

# Prosodic, lexical and sequential cues for assessments with German *süß*: Assemblages for action and public commitment

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## Abstract

This paper shows how conversationalists assemble lexical, prosodic, and sequential cues to accomplish social actions and commitment to a stance. The assemblage [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design] is used as a practice to implement positive and highly affiliative assessments of child-like agents. Participants use the same form of assessment to mitigate complaints about adult referents, and to assign non-membership to referents from different membership categories. While the assemblage in its general form remains constant, the specifics of the prosodic stylization show a considerable degree of flexibility. Consequently, the paper argues that the interactionally most relevant aspect of prosodic stylization is that it is *notably different* from surrounding talk, rather than *how precisely* it is different. The analysis shows that social actions are not accomplished or contextualized by individual cues, but by assemblages, which emerge online and have to be defined with the necessary flexibility to fit the nature of spontaneous talk.

Assemblage - assessments - prosodic stylization - German - Interactional Linguistics

Dieser Artikel zeigt, wie GesprächsteilnehmerInnen lexikalische, prosodische und sequentielle Merkmale zusammenfügen, um soziale Handlungen auszuführen und sich einer Haltung zu verpflichten. Die *assemblage* [*süß* + prosodische Stilisierung + freistehender Turn] wird als Praktik verwendet, um positive und stark affiliiierende Bewertungen kindlicher Referenzobjekte durchzuführen. TeilnehmerInnen gebrauchen die gleiche Form von Bewertung, um Beschwerden über erwachsene Referenzobjekte zu entschärfen und um Referenzobjekten anderer *membership categories* Nicht-Mitgliedschaft zuzuweisen. Während die *assemblage* als solche in ihrer Form konstant bleibt, weisen die spezifischen Merkmale der prosodischen Stilisierung erhebliche Flexibilität auf. Somit argumentiert der Artikel, dass der interaktional relevanteste Aspekt von prosodischer Stilisierung eher ihre *beträchtliche Abweichung* vom sie umgebenden Gesprächsdesign ist als *die präzise Form* der Abweichung. Die Analyse zeigt, dass soziale Handlungen nicht durch einzelne Gesprächsmerkmale ausgeführt oder kontextualisiert werden, sondern durch *assemblages*, die in einem *online*-Prozess hervor- und zusammentreten, und die mit der für spontane Gesprächsdaten notwendigen Flexibilität definiert werden müssen.

Assemblage - Bewertungen - prosodische Stilisierung - Deutsch - Interaktionale Linguistik

## 1. Introduction

There is growing understanding in Interactional Linguistics and beyond that the linguistic behavior of a single speaker cannot be considered in isolation from other behavior, from other users of language, and from its local context of use. Human interaction relies on bundles of linguistic and non-linguistic cues for collaborative sense-making. This means that linguistic and non-linguistic domains, such as syntax, turn construction, prosody, lexis, and embodied behavior have to be considered together for the analysis of talk-in-interaction. This study shows how a cluster of turn constructional resources (lexical, prosodic, sequential) is systematically employed to implement a definable social action. The cluster of interactionally relevant features that participants assemble for that purpose is referred to as an 'assemblage', with loose reference to the term as it is used in cultural studies (Deleuze/ Guattari 1987, Marcus/ Saka 2006). In that field, as in Interactional Linguistics, the aspect of assembling as an emergent activity is highly significant. For an analysis of natural talk the term 'assemblage', rather than, for example, 'pattern', emphasizes participants' active moment-by-moment building of interactional practices from a variety of available component parts for the accomplishment of social actions, with changes in the assembled cues resulting in changes to the action (to-be-)accomplished.

