мне очень нравится когда личный какой-то*  
 presenters .h I like a lot when some personal  
*опыт рассказыва[ют] ну то есть то что пережито,*  
 experience is shar[ed] well that is what is lived through,

15F: [Мхм]  
 [Mhm]

16A1: *(.) Ну: вот скорее так. То есть ну информация чтоб*  
*(.) Well: here rather so. That is well information should*  
*была более четкая, конструктивная. (0.2) это тоже мне: (.)*  
 be more clear, constructive. (0.2) this also I: *(.)*  
*приветствуется.*  
 welcome.

16(0.2)

17F: Mx.

17F: Mh.

19(0.8)

20F: *Я бы сказала про себя что мне важно (0.2)*  
 I would say about myself that it is important for me (0.2)  
*например что то что я рассказываю, это новое и для меня.*  
 for example that what I tell about, it is new for me, too.  
*[То есть] мне важно не*  
 [That is] for me it is important not

21?: [( )]

22F: *пересказывать что-то, что я сама уже знаю, а как бы*  
 to retell something, what I already know, but sort of  
*донести- а вдруг другие это не знают, (.) мне-*  
 to inform- but what if others don't know this, (.) for me-  
*ну вот мне интересно чтоб это было*  
 well here it is interesting for me so that it should be  
*и мне самой интересно. и ново. .х*  
 interesting for me, too. and new. .h



*Мне интересно с- ну- (.) какие-то (0.2) .тц*  
 It is interesting for me to s- well- (.) some (0.2) .ts

*(0.2) ха: как это сказать если рассказывать про какую-то*  
 (0.2) ha: how it to say if to tell something-

*(.) то есть лучше рассказать про какую-то маленький-*  
 (.) that is it is better to tell about some small-

*маленькую тему, например галлюцинацию взять чем*  
 small topic, for example to take hallucinations than

*[весь] мозг. Да то есть вот возможно*  
 [the whole] brain. Yes that is it is possible

23?: [x ]  
 [h ]

24F: .x (.) какой-то вот- (.) э Мне интересно  
 .h (.) some here- (.) uh It is interesting for me

*рассмотреть маленькую проблему, но рассмотреть ее глубоко,*  
 to consider a small problem, but to consider it in depth,

*чем (.) как вот здесь рассеивать энергию по многим*  
 than (.) how it is here to dissipate energy in many

*увлечениям. Да, то есть много всего обхватить, а в*  
 ways. Yes, that is to cover a lot, but in

*результате ну (.) поверхностное что-то такое. .x Это может*  
 the result well (.) something superficial. .h This can be

*при подготовке тоже это важно. Мне тоже важно*  
 important for preparation too. It is important for me too

*пересказывать и структурировать, (.) тоже стала выписывать...*  
 to retell and to structure, (.) also started to write down...

41 turns omitted

66N: *Многие вещи и мне хочется прочитать тогда и про того, и про*  
 Many things and I want to read then about that, and about

*того, и про того, а: (.) ну как не-*  
 that, and about that, bu:t (.) well how im-

67A: *Невоз[можно да.]*  
 Imposs[ible yes.]

- 68N: [потому что] у меня такое ощущение что  
[because] I have such a feeling  
  
как-то информация не полная. (Какая-то/такая)  
that information is somewhat incomplete. (Somewhat/so)  
  
поверхностная. (.) а [времени]  
superficial. (.) but [time]
- 69?: [( )]
- 70N: (не улица) да. И: найти [весь этот ( )] у меня  
(not a street) yes. A:nd to find [all this ( )] I
- 71A: [Исследование]  
[Research]
- 72 (.)
- 73F: Значит найди тогда [другой материал.] (.) Просто не всё  
So find then [another material.] (.) Simply not everything
- 74N: [катастрофически нет]  
[absolutely don't have]
- 75F: что читаешь, нужно про всё рассказывать.  
what you read, it is necessary to retell everything.  
  
