<http://www.diva-portal.org>

Postprint

This is the accepted version of a paper published in *Childhood*. This paper has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof-corrections or journal pagination.

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Ericsson, S., Boyd, S. (2017)

Children's ongoing and relational negotiation of informed assent in child-researcher, child-child, and child-parent interaction.

Childhood, : 1-16

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568216688246>

Access to the published version may require subscription.

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

Permanent link to this version:

<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:lnu:diva-61001>

Children's on-going and relational negotiation of informed assent in child-researcher, child-child, and child-parent interaction

Abstract

Contemporary considerations of childhood research ethics recognize children's competence and agency, their rights to be informed about research, and their capabilities to negotiate participation. There is also a recognition of children's assent as on-going and formed in the relationship with the researcher. Drawing on two different data sets, we investigate information and assent as they appear in child-researcher, child-child and child-parent interactions. We argue for the need to pay attention to participants' own meaning-making with regard to informed assent, and show how the presence or non-presence of the researcher in data collection may affect information and assent.

Keywords

Children's participation, research ethics, informed consent, assent, interaction

Recent decades have seen an increasing recognition of children's rights and competences, in society at large, such as through the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), as well as in research. The number of studies that investigate children's worlds and roles have multiplied and topics broadened beyond that of development towards adulthood, and children are seen as having competence and agency (Alderson and Morrow, 2004; Christensen and James, 2008; James and Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2002). In research on human interaction, children as competent interactional participants in their own right have similarly received increasing interest, and there exists a growing body of research on children's interactions and agency (e.g. Gardner and Forrester, 2010). By examining the fine detail of highly local contexts, such studies show how children actively engage in negotiating mutual understanding in interaction.

Concomitantly, the ethics of research involving children has attracted increasing attention, with the notions of information and assent being of central concern. While parents or guardians are granted the right of providing consent to the participation of their children in research, assent 'conveys a sense of agreement obtained from those who are not able to enter into a legal contract' (Ford et al., 2007: 20). If we take seriously children's rights to access information on matters that affect them and to have their views taken into account (United Nations 1989, 2009) in research, this means that

children should both be informed about research that involves them and be given the possibilities and means to decline or accept participation.

Research information is always partial, even though participants' understandings of the research may deepen throughout the study (Pinter and Zandian, 2015). Children's assent to participate in research is frequently shown to be continuous rather than given once and for all (Dockett and Perry 2011; Gabb, 2010). In this article we investigate children's on-going negotiation of information and assent, using data from two projects on children's interactions. Our study specifically contributes new knowledge in two ways: first, by using methods from research on human interaction we can access the micro-level of interaction and forefront participants' own meaning-making in complex settings; second, by focusing on the role of relationships between interactants, in this case the difference between children negotiating informed assent when a researcher is present and when one is not, we see the consequences that this difference may have for children's informed assent.

Children's informed assent

In the Swedish Ethical Review Act of 2003, children are given a right to be informed about the research, but are not given a right to give active assent. The Act assumes the child's assent if the guardian has given consent and in the absence of explicit objection on the part of the child (SFS 2003:460). This contrasts with the position increasingly

taken by researchers in what might broadly be termed a new sociology of childhood (Corsaro, 2015), and it contrasts with recent studies arguing that even young children are capable of giving informed assent, given appropriate support (Alderson and Morrow, 2004). Thus, children's assent is dependent upon the provision of information that is 'accessible and appropriate for specific children' (Dockett and Perry, 2011: 234). In line with this, several researchers show great sensitivity and creativity in adapting research methods to individual children and specific settings (Dockett and Perry, 2011; Eldén 2013a; Harcourt and Conroy, 2005; Harris et al., 2015; Pinter and Zandian, 2015).

However, it is also important to recognize that the information that participants, whether children or adults, have, is always and necessarily partial. That is, more strongly than the claim made by Pinter and Zandian (2015: 243) that children's 'initial understandings ... may remain partial', full understanding is unobtainable for participants that are not trained in our fields. That information is only partial is even more the case in qualitative and inductive research.

The partiality of information constitutes one facet of assent as an on-going process (Dockett and Perry, 2011; Gabb, 2010). Another aspect of this on-going process is that information and assent are formed in the relationship between the participant and the researcher. In ethnographic research, this can be quite different from the one usually involved e.g. in medical research. While the custom of ethical review boards requires the documentation of ethical procedures before the start of research, ethics is a practice

eventually in the hands of the researcher in the field, requiring critical reflexivity by the researcher (Allen, 2009; Cocks 2006; Flewitt, 2005; Renold et al., 2008).

