The anatomy of first-time and subsequent business-to-business 'cold' calls

	Name	Affiliation	Address	Email address
Authors	Bogdana Humă (corresponding author)	School of Education, Language, and Psychology York St John University	Lord Mayor's Walk, YO31 7EX, UK	b.huma@yorksj.ac.uk
	Elizabeth Stokoe	School of Social Sciences and Humanities Loughborough University	Epinal Way, LE11 3TU, UK	e.h.stokoe@lboro.ac.uk

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Abstract

This paper examines business-to-business ‘cold’ calls between salespeople and prospective clients. Drawing on 150 audio-recorded interactions, we use conversation analysis to identify the overarching structural organisation and constituent activities in first-time and subsequent ‘cold’ calls, a distinction that emerged from participants’ orientation to their relationship history or lack thereof. The paper reveals how structural features of telephone conversations, such as identification sequences and ‘reason for calling’, are adapted to achieve local interactional results and that these conversational microstructures are consequential for the outcome of the telephone call and, ultimately, a company’s bottom line. Data are British English.

Introduction

‘Cold’ calls – unsolicited commercial telephone calls initiated by salespeople – are a pervasive component of business-to-consumer (B2C) as well as business-to-business (B2B) selling. Depending on the industry, B2C ‘cold’ calls aim to sell products and services over the phone or establish initial contact with the prospective customer (‘prospect’) that may eventually lead to a sale (Bone, 2006). The latter non-sale ‘cold’ calls are typical for B2B settings, where selling usually involves step-by-step negotiations over potentially lengthy periods of time (Prus, 1989). In the initial phase of B2B selling, salespeople may call companies multiple times before securing a first face-to-face meeting. While we know little about *first-time* B2B ‘cold’ calls, we know even less about *subsequent* B2B ‘cold’ calls, made at a point where the prospect has been presumably contacted before but has not yet agreed to a face-to-face meeting.

Examining B2B ‘cold’ calls using conversation analysis (CA), this paper aims to explore the participant-oriented and participant-constituted features of first-time and subsequent unsolicited commercial calls to businesses. In the literature, practitioners differentiate between 'cold' and 'warm' calls, the latter label referring to interactions with prospects who have indicated that they are interested in buying the product (Bendremer, 2003). However, this distinction does not map onto the first-time and subsequent calls we have examined.

Both 'cold' and 'warm' calls are usually first-time interactions, while the subsequent calls in our corpus could not be classified as 'warm' because prospects do not exhibit nor are they treated as having shown an interest in a commercial transaction. We are used to thinking about 'cold' calls as only the first unsolicited encounter between salesperson and prospect, but, as it turns out, subsequent sales calls continue to be 'cold' in the sense that the pursued prospects continue to display reluctance to engage in a commercial transaction.

Even though, the salespeople and prospects in our data do not use terms such as 'cold', 'warm', 'first-time' or 'subsequent' to refer to their encounters, we observed that speakers oriented to each other either as strangers having a 'first' conversation or as acquaintances who have interacted before (Hopper & Drummond, 1992; Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984). However, rather than assume that such orientations map onto some exogenous 'fact' about prior contact, we regard the 'cold-ness', 'first-time-ness' or 'subsequent-ness' of the calls as interactional achievements. Indeed, one resource that salespersons use in subsequent calls is the invocation of a prior relationship with the prospect, who may or may not agree that they have spoken before. We will show that and how participants collaboratively (and often implicitly) constructed their interaction as either a subsequent or a first conversation. Moreover, we will highlight how establishing a history of prior interactions is consequential for the outcome of the call. This paper builds on a growing body of CA research of 'cold' calls that has so far mainly examined B2C conversations (except for ANONYMISED) to which we now turn.

CA studies of ‘cold’ calls have so far focused on the design of key sequences of action within these commercial encounters, without providing a comprehensive overview of complete ‘cold’ calls. Examining salesperson-initiated assessment sequences, Mazeland (2004) showed that and how they were treated by the prospects as having implications for potential future commercial transactions. De Stefani (2018) made a similar observation based on the investigation of unsolicited calls from banks to current clients. Focusing on two types of invitations to meetings to discuss the provision of new financial services, he showed how participants orient to the commercial goal of the calls.

Both De Stefani (2018) and Mazeland (2004) examined calls in which prospects are invited to face-to-face meetings with a consultant, but not all ‘cold’ calls have this aim. According to Freed (2010), the objectives of the ‘cold’ calls she studied – made by representatives of a telecommunication company to existing customers – comprised selling services as well as improving customer relations. By contrast, in Rothe’s (2011) study of insurance sales calls, prospects were talked into purchasing the products on offer then-and-there as they were exclusively available over the phone, leaving little room for ‘small talk’.

This review of CA studies of ‘cold’ calls leads to three conclusions. First, regardless of their institutionally mandated objectives, most ‘cold’ calls are oriented to, at some point in the interaction, as being in service of a commercial transaction. This observation challenges the mainstream understanding of ‘cold’ calls as a technique for identifying potential customers as well as qualifying them; that is, establishing whether contacted prospects need, want, and are able to afford the proffered products (Jolson & Wotruba, 1992).

Second, ‘cold’ calls appear to be quite heterogenous encounters fostering a variety of endogenously organised and collaboratively accomplished activities, to which ‘umbrella’ terms such as selling, prospecting, or qualifying prospects do not do justice. Single courses of action such as assessments and invitations have been meticulously documented; however, CA research has not yet provided an extensive outline of complete ‘cold’ calls. Thus, this paper sets out to address this gap by systematically documenting the order and sequential composition of the activities comprised in first-time and subsequent B2B calls in order to provide a comprehensive overview of these encounters.

Third, the majority of telesales interactions rely, at least to some extent, on scripts, whose use is often strictly reinforced through multiple control mechanisms (such as recording of calls or line managers listening in) (Woodcock, 2017). Because they are thought off as mechanical, script-based interactions, these conversations are seldom analysed even though they are habitually recorded and available for detailed scrutiny. This paper opens up the ‘black box’ of ‘cold’ calls, thus providing empirical knowledge about how these interactions actually unfold as well as about how and if salespeople ‘stay on script’.

The rest of the article is organised as follows: the next section introduces the study’s corpus of ‘cold’ calls and describes how we have used conversation analysis to examine the sequential organisation of the activities comprised in these calls. Following that, the main section of the paper is dedicated to data analysis and consists of three subsections that focus on the components of a ‘cold’ call: call opening, the ‘business of the call’, and the closing (Pallotti & Varcasia, 2008; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). We conclude the paper by discussing our analytic observations regarding first-time and subsequent calls.