Надо найти то, что вот (.) тебя зацепило, и что  
It is necessary to find, what here (.) hooked you, and  
  
можно рассказать, и что (вот будет) (.) интересно. Я  
what can be told, and what (here will be)(.) interesting. I  
  
ж тоже много читала статей, но из всех статей  
also read many articles, but out of all the articles  
  
выбрала почему-то  
I chose for some reason

F initiates metatalk by suggesting revisiting the participants' expectations about the meetings (turn 1). Three participants express agreement with F's suggestion. Their turns, however, get overlapped, and F intervenes to restore the order. F reframes her suggestion to have metadiscussion as an invitation for each person to share their thoughts (turns 7 and 9). After a short pause, A1 shares her expectations (turns 11, 14, and 16). F makes moves, that overlap with A1's speech, to indicate her agreement with A1's point (turn 12) and to acknowledge A1's

contribution (turn 15). After a pause, F expresses her view on the discussion quality. In contrast to A1 who pointed out positive aspects of the current discussions and what is important to her personally in terms of preparation, F's contribution contains criticism of these discussions. She opposes what is desired, that is, the depth of presentations, to what is happening "here", that is, lack of depth (e.g., "to consider a small problem, but to consider it in depth, than (.) how it is here to dissipate energy in many ways" and "superficial" result in turn 24). While F frames her move as her personal preference (e.g. "it is interesting for me"), her move can be heard as a recommendation for everyone ("it is better to tell about some ... small topic"). At the same time, she shows an alignment with the previous speaker in regard to how to prepare for discussions ("it is important for me too to retell and to structure" in turn 24). In the omitted turns, F and two other participants (A1 and N) continue sharing their views. In turn 66 N brings in a difficulty she is experiencing with selecting an appropriate material, namely, being overwhelmed with an amount of information and dissatisfied with its quality while, at the same time, not having enough time to prepare. A shows alignment with N by collaboratively completion of N's utterances (turns 67 and 71). F's move, on the contrary, signals disaffiliation. F gives advice how to select information and creates contrast between herself and N, that is, while they are in the same situation ("I also read many articles"), she handles it well.

This episode is another example of how the facilitator actively shapes the meetings. As the previous discussions revealed some issues in regard to the presentation quality, and the facilitator's interventions to indicate them were not sufficient to improve the interaction, the facilitator initiates metatalk that allows her to address these issues in a more explicit way. At the same time, it is framed as collaboration. Firstly, it is an opportunity for every individual voice to be heard. Secondly, the facilitator's move underlies a collective aspect of this activity, that is, the participants' reflections should take into consideration not only what is good for them but also for the others (turns 7 and 9). Also, it is apparent in this example how different situated identities of the facilitator become pronounced. When she moderates the metadiscussion (e.g., by inviting the participants to share their views and acknowledging their contributions), she acts as a facilitator. When she expresses her opinion, she acts as a participant. After A1 shared her view, the facilitator self-selects to voice her expectations instead of allocating a turn to some other participant, as a facilitator would normally do. Besides, she enacts a role of teacher, when she gives recommendations. Interestingly, at the beginning of the episode, she refers to the encounter

as “class”, thus highlighting its educational aspect, and in some way, makes the role of the teacher relevant.

The following section will discuss the findings in terms of communication design and a role of a facilitator in crafting interactivity.