Similar to the way in which information is partial, assent should also be recognized as non-binary, as a ‘continuum from clear refusal, through degrees of ambivalence, to clear and willing consent’ (Holland et al., 2014: 415).

Studying interaction

Research(ers) with an ethnomethodological perspective (Garfinkel, 1984) typically focus on the micro-level of society: what is being studied is the active creation of meaning and understanding in social interaction that participants themselves achieve. An influential perspective in both sociology and interactional linguistics, ethnomethodology underlies Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974) and similar approaches. Fundamental assumptions for such approaches, which we adhere to here, include the notion of sequentiality, that is, that the form and function of utterances in interaction are dependent on surrounding utterances. This means that for most utterances, their meaning is only deducible by careful attention to the context of interaction preceding and following the utterance.

Another important assumption is that meaning in interaction is co-constructed (Linell, 2005): participants in interaction are not senders and receivers of fully formed pieces of meaning – meaning is created jointly by participants. In our investigation, this

all means that we regard both information and assent as co-constructed by participants, locally, and context-sensitively in the interaction. This gives us yet another view on the difficulty of giving ‘full’ information in advance, as we have minimal knowledge of our participants at the stage of research where we ask for permission.

In recent years, interactional studies have begun to show children’s actions and competences as co-constructors of meaning at the micro-level (Gardner and Forrester, 2010). Recent development also includes increasing attention being paid to non-verbal aspects of interaction and the development of multimodal interaction analysis (Streeck, Goodwin, and LeBaron, 2011). In our study, children negotiate information and assent both verbally and in multimodal ways, using their bodies and voices.

In much sociolinguistic and interactional research there is a long-standing aim that involves the so-called naturalness of data – that what is to be collected and studied is naturally-occurring data, that is, interaction that would have occurred even if the researcher were not there. For instance, Labov (1972: 209) coined the famous ‘observer’s paradox’, whereby ‘how people talk when they are not being systematically observed’, which is to be seen as the aim of linguistic research, ‘can only [be] obtain[ed] ... by systematic observation’. With this perspective, data where the recording equipment or other aspects of the research process are oriented to by the participants, are seen as contaminated or inauthentic (Speer and Hutchby, 2003). This sets a gold standard, whereby the researcher and the research process are to be as absent

as possible. To some extent, these were also the preconceptions about the research process that we harboured as we set out on our research projects.

However, there has also emerged a critique of this view. Cameron et al. (1993: 86), for instance, argue against the underlying positivist assumption that there is ‘a reality independent of the observer’s perception’ that is to be seen as the proper object of study. Instead, they argue that interaction between researcher and participant is but one form of communication and can be studied as such. In accordance with critique such as this, some researchers instead make productive use of participants’ awareness of the research project, investigating meaning-making that participants do in relation to the recording equipment or the ethnographic observer (Gordon, 2013; Monahan and Fisher, 2010; Speer and Hutchby, 2003).

In line with ethnomethodological assumptions, a contextual factor such as the fact that a conversation is being recorded for research purposes, need not necessarily be relevant in a conversation (cf. Forrester, 2010). Rather, the analysis should investigate if and just how the particular context is ‘procedurally consequential’ (Schegloff 1992: 111), that is, how it matters to what is being done by the participants. This is what we attempt to show in this article, by examining four cases where young children initiate attention to the research process.

Material and methods

We draw on data from two research projects involving young children. Both projects study children's interactions and use qualitative sociolinguistic methods for data collection, transcription, and analysis (D'Arcy 2013; Ottesjö 2015). Our principal data are audio and video recordings of interactions. The advantages of the methods include the following: by careful study of the fine details of both linguistic and non-linguistic factors we can show just how participants and other contextual aspects matter, and what sense participants themselves make of the interaction; we study what participants actually do rather than what they say that they do (which is obtained in e.g. traditional interview studies); analysis involves watching and listening to the same data a large number of times, making the researcher well acquainted with the data and enabling novel findings to emerge inductively.

The first project had as its aim to study language policy in practice, and data was collected at an English-medium preschool in Sweden. The preschool class as a whole consisted of 28 children, aged 3-4 years. Four children were the focus of the study, but informed consent was sought from the parents of all the children in the class, as we wished to video-record naturally-occurring interaction among children, who were able to choose playmates freely. The recordings focused primarily on everyday "free" peer play, and interaction in the two extracts presented below both took place during free play. All video recordings were made with a hand held camera with one or more researchers present. The researchers attempted to play a passive role in interaction while

recording, but this was not always possible, due to children's initiatives to interact with them (see further below).