Data and method

The paper draws on a corpus of 150 naturally occurring ‘cold’ calls from three British companies that sell, lease, and service multi-functional printers and telecommunication systems. In all calls, salespeople promoted leasing rather than buying the products as the ‘default’ option. For the office equipment on offer, leasing contracts ordinarily have a three to five-year length. Once the lease expires, a company can either renegotiate a renewal or switch to a different provider. The expiry of the contract provides an opportunity for salespeople to 'swoop in' and persuade organisations to switch providers. In our data set, the contacted organisations were, with very few exceptions, already in a contractual agreement with another service provider, with the expiry date ranging from a few months to a few years away.

The calls were recorded by the companies, between December 2015 and January 2016, for training and research purposes. Nine salespeople contacted prospects who were themselves employees of either schools (22 calls) or private companies (128) calls. 117 out of the 150 calls were answered by receptionists while only 33 calls went straight to the 'relevant' person – the employee who would be able to take a decision about a potential future purchase. Except for the call opening, which featured switchboard requests when calls where answered by a receptionist, there were no systematic differences in the overall organisation of the activities comprised in the 'cold' calls answered by receptionists or the 'relevant' persons.

Identifying and reaching the 'relevant' person within an organisation as well as institutional gatekeeping are prevalent obstacles that characterise B2B but not B2C sales (Prus, 1989). We approached the data without knowing, in advance, whether salespeople were working from scripts and how strictly script-following is reinforced in each company. In line with ethnomethodological research on telemarketing (Whalen, Whalen, & Henderson, 2002), we approached sales work as a situated achievement rather than a script-following activity.

The data were transcribed using the Jefferson (2004) system and were anonymised by replacing identity-related information with pseudonyms. Our methodology has followed the British Psychological Society's (2018) Code of Ethics and Conduct and received approval from ANONYMISED University's Ethics Approval (Human Participants) Sub-Committee.

We examined the data using conversation analysis (Sidnell & Stivers, 2013), focusing on the overall structural organisation of the interactions (Robinson, 2013); that is, the sequential organisation of the social activities comprised in ‘cold’ calls. Following Robinson’s (2003) landmark analysis of the interactional organisation of activities within acute medical visits into a single project, we have scrutinised ‘cold’ calls for evidence of whether the identified activities are constituted into overarching projects.

According to Schegloff (2007b, p. xiv), the overall structural organisation of conversational units is one of the six ‘generic orders of organisation’ that ‘constitute a spate of interaction recognisable as “conversation”, as “interview” (…) and as particular, here-and-now-with-these-participants instances of these’. The examination of supra-sequential conversational structures, beyond the boundaries of single sequences, was pioneered by Schegloff and Sacks (1973) more than 45 years ago, but CA research on complete conversations is still rare (*inter alia* Bergmann, 1993; Robinson, 2003; Vázquez Carranza, 2017; Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987) compared to the plethora of studies on, say, action formation, or sequence organisation, probably due to the challenge of balancing the fine-grained scrutiny of a key practice with the rich content of long stretches of talk. Our solution to this issue consists in presenting single examples of each activity rather than a collection of similar cases. The extracts included in the paper have been chosen for their clarity and brevity from among the entire corpus which we have analysed for this study.

Analysis

We started the analysis by identifying the opening, the ‘business of the call’, and the closing sections for each of our 150 conversations and then narrowed in on the activities comprised in each section. We use this structure to present our findings below. In each of the three sub-sections of the analysis, we show extracts from both first-time and subsequent calls and highlight relevant similarities and differences between them. Our main focus will be the sequential architecture of the activities within each call.

Opening the Call

Institutional call openings differ from mundane telephone openings (Schegloff, 1986) through reduction and specialisation (Wakin & Zimmerman, 1999). In this section, we show how these adaptations play out in first-time (Extract 1) and subsequent (Extract 2) calls. Where calls were answered by receptionists (117 out of 150 cases), they also featured switchboard requests whereby salespeople asked to be transferred to a different person within the organisation. In the majority of our first-time calls (27 out of 41 cases), switchboard requests are produced as part of the opening, as exemplified in Extract 1. Later in the analysis, we present a case (Extract 3) where the switchboard request has been included in the first item of the ‘business of the call’. By contrast, in all subsequent calls, switchboard requests feature as part of the call opening. Our analysis in this section also highlights the difference in the designs of switchboard requests (Maynard & Hollander, 2014) in first-time and subsequent calls.

Extract 1 illustrates the opening of a first-time call in which the salesperson self-identifies before asking to speak to ‘the person who would deal with the print management for the office’ (lines 6-7).

Extract 1 Tech 60

```
                ((phone ringing))
    P:    Good morning (Prime).
                (0.2)
    S:    Mpth (.) Good mornin’,=It’s ↑Kathryn calling from
          Ladybird. .h I was wondering if you could help me. I am
          looking to speak to the person who would deal with the
          print management for the office.
                (1.3)
```

```
 9   P:    U:h:m, y:ea:h, That would probably: oh we have a few
10         ↓different people.=It depe:nds u:hm .h What kind of
11         ↑printing?
12               ((5 lines omitted))
13   P:    ↑Oka:y=I'm su- I think it's my colleague Nadine but
14         also [we h]ave >some< u:hm:: graphic desi:gners=
15   S:         [↑Oh.]
16   P:    =here that also have input in that kind of ↑thing¿
```

In line 2, the call-taker (P) replies to the phone's summons with a 'specialised' turn: a greeting token and an institutional categorical self-identification which informs the caller / salesperson (S) that she has reached Prime (anonymised company name). In response, the caller produces a multi-TCU turn that accomplishes several key 'organisational jobs' of call openings (Schegloff, 1986). With the greeting token 'Good mornin', the salesperson acknowledges the call-taker's self-identification; then she goes on to self-identify 'It's ↑Kathryn calling from Ladybird.'. Keeping the floor with an inbreath (line 5), the salesperson continues with a pre-request 'I was wondering if you could help me.' followed by a switchboard request which hints at the reason for the call 'I am looking to speak to the person who would deal with the print management for the office.'. Through the interlocked organisation of her turn, which comprises both backward as well as forward looking elements (Schegloff, 1986), the salesperson deletes the space where a greeting sequence could be produced and thus speeds up the progression of the conversation towards the 'business of the call'.

The salesperson's self-identification comprises two elements: her first name and the company she represents. Both components are introduced as recognitionals (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979); that is, as information that the interlocutor is expected to know or, at least, recognise. Similarly, in the first-time call featured in Extract 3, we will see the salesperson also using a recognitional format to identify via her first+last name 'It's Britney Ca:rter calling' (line 1) alongside a description of the company she works for '<u>Ele</u>ctec Print,=the manufacturers direct,' (lines 1-2). In fact, in 32 out of 41 first-time calls salespeople self-identify using a recognitional format, even though they have not been in touch with the call-taker before and, thus, can and should not expect to be known to them. The prevalence of this practice leads us to surmise that recognitional self-identification constitutes a 'specialised' caller utterance in first-time B2B 'cold' calls.