We know that small changes to the delivery of turns, such as variations in word choice (e.g. Raymond/ Heritage 2006) or prosodic delivery (e.g. Local 1992) can have a substantial impact on the social work performed by participants through talk. However, we also know that natural interaction involves a considerable amount of redundancy (e.g. Kaimaki 2011). For example, participants can be observed to orient routinely and systematically to a variety of behavioral patterns for turn completion; among them cues from syntax, lexis, articulation, pitch, voice quality, loudness, syllable duration, tempo, torso movement, gesture, and gaze (cf. French/ Local 1983, Local/ Wells/ Sebba 1985, Local/ Kelly/ Wells 1986, Selting 1996, Wells/ Peppé 1996, Wells/ Macfarlane 1998, Local/ Walker 2004, Ogden 2004, Stivers/ Rossano 2012, Li 2013, 2014). Not all of these patterns are called upon on each occasion, and at times directly contrasting cues may be used at different turn completion points (Szczeppek Reed 2004). With respect to sound patterns, previous work has also shown that in certain contexts speakers relate the prosodic design of their own contributions to that of other speakers. This is observably the case for turns in responding position, where participants frequently make use of prosodic matching (Szczeppek Reed 2006, 2009a, b, 2010, 2012. See also Goldberg, 1978, Couper-Kuhlen 1996, this volume, Müller 1996, Tarplee 1996, Wells/ Corrin 2004, Wells 2010, Gorisch/ Wells/ Brown 2012) in order to present their talk as following on from a previous speaker's contribution (Szczeppek Reed 2012). In these circumstances the main interactional impact of the prosodic delivery is its backward-orienting function, achieved by the repetition of the way a previous speaker delivered their talk prosodically. What counts most in such cases is that a participant is doing prosodically *the same* as a previous speaker, rather than *what exactly* they are doing. The analysis reported here, in contrast, shows a context in which the opposite is the case: what is important in the excerpts below is that the TCU in question is prosodically *different*, and in-

deed markedly so. The change itself, rather than the precise nature of how it is achieved, is what occasions the turn's main interactional function at a specific sequential position. In the case reported here, the issue at hand is the assemblage [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design], for example:

<<high, tense, held pitch>ganz SÜ::ß ->.

This assemblage is found to perform highly affiliative and at times mitigating assessments of third parties in first position.

In the following, methods and data are briefly introduced before analyses of three basic types of assessments with *süß* are presented. Subsequently, the extract which provided the first noticing for this study is analyzed in depth and finally a number of concluding observations are offered.

## 2. Methodology, data, and transcription

The methodology adopted here follows an interactional-linguistic approach, in that language is considered to be a collection of resources for social action and interaction (Selting/ Couper-Kuhlen 2001). The analysis has been conducted on recordings of six hours of naturally occurring German conversations around the dinner table. Each recorded interaction is roughly one hour long and involves two or three participants. The dinner host (Linda), a speaker of Swabian German, is present in all interactions as her apartment was the venue for the recordings. The participants have given their consent for the data to be used for research purposes in anonymized form; however, in two of the six recordings participants did not give permission to be video taped. As a result, those interactions are available as audio recordings only.

The recordings have been transcribed according to an adapted version of GAT2 (Couper-Kuhlen/ Barth-Weingarten 2011, see Appendix). An English translation, or at times a gloss, is provided for each line of transcript, although this should only be regarded as a rough guide to the original. The German word *süß* itself does not always have a straightforward English equivalent, except where it refers to taste as *sweet* (extracts (2) and (3)). At other times *cute* or (*aw*)*bless* may be more appropriate. For this reason, Betz/ Golato's (2008) practice of maintaining the original German word, rather than an attempt at translation, is followed here wherever the referent of *süß* is not food.

All prosodic and embodied information is provided in the German transcript line. Only one line of translation is provided, instead of the interlinear gloss required by GAT2 notations, for a more accessible transcript, especially in cases where a large amount of prosodic and embodied information is provided. Consider, for example:

2562 M: <<all>und dann hAt er so\_n>verBEULten BEsen,  
and then he's got this beat-up broom

2563 damit macht er dann SAU<<breathy>ber.>  
and that's what he cleans up with

As Ashmore/ Reed (2000) have noted, audio recordings and transcripts are 'analytical objects' rather than original data (see also Kelly/ Local 1989). Further, both the visual detail provided by the video recordings and the necessity to translate from another language introduce additional layers of complexity and additional opportunities for aspects of the original event to be missed. Therefore it is important to keep in mind Ten Have's (1997) observation that 'transcripts are unavoidably incomplete, selective renderings of the recordings'. All audio recordings are available from the author upon request, but can be shared for research purposes only. For a single example of the assemblage [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design], please see LIS1.



### 3. Analysis

This study began with a first noticing of *süß* in the following dinner table conversation, where it is used with highly remarkable prosody and facial expressions. The extract comes from a longer sequence, which will be considered again in more detail later. Linda has just told Julia that their mutual friend Mark is going traveling with an admirer'.