## **6. Conclusion**

The analysis shows that the facilitator makes a variety of moves to shape interaction. These moves accomplish different functions such as constructing meetings in general (e.g., introducing the participants and soliciting suggestions for time to meet) and managing the discussion (e.g., asking for clarification, sanctioning, and giving recommendations). While most of the actions that the facilitator performs are similar to what a chairperson usually does to moderate interaction (e.g., turn allocations, time keeping, asking for feedback, controlling the topic progression, opening and closing of the meeting), they have their own specificity. As it was noted before (see e.g., Pomerantz and Denvir 2007), this role can be accomplished in different ways (e.g., facilitating group participation or controlling participants' contributions). The facilitator actively shapes interaction, and her actions are a mixture of facilitative chairing (e.g., asking the participants for their input on topic selection) and authoritative chairing (e.g., indicating inappropriate content and giving specific tasks such as adding a joke to introduction). The facilitator's interventions also vary in terms of directness and present a combination of aggravated and mitigated moves, as it was seen in excerpt 4, where, on the one hand, the facilitator upgrades criticism and starts her oppositional moves with the disagreement marker “но (but)”, and, on the other one, uses such softeners as expressing a personal view, providing an account, and using the hesitation marker “hy (well)”.

One factor that possibly plays role in what types of interventions the facilitator makes and how she designs them is the goal of the meetings and who are the participants, which is in accordance with the idea that the chairperson's actions depend on a situation (see e.g., Holmes, Schnurr, and Marra 2007). The meetings were framed as educational encounters to have intellectual discussion and to sharpen rhetorical skills and as a collaborative learning activity. In this respect, the facilitator's interventions to indicate inappropriate content or the participants' performance and to provide recommendations to the participants how to present information can

be seen as aimed at helping the participants to improve their presentation skills and critical thinking, and, thus, appropriate.

Another important aspect of the facilitator's performance is the plurality of roles that she enacts in the course of the meeting (i.e., a host, an organizer, a facilitator, a participant, and even a teacher), particularly those of facilitator and participant. It should be noted that these situated identities are intertwined, which is seen in excerpt 4. While as a facilitator she makes moves to shape discussion by questioning what content is appropriate for the meetings, she frames it as her personal dissatisfaction with the presented material as a participant. This interrelation of identities, on the one hand, mitigates the authoritative aspect of the intervention; on the other one, it allows the facilitator to voice her concerns about the interaction quality and to keep enforcing a preferred format of the meeting, that is, having intellectual discussion.

Current research emphasizes meetings as interactional joint achievements (e.g., Asmuß and Svennevig 2009). The findings of the present study are an agreement with this view. Although the main focus of the study was the facilitator's communicative actions, the analysis provides different kinds of evidence to support this idea. The collaborative nature of the club meetings is evident, for example, in the facilitator's orientation towards balancing the tension between her own priorities and others' interests, as depicted in excerpts 2, where the facilitator uses time constraints to redirect the discussion (i.e., the necessity to finish the meeting as she has to leave, thus indicating her personal interest) and, at the same time, acknowledges that the issue can be of interest to all the participants and creates a possibility to continue the discussion on the current topic (i.e., displaying her concern for others' preferences). Another feature of the facilitator's moves is framing a dialogue activity as a collaborative process, even though taking a leading role in the process. For example, in excerpt 3 the facilitator suggests that the participants should decide the order of presentations before asking one participant to give her presentation. The joint achievement is also evident in how the facilitator adjusts her moves based on the participants' reactions. In the same excerpt, the participants' laughter challenges the facilitator's decision and makes her to provide an account for her action, thus downgrading her deontic authority.

Asmuß and Svennevig (2009) state, “Being in a meeting means orienting to the normative practices of this form of talk.” (p. 13). These norms help to gear interaction in a preferred way. When each meeting follows the same design, which was a feature of status meetings Thompson et al. (2014) studied, the familiarity with norms, for example, the routinized order of turn-taking, allows for smooth participation. The challenge, however, arises when the norms and rules are not specified and the participants do not share the same organizational culture. As Pomerantz and Denvir (2007) note, participants of a meeting have expectations about the chairperson’s role and what action they should perform but these expectations are not necessarily the same for all of them and may require negotiation during the meeting. This observation can be extended to the performance of all the participants and the activity in general. Unlike meetings in organizations where the participants have shared values and norms, the female club meetings under study, first of all, bring together people from different backgrounds (educational and occupational), and, secondly, are a new establishment that lacks traditions, routines, and rules as such. As these meetings are an emergent form of interactivity, the norms are yet to be created as the meetings progress. This brings us to the questions of communication design.