Given that, by keeping the floor with an inbreath (line 5) after the end of her TCU, S does not give her interlocutor the opportunity to display other-recognition, we ask: what does the salesperson achieve by presenting herself as potentially already known to a complete stranger? Recognitional self-identifications have an "informal" quality, partly based on their shortened form and partly based on their recurrent usage in informal conversations between acquaintances (Hopper & Drummond, 1992; Maynard & Hollander, 2014). In theory, by emulating acquaintanceship in self-presentations, salespeople would be able to 'break the ice' and establish rapport with their interlocutor (Kaski, Niemi, & Pullins, 2018) – which is widely advocated in sales handbooks (e.g., Boyan, 1989). However, in practice, we see that, by using recognitional self-identifications when talking to a stranger, salespeople infringe the interactional norm to recipient design self-references; that is, using "just-right-for-this-recipient-at-this-moment-of-this-interaction way of referring" (Schegloff, 2007a, p. 148). As a result, recognitional self-identifications provided by unknown callers are reflexively constituted as specialised callers' turns in 'cold' calls.

The switchboard request in lines 6-7 identifies the person that S is looking for by means of her job remit, specifically through the modal construction 'the person who would deal with the print management for the office' (lines 6-7) which indexes habitual and repeated activity (Edwards, 2006). Thus, Extract 1 sheds light on a key aspect of what we are calling 'open' switchboard requests; that is, requests in which the sought person is identified via a particularising attribute (here, their job remit) and not by name. We see that, for the request to be granted, the call-taker has to collaborate with the salesperson in identifying the ‘relevant’ person to talk to. In line 9, P receipts the request, and then starts the identification-response. She abandons that mid-TCU and introduces an unexpected difficulty (Heritage, 2018) ‘oh we have a few ↓different people’ (lines 9-10) and asks for more details from the salesperson (lines 10-11), thus temporarily halting the progress of the switchboard request. Once the side sequence (Jefferson, 1972) is closed (lines omitted from the transcript), the call-taker resumes her response by tentatively identifying her colleague Nadine as the relevant person (lines 13). Thus, in ‘open’ switchboard requests, the call-takers are, ultimately, the ones who single out whom the salespeople should speak to, making the selection of the ‘relevant’ persons a joint achievement.

By contrast, in the next extract which features a subsequent call, the salesperson singles out, through the design of his switchboard request, that he is seeking to speak to Waqar, with whom he is already acquainted.

Extract 2 Eplus 40

```
1   P:    Good afternoon Fiorentina,
2               (0.4)
3   S:    .pthh (.) Hello:=Good afternoon, Can I speak to Waqar
4         please.
5               (0.5)
6   P:    U::hm He’s currently not in at the moment,
```

As in Extract 1, P answers with a specialised institutional identification. S receipts it with a double greeting and then launches a ‘closed’ switchboard request. The salesperson does not self-identify; however, the design of the switchboard request ‘gives off’ some information about his identity (Schegloff, 1979): by using Waqar’s first name and a high entitlement request format (Curl & Drew, 2008), the caller implies being acquainted with Waqar. In turn, such implied acquaintanceship claims S has the right to speak to him. In contrast to call openings between intimates (Hopper & Drummond, 1992), here the missing self-identification does not presume or expect recognition from P based on S's voice sample (Schegloff, 1979). Instead, it treats the latter as a temporary interactant, an interpretation that is also warranted by the ensuing switchboard request. By skipping the self-identification and by acting as Waqar's acquaintance, S discourages further enquiries from P into the nature of the call.

Note that the caller is not explicitly claiming that he knows Waqar. As analysts, we are not able to ascertain the truthfulness of his claim, but neither does P here and now. In the openings of subsequent calls, the design of the self-identification and 'closed' switchboard requests serve both as claims and evidence that S is not a first-time caller.

So far, our analysis revealed that B2B 'cold' call openings are organised to connect the salespeople with the 'relevant' persons within the contacted companies. Salespeople speed up the progression of the conversation by producing compact turns; that is, turns comprising a responsive and a sequence-initiating component. Openings of first-time and subsequent calls differ with regard to (1) whether the salespeople introduce themselves to their interlocutors or not and (2) how they refer to the 'relevant' person in their switchboard requests. In first-time calls, the salesperson self-identifies using a recognitional format before enlisting the interlocutor's help, via an 'open' switchboard request, in identifying the 'relevant' person based on some aspect of their job (such as title, description, or remit). In subsequent calls, the salesperson skips the self-identification and produces a 'closed' switchboard request in which the 'relevant' person is referred to by name, thus claiming prior acquaintanceship with them.

These differences have consequences for the call's sequential structure, even beyond its opening, as we show next.

The 'Business of the Call'

In the previous section we saw that openings of first-time and subsequent calls differ with respect to the self-identification (or lack thereof) and the design of the switchboard request. Further differences between first-time and subsequent calls emerge when we scrutinise the activities that comprise the main body of the calls. The first-time calls in our collection comprise three activities: (1) gathering information, (2) getting the prospect's contact details, and (3) making provisions for future encounters, while subsequent calls consist of (1) securing a meeting, (2) scheduling the meeting, and (3) getting the prospect's contact details.

The 'business' of first-time 'cold' calls

While 39/41 first-time calls in our corpus feature the three activities that we outline below[1] there was some variability in their ordering. In all calls, information gathering occupied the first slot within the 'business of the call', but then some callers went on to ask for contact details before discussing future encounters while others initiated talk about future contact opportunities and then went on to solicit the prospect's contact details. Neither salespeople nor prospects treated either order as deviant or non-usual. Furthermore, in a few cases (as the ones we show in Extracts 4 and 5), the salespeople start one activity then temporarily put it on hold to pursue another. Once completed, the participants return to the initial activity. These cases provide further evidence for the independent nature of the activities that comprise the 'business' of first-time calls as well as the autonomy of the salespeople to direct the conversation without having to follow a strict script.

The next extract illustrates 'information-gathering'.