#### (1a) Linda and Julia 3, 11.31LJ3-LJ7

- 529 J: [<<breathy, frowning, holding gaze, torso forward>hat-] hat\_n verEHRer?>  
(he) has has an admirer
- 530 L: <<smiling, nodding>m[\_hm:::,>]
- 531 J: [der ihn ] AN[wirbt?]  
who is romancing him
- 532 L: <<smiling, nodding>[ m]\_hm:::,>
- > 533 [<<tense, nodding, eyes closed, smiling>GAN:Z>  
really
- > 534 <<high, tense, vibrato, eyes half closed, smiling, frowning SÜ]::::ß - >

The exaggerated prosodic and facial design of the assessment item (*ganz*) *süß* (line 533) involves tense phonation, high pitch register, held pitch with vibrato, vowel lengthening, (half-)closed eyes, and a smiling-frowning facial expression. This highly marked turn design seems to combine with the positively valenced lexical item *süß* to display strong commitment to high regard for the referent (Mark). However, the turn is a surprising choice for an adult referent, whom the German lexical items '*n Verehrer ... der* (*an admirer...who*, masculine gender) reveals to be gay. It was therefore considered helpful to investigate other assessments with *süß* in order to understand the role of the lexical choice and the prosodically stylized turn design. In the following, three basic uses of *süß* will be presented.

### 3.1. Prosodically unmarked *süß*

In its basic sense, German *süß* can be used to assess the taste of food as *sweet*. In the 3 occurrences of this use in a collection of 28 cases, *süß* is embedded into a simple clause, such as a copula construction, rather than being freestanding; and occurs with unmarked prosodic or facial attributes. For example, in the following extract Barbara assesses the taste of an Indian sauce, which another participant had feared to be too hot.

#### (2) Linda, Barbara, Sophie, 14.35 LBS1

- 923 L: DAN[ke.]  
thank you
- 924 B: [die] IS nich SCHARF;  
this isn't hot
- > 925 die is ↑SÜ:ß. (.)  
it is sweet
- 926 L: ECHT?  
really

Barbara's *süß* marks a contrast with the description of the sauce in the previous TCU (*die is nich scharf*, line 924), and *süß* therefore receives a degree of prominence typically found with such contrastive statements. The prominence is realised by means of syllable lengthening and a pitch step-up. Barbara's facial expression remains relaxed with the exception of the lip rounding and lip protrusion necessary for the articulation of [y:]. A similarly unmarked combination of cues occurs in the following assessment of a piece of dragon fruit that one of the participants is eating. Linda's articulation of *süß* again involves the necessary degree of lip rounding and protrusion, but otherwise shows relaxed facial expressions. Her prosodic design is appropriate for the turn-final location of *süß*, that is, it involves a degree of final lengthening and prominence typical for a focus accent.

#### (3) Linda and Julia Part 2, 00.25 LJ2

- 32 J: zum in\_d GOSCH neischlage.  
makes you want to hit him
- 33 (1.1)
- > 34 L: ((giggles))
- 35 <<pointing>dIE sind SÜ:ß.>  
these are sweet
- 36 (.)
- 37 J: <<chewing>mhm,>
- 38 L: <<pointing>dIE> sind REIF.>  
these are ripe

Both instances of *süß* are first-position assessments of currently and interactionally available material objects (food on the table). In this use of *süß* the item is embedded into a simple syntactic construction. Regarding the prosodic and articulatory production of *süß*, both instances exhibit a degree of syllable lengthening that is consistent with their turn-final location and focus accent, and in (2), with contrastive stress.

Default, unmarked turn design can also be observed when *süß* is embedded into longer syntactic constructions that assess third parties, rather than immediately accessible tastes. Examples from the corpus include:

**(4) Linda, Frauke, Jens, 22.05 LFJ3**

F: sie war so SÜß katrin;  
she was so cute Katrin (was)

**(5) Linda, Frauke, Jens, 17.55 LFJ2**

F: und die ham so Süße KIDS auch;  
and they've got such cute kids as well

**(6) Linda and Mark, 19.32 LM4**

L: desch aber SÜß dass er\_s WAHRnimmt.  
but it's cute that he realises it

Of the 28 cases of *süß* in the corpus, 14 occur as part of a longer construction. 12 of these cases show a prosodic delivery that is unmarked except for what is appropriate for locally relevant accents, contrasts, and turn-internal positions. It appears that the extremely marked prosodic and visual design seen in extract (1a) is typically found in syntactically and sequentially freestanding position, as the following sections will show.

**3.2. [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design] as a practice for affiliative assessments of 'little' referents**

*Süß* can be used in a freestanding format similar to other German assessment tokens (*klasse*, *super*) in first responding position. In this format and location, *süß* may be prosodically unmarked; however, in the corpus for this study it is very often extremely marked (13 out of 14 cases). The following extract is a typical example. Here, Sibylle has been telling Ines and Linda about a map of Germany in her parents' road atlas on which she drew pencil lines as a teenager to measure the distance between her town and the hometown of a boy she had a crush on.

