

# Stability and visibility in embodied action: the 'Palm Up' in interaction<sup>1</sup>

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This paper identifies hitherto unidentified aspects of the relationship between language and bodily behaviour by examining the production of a recognisable embodied practice in interaction – the 'palm up' (PU), by which the palms of the hands are turned in parallel to face towards the recipient. Two features turn out to be central to understanding both this practice and, by extension, embodied action in interaction generally. The first is the 'held' element, iconically indicating disruption to the progressivity of the interaction. The second is the production of the PU at particular positions in sequences of talk. Using multi-modal Conversation Analysis to examine two contexts in English – pursuits and challenges – reveals that it is analytically insufficient to focus on solely the embodied action and its affiliated utterance without considering its wider sequential context. Rather, any account of embodied action should in the first instance investigate its *temporal* and *sequential* production to identify its pragmatic function in interaction.

*Key words: Embodied action, multimodality, interaction, Conversation Analysis, challenge, pursuit*

## 1. Introduction

The study of gesture in interaction has largely developed distinct from the study of language itself (e.g. McNeill, 1992, Kendon, 2004), in what Floyd has described as 'the tendency to look just to the auditory channel to study the linguistic system proper, and to look to the visual channel only for more holistic and depictive forms of expression' (2016:32). Of course, research into sign languages, with its encoding of conventionalised forms, makes it a singular exception (e.g. Goldin-Meadow and Brentari, 2017); but the widespread lack of such precise form-meaning correspondences in bodily behaviour alongside spoken language renders problematic attempts to identify, for any form, a stability of function across occasions of its use.

This article focuses on a pervasive, recognizable, and studied embodied action in English interaction to propose that it is indeed possible to identify such a stable function – but that to do so requires throwing a gestalt switch on the methods by which this is achieved. That is, not solely by direct examination of the form of the gesture and its affiliated utterance(s) but, perhaps paradoxically, by simultaneous examination of the

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form and position it occupies in the interactional sequence in which it is produced. In other words, it is not compositional form alone – which, as we shall see, may vary across instantiations – but rather the contexts that, in their invariance, finally yield the functions. And, as we shall see, it is only by using the methods of multimodal Conversation Analysis (e.g. Mondada, 2006, Kendrick and Drew, 2016) in examining the sequential contexts that we can identify the moments at which gesture is introduced into talk, and thus illuminate the principled relationship between linguistic and embodied interaction.

The focus in what follows will be on the so-called ‘palm up’ (PU) gesture, whereby a participant in interaction rotates their palms in parallel outwards from a default position facing their own body towards the recipient. In addition, where PU producers are standing, there is a lift of the arms away from the body to about mid-body or waist height. Figure (1) and figure (2) show possible standing and sitting variants of the PU.<sup>2</sup> These make clear that, while the central feature of the palm facing outwards is present in both cases, in Figure (1), unlike in (2), the arms are moved out from the body and extended to waist height, with the palms facing upwards in orientation. In the sitting position where the arms are already bent at the elbow, the PU is produced with a more minimal movement of the palms outwards, such that they are more in parallel with each other rather than facing outwards or upwards.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 1: Palm up – standing

Real Madrid footballer Pepe is shown the red card by referee Wolfgang Stark during a European Cup semi-final (2011)



Figure 2: Palm up – sitting

Jeremy Paxman (L) interviews British Home Secretary Michael Howard on ‘Newsnight’ (BBC2) (1997)

The PU has been variously named, and extensively documented and researched; as we shall see, studies of its use have overwhelmingly focused on its form and from its various instantiations attempted to derive its function. What makes the current study unique, however, is that, instead of focusing on its various forms in the first instance, the analytic attention will be on two aspects largely overlooked by studies of its use. The first of these is the brief but visible suspension of the gesture from a dynamic to a static

<sup>2</sup> These two exemplars of course show the PU being used during very specific activity types (Levinson, 1992), while the current study examines the gesture in both ordinary and institutional interaction. These are chosen primarily, with exemplification in mind, for their clarity; these particular instantiations and their contextual shaping will be discussed later.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, the PU may also be combined with other communicative movements, such as the lift of the shoulders in a shrug (see, e.g. Beaupoil-Hourdel and Debras, 2017, on the emergence of shrugging in children) which, as a distinct action, is not the focus here.

position, what Kita (1993) calls a ‘post-stroke hold’ – that is, a temporary ‘freeze’ of the movement of a gesture subsequent to its main dynamic phase (the ‘stroke’, McNeill, 2005). Mondada, in pioneering work on the integration of embodied action with turntaking, showed a pointing gesture accompanying a question held until the end of the recipient’s answer, and only released just before the gesturer’s own acknowledgement (2007:216). In more recent literature on gesture and interaction, this brief suspension of a movement has come to be known simply and generically as a ‘hold’ (e.g. Manrique, 2011, Floyd et al, 2016) which can encompass a wide range of embodied actions deploying the head, eyes, face, hands, or torso, or any combination of these (Floyd et al, 2016). Work by Sikveland and Ogden (2012) on Norwegian interaction shows how participants may orient to such held gestures beyond the end of a turn-at-talk as displays of occasions where participants do not – yet – have a shared understanding. Floyd et. al. (2016), show that, across three languages (Northern Italian, Cha’palaa of Ecuador, and Argentinian Sign Language (LSA)), when a party accompanies the initiation of other-initiated repair (such as ‘huh?’, ‘what?’, or ‘who?’) with a hold, then the position will not be disengaged until the problem is resolved and the sequence closed. This suspension is seen in the first instance to be inextricably linked to the action to which it responds. The second aspect of use largely overlooked in prior work on the PU is that this embodied action is produced not solely as responsive to a prior action, but in the context of a wider interactional *sequence* of utterances. As will become evident, the production of the PU in a particular position in a sequence of actions is similarly central to the action we understand it to be implementing. Thus attending to sequential placement as well as form – encapsulated neatly by Schegloff (1993) as ‘position and composition’ – illuminates its production in hitherto unexplored ways; key to this perspective is the situated nature of the gesture in time.

## 2. *The Palm-Up: the background*

‘In asking questions, we use gestures of more kinds than one; generally, however, we turn the hand towards the person addressed, whatever the form into which it is put’.