The second project investigated norms surrounding family and relationships in conversations between children and their parents. Participants consisted of 13 families, including 23 children mainly aged 5–8 years. In addition, four families with seven children altogether participated in a pilot study. Conversations were elicited and recorded using a purpose-designed tablet app, which participants used freely in the home. The app recorded audio data, and no researcher was present during the sessions. The app was interactive and included images, spoken utterances, sounds, clickables, and simple animation. A fictional character in the app called Moi interacted with the participants by asking questions. Moi's questions were uttered when participants clicked on labelled speech buttons, specific to each question. Children and adults talked and gave answers to Moi, and at times further elaborated on various topics. They were encouraged to behave exactly as they wanted with the app. In accordance with Swedish law, informed consent was asked of parents, and they were in turn asked to inform their children about the project in ways that they saw fit.

Thus, in the preschool setting, the researcher is present, and information and assent are negotiated between the children and the researcher, and also, as we will see, between the children themselves. In the family app project, the researcher is not present, and informed assent is negotiated between the parent and the child.

In selecting the cases that we present in this article, we have investigated the video and audio recordings and the transcriptions we have made of these, inductively identifying ‘ethical speed-bumps’ (Holland et al., 2014; Renold et al., 2008), that is, ‘moments that [bring] ethical issues to the forefront in the research process’ (Holland et al., 2014: 412), in our study, issues of research information and assent. We have watched and listened to the data a large number of times, individually and with other researchers, and from this identified a large collection of ethical speed-bumps. The selection below has been made to illustrate the rich settings of information and assent, respectively, for both data sets. While qualitatively unique in several ways, the cases also all contain aspects that re-occur. For instance, William and his father (the second case below) are the only participants to talk about YouTube, but the data contains several other negotiations regarding e.g. the participants’ being recorded.

Children’s negotiation of informed assent

For the most part, in both data sets, participants just get on with the activity at hand. This may be seen as the children having at least a basic understanding of the research: they understand that they are to get on with their everyday pre-school activities while someone is recording them with a camera, or that they are to give answers to the questions given by the app or their parent. There is evidence in both projects that they

are aware of their interaction being recorded, even aside from the ethical speed bumps. It may also be seen as evidence of children's implicit assent, locally in the interaction.

Most of the time they don't actively attend to the researcher or the recording equipment. Even so, it seems that the question of whether participation is to be continued or not, can be explicitly negotiated at any time, even when the researcher or a gatekeeper does not explicitly ask for permission to record.

We are now going to analyse four cases in some detail. The cases are chosen to illustrate different aspects of information and assent, some with researchers present, others where they are absent.

Negotiating information: 'This is your work?'

In the video-recorded preschool data, on occasion children very consciously act or perform (Gordon 2013:309) in front of the camera or go behind the camera to see what is being recorded. In the first case that we analyse, Andy and George at the very beginning of a recording session, show an interest in the camera and ask the researcher where she got it. When she provides information about the research process, one of the boys shows clearly that he doesn't believe the information she provides. He does not protest, however, but after a long and thoughtful pause, simply continues playing with his friend.

1   George: <pointing to camera> Hey this is the (camera).

3   Andy: Hey yeh, there's the cam(e)ra.

4   Researcher: Yeh there we are.

6   Andy: Hey where d(id) you get that camera from?

8   Researcher: Well I had it at work. It's at my job.

9   Andy: This is your *<inaudible>*?

10   George: Is this wuh, your work? *<strong question intonation>*

11   Researcher: Yeh this is my work.

12   Andy: Work hey.

13   Researcher: My work is uh to, record you.

14   George: (This) your work?

15   Researcher: This is my re- work to record you.

16   *<2.4 sec pause>*

17   George: Um um *<shaking his head strongly>*

18   Andy: *<turning to toys>* Hey look at me!

19   Researcher: And then I'm gonna, study the recordings.

20   George: *<shakes his head strongly several times, cheeks blown
up>*

21   Researcher: Yeh, that's true.

In this extract of interaction, we see the children explicitly attending to the camera, which is not so unusual in the material as a whole, but what is less usual is Andy's question about its provenance (line 6). When both children explicitly ask again (lines 9 and 10), questioning that the camera is associated with 'work', the researcher uses the opportunity to provide information about the camera's and recording's role in her work (line 13). Andy then turns to play with a nearby dollhouse, while George continues to question the researcher's statement that recording children is her 'work'. She uses the children's questions as an opportunity (Pinter and Zandian, 2015: 241–242) to provide an explanation of why she is recording their interaction (lines 15 and 19), attempting to adapt the information to what the children can understand (Harcourt and Conroy, 2005: 573).