The analysis shows that disagreement arises in the course of discussion due to drawbacks of design. As it was mentioned in the analysis section, during the first encounter, the participants were invited to express their vision of the meetings. This could have set grounds for designing a particular type of interactivity, as any communication design serves a certain purpose and provides affordances for and constraints on what is possible in interaction. However, the participants shared only general expectations about what should happen during the meetings, that is, seeing them as a collaborative learning process, giving presentations, and having intellectual discussions. The participants did not specify, for example, any rules how to proceed, how to do presentations, or what the format of intellectual discussion presupposes in terms of its content. This led to some problems later in the meetings (e.g., excerpt 4), when the facilitator raised issues with the presented material and its source and the participants’ performance. This episode, however, revealed different expectations and understanding of what the participants consider to be an appropriate contribution, which made the facilitator to revisit the vision of the meetings and to initiate metatalk on the discussion standards (excerpt 5).

Interestingly, the facilitator appeals to the rules (“we talk about ourselves” in excerpt 4), even though it was never spelled out that in the course of the discussion the participants should only share their own experience. On the one hand, it highlights the importance of communication norms not only as guiding principles for participants’ actions but also as a resource for the facilitator to shape and control interaction. On the other one, it shows how rules emerge from interaction. This episode also demonstrates the participants’ orientation towards the rules. The participant N complies with the facilitator’s request to share her personal experience only when the facilitator spells out the norm and directly asks this participant to follow it.

Similar to mediators (Vasilyeva 2015, 2017), the facilitator acts as a designer of the interaction and faces the same challenge of constructing interactivity in an evolving situation, as the other participants’ moves constantly change the development of the interaction. The facilitator has to adapt to the situation and uses resources available in the very interaction to shape interaction (e.g., situated identities and topics). For example, the facilitator makes shifts between different roles (a facilitator, a participant, a teacher) to accomplish different functions that help to construct meetings. The facilitator’s language use also contributes to framing interaction in a particular way. For example, referring to an encounter as “class” evokes different participation roles and projects different actions and activities in contrast to usual “meeting”. Another feature of the design the facilitator uses is structuring meetings around particular topics to discuss, which has impact not only on the content but also dialogue activities. For example, excerpt 1 illustrated how the facilitator modified the activity of introduction based on the topic of the meeting (i.e., humor).

In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of communication design and the facilitator’s communicative work as a designer of interaction. It also contributes to our understanding of meetings as a collaborative achievement and an emergent form of interaction. While the focus of this study was on the facilitator’s communicative actions, the discussed examples also show that other participants contribute to shaping interactivity in various ways (e.g., by resisting the facilitator’s actions). Future research will explore the participants’ actions to construct the meetings. Moreover, the female discussion club is not an institution or an organization as such. The club was organized with a goal of providing a platform for females to engage in intellectual discussions in an informal setting. Thus, these interactions can be viewed

as an organizing feature through which the club comes to existence. In this respect, the future study can explore how it is accomplished and thus contribute to the idea of communicative constitution of organizations and organizing (see e.g., Schoeneborn et al. 2014).



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**Appendix: Transcription Conventions**

[ ]	overlapping talk
(word)	talk that the transcriber is not sure about
( )	indecipherable talk
word-	a word was cut off abruptly
(.)	pause
\$word\$	smiling
.	falling intonation
,	rising intonation
...	omitted part
°word°	decreased volume
word:	lengthening the preceding sound
<u>word</u>	marked stress
.hhh	inhalations
hhh	laughter tokens
F	facilitator
?:	unidentified participant
<i>word</i>	the Russian language

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The name of the meetings.

<sup>ii</sup> Deontic authority is referring to one's right "to determine others' future actions" (Stevanovic and Peräkylä, 2012, p. 297).