*Quintilian, De Institutio Oratoria, XI,3:101: 101.*

In his discussion of Roman oratory, Quintilian’s observation of what is recognisably the PU in the context of questions testifies to the salience and distinctiveness of the gesture since classical antiquity. Müller (2004) provides a historical overview; but broadly, work on the PU can be traced back through the Renaissance, with the English physician John Bulwer, to the 19<sup>th</sup> century work of Andrea de Jorio whose work on the ethnography of gesture derived from observation on the streets of his native Naples. Efron’s study of Italian and Yiddish speaking immigrants in New York in the 1930’s shows the cultural reach of the gesture through time and space – and, as Table 1 shows, his proposals as to its use and meaning show striking commonalities with his scholarly antecedents:

<i>Author</i>	<i>Context/Meaning</i>
Quintilian, AD 95	Questions
Bulwer, 1654	Begging/Asking for something

De Jorio, 1832  
Efron, 1941

Request/Not knowing something  
Pleading/Not knowing

Table 1: historical work on the Palm Up gesture

More recent years have seen a more concentrated focus on the PU. This has been both in the context of major studies of gesture, most prominently by Kendon (2004) McNeill (2005), and Streeck (2009) and, as independent studies, by Müller (op.cit) and Cooperrider et al. (2018). All of these studies testify to the pervasiveness of the PU across the languages of the world; indeed Cooperrider et al., in an extensive overview of past work on the PU in both spoken and sign language, document the PU across sixteen spoken languages (op.cit: 6) including Yoruba (Agwuele, 2014), Brazilian Portuguese (Rector, 1986) and in Syuba, spoken in Nepal (Gawne, 2018). Furthermore, work by Chu et al. (2013) attests to the pervasiveness of the PU solely in English; their analysis of 8000 gestures established that two PU gesture variants together accounted for 24% of all gestures.

The variability across instantiations of the gesture is reflected in the variability of terms used to denote it. The variations in terminology reveal the ways in which different authors have sought to capture the variability in both form and usage. So Müller (op.cit), and, following her, McNeill (op.cit) and Streeck (op.cit) use the term ‘Palm Up Open Hand’ to cover a variety of forms in what Müller calls a ‘gesture family’, while Chu et al (op.cit) use the term ‘Palm Revealing’. Kendon (op.cit), examining a wide variety of possible instantiations in an array of contexts, distinguishes the lateral separation of the hands – what he calls ‘Palm Lateral’ – from a movement towards the interlocutor with the hands – what he calls ‘Palm Presentation’. Cooperrider et al (op.cit) make the same distinction but term the same recognisable gestures ‘Palm Up Epistemic’ involving a lateral separation of the hands, ‘used to express epistemic meanings’ (op.cit:4) and ‘Palm Up Presentational’, prototypically involving ‘a movement toward the interlocutor as if “presenting” an idea’ (ibid.) respectively. In the face of this terminological variation, this paper follows Cooperrider et al. in using the term ‘Palm Up’ as both a recognisable and more generic basic term.<sup>4</sup> However, unlike Cooperrider et al., in what follows, no *a priori* functions are attributed to the particular embodied actions in their contexts. The generic term ‘Palm Up’ will, in what follows, be adopted for all the instantiations of this embodied action to capture the central feature of the palms held outwards towards the recipient in a ‘hold’ – but, as we shall see, these are instantiated in a variety of locally situated ways.

Previous studies have sought to establish a core semantics of the PU across its variations. Both Müller and Streeck, following McNeill (1992), have proposed that it embodies the conduit metaphor (outlined in Reddy, 1979) whereby conversation is conceived of as the exchange of concepts through a conduit. From this, Müller suggests that the gesture family thus has a common metaphorical origin: ‘the instrumental action of giving, offering, and of showing [discursive] objects’ (2004:254). Kendon, in contrast, proposes that ‘the semantic theme of these gestures is of the withdrawal of action or of non-intervention’ (2004:248), and, further, that ‘by this gesture the speaker shows

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<sup>4</sup> In some of its instantiations, such as in Figure (2), the palms are less facing upward than vertical and parallel (parallelism is discussed as a central feature of the PU in Section 3.3).

inability or unwillingness to act, inability or unwillingness to offer any suggestions or solutions, to provide meaning or an appropriate interpretation of something' (op.cit: 275). This has affinities with Cooperrider et al's claim that 'the core of the gesture is absence of knowledge' (op.cit:11) – both proposals suggesting a central element of absence or lack of resolution with respect to some issue. In this respect, these contemporary interpretations share common features with the historical accounts detailed in Table 1. Streeck's (op.cit.) proposal that it is a response solicitor – a symbolic 'hand-over' act<sup>5</sup> – adds an interactive dimension that is consistent with these other proposals. Moreover, these characterisations plausibly look as if they could be applied to the embodied actions represented in Figures (1) and (2).

These proposals are plainly grounded in the compositional form of the PU, as captured in the frame-grabs in Figures (1) and (2). Figure (1), moreover, fortuitously captures precisely what the PU is responding to, thus giving us a sense of the sequential context for this gesture – a context to which I return in Section 3.3. However, Figure (2) gives us no such information – and in what follows I show how the positioning of these gestures, not just in SPACE, but also in TIME, illuminates a basic feature of the PU. While a number of recent studies, namely Kendon (op.cit) and Streeck (op.cit) have also examined the PU in the context of different activity types, the current study seeks to bring the technical analytic resources of sequence organization as detailed in Schegloff (2007) to bear on tracking its production in time. In doing so, it addresses the issue of whether there is one basic gesture, or more. That is, the sequential context, as we shall see, has as much a part to play in revealing the basic features of the PU as the compositional form in the face of its variability.

### 3.1 *The Palm Up in sequential context: an initial case*

The data here consist of videoed English interaction in both British and American contexts.<sup>6</sup> The clips are available to examine at: xxx. They comprise interactions from both domestic and institutional settings. The core corpus is the transcripts entitled 'Author: Family 1 or 2' which involves two British families filmed continuously in their homes by 21 cameras across 100 days for a British TV series 'The Family'.<sup>7</sup> The broadcast programmes, on Channel 4 from 2008-2010, consisted of nine episodes edited from the approximately 1500 tapes of footage.<sup>8</sup>

In order to identify the interactional motivation for the deployment of the PU as an adjunct to talk, the first context examined is one in which this embodied action is introduced *after* the verbal action has failed, on its own, to elicit a response. Thus we see very clearly the motivation for the use of the PU. This initial case makes plain that it is deployed subsequent to verbal attempts to secure another's attention. In the following,

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<sup>5</sup> I thank an anonymous reviewer for this observation.