**(7) Linda, Ines, Sibylle, 1.05.20 LIS1**

1025 S: ich hatte mich auf\_m kirchentag in berlIn -  
at the church congress in Berlin I had



yond the routine prosody for turn taking, sequence organization, and contrastive emphasis, is referred to here as 'prosodic stylization' (Szczepek Reed 2006).<sup>2</sup>

Ines's turn is sequentially in first responding position, directly following the assessable (line 1035), and displays commitment to a highly affiliative stance. Earlier in the sequence, Ines has already received parts of Sibylle's telling with prosodically stylized continuers (lines 1030, 1034), thus aligning with a storytelling activity that makes affective involvement relevant. Following the *süß*-assessment, Ines continues to display affiliation with a positively valenced third-position assessment *klasse* (line 1040). This extract is the only one in the collection in which a second assessment is offered. All other cases of freestanding *süß* are the only assessment following the assessable turn and are typically sequence-closing. In the above instance, rights to assess (Heritage/ Raymond 2005) are being handled carefully by participants. As the assessable is Sibylle's younger self, her second position assessment is constrained by preferences regarding self-praise. She neither upgrades nor downgrades, but instead offers *echt so witzig* (*so funny*, line 1038), which conveys a non-committal stance.

The lexical content of *o süß*, the extreme prosodic marking, and the freestanding position combine to implement a distinctly positive assessment, showing strong public commitment to an affiliative stance and affective involvement (Goodwin/ Goodwin 1987). This is supported by the smiling delivery and the additional positive assessment in third position. The assessable is Sibylle's behavior as a teenager. What is being assessed with *o süß* is the 'sweet' and innocently romantic behavior of a young person. Later examples show that this intrinsic connection between a 'sweet' referent and the reference form 'sweet' cannot be taken for granted.

In the following extract a similar pattern can be observed. Eleven-year-old Sophie is telling Linda how she fed raccoons during a recent visit to the zoo.

### (8) Linda, Barbara, Sophie, 28.02 LBS4, LBS5

- 1657 S: ICH hatte hier (.) WASCHbärfutter?  
I had the food for the raccoons here
- 1658 <<acc>und DIE ham - >=  
and they
- 1659 =mach mal DEIne hand so hin? (.)  
put your hand like this
- 1660 °h und die haben mit IHRen händen,  
and they with their hands
- 1661 (0.7)
- 1662 äh des so RAUS genom[m]en, ]>  
took it like this
- > 1663 L: [ <<smiling>S:Ü[:::ß - >]

<sup>2</sup> See Szczepek Reed (2006) for an overview of the use of the term 'stylisation' in the literature, where it is often restricted to 'sing-song' intonation.



- 1664 S: [und HAM ]  
des dann geGESSen.  
and then they ate it
- > 1665 L: <<high, loud, smiling>↑↓SÜ::ß.>
- 1666 B: wie ÄFF[che:n].  
like little monkeys
- 1667 L: [wO WAR denn des sophIE;  
where was this Sophie

Once again, the assemblage [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design] implements a highly positive assessment of a sweet and innocent third party. This time the item is repeated after an initial placement in overlap with ongoing talk (lines 1663, 1665). As in the previous case, strong commitment to affiliation is apparent in the smiling delivery of both turns. However, while both instances of the assemblage involve notable prosodic stylization, the specifics of the prosodic design differ both from the previous example and from each other. While (4) shows tense phonation, both instances in (5) are produced with modal voice quality. There is also a difference in pitch contour, as neither instance in (5) shows the portamento contour seen in (4). Instead, line 1663 shows a held level pitch throughout the entire item. This format stands out from surrounding talk due to its lack of pitch movement, and due to the rarity of level pitch in turn-final position (Szczeppek Reed 2004). In contrast, line 1665 shows a wide rising-falling movement. Finally, while (4) is delivered with high pitch register, only the second instance in (5) (line 1665) shows the same feature.