[1] 2/41 first-time calls only comprise information-gathering which is terminated abruptly when the prospect hangs up. See Extract 9 for an example of a unilateral ending

Extract 3 Tech 33

```
 1   S:    It's Britney Ca:rter calling from Electec Print,=the
 2         manufacturers direct, .pthh and um- th'=reason I'm
 3         calling .Hh we're actually appointed via Hamil County
 4         Council your preferred supplier .h in relation to the
 5         copier contracts. .hh I wonder if I might speak to the
 6         business manager or administrator uhm just to ask her
 7         uh=uh if he she knows .thh uhm actually when your
 8         contracts are due to expire, (.) and when they might be
 9         r[eviewed.=
10   P:     [We-
11   P:    =W:e: uh well you're talking to the right person and
12         we've got another three years left on our
13         Co[ntract.
14   S:      [°.h a:h°
15               (0.3)
16   S:    Right,=So [you >you've got< (.)a five-year=
17   P:              [°(Right.)°
18   P:    =Yea[h.
19   S:        [contract maybe [haven't you, .hHh
20   P:                        [Yeah.
21   S:    Two years of the way through.=
22   P:    =Y:eah.
23               (0.2)
24   S:    Three years to go, Okay.=Thank you, uhm So uh- can you
25         tell me who the current supplier is. .hhHh  #uh=
26   P:    =U:hm No,=↑Not really bu[:t
27   S:                            [ (  )
28               (0.2)
29   S:    .h No it's just that I'm (          ),= That's
30         absolut[ely] fine,=That's fine. .h And how many=
31   P:           [N- ]
32   S:    =devices do you have [there
33   P:                         [Just the one.
34               (0.3)
35   S:    Just the one, Okay. .h May ↑I: >just send you< an email
36         and be in touch to .h see if- when we might approach
37         you to: u:hm: arrange to: .hh come in and offer you
38         some prices?
```

After the self-identification in line 1, S launches the 'business of the call' with a 'reason for calling' preface (lines 2-3). This TCU is temporarily put on hold (notice the inbreath and syntactic and pragmatic disjunction between the preface and the ensuing talk) to allow the salesperson to explain her company's relationship with the call-taker's school in a parenthetical sequence (Mazeland, 2007). By alleging she is the school's preferred supplier, the salesperson musters legitimacy for her subsequent switchboard request. In contrast to Extract 1,**Error! Reference source not found.** which featured a switchboard request as part of the opening, here the reason for calling incorporates the request to speak to the ‘relevant’ person, thus constituting the first item of the call’s ‘agenda’. Having tracked the incidence of these alternative sequential architectures across our data set[2], we surmise that, first-time calls are designed to afford some flexibility in the placement of the switchboard requests, either as the last item of the call opening or the first item of the ‘business of the call’. We find further evidence for the flexible organisation of the activities that comprise first-time calls in rest of our analysis of the ‘business of the call’ (Extracts 4 and 5).

In Extract 3, information gathering is accomplished via three inquiry sequences, each initiated by the salesperson asking about the school’s printers: (1) the contract expiry date, (2) the current supplier, and (3) the number of printers. It is not happenstance that the salesperson starts with a question about the contract expiry date. Inquiring into this matter is warranted by her previously invoked identity as the school’s preferred supplier. This identity grants her the right to ask for information relevant to a potential future business relationship that is projected by this status. Comparatively, when the salesperson fails to establish a link to the called company, the prospect refuses to disclose the contract expiry date (see Extract 9**Error! Reference source not found.**).

In the first-time calls we examined, information gathering occupies the first slot within the ‘business of the call’. Once completed, salespeople continue with one of two activities: getting the prospect’s contact details or making provisions for future encounters. In this extract, S asks for permission to email the prospect about a potential meeting (lines 35-38).

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[2] 27/41 first-time calls feature switchboard requests in the call opening, 11/41 calls feature switchboard requests as the first item of the ‘business of the call’, and 3/41 calls do not contain a switchboard request.

The second activity, getting the prospect's contact details, is illustrated next. Even though the extract starts with the salesperson making provisions for future contact after finalising information-gathering, that activity is temporally halted in line 5 where the salesperson asks for the call-taker's name. We see provision-making being resumed in line 30, as a possible pre-closing for the call (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

Extract 4 Tech 42

```
S:     ↑Can I just send you an e:mail now and be in touch in
       in in: >perhaps< in a year's
       tim[e with an update¿]
P:        [>Yeah,=no  proble]m<.
S:     .PThh Thank you.=What w's your ↑name?
P:     Joanna Bird.
             (0.2)
S:     .phh Joanna Bi:rd,=You're a standalone school there
       >aren't you.< [.hh J]oanna Bird. <And your=
P:                   [Yeah.]
S:     =email >Joanna< is it admin¿
P:     .Pk It's admin at Whample hyphen ↓primary.
             (0.4)
S:     Doubleyou aitch isn't it? °>D[oubleyou a]itch<°=
P:                                  [ Y e a h .]
S:     =.hh Whample hyphen primary, .hh
             (.)
P:     #Dot [Hamil. ]
S:          [Dot Ham]il dot es cee aitch dot you
       k[ay
P:      [That's the one. [(°Yeah.°)]
S:                       [(       )] (Well) (.)  Quite a
       number of schoo:ls
       [ around  there so at least I'm getting to know,]=Uhm=
P:     [°(h)Yeah.° hh   huh   huh    hah    ha    .hhh ]
S:     =and you're happy at the moment it meets your nee:ds,
       every[thing?]
P:          [ Perfe]ct. Yeah.
                   (0.2)
S:     All right.=So .h thank you for that Joanna.=I'll mark
       it for your attenti:on and=uhm send something
       verifyi:ng our conversa:tion,
```

At the beginning of the extract, the participants are engaged in discussing future contact opportunities. The salesperson asks for and is granted permission to remain in touch with the prospect. After receipting the latter's aligning response, she keeps the floor, latching a new

TCU through which she asks for the prospect’s name (line 5). This action draws its intelligibility and legitimacy from the interactional environment constituted by the participants having agreed to keep in touch.

As an activity, ‘getting the prospect’s contact information’ can vary in terms of the number and type of details it is made up of. Most often, salespeople ask for prospects’ names and email addresses (lines 9-21). In this extract, the salesperson also checks the status of the school – whether or not it is a stand-alone school (lines 8-10) – and whether the prospect is content with their current printing arrangements (lines 24-28). Thus, we can see that and how salespeople can use this activity slot to continue garnering information about the organisation they are contacting now for the first time. It is worth noting that getting the prospect’s contact information provides an opportunity for the salesperson to solicit their interlocutor’s name which (1) constitutes key information that salespeople are after and which (2) otherwise would be difficult to ask for in an interactionally appropriate way beyond the call’s opening (Sacks, 1992).

While Extract 4 started with the participants discussing future encounters before moving to the prospect providing her contact details, in the next extract the order is reversed. We join the conversation after the salesperson has completed gathering information about the number and type of printers in use in the prospect’s company.