But George shows clearly gesturally (lines 17 and 20) his lack of acceptance of her description and explanation, by shaking his head and blowing up his cheeks. The former is a conventionalized negative gesture, the latter a facial expression difficult to interpret. The researcher, responding to George's gesture of disbelief, argues for the veracity of her description (line 21); this response is a further indication that George questions the information she provides. At the end of this excerpt, George is silent for about 10 seconds, looking down and touching his mouth and nose with both hands (Figure 1). His downward gaze and self-touching behaviour are indications that he is withdrawing from interaction (Cibulka and Andrén, 2016) both with the researcher and

with his friend, perhaps trying to interpret her explanation that she will ‘study the recordings’. After several appeals from his friend, George finally turns his attention to Andy (contributions not shown in the extract). As she doesn’t stop recording or even ask explicitly if she should continue, the researcher presumably interprets George’s negative responses not to be grounded in ethical concerns on his part, rather on the veracity of her claim that recording children playing can be (part of) ‘work’ or on difficulties interpreting the phrase ‘study the recordings’. While those collecting data of course fully accept the information requirement of research ethics, we must be aware that information can only be partial, even for adults (cf. Holland et al., 2014: 422–423), or older children (Pinter and Zandian, 2015). Here we see evidence that even when it is provided, it is not always fully accepted or understood.

Figure 1. George withdrawing from interaction.

Negotiating information: 'Will this be on Youtube?'

Children in both projects show an awareness of their being recorded and that this leads to a recorded product that can be accessed afterward. In the audio-recorded family conversations, children ask when they themselves can listen to the recording, use whispering for some things not meant for the recording, and so on.

Information about who will have access to the research data collected and how this is conveyed is a related matter that needs to be considered in research involving children (Harcourt and Conroy, 2005). This is the issue of the second case that we consider. Here, William and his father have begun by doing the task of giving a family to the Moi character, which involves choosing from a set of characters who should be part of Moi's family, and then answering questions about this family. The father gives a female name to a character that William had assumed was a man, and when this is brought up in the conversation, William swaps characters for Moi's family. The exchange in the extract (translated from Swedish) then ensues.

- 1 William: He's a guy, he really is a guy right?
- 2 Father: That is, well. Yeah. M.
- 3 Moi: What are our names?
- 4 Father: Euh, everyone's names are like before but that one is John now.

- 5 William: <whispers:> Do they know (that) the others>
- 6 Father: What did you say? Speak up. <laughs>
- 7 William: Do they know what the others are called?
- 8 Father: Who?
- 9 William: The others.
- 10 Father: We're just making this up.
- 11 <7.3 sec pause>
- 12 William: <whispers:> Is this going to be <smiles:> on Youtube?>
- 13 Father: What did you say?
- 14 William: <very soft laughter> Is this going to be on Youtube?
- 15 Father: <smiles:> No <laughs> won't be on Youtube <laughs> >
- 16 Moi: How old are we?

Apparently William wants to be sure of the gender of the new character, and asks a question to which his father gives an affirmative but slightly unclear answer (lines 1–2). Either William or the father then clicks on the name question (line 3), and the father gives a male name to the new character. In lines 5–10 William then asks a question about an unclear *others*, possibly referring to the characters that are not selected to be in Moi's family. William uses a strategy of introducing the question using a whisper (line 5), organizing his talk into quieter private turns and louder public turns (cf. Mondada,

2014). After a fairly long silence, just over seven seconds (line 11), William uses the same whispering strategy for another question, asking his father whether *this* – their conversation, what they do with the app – is going to be on Youtube (line 12). After a prompt from his father, William repeats his question without whispering (lines 13–14).

Williams's question about Youtube shows his awareness of their being recorded, and of the recording leading to something that is stored and that can be used later. However, the question also shows that William lacks a full understanding of what happens to research material in the project that he is part of. Harcourt and Conroy (2205: 568) found that 'children are able to clearly articulate their own gaps in understanding ... and will often offer alternatives that best fit with the individual child's skills and abilities'. Here William's question concerns what happens to the research material afterwards, and he frames his question using a channel for media presentation that he is familiar with.