All three examples show extensive vowel lengthening, and also lip spreading. The latter may be related to an increase in vowel fronted-ness observable in (5) (Fagel 2010).<sup>3</sup> At line 1665, Linda's F<sub>2</sub> formant in [y:] has a mean value of 1999 Hz, which is considerably higher than in her articulation of unmarked *süß* at other times in the corpus, such as:

### (9) Linda and Mark, 19.09 LM3

- L: dEs find ich schonmal SÜ:ß                      Mean F<sub>2</sub> for [y;]:1876 Hz  
that I find rather cute

### (10) Linda and Mark, 19.22 LM4

- L: desch aber SÜß dass er\_s WAHRnimmt      Mean F<sub>2</sub> for [y;]: 1856 Hz  
but it's cute that he realises it

<sup>3</sup> The formant responsible for perception of vowel fronted-ness is F<sub>2</sub>. Where possible formant analyses have been carried out using Praat 5.3.82 (Available at <http://www.fon.hum.uva.nl/praat/>). However, a definite increase in F<sub>2</sub> can only be claimed for certain for Linda, for whom there is considerably more data available due to her presence in all recordings, and whose formant values can therefore be compared with other instances of *süß*. As formant frequencies depend very much on phonemic context and a speaker's physiology no definite claims regarding vowel quality will be made with regard to other speakers.

Fagel (2010) shows that lip spreading can have a raising effect on F<sub>2</sub> formants in certain vowels, including /i:/ (his study does not include /y:/). However, later cases (1b, lines 533, 536) show that smiling does not necessarily result in an increase in vowel fronted-ness in our data.

Once again, [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design] implements a first-position assessment, and this time no second assessments are offered by other speakers. Instead, Linda closes the storytelling sequence with *süß* before she goes on to initiate a request for information (line 1667). With regard to the referent of *süß* here, too, a 'little' agent co-occurs with the reference form 'sweet' in addition to the child-adult nature of the interaction itself.

The following extract shows a similar occurrence of *süß*, this time referencing (the giving of) a chocolate Easter bunny. Linda enquires of eleven-year-old Sophie whether she received Easter presents (a 'nest') from her grandmother.

### (11) Linda, Barbara, Sophie, 24.26 LBS3

- 1452 L: GAB\_s jetzt n nestle oder NICH.  
so was there a little nest or not
- 1453 S: ja ne so ne (.) kleine dOse mit Süßigkeiten,  
yes a like a small box with sweets
- 1454 und so\_n HA:se mit ZWANzich EUro hinten [drin. ]  
and like a bunny with twenty euros in its back
- 1455 L: [o:a::;]  
wOW
- 1456 des\_isch ja\_n GOLdhasse;  
that was a gold bunny
- 1457 im WAHRschten sinne des WO:Rtes  
<<smiling>GWE:s[n::..>  
quite literally
- 1458 S: [ja. ]  
yes
- > 1459 L: <<smiling>S::Ü::ß;>
- 1460 und da hatse sich WAHNsinnich gfreut;  
and she was really happy
- 1461 über dein selber gmachtes NESCHtle;=  
to get the little nest you made
- 1462 =ODer?  
was she

Linda's prosodic delivery of *süß* involves considerable lengthening, this time both on the first and the second segment, [s] and [y;]. Once again there is an increase in vowel fronted-ness, as F<sub>2</sub> for [y;] has a mean value of 2074 Hz. The pitch contour is falling minimally, while other prosodic features remain unmarked (phonation, pitch register, loudness). As in the above extract the assemblage [*süß* + prosodic

stylization + freestanding turn design] accomplishes a positive and highly committed assessment of a (behavior involving) a 'little' referent in sequence-closing position. Affiliation is displayed by Linda's preceding turn (lines 1455-1457), where she receives the news of the Easter present with an extreme case formulation (*Goldhase*, line 1456) and the beginning of smiling delivery (line 1457), which continues into the *süß*-assessment. The choice of referent continues the list of 'little' things or agents with which this assemblage co-occurs.

A final example in this line of argument is the following one, in which a three year-old child is assessed as *süß*. Here the assemblage is incorporated into a longer turn, where it functions linguistically as an added adverbial phrase and sequentially as a freestanding assessment TCU. Linda is telling Michael that she needs to call her niece, who left a message on her answer phone.