<sup>6</sup> As we have seen, the PU is already attested across many languages and speech communities of the world. Author, 2016a is a comparison of the PU in its sequential context in English and Mexican Spanish interaction.

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Dragonfly Productions for permission to use the data from The Family included here.

<sup>8</sup> The edited nature of the footage clearly raises issues for the analyst, but the data selected here – as should be apparent – contain entire, unedited sequences of talk. It should be evident that, as far as can be established, none of the extracts presented here have been analytically compromised.

Simon has been told by his wife, Jane, that their nineteen-year-old daughter Emily has been spotted in a picture on Facebook wearing a jumper of hers without her permission. Simon undertakes to confront Emily about this, and walks into the living room where she is sitting, summoning her (l.1) as he enters the room, and walking towards her:<sup>9</sup>

(1) (Author: Family 1:xxx. S=Simon (\*), father; E=Emily (+), nineteen year old daughter.)

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1 S EMily:.
2 (1.0)
3 .hhh <YOU'VE BEEN SEEN,> (.) <WEARING YOUR MUM'S CLOTHES,>
e +disattends S. . . . . >
4 [(1.0)+ <ON FACEBOOK.>
e ->+picks up mobile phone in RH, holds it up and gazes at screen->1.7
5 (0.2)
6 S Yes?
7 +(1.0)+
e holding phone-->+,+glances up at TV, then back down to phone screen->
8 S +Yeah?
e ->holding phone, gazing at phone screen-->1.13
9 (0.7)
10 S You're clearly wearing your Mum's clothes, aren't you.
11 (1.0)
12 S Em.+
e ->-+
13 [(1.0)+
e [-->+++turns eye gaze from phone to S, now standing opposite her+
14 S → ##Em!
→ *PU-->
15 S Come [on.]*
----->*
16 E [Why you shouting at me.
17 S W'l- u- let's just have a conversation...

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After his initial summons, Simon launches his accusation at lls. 3-4: 'You've been seen wearing your mum's clothes on Facebook'. In the course of his turn, after '...your mum's clothes', Emily picks up her phone, glances at the TV and then back at her phone, in a display of studied disattention (see Goffman, 1961 on 'civil inattention'), holding her posture as she looks at her phone. Simon pursues confirmation of his accusation at l.6 and l.8, and, getting no response from Emily, takes another tack, with a partial reformulation of his original accusation, this time with an appended tag question in a further attempt to mobilize response (Stivers and Rossano, 2010). To no avail; Emily continues to look down at her phone, whereupon Simon reissues the summons he had originally produced in l.1 but this time in the diminutive and so evidently beseeching form: 'Em!' (l.12). It is at this point that Emily finally turns her eyegaze to Simon. As mutual eyegaze is achieved, Simon raises his arms up and out to the side in a PU (l.14), and reissues the summons with more emphasis – 'Em!' – at the point at which his arms come to rest in the PU configuration. He holds the PU as he further pursues a response:

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<sup>9</sup>Transcription conventions follow the transcription system for embodied conduct developed by Lorenza Mondada, accessible at: <https://www.lorenzamondada.net/multimodal-transcription>  
Embodied conduct for each speaker, following Mondada's conventions, is indicated with a specific symbol, e.g. (\*) or (+) on each transcript.

'Come on.' (l.15) (see Figure 3; the point at which the PU is produced is marked with # and when simultaneous with talk, the talk is marked in bold on all figures).



Figure 3  
l. 14: #Em!

The PU is thus launched just before the talk is produced. The talk and the embodied action are thus produced to be visibly brought off together, with the gesture launched slightly in advance of the talk and so, in its visibility, adumbrating the trouble that the verbal turn formulates. What is clear from this instance is that the PU is used in conjunction with talk at a juncture at which successive attempts to mobilize a response from Emily have failed. It is on the sixth opportunity passed up by Emily (at lls. 2, 5, 7, 9, 11 and 13) that Simon produces the PU in conjunction with talk. The progressivity, or forward movement, of the sequence has, up to that point, been repeatedly stalled by Emily's resistance. Schegloff characterises progressivity in the following way:

Moving from one element to a hearably-next-one with nothing intervening is the embodiment of, and the measure of, progressivity. Should something intervene between some element and what is hearable as a/the next one due – should something violate or interfere with their contiguity, whether next sound, next word, or next turn – it will be heard as qualifying the progressivity of the talk... (2007:15)

A response from Emily at the first opportunity after Simon's l.1 would thus have embodied progressivity. In this light, we can see that the characteristic hold in Simon's PU at lls. 14-15 in response to her resistance iconically embodies the freeze in the progressivity of the sequence: Simon's deployment of the PU thereby brings it to a temporary halt. In this respect, we can see how the hold is a central feature of the PU. This relates it to both the bodily holds identified by Sikveland and Ogden (2012) deployed at interactional junctures where understanding has yet to be achieved, and by Floyd et al. (2016) in repair sequences – both contexts in which progressivity is temporarily halted. A central and visible feature of the composition of the PU can thus be seen to be derived from its sequential position, as part of a responsive, rather than initial, action.

### 3.2 *The Palm Up in Pursuits*

That the use of the PU is not idiosyncratic to this episode of interaction, and indeed a generic resource across contexts, is evidenced by the following three extracts, which all involve pursuits by the producer of the PU.

In the following, Jane and Simon are lying side-by-side in bed, having had an argument with Emily ('she', l. 1) earlier in the evening.

(2) Author: Family 1:5:44. S=Simon (\*); J=Jane (+).