Extract 5 Tech 35

```
S:    And (.) ↑c’ld I have your email address to .hh uhm
      (0.4) t- (0.3) >perhaps< we’ll: send something to you
      now an’ [.hh when you’re next reviewi:ng=
P:            [Yeah.
S:    =[things.= (A]ha) >[D’you think tha]t’s<=
P:     [No problem.]      [Yes   (is tha-)]
S:    =going to be [in the next] year you think?=
P:                 [ °(Yeah)°  ]
P:    =N:nno: n- it’d be in about two years I would have
      thought.
           (0.4)
```

```
P:    Uh
             (0.4)
S:    Nearly two- ( [           )] two years from no:w,=
P:                  [Yeah (     )]
S:    =.hh it'd be just a few [mon]ths prior to that=
P:                            [Yes]
S:    =>w'll it<=
             (0.2)
P:    =That's right.
             (.)
P:    U:[h
S:      [Okay=So where's that.=That's uh (0.6) (°  °   ) so
      the end- (0.3) so the au:tumn of seventeen¿ Does that
      so[und]
P:      [(  ]   )
             (.)
S:    (If) not before?
             (0.4)
P:    Yeah arou:nd then.
             (0.2)
S:    Mh[m:.
P:      [>I'm not sure to be quite honest, [But uh  huhh
S:                                         [Okay.
S:    £Oh I know£ it sounds a long way off but we'(v-) (0.2)
      >didn't want to miss< the opportunity >y'kn'w< to keep
      in touch with you to >(effectively you know) just to
      see if that's still< the case you know .hHh (0.3) uhm
      in about twelve months' time if that's okay?
P:    It will still be the <case> [°yeah°.
S:                                [Yeah(h), .h okay.
             (.)
S:    .hH ↑Can I uhm make a note of your email to send you
      today something [then.
P:                    [Yes. Admin,
```

In line 1, the salesperson starts asking for the prospect's email address but then, after some mid-TCU delay, veers towards provision-making 'And (.) ↑c'ld I have your email address to .hh uhm (0.4) t- (0.3) >perhaps< we'll: send something to you now an' hh when you're next reviewi:ng'. The prospect only responds to the latter action, consenting to be contacted by the salesperson.

This extract provides an illustration of the micro-frictions that are frequent in a 'cold' call. The main point of contention arises during the attempt to establish when the company's printer contracts will be reviewed as a reference point for when the prospect should be contacted next. For salespeople, it is crucial to get in touch with prospects as early as possible during the review period to get their offers taken into consideration before a decision is reached. Throughout the extract, the salesperson exploits the prospect’s imprecise and hedged formulations (lines 9-10 and 30) in pursuit of establishing, on the record, an earlier date for the next point of contact. The prospect avoids problematising the salesperson’s speculations (lines 23-28) and instead starts backtracking ‘>I’m not sure to be quite honest, But uh huhh’ (lines 33), at which point the salesperson grabs the floor to make a case for keeping in touch. She ends her turn by seeking the prospect’s permission to contact her in a year ‘just to see if that’s still< the case you know .hHh (0.3) uhm in about twelve months’ time if that’s okay’ (lines 38-40). The prospect produces a non-type conforming response (Raymond, 2003) ‘It will still be the <case> °yeah°’ (line 41), which only confirms that the reviewing will take place, but leaves out the contested time frame. The salesperson’s ‘Yeah(h), .h okay’ closes down the sequence. After a micropause she resumes getting the prospect’s contact details – the activity which had been initiated in line 1.

This extract sheds light on the sequential embodiment of disagreement as a situated accomplishment in ‘cold’ calls. The above analysis has highlighted the resources that participants use to simultaneously promote their agenda (which is at odds with their interlocutors’) and curb potential misalignment which would have led to a breakdown in the conversation (see Extract 9).

Summary

This section has illustrated the activities that comprise the ‘business’ of first-time ‘cold’ calls: gathering information, getting the prospect’s contact details, and making provisions for future encounters. We highlighted that and how the ordering of these activities is not fixed. Specifically, while information gathering usually occupies the first position in this section of the call, the order in which salespeople ask for the prospect’s contact details or make provisions for suture encounters varies across the collection, as we saw in Extracts 4 and 5.

This led us to conclude that (1) the three activities are independent from each other, in that the completion of one activity does not constitute a condition for progressing to a ‘next’ activity and that (2) they are not constituted into a single overarching project. By contrast, subsequent calls, to which we turn to next, are oriented towards arranging face-to-face meetings with the prospects, an overarching project to which the three constituent activities contribute.

The ‘business’ of subsequent cold calls

Arranging a meeting, as the ‘business’ of a subsequent call, is organised as a multi-activity project (Robinson, 2003) consisting of three components: (1) securing a meeting, (2) scheduling the meet, and (3) getting the prospect’s contact details. Each of these activities spans over several sequences accomplishing different actions.

The first step in the arrangement of a sales visit consists in securing a meeting with the prospect which is illustrated in Extract 6.

Extract 6 Eplus 8

```
S:    .Hh Mister Gupta I hope you recall we:: discussed about
      the telecoms,=uh especially you:r old Alcatel systems.
            (0.7)
P:    [( )]
S:    [ A:]ndu::h its maintenance and .h lines and calls and
      stuff. .h A:nd you asked me to send some details about
      the company and you said that you are going to discuss
      with one of your collea:gues senior colleagues I
      ↑believe.
            (0.6)
P:    Yeah.=
S:    =U:h so:: I’m just wonderi:n’ whereabout are we in
      terms of the conversation .h uh fo=or- Can we come and
      have a chat about u:hm your phone systems andu:h see
      how we could be of he:lp to you sometime next month o:r
      .h end of this month?
            (0.3)
P:    Y- yeah we can do that. °Yeah°.
S:    =↑Oh. Fantastic, .h So: ↑u:hm mkt (0.5) shall we look at
      like the: next- the third week of January or ↑so?
```

In lines 1-9, the salesperson accounts for calling by invoking her prior conversation with the prospect. Importantly, she recounts having arranged for her to send the prospect information about her company that he would then discuss with his colleagues. These arrangements index a recognisable action trajectory: the prospect can and should be able to report the decision made as a result of that discussion. Framing the current call as a 'follow-up', she legitimates it by claiming she has called to find out what decision has been reached.