### (12) Linda and Michael, 1.00.27 LMi1

- 3059 L: wEIl die geht sonst in\_s BE:TT.=  
because she'll go to bed otherwise
- 3060 =und die hat mir geschtern auf\_sBAND geSPROchen ->  
and she left me message on the answerphone yesterday
- > 3061 <<high, tense, held pitch>ganz SÜ::ß ->  
really süß
- 3062 und die WA:Rtet jetzt schon immer;  
and now she always waits
- 3063 dass die PAtentante zurückrUft;  
for her godmother to call her back

Again the prosodic stylization involves both similarities and differences with previous cases. It includes vowel lengthening, high pitch register, tense voice quality and held pitch across the entire phrase *ganz süß*. The articulation of [y:] is further front than for Linda's unmarked items, with 1990 Hz as a mean F<sub>2</sub> value. What is substantially different here is that [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design] is not a first-position assessment by a different speaker, but is produced by the speaker who has produced the assessable (line 3060). This practice of assessing one's own talk is shown to be used as an interactional strategy in the following section. The stylized prosodic delivery hearably sets the assemblage apart from preceding and following talk and shows it to be designed as a freestanding assessment TCU.

The four extracts above have shown that an assemblage of lexical, sequential, and prosodic cues is used to perform highly committed affiliative first-position assessments of small or otherwise 'sweet' assessables. The assessments refer to children, small animals or animal-like objects, and most of them are also addressed at children. The assemblage has been represented as

[*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design].

It is argued here, first, that prosodic markedness can be achieved by a range of prosodic cues, rather than a defined set of specific changes; and second, that prosodic markedness as such is a defining factor for the accomplishment of a highly committed affiliative assessment with *süß*. In order for the second argument to hold, it would also need to be shown that a modification of the assemblage to [*süß* + freestanding turn design] without prosodic stylization does not accomplish the same action. The corpus indeed contains one such case.

**(13) Linda, Barbara, Sophie, 36.40 LBS6, LBS7**

- 2140 L: du hasch ne SCHÖne (.) KETTE.  
you've got a lovely necklace
- 2141 hasch die SELber gmacht?  
did you make it yourself
- 2142 (0.7)
- 2143 S: hm?m.
- 2144 hat mAma mir aus itALien mitgebracht.  
mum brought it back from Italy for me
- 2145 L: die\_sch TOLL.  
it's lovely
- 2146 (2.6)
- 2147 B: von liMO:ne.  
from Limone
- > 2148 L: [SÜß;]
- 2149 B: [ am ] LA:go die GARda.  
at Lake Garda
- 2150 (1.1)
- > 2151 L: SÜß sieht die aus.  
it looks cute
- 2152 (3.4)
- 2153 JA mädels;  
well girls

In this instance, the assessment accomplished by the modified assemblage implements a compliment paid to the recipient, rather than an assessment of a non-present third party. In this function, public commitment to affiliation is not made in relation to a stance previously expressed by the recipient, but in relation to locally available attributes and possessions of the recipient herself. The absence of prosodic stylization thus seems to result in an assemblage of cues that is employed for a different interactional function. While prosodic stylization thus appears to have a contrastive function in highly affiliative assessments with *süß*, its individ-

ual form seems less relevant. Regarding the specifics of the prosodic delivery of *süß* throughout the collection, only vowel lengthening can be observed in all cases. Other features, such as increased fronted-ness in vowel articulation, high pitch register, and a change in voice quality occur in some instances, but not others. With regard to pitch contour, there seem to be two main movements, portamento and level tone, with a number of exceptions. These observations suggest that there is a core set of features, vowel lengthening and possibly a held or portamento contour, which speakers combine with other prosodic features to design turns as notably separate from the surrounding run of talk.

In the following section the same assemblage is shown to be used as an interactional practice for referring to and mitigating the complainable behavior of adults.

### 3.3. [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design] as a practice for mitigating the behavior of adult referents

Out of the 13 cases of freestanding, prosodically stylized *süß*, 6 either refer to children, and/ or are addressed at them. The remaining 7 refer to, and are addressed at, adults. In the following it is argued that where the assemblage [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design] is used to assess adult referents, this is done to mitigate potential criticism of their complainable behavior. This is made possible because the use of the assemblage allows participants to treat adult referents interactionally as child-like and thus not fully responsible for their behavior. See, for example, the extract below, in which Linda and Mark are eating cake bought for them by Gaby, a non-present friend, who is currently visiting from out of town.