1 J \*She is goin' to spoil my week.  
 S \*Yawning-->1.3  
 2 (0.6)  
 3 J Cos I'm gonna be fighting with\* \*'er now.  
 S -->\*  
 S \*leans over to bedside table->  
 4 S \*Don't\* say it.  
 \*switches off bedside lamp\*-->  
 5 J What.  
 6 (1.1)  
 7 S What you're about to say.  
 8 J Which is what.  
 9 (1.8)  
 10 J ↑Which is what.  
 11 (0.8)  
 12 S HHHHHH  
 s \*with RH reaches with palm out over J's body\*  
 13 J +↑what+ am I about to say.  
 +pulls her RH up as S reaches towards it+  
 14 (0.2)  
 15 S °Don't say it°.  
 16 J No, °what am I about to say°.  
 17 (3)  
 18 J→ +Wh#at+ was I gonna say.  
 → + PU +  
 19 (2)  
 20 S hhh °Oh, dear.°  
 21 s Pulls back duvet; moves to get out of bed  
 22 hhh °You were gonna say° (2) she needs to leave home.

In response to Jane's pessimistic prediction concerning the nature of her interactions with Emily (lls.1-3), Simon at l.4 produces a turn that is formatted as a directive. In its epistemic presumption and anaphoric reference to something not yet established, it is formatted as if 'it' is something Jane will be able to recognise, but in fact 'it' is provocative, and clearly designed to prompt repair initiation – which Jane does at l.5. Simon's response to this has the form of a clarification, but instead constitutes a further, equally opaque reference – 'what you're about to say' – that does nothing, in fact, to clarify. Jane pursues this at lines 8 and 10, Simon producing nothing in response but a sigh. At l.13 Jane attempts once more, this time producing a question that reproduces, in question form, the format of Simon's opaque response in l.7: 'What am I about to say?'. In response, Simon simply repeats his initiating turn, which Jane rejects 'No' – at l.16, with an appended repetition of her question. After Simon continues to resist, Jane opens out her palms and bounces them down as she launches her pursuit at l.18, with the PU



and bounce down emphasising her production of 'What' in the slightly reformulated version of her question, 'What was I gonna say' (Figure 2). After another pause, Simon finally moves towards a compliant response, which he finally delivers at l.22. In one respect, the PU produced by Jane here differs slightly in its composition from that produced by Simon in (1) in that it is delivered from a semi-recumbent position, as Jane lies beside Simon. Thus the arm extension that characterised the PU in (1) from a standing position is not possible here, and the arms are bent at the elbow. But in other respect – that of sequential position – the PU is recognisably the same, as in (1), this sequence shows one speaker vigorously pursuing a response after visible resistance; in fact in both cases, the PU accompanies the sixth opportunity provided to respond.

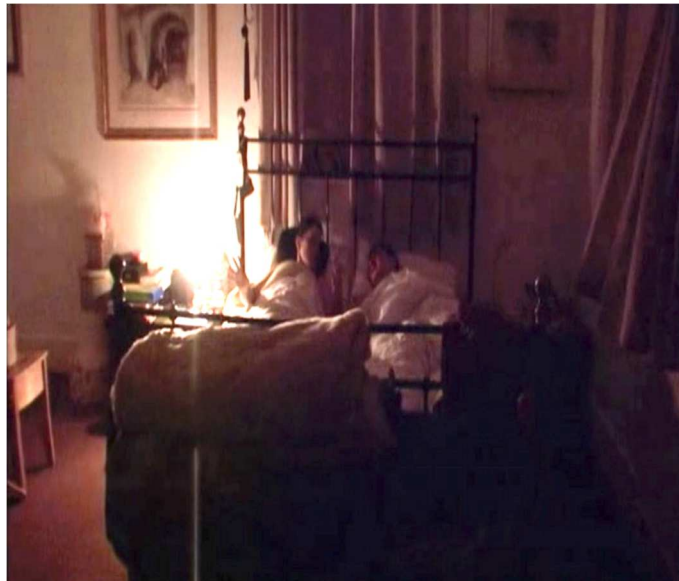


Figure 4  
l.18: Wh#**at** was I gonna say

If these two cases show the PU being used successfully to accompany a verbal pursuit – that is, by finally prompting a response from a recipient – the following cases show firstly the extent to which participants may go in vigorously pursuing a response, and also the limits of the PU as an upgrade to a verbal pursuit. The first, captured in Figure (2), comes from a notorious case broadcast on British television: the questioning by the journalist Jeremy Paxman of the then-Home Secretary Michael Howard.<sup>10</sup> Paxman here asks Howard whether he had instructed Derek Lewis, the Director-General of the Prison Service, to dismiss a prison governor, John Marriott, and, as Lewis claimed, threatened to overrule him if he did not do so:

(3) (13 May, 1997, BBC2 Newsnight; H=Michael Howard, Home Secretary; P=Jeremy Paxman (\*), interviewer)

1	H	...Mr Marriott was NOT <u>suspended</u> (1) I was entitled to
2		express my views (.) I was entitled to be consulted
3	P	Did you threaten [to overrule him
4	H	[I- I was not entitled

<sup>10</sup> For an analysis of Howard's resistance in the face of questioning, see Clayman and Heritage, 2002:256-7).

5 to instruct Derek Lewis and I did not instruct  
6 him .hh [an the-  
7 P [Did you threaten to overrule [him  
8 H [The<  
9 truth of the matter i:s th't (.) Mister  
10 Marriott was not suspend[ed. I did not-  
11 P [Did you threaten to  
12 =[overrule him.  
13 H =[I did not overrule Der[ek Lewis.  
14 P [Did you threaten to  
15 overrule h[im.  
16 H [I took advice on what I could or  
17 could not do: :...  
...  
... ((three more rounds of questioning omitted))  
32 H I have accounted (0.5) for my decision to dismiss  
33 Derek Lewis [in grea:t (0.2) detail before the House=  
34 P [Did you threaten to overrule him.  
35 H =of Commons.  
36 P I note you're not answering the question of whether  
37 you threa[tened to overrule him.  
38 H [Well .uhh the- thee important aspect of this,  
39 which it's very clear to bear in mind, [hhh is this.  
40 P [I'm sorry I'm going  
41 to be \*frightfully\* rude \*but [but- I- I'm s(h)o(h)rry, it's=  
\*moves forward\* \*places elbows onto desk\*  
42 H [Yes, you c'n- you c'n put=  
43 P→ =a \*quite-\* straight #\*yes\* or no answer, did you threaten to=  
→ \*hands out\* \*PU\*----->1.47  
44 H =the question and I will give you- I will give you an answer.  
45 P =overrule him.  
46 (1.5)  
47 H I discussed this matter with Derek Lewis. (1.5) I gave him the=  
p ---->\*  
48 benefit of my opinion...