The high entitlement request (Curl & Drew, 2008; Lindström, 2005) 'Can we come and have a chat about u:hm your phone systems' (lines 13-14) builds on the entitlement to ask for a meeting that has been worked up through the preceding account (Humă, Stokoe, & Sikveland, 2019). As no reply is forthcoming at the first TRP, the salesperson extends the TCU with 'andu:h see how we could be of he:lp to you sometime next month' (lines 14-15) and then again 'o:r .h end of this month?' (lines 15-16) whereby she actively pursues her interlocutor's absent acceptance (De Stefani, 2018; Mazeland, 2004). Evidence for her orientation to the absent response and her manoeuvre to mask it by expanding the TCU comes from the elongated production of 'andu:h' and 'o:r', the first words of each TCU extension (Davidson, 1984). By adding further components to her turn, the salesperson (1) minimises the inter-turn gap which could be indicative of a dispreferred response (Anderson, Aston, & Tucker, 1988), (2) provides the prospect with two more opportunities to respond to the request by recompleting the TCU (Ford, Fox, & Thompson, 2002), and (3) produces further inducements for accepting the meeting (Davidson, 1984), such as an offer of help and a flexible time frame. In his subsequent turn, the prospect accepts the meeting request with an expanded confirmation 'Y- yeah we can do that. °Yeah°' (line 18) that displays his commitment to the meeting (Lindström, 2017). The salesperson receipts the acceptance as news with a change-of-state token (Heritage, 2018), closing the sequence with a high-grade assessment (Antaki, Houtkoop-Steenstra, & Rapley, 2000). She then initiates the scheduling of the meeting (lines 19-20).

Securing the appointment is a key component of the 'business' of a subsequent call. which allows the project to move forward to the next activity, the scheduling of the meeting, illustrated in Extract 7.

Extract 7 Eplus 8

```
S:     =↑Oh. Fantastic, .h So: ↑u:hm mkt (0.5) shall we look at
       like the: next- the third week of January or ↑so?
             (0.6)
P:     °Uh third week of January let me che:ck°, Uh w- what
       date exactly.
             (0.4)
S:     U::hm I am looking a:t the eightee:nth of January (.)
       which is Monday, >But but< it- i- it's your diary so:,
       (0.2) whatever suits you. .h
             (0.7)
P:     Mm::#m:: (0.5) (<°Waiting to°>) (1.3) U- (0.3)
       (>it=w'ld-<) (0.3) is it po:ssible to move it ↓forward?
             (1.1)
S:     ↑Oka:y=no problem=Is that next week you mean.
             (0.9)
P:     No I mean the=uh: (.) b- bit forward than eighteen
       u[h I mea:n
S:      [#Uh- o::h okay, uh:m .pcht .h
P:     Twenty-fifth twenty-sixth twenty-seventh something like
       that.=
S:     =↑Oka:y no problem. .h  Shall we look at the twenty-
       sixth which is Tuesda:y?
             (0.4)
P:     Yeah(p), Tha- that's that would be okay.
             (0.4)
S:     Fantastic. And what ↑time would be (0.8)
       appropriat(h)e(h).
             (0.7)
P:     U:::hm .pk (1.7) It (w-) it would be: oka:y around uh
       (0.2) twelve o'clock? Twelve o'clock one o'clock?
             (0.2)
S:     Twelve pm. .h [↑An:d Mister Gupta: can I also get=
P:                   [°Yeah°
S:     =your u:h direct email address so I'll send an
       invitation?
```

The scheduling of the meeting consists of two base adjacency pair sequences through which the date and the time of the meeting are established. The first sequence (lines 1-26) is expanded multiple times via insert sequences through which participants negotiate a suitable date for the meeting. The second adjacency pair (lines 26-34) pinpoints the time of the meeting.

The scheduling of the meeting is launched in line 1 through the salesperson's proposal '.h So: ↑u:hm mkt (0.5) shall we look at like the: next- the third week of January or ↑so?'. A collaborative framework is invoked through the formulation 'shall we look', that turns the scheduling into a joint endeavour (Couper-Kuhlen, 2014). Note also the flexible time frame formulation, in particular the turn-final 'or ↑so?' (Drake, 2013; Stokoe, 2010), that invites further negotiation of the date, rather than immediate acceptance.

While this is a new activity that has emerged as a contingency of the accepted appointment request, it also recycles the proposed time frame for the meeting, put forward by the salesperson in her request 'Can we come and have a chat about u:hm your phone systems andu:h see how we could be of he:lp to you sometime next month o:r .h end of this month?' (see previous extract, lines 15-16). The turn-initial 'So' frames the new course of action as having been foreshadowed by previous talk and thus pending (Bolden, 2009).

Despite some initial difficulties in understanding that slow down the progress of the activity, the interlocutors manage to agree on a day and a time for the meeting (lines 26-32). Note that the salesperson while designing her turns to give the interlocutor the opportunity to decide on the details of the meeting, still retains control of the overall trajectory of the sequence. Her turns occupy first positions within adjacency pairs, thus enabling her to dictate the direction of the conversation (Sacks, 1989).

Once all the details of the meeting have been established, salespeople launch the next activity: getting the prospect's contact details. The extract below starts just after S and P had finalised the scheduling of the meeting.

Extract 8 Eplus 13

```
S:     .h Right,=What’s your email please.
             (0.3)
P:     U:h It is Giles, G-i-l-e-s:,
             (0.9)
S:     Y#::[e:a(p).
P:         [Dot
             (0.3)
P:     Dot White W-h (0.2) i-t-e:,
             (1.0)
S:     W-h-i: (.) t-e:.
             (0.3)
P:     >Yeah<
             (0.4)
S:     Y#:ea(p),
             (0.2)
S:     A[t ( )
P:      [At S-D:
             (0.3)
P:     At (0.2) S-D-L
             (0.6)
S:     S: D: L:,
             (0.5)
P:     Dot ac dot uk.
             (0.6)
S:     Ac #dot u:k:(h). (.) .h (.) ↑Good=That’s a nice easy
       o:ne. Good=lovely,
```

Extract 8 features a single sequence that accomplishes a single course of action. The change-of-activity token ‘Right,’ (lines 1) marks the transition between activities; that is, a shift from scheduling the meeting to getting the prospect’s contact details (Gardner, 2007). The salesperson's initiating action ‘What’s your email please’ (line 1) is responded to in four instalments that deliver the requested information bit-by-bit. The points at which the email address is broken up are not arbitrary. The prospect parcels out the address in intelligible units (for instance full first and last name) that maximise their comprehensibility. After each unit, the salesperson displays his understanding of it through acknowledgement tokens (line 5) or through repeats (lines 10, 21, and 25).

Comparing the sequential composition of ‘getting the prospect’s contact details’ in first-time (Extract 4) and subsequent (Extract 8) calls two key differences are worth noting. First, in subsequent calls, salespeople never ask for the prospect’s name in this slot (like we saw in Extract 4) as this information is supposed to be already known. Second, in first-time calls, this activity enables the salesperson to acquire further information about the prospect's organisation, while in subsequent calls the activity is streamlined to provide the call-taker's contact details.