The ethical review process of this project involved detailing how the data would be stored in a way that is inaccessible to anyone outside of the research group. This is also information that William's father received for his informed consent. In a sense, William's father's reply is a missed opportunity for providing further research information, such as confidentiality and why the recording would not be published on Youtube. However, taking sequentiality and the behaviour of the interlocutors into account, it is more difficult to see this as a missed opportunity. The humorous framing

of the exchange in lines 12–15 is crucial here: the father’s brief reply with a smiling voice and laughter (line 15) is produced in the context set up by William’s question (lines 12, 14). The humorous framing implies mutual understanding and a feeling of trust between parent and child that seems to pre-empt any need for further explanation. A question about research data and Youtube brings to the fore the difference between private and public, and the question could potentially concern either curiosity and expectation or worry. The father’s reply does not indicate that he reads William’s question as one of worry in any way, and his ethical practice is here situational and responsive (Morrow, 2008).

In sum, in this second case we see both how the child is active in seeking research information, and how this information is provided by the parent in a way that is precisely tuned to the local interactional context.

Negotiating assent: children’s acting up

We can see the interaction in the extracts below as both a verbal and a multi-modal negotiation of informed assent (Dockett and Perry, 2011: 233) between the researcher and three children, and among the children themselves. The researcher’s aim is to maintain the children’s informed assent in order to obtain naturalistic data for analysis. At the same time her actions can be interpreted as exercising an ‘ethics of care’ with regard to the children (Tronto, 1993; Holland et al., 2014), not recording their

interaction if they do not wish it. The children's aims seem to be primarily to have fun playing together and secondarily to be cooperative or compliant with the researcher.

The children act in ways that can be interpreted both as cooperative and mildly uncooperative during this short interaction, thus expressing the constant possibility to opt both in and out of the researcher's agenda, not only fully, but also partially.

At the beginning of this interaction, the researcher actually departs from her goal of obtaining naturalistic data by directing one of the children, Rut, to move so that she is "on camera" with her friends, which Rut indeed does. So far, the researcher has obtained active assent from Rut and silent assent from the other two girls, who sit drawing and talking about their drawings, to being recorded.

But then Hanna begins to playfully challenge the researcher's agenda. She starts moving out of sight of the camera, sliding her body under the table. Virginia follows suit. These two girls play back and forth standing up and sliding under the table, while Rut continues to sit without much to do. Subsequently, Rut also changes her fully cooperative stance shown above, saying 'It's so boring', expressing her dissatisfaction with the situation. Whether it is her lack of play materials or being "directed" by the researcher, or both, is unclear. So at this point all three girls have shown by words and actions that they are not fully cooperating with the researcher, already modifying the implicit or explicit full assent at the beginning of the extract.

Rut then openly asks the researcher (line 20) why she's recording.

- 20 Rut: <whiny voice:> Why're you DOing this?
- 21 <Hanna and Virginia are drawing again>
- 22 Hanna: Weeee <singing>
- 23 Researcher: Cause I wanna remember how you look when you're
playing with each other.
- 24 Rut: Agrrh, it's so boring.
- 25 Hanna: So you rewember, the

The why question and her whiny voice (line 20) indicate not only Rut's wish for further information, but also upgrade her challenge to the researcher's aims. The researcher, in line with her research ethics agenda, provides an account (line 23), adapting the information to the children's level of understanding (Harcourt and Conroy, 2005). Rut's response to this is a recycling of her previous utterance expressing boredom (line 24). Hanna's response, on the other hand, is to repeat part of the researcher's explanation (line 25), confirming her attention to and understanding of the researcher's answer to Rut's question.

Instead of hiding from the camera, Hanna and Rut now play up to the camera, sticking out their tongues and laughing. Thus they transform the camera into an audience to perform their uncooperative stance in a silly, playful way (Gordon, 2013: 209-212). While Rut and Hanna are hamming it up, Virginia doesn't join in at first, but

instead tries to resume the strategy of hiding by sliding under the table. The other two girls then join her, all of them laughing and crying ‘ahhh.’

When Hanna directs her next utterances to the researcher (lines 40, 42 below), the researcher interprets these utterances, in the context of the previous somewhat uncooperative behaviour on the part of all three girls, as a potential wish to withdraw assent, asking all three children if she should stop recording (lines 44, 46, 48, 51). Rut and Hanna protest, that she should not stop (lines 54, 55), while Virginia is silent and only in response to a direct question (line 60), expresses her desire for the researcher to stop recording (line 61), which she also does.