As this transcript makes clear, Paxman produces essentially the same question, requiring a yes-no response eight times without success before, on the ninth occasion, using another formulation (l.36-7): 'I note you're not answering the question of whether you threatened to overrule him'. As Howard launches (l.38), in the midst of the question, a response which, as the 'Well'-preface indicates, will again not be straightforward (Lerner and Schegloff, 2009), Paxman takes another approach, with an agentive apology (Heritage and C. Raymond, 2016) as a preface to an apparent warning 'I'm going to be frightfully rude'. As he reiterates the apology and then produces the declarative observation 'it's a straight yes or no answer', he leans forward in his chair, placing his elbows on the desk and, at 'yes', opening out his palms into a PU configuration (l.43). This PU is held until the end of Howard's first responsive turn-constructional unit (l.47) – and it is clear that, once again, Howard will not be producing a 'yes' or 'no' response to Paxman's question. Paxman goes on to pursue the question twice more – so producing essentially the same question twelve times, before Paxman finally abandons the pursuit. So while the PU is clearly used here as a resource to upgrade the verbal attempt to extract a pertinent response, we see in no uncertain terms its limits in the face of a recipient who will not be deterred from responding to the question in his own terms.



Figure 5

1.44: 'quite- straight #yes or no answer'

If the previous cases showed one participant pursuing a response from another, the following shows two participants aligning in an attempt to persuade a third to comply. Tindy, the twenty-something son of Arvinder and Poli, is watching the television, with a remote control in his hand, while having his head massaged by Poli; Arvinder sits to one side in the living room.

(4) Author, Family 2: A=Arvinder, father; P=Poli (\*), mother; T=Tindy, son)

1 A Tindy can you:, can you: (.) put the volume down on that,  
p >>\*massages Tindy's head--->1.23  
2 (2.1)  
3 A Put the volume down.  
4 (0.2)  
5 A I:>::\*ve been working:: bloody: for forty-eight hours.  
6 (2.4)  
7 P Put it down a bit more, Tindy.  
8 (0.4)  
9 A Put it down a bit more,  
10 (0.2)  
11 A Go on.  
12 (7.6)  
13 A ↓I told you to put it down.°  
14 (1.1)  
15 T I have!  
16 (3)  
17 A ((Punjabi)) A karde yaar thora [jiya  
Do it mate a bit  
C'mon mate, do it a bit  
18 T [I have! Look I'm doin' it  
19 now=I can just about hear it (it's the only reason ----)  
20 (.)  
21 A Just put it do::wn.  
22 P → ((Punjabi)) thora jiya \*khat kar de\* ((English)) #\*I\* can't hear=  
A bit turn it down  
Turn it down a bit  
→ \*moves hands off head\* \*PU\*-----> 1.25  
23 P [=you why-

24 T [YOU can stop talking and then #\*(I'll- [[we'll-)  
p \*moves from held PU to raise RH in  
hold as if about to hit Tindy--->1.27

25 A [[THEN

26 PUT THE FUCKING THING DOWN!!  
p -->\*

27 (0.4)

28 T I'm puttin' [it- (look how) low it is!

29 A [NOW!!

After Arvinder's request (l.1) to Tindy is met with no response, Arvinder issues a directive (l.3) and an account (l.5), perhaps in a bid to appeal to Tindy's sympathy. But there is no discernable lowering of the volume, although Poli, in collaborating with Arvinder at l.7, proposes that he has already partially complied: 'Put it down a bit more, Tindy'. That there is no evident compliance from Tindy is clear from what follows. At lines 9, 11 and 13 Arvinder urges him three more times, whereupon at l.15 Tindy claims compliance: 'I have!' (see Kent, 2012 on incipient compliance). But that this is not sufficient for Arvinder is displayed in Arvinder's next turn, which switches into Punjabi: 'C'mon mate, do it a bit' (see Raymond, 2018 on code-switching as a resource). This is met by Tindy with a repetition of his earlier claim and then an appeal to the evidence: 'Look I'm doin' it now...'. But Arvinder pursues the matter with a bald directive: 'Just put it down'. At this, Poli herself switches to Punjabi to make her own appeal: 'Turn it down a bit', and, as she does so, she moves her hands from Tindy's head into a PU (Figure 6), which she holds as she switches into English with 'I can't hear you' (ll.22-3):

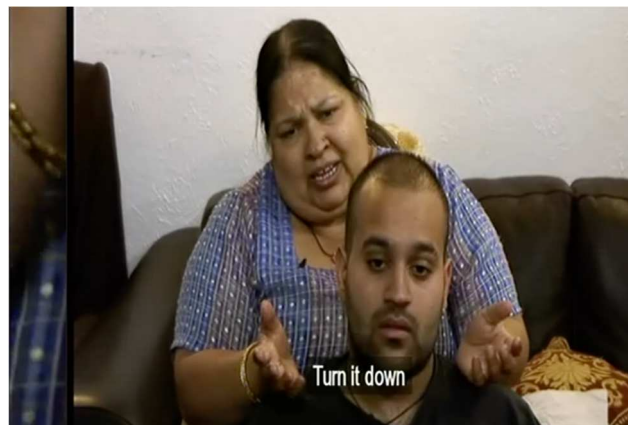


Figure 6  
1.22:#I can't hear you

This is the tenth appeal to Tindy, and, as in the previous cases, the PU underlines the verbal pursuit. It is at this point that Tindy undertakes to respond with more than just a claim of compliance: an accusation that, in turn, is designed to counter the implicit accusation of non-compliance against him. At the point at which his counter-accusation becomes identifiable as such, Poli, having held the PU from the launch of her turn at l.22, moves her right hand up and back out as if to smack him, then lowering her hand slightly but still keeping it raised in a hold, as if to maintain the threat of hitting him, constituting herself as the mother admonishing her child for talking back to his parents (Figure 6a).