#### (14) Linda and Mark, 10.22 LM1

- 593 L: die sehn TOLL aus.  
they look amazing
- 594 M: JA.  
yes
- 595 hm:: so RIChtich zum REIN[beißen.]  
mm really yummy
- 596 L: [aber L]EIder weiß gAby  
nimmer wo die konditoREI isch;=  
but unfortunately Gaby can't remember where the pastry shop is
- > 597 =<<creaky, quiet>SÜ::ß - >
- 598 M:E[CHT?]  
really
- 599 L: [des ] ISCH halt so bei Ortsfremden.  
that's what it's like with people who are not locals

- 600            die LATSCHen[halt R]AUS,  
                 they'll wander out
- 601    M:                            [ja:. ]  
    yes
- 602    L:    irgendwo HIN,  
                 somewhere
- 603            und finden wieder ZRÜCK;  
                 and find their way back
- 604            [aber] beSCHREIben können sie\_s dir dann NICH.  
                 but they can't describe it to you
- 605    M:    [klar.]  
                 sure

Similar to (12), this assessment is produced by the same speaker who produces the assessable turn. The assemblage [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design] at line 597 is latched directly onto the previous TCU without a break and is designed with many of the features found in other cases. The vowel is lengthened, pitch is held level, and there is a change in voice quality, this time to creak. Vowel fronted-ness is again increased compared to Linda's default values with a mean F<sub>2</sub> for [y:] of 2039 Hz. This assemblage is also quieter than surrounding talk.

The referent of *süß* is of a different type than in earlier cases: while previous assessments with *süß* referred to 'little' things or agents and their 'sweet' behavior, this referent is an adult whose behavior is neither recognizably sweet nor innocent. Instead, the assessable is presented as a complaint, and the referent's behavior is made relevant as problematic: Gaby cannot remember where she bought the cakes. That Linda's turn is indeed designed as a complaint is observable from its initiation with *aber leider* (*but unfortunately*). It is this complainable behavior that is assessed with the positively valenced item *süß* in the directly following TCU.

By latching onto her complaint an affiliative and positive assessment, Linda is able to mitigate without delay any criticism inherent in her complaint. Further, by using an assessment assemblage that is routinely found with little and innocent agents who cannot be held responsible for their actions, Linda retrospectively contextualizes the referent and her behavior as minimally guilty of any complainable action. She thereby manages to avert any potential second position complaints by co-participants that may otherwise relevantly follow (Drew and Walker 2008, Ogden 2010). This analysis is confirmed by Linda's subsequent talk (lines 599-604), which maintains a defending stance towards the complainable issue.

Another example of this strategy is the following, in which Mark tells Linda about his new partner (cf. ex. (1a, b)), a senior academic, whose apartment he has recently visited for the first time. He is in the process of describing various features, such as the lack of furniture and his partner's apparent lack of interest in his surroundings.

**(15) Linda and Mark, 46.34 LM5**

- 2562 M: <<all>und dann hAt er so\_n>verBEULten BEsen,  
and then he's got this beat-up broom
- 2563 damit macht er dann SAU<<breathy>ber.>  
and that's what he cleans with
- 2564 °hhhh he
- 2565 [<<laughing>ach JA, ]>  
oh well
- > 2566 L: [<<tense, quiet, smiling>S:Ü::ß ->]
- 2567 M: stAUbsauger gibt\_s AUCH net -  
there's no vacuum either
- 2568 L: ja=aber GUCK,  
yes but look
- 2569 wEnigschtens MACHT er sAUber.  
at least he does clean up
- 2570 M: geNAU.  
exactly

As in the previous example, the assessable in this instance is neither little nor young. Instead, the assessed behavior is presented in a complaint about sub-standard cleaning equipment (line 2562-2563). The resulting implication of a lack of cleanliness is later mitigated by Linda (2568-2569). As in the previous case, the complaint is immediately followed by a relativizing item produced by the same speaker who makes the complaint (*ach ja*, line 2565). In overlap Linda offers her assessment with prosodically stylized, freestanding *süß*. The stylization involves sound and syllable lengthening, spread lips, tense phonation, held pitch and a decrease in loudness. Once again, the assemblage [*süß* + prosodic stylization + free-standing turn design] is used to mitigate potential criticism of an adult's behavior that intrinsically possesses none of the features denoted by the lexical item *süß*. By using an assemblage often found to assess small, and by implication innocent, referents, a not-so-innocent referent is treated with minimal attribution of responsibility. This once again has a sequential implication in that further complaints are averted (lines 2568-70).

### **3.4. [*süß* + prosodic stylization + freestanding turn design] as a practice for assigning non-membership**

The above observations provide insight into the multi-layered referential possibilities afforded by freestanding, prosodically stylized *süß*. They also allow for a deeper understanding of the sequence that inspired this analysis (see ex. (1a)). In assessing adult referents and their behavior with the assemblage described above, the implication arises that those referents are not only treated as little, but that

their behavior is potentially complainable and must be mitigated. It is this combination of highly committed benevolence, as if to a child or to a friend who has misbehaved, directed at the entirely un-complainable behavior of two adults, that accounts for the notable effect of the sequence in question. The following transcript provides a detailed notation of the entire sequence, during which several *süß*-assessments are made. The sequence is part of a longer conversation in which Linda and Julia are discussing who to invite to a bicycle ride that Linda is trying to organize. Julia suggests asking Mark, one of Linda's best friends.