Summary

In subsequent calls, the 'business of the call' is occupied with arranging a meeting with the prospect, a goal accomplished collaboratively through the joint participation of salesperson and prospect in three activities: securing a meeting, scheduling the meet, and getting the prospect's contact details. Unlike in first-time calls, these activities are interlinked, forming an overarching project. The initiation of a subsequent activity is contingent on the successful accomplishment of the former one. Furthermore, the order in which the activities occur is fixed: participants could not schedule an appointment before first agreeing to meet. Thus, it turns out that first-time and subsequent calls differ not only in terms of constituent activities, but also with respect to how these activities are interconnected.

In the final section, we consider the closing section of 'cold' calls.

Closing the Call

Closing a call requires participants to collaborate in bringing the conversation to an end (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Even though in most 'cold' call closings participants work in concert to terminate the conversation, there are also, on occasion, unilateral closings (Raymond & Zimmerman, 2016) initiated by the prospect who hangs up on the salesperson. The next extract, from a first-time call, exemplifies such a closing. Throughout the call, the prospect has been resisting the salesperson's questions about their printers (as part of 'information gathering'). Prior to line 1, the prospect has challenged the caller's entitlement to solicit information about his company by asking her if she works for their current supplier (an identity which would warrant ‘information gathering’ based on the ongoing commercial relationship). Just before line 1, the salesperson reveals she is not working for the company’s current supplier, which prompts the prospect to react with ‘Oh, it is a sales (.) call.’.

Extract 9 Tech 28

```
P:    O[h, it i]s a sales (.) call.
S:     [ ↑No.  ]
           (0.3)
S:    >Yeah.< But what I want to find out is when that
      contract’s up for review=Then we can contact at
      [  t h e  ] ti:me.
P:    [Yeah w’ll]
P:    We:ll we’re happy with u:hm ↓the people that we’re
      currently using.
           (0.3)
S:    <I’m sure you are, but I wanted to find out when the
      contract’s up for review: so then I can
      c[all maybe nearer the time, ]
P:     [Yeah no we’re happy with wh]o we’re currently using.
           (0.5)
S:    ↑You don’t know when the [contract’s up for re]view¿
P:                             [ O k a y. Thank you.]
P:         ((Hangs up))
```

Throughout this extract, the salesperson pushes forward with ‘information-gathering’, despite getting non-aligned responses (Steensig, 2013). In line 1, the prospect exposes the conversation as a sales call. The turn-initial ‘oh’ indexes a change in the speaker’s knowledge status (Heritage, 2018), thus delivering the turn as a discovery. The indexed change-of-state and the design of the affirmation with the full verb form ‘it is a sales (.) call.’ carry accusatory undertones implicating the salesperson has not been forthcoming about the nature of the call (Atkinson & Drew, 1979). The salesperson acknowledges the prospect’s concern about the commercial nature of the call and then follows that up with a contrastive point (Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson, 2000). In line 4, she receipts the prospect’s accusatory remark but does not topicalise it. Instead, she starts a new, disjunctive course of action inquiring about the printer contract expiry date. Not only does her action disattend the current interactional concern raised by the prospect, but it also explicitly privileges her own agenda, through the 'self-attentive' (Bolden, 2006, p. 661) formulations 'But what I want to find out is when that contract's up for review=Then we can contact at the ti:me.' (lines 4-6). In response, the prospect produces a my-side report 'We:ll we're happy with u:hm ↓the people that we're currently using.' (Drew, 1984). His response provides the grounds for not answering the question by invoking his commitment to the current supplier through a positive subject-side assessment (Edwards & Potter, 2017) of their services. It also exposes the question as not 'mere' information-gathering, but as preliminary move in a longer sales-oriented course of action which he blocks.

Nonetheless, the salesperson continues to push for an answer. In her next turn, she produces a *pro forma* agreement (Pomerantz, 1984) followed by a disjunctive marker that introduces a reiteration of her question, thus not accepting the prospect's turn as an adequate response. The past tense verb form indexes the utterance's subsequent position as a recycled query 'but I wanted to find out when the contract's up for review: so then I can call maybe nearer the time,' (lines 11-13). In interjacent overlap, the prospect grabs the floor to reiterate his prior response 'Yeah no we're happy with who we're currently using.' (line 14). The turn-initial skip-tying device deletes the salesperson's prior turn (Broe, 2003). In effect, the prospect ignores his interlocutor's query and reaffirms his previous stance in a way that emphasises its production as a repeat, thus underscoring the lack of conversational progressivity.

In her next turn, the salesperson displays having had trouble in understanding the prospect's overlapped turn. It is not possible to ascertain whether she indeed has heard her interlocutor's response. Nonetheless, she initiates repair producing a candidate interpretation of her interlocutor's prior turn: '↑You don't know when the contract's up for review¿' (lines 16). Midway through her turn and in interjacent overlap, again, the prospect initiates call closure with the formulaic ‘Okay. Thank you.’ (line 17) and hangs up without producing a greeting and without waiting for an answer from his interlocutor. Note how here, as in other service encounters that end unsatisfactorily (Aston, 1995; Sikveland & Stokoe, 2017), ‘thank you’ is not used as a token of appreciation or a display of satisfaction, but as a resource for expediting conversational closure.

By contrast, Extract 10 exemplifies a bilateral closing in a subsequent call in which participants had arranged a sales meeting.

Extract 10 Eplus 5

```
P:     No:. I’m not looking at spending any money this year.
             (0.3)
S:     No. So: at the moment there’s no budget (.) u:h for
       .thh additional but #m:aintenance only at this point¿
       .hhh ↑Okay, w’ll would be great to talk to you: about
       that so >what I’ll do is I’ll send you< a calendar’s
       invitation shortly. .Phh  Through Outloo:k,=And my
       colleague’ll be with you eleven am on the twenty-ninth
       of January.
             (0.6)
P:     Lovely. Look forward to seeing it.
             (0.2)
S:     Excellent. Thanks very ↑much, >Cheers Daniel.<
             (0.4)
P:     ↑Bye now, [Bye. ]
S:                [Bye n]ow.
```