Figure 6(a)  
1.24: then (#I'll- we'll-)

What this embodied action makes evident is that the non-verbal threat is deployed in the context where successive pleas have failed – underwriting the use of the embodied action as one interactional recourse in the context of verbal failure. Of course, as Poli's hand is still raised, Arvinder produces a yet more dramatic response, leaning forward with the shouted directive 'THEN PUT THE FUCKING THING DOWN!' (lls. 25-6) that is then met, after a pause, by yet another claim of compliance by Tindy that is intercepted by Arvinder's yelled 'NOW!' (l.29). We thus see in this extract how embodied action in general may be used to upgrade a verbal action. Furthermore, across all four previous extracts, we have the same recognisable compositional features of the PU produced from a variety of standing/sitting/semi-recumbent positions, with or without arms extended. These all show the PU – with varying degrees of success – deployed in the sequential context of successive verbal pursuits that have failed to secure compliance from another.

Taken together, these cases show the necessity of examining the PU not as a gesture affiliated to a single action, but as produced in the context of an entire sequence of actions. So, for example, Simon's PU accompanying 'Em!' cannot but be understood as a subsequent, rather than an initial, summons. In this light, consideration of the composition of the PU – the 'hold' at its apex, produced in conjunction with the turn – illuminates an important aspect of its position as a subsequent action. For the hold iconically reflects the disruption to the straightforward progressivity of the sequence from first to second pair part.

### 3.3 *The Palm Up in challenges*

Having seen how this particular embodied action is introduced into the context of talk to underwrite verbal action, we now examine the PU in another context – one where, in contrast, the embodied action is introduced at the first opportunity. The vehemence characterising the use of the PU in pursuing a response is mobilised in the deployment of the PU in the environment of challenges. The following is a case in point, involving fourteen-year-old Tom and his parents Jane and Simon. There have been conflicts over

Tom's bedtime and his school reports have suggested that his schoolwork has been suffering from too many late nights. As Tom enters the dining room where parents are sitting at the table, Simon, looking at a letter held in his left hand, extends his right hand towards the other side of the table in a held posture as if to invite him to take a chair:

5. Author, F1:3:24ff; S=Simon (\*); J=Jane (+); T=Tom, 14-year-old son(⊥)

*((S and J are sitting at the dining table. J is writing on a piece of paper. S is reading a piece of paper in his LH. As T crosses the dining room, passing the dining table, S extends his R arm, palm out and pointing opposite him to a seat. S's eyes stay fixed on the paper as he speaks.))*

1 S: ↑Seat ↑please Tom⊥  
t: >>walks through dining room towards living room-->1.4

2 ⊥(0.8)⊥  
t: ⊥passes the dining table at which S and J are seated-->

3 J: +To:m?+ ((Croakily))  
+looks up from paper on which she is writing+

4 \*(0.2)\* + ⊥ (0.2) ⊥  
s: \*RH moves from indicating seat to grasp paper\*  
t: ⊥comes to a halt and starts to turn⊥

5 S: .hhh To:m,  
6 (?): .hhhhh

7 ⊥ (0.2) ⊥  
t: ⊥ stands still facing parents, head tilted to L ⊥

8 J: +Sit+ do:wn.  
+Head bob+

9 (0.6) + ⊥ # (0.2)  
t: → ⊥raises arms out to side in PU-->1.11

10 T: → Why.

11 J: -->⊥Sit down.+ ⊥  
+ looks back down at paper+  
t: -->⊥ ⊥ starts to walk back towards table ⊥

As Simon holds his right hand out and directs Tom to sit, Tom continues to walk through the dining room towards the living room, displaying no attention to Simon's injunction. Jane, aligning with Simon, then pursues Tom with a summons; Tom, reaching the far side of the room, turns, and, as he does so, Simon produces another summons (l. 5). As Tom stands, looking at Jane, she directs him to sit down. At this, Tom raises his arms up and out to each side, turning his palms forwards, in a PU (Figure 7), and just after he starts to do so, launches a turn that is produced at the apex of the embodied action, just as the palms are raised out in a hold: 'Why'. As in extract (1), the PU very clearly here heralds the trouble formulated by the verbal turn.



Figure 7:  
1.9 #

The association here between the verbal challenge and its adumbrating gesture is evident. But, just as it is evident that the PU, when produced alongside a verbal pursuit, has its interactional origins further back in the sequence, here, too, we can identify Tom's challenging PU-marked 'Why' as itself responsive to a prior challenge – Jane's directive. The resistance embodied in the PU might be most clearly represented schematically here. Below we see the sequential organization of a two-part adjacency pair sequence in the context of compliance:

First pair part (FPP):	Sit down.
Second pair part (SPP):	<i>(Compliance)</i>

The sequential organization (Schegloff, 2007) of the PU sequence in (5), however, is as follows (where FPP<sub>b</sub> indicates a base first pair part, and FPP<sub>i</sub> indicates an inserted first pair part):

J:	FPP <sub>b</sub>	Sit down.
T: →	FPP <sub>i</sub>	Why.
J:	FPP <sub>b</sub>	<u>Sit</u> down.
T:	SPP <sub>b</sub>	<i>(Compliance)</i>

Tom's 'Why' with its associated PU, then, is itself produced as responsive – more specifically, as what Schegloff identifies as the first pair part of a pre-second insert expansion. Of pre-second inserts generally, Schegloff remarks that they 'look forward, ostensibly to establish the resources necessary to implement the second pair part which is pending' (2007:106). So 'Why', inserted after the first pair part, temporarily displaces the second pair part that is due. It is in this context that we can see once again the significance of the 'hold' element: as with the environment of pursuits, the progressivity of the sequence in this context is being halted. There is no straightforward progression from first to second pair part and the hold once again iconically embodies this lack of progression.