40 Hanna: <excitedly:> (You're) putting something on picture>.

41 <Rut and Hanna laugh>

42 Hanna: You (put on/take) a picture on us.

43 <looking quickly at researcher/camera>

44 Researcher: Do you want uh, do you want me to stop?

45 <1.6 sec pause>

46 Researcher: If you want me to stop I'll stop.

47 Hanna: No.

48 Researcher: Do you want me to stop?

49 Hanna: No.

50 Researcher: Okay.

51 Researcher: Do you want me to stop? <Virginia looks at
researcher/camera>

52 Virginia: <nods clearly once>

53 Researcher: Okay I'll stop then.

54 Rut: <looking at the camera:> No no neh [neh neh neh neh neh>

55 Hanna: <looking at the camera:> [No no.]

56 Researcher: Is it okay if I keep doing it, Virginia?

57 <Virginia moves head slightly upwards, looking at the camera>

58 Researcher: Cause if she doesn't like it then I'm gonna stop.

59 <1.7 sec pause>

60 Researcher: Shall I stop?

61 Virginia: <nods head slightly>

62 <camera switched off>

The interaction in this extract as a whole shows how children's assent is not a matter of yes or no, nor of once-and-for-all. Clearly, children show their agency in giving assent, both verbally and non-verbally, although their understanding of the research process

must be only partial. In order to follow the research ethics requirement of informed assent, the researcher is constantly responsive to verbal and behavioural signals that children may be opting in or out of participation. Presumably different researchers, in different contexts and with different participants draw the line between assent and no assent at different points. Here, the accumulated less than fully cooperative actions of the children lead the researcher to ask an explicit question and receive a clear response from one child, withdrawing assent.

Negotiating assent: motivating the withdrawal of assent

As the preceding case also illustrates, assent can be considered as on a continuum of degrees of participation (Holland et al., 2014), and even if a child does not fully withdraw from the research, she may still regulate her level of participation (Danby and Farrell, 2005). In the family conversations, for instance, there are many examples of children not saying anything in reply to a question, or saying *I don't know* or *Let's skip that*, before moving on to the next question. They also, at times, give nonsense answers, or playful or subversive answers.

In the fourth and final case that we consider, Tim temporarily withdraws his assent in a conversation with Moi and his mother. (See the extract.) In reply to a question from Moi about adults separating (line 1), Tim starts talking about a friend of his (line 2). However, after a while he stops himself, saying that for his friend's sake, he

is not going to tell this. With respect for Tim's stance, we have removed the parts that he does tell before he stops himself, from his utterance in line 2. However, Tim's mother exerts pressure (Dockett and Perry, 2011: 244) to convince Tim that there is no problem in his telling, with reference to research anonymity (line 2), that is, she negotiates assent by providing information about the research process. This negotiation on the part of the mother may be facilitated by the epistemological formulation of Tim's preceding utterance: he indicates lack of full certainty through *I don't think*.

- 1   Moi: Sometimes grown-ups decide not to live together anymore. Why?
- 2   Tim: It depends 'coz because of Mike it was that he uhm /.../ and
                                         actually I'm not supposed to say this for Mike so I don't think I'm
                                         going to.
- 3   Mother: (But) there's no one who, there's no one who knows, there's no
                                         one who knows who Mike is, no one can realize who he is.
                                         So it's [okay to say it].
- 4   Tim: [ng::   ] promised.
- 5   <recording temporarily shut off>
- 6   Tim: - Mike, mum.
- 7   Mother: Mm.
- 8   Tim: <unclear word>

- 9   Mother: No but if you feel that it's important that you promised him and
                         don't want to tell, then you shouldn't do it if you've promised.
- 10   *<participants move on to the next page in the app>*

Despite his initial uncertainty, Tim maintains his position in overlap with his mother's utterance (lines 3–4) and by upgrading his presentation of the obligation to his friend by saying that he has made a promise (line 4). After this, the recording is temporarily shut off (line 5), either by Tim or his mother. When the recording starts again, shortly afterwards, Tim is in the middle of an utterance (line 6). After a brief exchange (lines 7–8), the mother utters support for Tim's position on the matter, and they move on to another question. In this extract we can see how the parent first takes a research perspective (line 3), and then a parental perspective of care for the child (line 9).

Tim successfully negotiates his temporary withdrawal of assent, or regulates his level of participation. This is a clear illustration of how assent is on-going and locally negotiable, and also how assent is co-constructed at the micro-level. As Dockett and Perry (2011: 242) argue, '[s]upportive and enabling environments in which adults expect and provide for children's active decision making and regard assent as an on-going process are important contributors to children's exercise of agency.'