In lines 1-4, the interlocutors are discussing the upcoming meeting, specifically what services P’s company has budget for and, thus, is interested in receiving offers for from S. In line 3, the salesperson repeats the information that P’s budget exclusively covers maintenance. Keeping the floor with an inbreath (line 5), he produces a new TCU that functions as a possible pre-closing (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). The TCU closes off the on-going sequence with a positive assessment ‘would be great to talk to you: about that’ (lines 5-6). It then continues with two closing implicative moves (Button, 1987; Sikveland & Stokoe, 2017): (1) a reiteration of the already agreed plan to send the prospect an Outlook invitation and (2) a reminder of the time and date of the meeting. The prospect sustains the call's closing trajectory by producing a combination of assessments (the object-side 'Lovely' followed by a subject-side assessment 'Look forward to seeing it' in line 11) which can be heard as 'complete' (Edwards & Potter, 2017). In line 13, the salesperson aligns with an upgraded assessment 'Excellent'. His turn consists of two additional closing-relevant TCUs: a 'thank-you' and a goodbye token followed by an address term (Rendle-Short, 2007). The participants' last two turns overlap in part and are almost identical, which is indicative of an aligned closing of a conversation (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

Comparing this bilateral closing with the unilateral one shown in Extract 9 (which occurred in a first-time call) we notice that both calls end with the speakers synchronised in the production of their final words within the call. However, while in Extract 10 their actions are also aligned, in Extract 9, the prospect's 'Okay Thank you.' (line 17) is not fitted to his interlocutor's information elicitation (line 16). Finally, it is worth noting that the resources habitually available in bilateral closings, such as thank-you tokens, can also be used in unilateral closings, as the one in Extract 9.

Conclusion

This paper opens the 'black box' of B2B 'cold' calls to provide the first comprehensive overview of the social activities that are accomplished in and as part of B2B 'cold' calling. Our empirical analysis of 150 conversations revealed that salespeople and prospects can interact either as strangers or as prior acquaintances, which led us to propose a distinction between first-time and subsequent 'cold' calls. In addition to participants' orientation to their interlocutors and to the conversation (as either a 'first' or a 'continuation' of a prior commercial interaction), we discovered that first-time and subsequent calls differ with respect to the sequential architecture of the conversation; that is, the order and composition of the social activities comprised in the two 'types' of calls.

In first-time calls, salespeople introduce themselves to call-takers, while subsequent callers largely skipped self-identification, treating the call-takers as temporary interlocutors. In first-time calls, salespeople habitually use recognitional self-identifications even though they are talking to strangers. While this specialised practice has been designed, in theory, to build rapport, we suspect that the recurrence of this marked format has led to 'cold' calls being associated with recognitional self-identifications and to salespeople using this format being recognised as 'cold' callers.

When asking to speak to the 'relevant' person in the company, salespeople also format their switchboard requests differently. In first-time calls, they use 'open' switchboard requests which require call-takers to collaborate in identifying the 'relevant' person before granting requests. By contrast, subsequent calls feature 'closed' switchboard requests in which callers identified prospects by name, thus claiming acquaintanceship with them. Throughout the paper, we have shown that this distinction emerged out of members' orientation to a prior relationship or lack thereof. Thus, our paper adds to Hopper and Drummond's (1992) pioneering work on the local accomplishment of 'strangers' and intimates' identities by exploring the categories 'first-time' and 'subsequent' callers in a business context.

Crucially, the two 'types' of encounters differ with respect to the organisation of the 'business of the call'. First-time calls comprise three independent activities: (1) gathering information, (2) getting the prospect's contact details, and (3) making provisions for future encounters. By contrast, the activities that make up the 'business' of a subsequent call, (1) securing a meeting, (2) scheduling the meet, and (3) getting the prospect's contact details, are contingently ordered as an overarching project – arranging a sales appointment. The organisation of first-time calls exhibits further flexibility with respect to the order and the composition of its constituent activities. Except for information gathering, which always occupies the first slot within the 'business of the call', an ongoing activity (e.g. provision-making) can be put on hold while another one is launched and completed (e.g. getting the prospect's contact details). Furthermore, in first-time calls, salespeople had the option of inserting switchboard requests either before (Extract 1) or after (Extract 3) revealing the reason for calling.

These observations beg the question: how can the flexibility in the structural organisation first-time calls be explained, especially when compared to the robustness exhibited by subsequent calls? We believe that the flexible sequential organisation of first-time calls can be accounted for by the absence of an overarching conversational project. While subsequent calls are aimed at arranging a sales meeting, first-time calls do not have a single aim. Furthermore, first-time callers are more likely to encounter a range of difficulties and obstacles as prospects resist their attempts to extract information (Extract 3) or push for a closer contact date (Extract 5). Thus, having the freedom to creatively switch between conversational activities constitutes a useful resource for dealing with prospects' resistance. As such, our findings tend to suggest that imposing a rigid structure onto first-time 'cold' calls, through the use of scripts, might actually hamper salespeople's ability to successfully navigate prospects' challenges.

Overall, what have we found out about B2B 'cold' calls from this analysis? First, we conclude that there is no such thing as a 'typical' 'cold' call and that, like the participants, we need to distinguish between first-time and subsequent calls. Having compared the two 'types' of calls in terms of their sequential architecture and conversational 'agendas', we highlighted that and how even similar actions, such as switchboard requests, and similar activities, such as 'getting the prospect's contact details' differ in terms of their structural design. Second, our paper corroborates previous CA research on B2C sales (e.g., Mazeland, 2004; Rothe, 2011) which suggested that ‘cold’ calls are not designed to ‘qualify’ prospects; that is to check whether they are interested, in need, or able to by the products on offer. In the examined B2B ‘cold’ calls, salespeople contacted prospective customers to try to talk them into considering a future commercial transaction. Even first-time calls, while they were not organised to arrange a meeting, they still established a future contact opportunity during which the salesperson would, no doubt, try to get a meeting with the prospect.

The majority of conversation analytic studies of ‘cold’ calling have so far meticulously documented single sequences of action such as invitations (De Stefani, 2018) and assessments (Mazeland, 2004) in B2C ‘cold’ calls. The current paper adds to this body of work by investigating B2B ‘cold’ calls. Unlike prior research on ‘cold’ calling we (1) examined complete conversations and focused on the (2) overall structural organisation of these encounters; that is the activities that are comprised in ‘cold’ calling and their overarching organisation. Having read the analysis, scholars familiar with conversation analytic work would have noticed that, unlike ‘conventional’ CA studies that focus on the linguistic particulars of small stretches of talk which are unpacked in great detail, this paper highlights how such intricate linguistic details contribute to and constitute evidence for larger conversational structures (Robinson, 2013). We necessarily omitted highlighting in our analysis some noteworthy aspects of the conversational co-production of ‘cold’ calling, not because we have ignored these features of the talk, but because they are not relevant to the main focus of the paper. As such, the paper furnishes the first empirically grounded rough but exhaustive ‘road map’ of B2B ‘cold’ calls which we hope will stimulate and facilitate future investigations of these commercial encounters.

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