Other instances of the PU in the environment of challenges show exactly the same sequential position of the gesture as a subsequent, rather than initial action. In this sequence, Arvinder, has summoned and directed Poli to get some 'mehndi' (Punjabi for



'hair dye') for him in preparation for their elder son, Sunny's, wedding. At this, Sunny proposes to his mother (l.14) that she dye her hair as well:

(6) P=Poli, Sunny, Poli's elder son (€).

```

1 S      Why don't you: do your hair as well. (.) Mehndi [(----)
                                     Hair dye
2 P
3        wanna put the mehndi on=
4 S      =It's good for your €head. As€ [well.
        >>Left elbow on sideboard; €fingers of LH up and down€
5 P      [Okay, I'm gonna
        €try a little bit.
        s      €RH moves to R ear and scratches in ear--->1.7
6        (.)
7 S→    W'- y- €how you gonna #€try a little bit;€
        →      ----->€ RH moves to   €      PU      €

```

Poli initially resists Sunny's proposal (lls.2-3) but then relents, suggesting that she will 'try a little bit'. At this, Sunny launches a question; as he is doing so, he has a finger in his right ear, but at the launch of the question on 'How' he moves his right hand down and into an PU (Figure 8). While the prior exemplar of the PU showed Tom standing with his arms out in the PU, in this case the PU producer, Sunny, is seated, with his left elbow up on a sideboard. As with the previous exemplars of an PU in sitting position (in extracts (2) – (4)), the arms are not extended, but bent at the elbow. His left hand is thus constrained, so the PU he produces is shaped to fit the environment at that point. What this exemplar makes clear is the extent to which parallelism is a defining characteristic of the PU; given that Sunny's left arm and hand are constrained by their position on the sideboard, Sunny moves his right arm and hand into an PU position that parallels those of his left arm and hand, that is, with the hands recognisably open but in a somewhat cupped position (Figure 8):



Figure 8:  
1.7: 'How you gonna #try a little bit'

Plainly his right arm and hand are not constrained in the same way as his left, and so could have been extended – but in producing the PU, Sunny clearly works to



keep the parallelism of shape. Thus the exact instantiation of the PU is shaped by its producer in accordance with its physical environment.

The question that the PU accompanies – ‘how you gonna try a little bit’ – like Tom’s ‘Why’ in extract (5), is itself a challenge to Poli’s assertion that she can ‘try a little bit’ of hair dye (as opposed, presumably, to the standard procedure of covering her whole head with it). The verbal challenge in this case is embodied in the repetition of nearly the entire prior turn of Poli’s, such repetitions being a standard means of launching disagreements (see, e.g. Heritage, 2002). But note that Poli’s turn, with its somewhat grudging assertion (‘a little bit’) is itself produced after Poli’s initial resistance to Sunny’s original proposal. Thus seen in its sequential context it is clear that Sunny – the producer of the PU – initiated the sequence; he, in a real sense, is invested in the outcome. In the same way, Tom’s ‘Why’ in (5) is responsive to his parents’ directives – which have their own origins in Tom’s original behaviour.

One final case of an PU challenge underwrites this sequential analysis. In the following sequence, Shane, who has been teasing his girlfriend Vivien, about her cooking as they and their guests start to eat the dinner she has prepared, launches a question to their guests, Nancy and Michael (l.1). Both undertake to respond – as it turns out, at the same time – but in different ways (lls. 3 and 4):

(7) Chicken Dinner. S=Shane (\*); N=Nancy, M=Michael

```

1  S          *Are those peas any good?
    >>pointing at peas on M's plate--->1.4
    >>gazing towards M --->1.9
2          (0.7)
3  N          [They're good ↑for ya,]=
4  M          [I don' know I hav ]en' *looked ↓at ['em. ] I ] haven'
    S          --->*
5  S          [Theh g]ood] faw you;
6  S          Who knows: .
7  S→        Wuh wuh u-#*whaddayou, en authority?
    S→        *PU--->1.9
8  N          Huh huh [huh
9  S          [Huh?*
    ----->*
    ----->*

```

While Nancy, fixing on the nutritional value of the peas, produces an assessment, ‘They’re good for ya’, Michael disavows any knowledge and resists proffering an assessment: ‘I don’t know I haven’ looked at them’. Shane initiates repair on Nancy’s turn with an interrogatively-intoned repeat (Robinson and Kevoe-Feldman, 2010), with an appended ‘who knows’ which queries the basis of this knowledge. Shane then produces a direct, jokey challenge specifically to Nancy: ‘whaddayou, en authority?’, opening out his hands into an PU as he does so (Figure 9).



Figure 9:  
1.7: '#Whaddayou, en authority?'

Once again we see that the challenge accompanying the PU is in response to a turn – Nancy's 'they're good for ya' – which is itself somewhat resistant to an initial action produced by the PU producer. Instead of producing a type-conforming 'yes' or 'no' response (Raymond, 2003) to Shane's yes/no question at 1.1 'They're good for ya' dissents from the terms of the question. So as in the two previous extracts, it is clear that the sequence has its origins in the PU producer's action. Indeed, that this is generic to the production of the PU across contexts is evident from the recognisable embodied action from the distinct activity type shown in Figure 1. Here, the PU producer, Pepe, is clearly responding to the referee's red card – which of course is itself prompted by Pepe's action.

Across these very different contexts (5) to (7) it is possible to identify a number of generic features of the PU challenge. In each case it accompanies a first-pair part ('Why' / 'How you gonna try a little bit' / 'Whaddayou, an authority?'), which is itself responsive to a prior action. With respect to the structure of the sequence in which it occurs, Tom's 'Why' in (5) is in fact the first-pair part of a pre-second insert expansion; the others are not. But in each case the producer of the PU thereby brings the onward progression of the sequence to a halt. Whereas in the context of pursuits, the PU is produced in response to the stalling of progressivity in a sequence, in challenges the PU and its affiliated turn together bring the onward progressivity of the sequence to a halt.

#### ***4. Discussion: variability and visibility in the Palm Up***

We have seen the PU implemented in two main environments: that of pursuits and challenges. Bringing together a number of cases in which the sequential contexts are similar in this way has allowed us to see both the commonalities and variation across the cases. The variation was initially represented by Figures (1) and (2) which showed distinct embodied actions, the former produced from a standing