For Tim, his moral obligation to a friend here overrides his willingness to provide data for research. This is an example of a local and specific ethical issue that we were not able to foresee in advance (Mazzoni and Harcourt, 2014) – our considerations of research anonymity in the consent form given to participants had nothing to say about promises made to other people, nor other ethical concerns which can become locally relevant during the course of doing research. These must be met as they arise.

Concluding discussion

In this paper we have reflexively engaged with the ethics of our research (Renold et al., 2008; Dockett and Perry, 2011), specifically regarding children's informed assent. We argue that attention to the micro-level of interaction, using methods from interaction analysis, has revealed that children take an active interest in the research that they are part of, and that they find different ways of asking for and getting information about the research, as well as of assenting to or (partially or temporarily) withdrawing their participation in data collection. By attending to how the research process is being made 'procedurally consequent' (Schegloff 1992: 111) by children in co-constructed sequences, we thus show how interactional linguistics can reveal participants' own understandings of the research.

Two of our cases above came from a setting – the preschool – where the researcher was present. Here, the presence of the researcher may afford opportunities

for children to learn about the research process they are involved in, not only by asking questions about it (example 1), but also by observing how researchers behave (e.g. in contrast to staff members) in an otherwise familiar setting. By co-operating with the researcher, they give their continued assent to participate in the research process, despite their only partial understanding of what it involves and various risks it could entail. Children also know how to express non-co-operation, and can opt out of research in collaboration with attentive researchers. The researcher is required not only to obtain informed consent from adults, but to build up a relationship of trust (Dockett and Perry, 2011) with children and adults around the children, so that the research can be carried out successfully.

The other two cases above came from the family app data, where no researcher was present. In this setting, informed assent is negotiated between the parent and the child, meaning that the researcher here hands over the responsibility for the child's informed assent to the participants themselves. In contrast with data collection where the researcher is present, a relationship of trust involving the researcher is thereby not overtly negotiated as part of the research data itself, and for the child only indirectly via the parent and the research setup (here the app). Handing over responsibility for informed consent or assent can be both useful and necessary, as well as ethically sound (Mortensen, 2015), as also attested by the project's being approved by an ethical review board. In the family conversations, it is conceivable that William's and Tim's

relationships with their parents is precisely what enabled them to ask about Youtube and to refrain from breaking a promise, respectively (cf. Dockett and Perry, 2011: 242, 244 on supportive environments and familiar people). However, parents can also exert pressure (Dockett and Perry, 2011: 244), and Eldén (2013b) convincingly argues that children's right to participate on equal terms, in particular when it comes to opting in to research, can and should be taken seriously.

In studies involving the presence of a researcher, such as in our preschool data, continuous negotiation of both information and assent may be at least partly in the hands of the researcher. Even though children in the family app interactions can be seen to be, locally in the interaction, both agentive and competent in negotiating informed assent, such studies, where no researcher is present, may need to pay careful attention to research design in order to fully enable children's participation.

Funding

This work was supported by the Swedish Research Council [grant numbers 421-2012-854, 721-2011-5842].

References

Alderson P and Morrow V (2004) *Ethics, Social Research and Consulting with Children and Young People*. 2 ed. Ilford: Barnardo's.

Allen L (2009) 'Caught in the act': Ethics committee review and researching the sexual culture of schools. *Qualitative Research* 9(4): 395–410. Cameron D, Frazer E, Harvey P, Rampton B and Richardson K (1993) Ethics, advocacy and empowerment: Issues of method in researching language. *Language & Communication* 13(2): 81–94.

Christensen P and James A (eds) (2008) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*. 2 ed. London: Routledge.

Cibulka P and Andrén M (2016) Self-touching behaviour in social interaction: Shifting in and out of speakership. In: Cibulka P, *A universal of human interaction? Manual movement as interactional practice in spoken and signed conversation*. PhD Thesis, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Available at <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/42407>.

Cocks A (2006) The ethical maze: Finding an inclusive path towards gaining children's agreement to research participation. *Childhood* 13(2): 247–266.

Corsaro WA (2015) *The Sociology of Childhood*. 4 ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Danby S and Farrell A (2005) Opening the research conversation. In: Farrell A (ed.) *Ethical Research with Children*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, pp. 49–67.

D'Arcy A (2013) Advances in sociolinguistic transcription methods. In: Mallinson C, Childs B and Van Herk G (eds) *Data Collection in Sociolinguistics: Methods and Applications*. London: Routledge, pp. 187–190.

- Dockett S and Perry B (2011) Researching with young children: Seeking assent. *Child Indicators Research* 4: 231–247.
- Eldén S (2013a) Inviting the messy: Drawing methods and ‘children’s voices’. *Childhood* 20(1): 66–81.
- Eldén S (2013b) “Your child is just wonderful”: On ethics and access in research with children. *Journal of Comparative Social Work* 2.
- Flewitt R (2005) Conducting research with young children: Some ethical considerations. *Early Child Development and Care* 175(6): 553–565.
- Ford K, Sankey J and Crisp J (2007) Development of children’s assent documents using a child-centred approach. *Journal of Child Health Care* 11(1): 19–28.
- Forrester M (2010) Ethnomethodology and adult-child conversation: Whose development? In: Gardner and Forrester (2010), pp. 42–58.
- Gabb J (2010) Home truths: Ethical issues in family research. *Qualitative Research* 10(4): 461–478.
- Gardner, H and Forrester M (eds) (2010) *Analysing Interactions in Childhood: Insights from Conversation Analysis*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Garfinkel H (1984) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gordon, H (2013) Beyond the observer’s paradox: The audio-recorder as a resource for the display of identity. *Qualitative Research* 13(3): 299–317.

- Harcourt D and Conroy H (2005) Informed assent: Ethics and processes when researching with young children. *Early Child Development Care* 175(6): 567–577.
- Harris C, Jackson L, Mayblin L, Piekut A and Valentine G (2015) ‘Big Brother welcomes you’: Exploring innovative methods for research with children and young people outside of the home and school environments. *Qualitative Research* 15(5): 583–599.
- Holland S, Williams A and Forrester D (2014) Navigating ethical moments when researching substance misuse with parents and their children. *Qualitative Research* 14(4): 411–427.
- James A and Prout A (1997) *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Labov W (1972) *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Linell P (2005) En dialogisk grammatik? In: Anward J and Nordberg B (eds) *Samtal och grammatik: Studier i svenskt samtalsspråk*. Lund: Studentlitteratur, pp. 231–328.
- Mayall B (2002) *Towards a Sociology for Childhood: Thinking from Children’s Lives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Mazzoni V and Harcourt DS (2014) An international experience of research with children: Moving forward on the idea of children's participation. *Qualitative Research* 14(2): 252–268.
- Monahan T and Fisher JA (2010) Benefits of 'observer effects': Lessons from the field. *Qualitative Research* 10(3): 357–376.
- Mondada L (2014) The conversation analytic approach to data collection. In: Sidnell J and Stivers T (eds) *The Handbook of Conversation Analysis*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 32–56.
- Morrow V (2008) Ethical dilemmas in research with children and young people about their social environments. *Children's Geographies* 6(1): 49–61.
- Mortensen KK (2015) *Language and sexuality in an online-mediated world: Interactional workings of desire in heterosexual online dating*. PhD Thesis, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.
- Ottesjö C (2015) Insamling och bearbetning av talspråksmaterial. [Collection and analysis of spoken language data] In: Boyd S and Ericsson S (eds) *Sociolinguistik i Praktiken*. [Sociolinguistics in Practice] Lund: Studentlitteratur, pp. 75–92.
- Pinter A and Zandian S (2015) 'I thought it would be tiny little one phrase that we said, in a huge big pile of papers': Children's reflections on their involvement in participatory research. *Qualitative Research* 15(2): 235–250.

- Renold E, Holland S, Ross NJ and Hillman A (2008) 'Becoming participant':
Problematizing 'informed consent' in participatory research with young people in
care. *Qualitative Social Work* 7(4): 427–447.
- Sacks H, Schegloff, EA and Jefferson G (1974) A simplest systematics for the
organization of turn-taking in conversation. *Language* 50(4): 696–735.
- Schegloff ES (1992) On talk and its institutional occasions. In: Drew P and Heritage J
(eds) *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, pp. 101–134.
- SFS [The Swedish code of statutes] (2003:460) Om etikprövning av forskning som
avser människor [Concerning the ethical review of research involving humans]
http://www.epn.se/media/2348/the_ethical_review_act.pdf
- Speer SA and Hutchby I (2003) From ethics to analytics: Aspects of participants'
orientations to the presence and relevance of recording devices. *Sociology* 37(2):
315–337.
- Streeck J, Goodwin C and LeBaron C (eds) (2011) *Embodied Interaction: Language
and Body in the Material World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tronto JC (1993) *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethics of Care*.
London: Routledge.

United Nations (1989) Convention on the rights of the child. Available at:

<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx> (accessed 21 March 2016).

United Nations (2009) General comment no.12: The right of the child to be heard.

Available at:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf> (accessed 22 March 2016).