position with the arms out to the side of the body, and the latter while seated, with the hands held outwards as the elbows remain on a desk. The core feature of these embodied actions is that the palms are held in parallel outwards towards the recipient and held static, iconically displaying a halt in the progressivity of the interactional sequence. As noted earlier, a number of earlier commentators have proposed that the variation across the realisations of the PU in actual sequences warrants the use of distinctive terminology for each interactional function. However, what this study has shown is that the variation across the interactional realisations is less to do with function *per se* than local material context. That is, the core feature of the PU is the same, but as a practice its realisation is sensitive to the material context into which it is produced. So, on the face of it, Figures (1) and (2) show the PU being used in implementing different actions: in the former, a challenge, and in the latter, a pursuit. But this is in itself, of course, no warrant for naming them, e.g. the PU challenge or the PU pursuit, because examining other cases suggests that it is not in the compositional form of these embodied actions that their functions are to be found. So while Figure (1) shows a PU used to implement a challenge that, in its amplitude, has similarities with the challenge in Figure (7), it is dissimilar to the other challenges we see in Figures (8) and (9), which are of far lesser amplitude, and do not involve arms raised out to the sides. Indeed, in its form alone, Figure (1), a challenge, most resembles Figure (3): a pursuit. Thus, beyond the central features of the exposed palm, the parallelism of the hands and the hold, form is not tied to action. Form, is, rather, shaped in its specific instantiations by the local material environment: that in Figure (4), a pursuit, is produced by a speaker sitting in bed beside another; that in Figure (9), a challenge, is produced by a speaker sitting between two others. That in Figure (8) is produced by a speaker who already has one elbow on a sideboard, who, as we have noted, brings off the PU in such a way as to explicitly maintain the parallelism of the hand shapes. In all of these cases, the PU is shaped by the constraints of their material environments, where producing a PU with the amplitude of, e.g. those in Figures (1), (3) or (7) – those from a standing position with enough surrounding space to raise the arms straight out to the side – would be impossible. Moreover, there is a correlation between the PU produced from a standing position and the arms being raised straight outwards with the hands either facing the recipient (as largely in Figures (3) and (5)) or inclined upwards (as in Figure (1)). While sitting, the PU is produced with arms bent at the elbow and a more minimal swivel of the hands outwards, such that in many of the cases we have seen (namely Figures (4), (5), (6), (8) and (9)), the hands are facing each other rather than facing the recipient. It is proposed here that the raise of the arms out to the sides while standing has to do with the visibility of the embodied action itself. The minimality of that displayed in, for example, Figure (9) – constrained in its implementation by the speaker's location between two other participants – is made possible by the close proximity of all the participants. The amplitude of the raise of the arms to the sides is, by the same token, made possible by the relative distance between the participants when the PU producer is in a standing position; in Figures (1), (3) and (7) the raise of the arms up and outwards renders the PU visible in a way that the more minimal pivot of the hands out from a sitting position is not.

While it is a truism that embodied actions are predicated on visibility, is not of course the case that they are necessarily produced in such a way that they *are* in fact

visible to their recipients. In Figure (6) we see such a case: Poli is seated behind Tindy as she massages his head. He thus has no visual access to her beyond what is available in peripheral vision – the extent to which he is able to see her hands as they move from his head into the PU is not clear from Figure 6<sup>11</sup> – but clearly the fact that she suspends her massaging and moves her hands off his head will be sensorily available to him (see Cekaite, 2015, Mondada, 2016 on touch in interaction). Figure 9 also shows a speaker addressing a non-gazing recipient, Nancy (although once again, she will have Shane in her peripheral vision). What such cases show us is that, while embodied actions are designed to be visible, they are not necessarily visible to those to whom the PU is a response, but are always potentially available to those who may also be present (in Figure 6, Arvinder; in Figure 9, Vivien and Michael). A final exemplar, represented by Figures 10(a) and 10(b) provides some more evidence to this effect. As Emily arrives home after a day at work, Simon opens the door to her with proclamatory ‘Ta da:::!’ Emily walks through the door, making no eye contact with Simon, producing only a minimal ‘Hi’ as she passes through to the dining room on her right (Figure 10 (a)). Simon’s response to Emily’s disregard is to produce a wordless PU (Figure 10 (b)). Clearly, as Emily is now in another room, this action is not visible to her. It is clearly impossible to determine the extent to which Simon may be designing the PU in the full awareness that he is being filmed,<sup>12</sup> but the central point remains: the PU is designed for visibility, even if its target does not see it, and to that extent it is a wholly interactional object.



Figure 10 (a)

Figure 10 (b)

## 5. Conclusion

The aim in this paper has been to use multimodal Conversation Analysis to examine a phenomenon that has been fairly extensively studied – the Palm Up gesture – and bring to attention hitherto overlooked aspects of its use. Across a variety of contexts with a range of participants, we have seen the PU implemented in two main action environments: pursuits and challenges. In doing so, it has been possible to identify those features of the practice that are core to its recognisability

<sup>11</sup> In Figure 6a there is even less evidence that Tindy can see Poli’s right hand as it moves up into a position as if to slap.

<sup>12</sup> Footage was filmed on remote-controlled wall-mounted cameras over 100 days.

and to establish what this analysis implies for our understanding of the action it implements. We recall that research on the PU has largely focused on: a) its compositional elements and b) its possible meanings. In both cases, it has been suggested that distinctions in composition or meaning warrant the use of distinct terminology, such as (in the case of the former) Palm lateral vs. Palm presentation (Kendon, 2004) or (in the case of the latter) Palm Up epistemic vs. Palm Up presentational (Cooperrider et al, 2018). The current study proposes, in contrast, that such distinctions are unwarranted, because it has identified one core practice, which is shaped to its local material environment; this local context is literally what shapes the realisation of the PU on each occasion of its use. That core practice consists of the rotation of the palms upwards or outwards towards the recipient, with – if standing – a raise of the arms outwards away from the body. These are then momentarily held static in parallel, iconically displaying a temporary halt to the progressivity of the interactional sequence. In this light it is understandable that research concerned with the core semantics of the PU has come to focus on deficit, absence or lack of resolution: what this research shows, examining the pragmatic implementation of the PU in sequential context, is that the lack of resolution occurs at the sequential level. So for example, the hitherto common proposal that the PU is mobilised in questions or requests might, on the face of it, be supported by an example such as that shown in extract 5, Figure 7 – Tom’s ‘Why’, if considered as a stand-alone utterance. But, as we have seen, when we examine the sequence in which Tom’s turn is embedded, the question form here is in fact responsive to a prior action, the directive ‘Sit down’, and so the question form here is implementing a challenge. Indeed, as we have seen, in both the contexts of pursuits and challenges, the PU is essentially *responsive* in the actions it implements. Previous studies proposing that the PU is a request or question overlook the fact that, sequentially, a request is an initiating action, and moreover that a question form may implement any number of actions, from a repair to a directive (Author, 2016b). The methodological implications for the study of gesture and embodied action are clear. A focus, not simply on the turn to which the embodied action is attached, but in the first instance on the interactional sequences in which they are produced, is necessary to identify what they serve to do. Paradoxically, it is the contexts that yield the pragmatics.

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