**(1b) Linda und Julia, 11.20 LJ3-LJ7**

- 516 J: aber DEN kannst du [doch FRAGEN; ]  
but you could ask him couldn't you
- 517 L: [ <<high>AH: NEE:;> ]  
ah no
- 518 J: [ ( ( ) ) ]
- 519 L: [der isch der geht] mit nem::;  
he is he's going with an
- 520 (0.2) ((hand gesture, raised eyebrows, slow nod, gaze at J))
- 521 <<slow, smiling, holding gaze>verEH:Rer?>  
admirer
- 522 <<slow, smiling, holding gaze, head nod>nach  
itA:Lien.>  
to Italy
- 523 J: ((hand gesture, raised eyebrows, slow nod, smiles, holds gaze with L))
- 524 <<low, creaky, smiling, holding gaze>NEI:::N;>  
no
- 525 L: [ <<smiling, holding gaze, nodding>m\_hm::: -> ]
- 526 J: [ <<smiling, holding gaze, leaning forward>nach  
it]Alien;>  
to Italy
- 527 L: <<smiling, holding gaze, nodding>JA,  
yes
- 528 [weil ] des\_n italiener ISCH,>  
because this is an Italian
- 529 J: [ <<breathy, frowning, holding gaze, torso forward>hat- ] hat\_n verEHRer?>  
(he) has has an *admirer*



- 530 L: <<smiling, nodding>m[\_hm:::,>]
- 531 J: [der ihn ] AN[wirbt?]  
who is romancing him
- 532 L: <<smiling, nodding>[ m]\_hm:::,>
- > 533 [<<tense, nodding, eyes closed, smiling>GAN:Z>  
really  
-> <<high, tense, vibrato, eyes half closed, smiling,  
frowning SÜ]:::ß - >



**Still 1:** Julia (recipient, left), Linda (speaker, right), line 533

- 534 J: [seit<<creaky, smiling, frowning>WANN,>]  
since when
- 535 L: °hh<<smiling>du des ging schon vor der KUR los  
anSCHEInend.>  
it started even before he went to the resort apparently
- > 536 <<high, tense, held pitch, eyes half closed,  
smiling, frowning>so:: Sü:::ß ->  
so süß
- 537 auch bei so\_m porTAL halt.  
through one of those portals again
- 538 (1.0)
- > 539 <<giggling, extra high, breathy, eyes half closed,  
smiling, frowning>gan:z SÜ:::ß ->  
really süß
- 540 wenn\_er von DEM [erZÄH:]LT ->  
when he talks about him
- 541 J: [(( )].

- 542 L: <<high, giggling, smiling, frowning>da wird er ganz  
WEICH so::;>  
he gets really soft like
- 543 und GANZ, °hh  
and really
- 544 (1.0)
- 545 emoTIOna:l,  
emotional
- 546 und es tut ihm einfach so [GUT.]  
and it's just so good for him
- 547 J: <<smiling, frowning>[och ] [COO:]:L;>  
aw cool
- 548 L: [und ] dessen  
BRUder,  
and his (that person's) brother
- 549 hat ne FErienwohnung,  
has a holiday apartment
- 550 irgendwo bei GEnuA:?  
somewhere near Genua
- 551 ((L smiles and holds gaze with J))
- 552 J: <<becoming higher, tense, creaky, smiling,  
frowning>und dann wi- will er ihn MITneh::m,>  
and so he wants to take him
- 553 L: ((nods))
- > 554 J: <<falsetto, loud, smiling, frowning>oh: is das  
SÜ::ß;>=  
aw that's so süß
- 555 =<<high, loud, smiling>und die ham sich auch schon  
ge↑TROFFen und [sO::.> ]  
and they've already met and so on
- 556 L: <<smiling>[JA↑↓::.>]  
yes
- 557 J: ((voiced gasp, mouth wide open, raised eyebrows,  
held gaze)) °hhh
- 558 <<creaky, held gaze>och TOLL::;>  
aw great
- 559 L: <<smiling, held gaze>und der kleine italiEner,  
and the little Italian
- 560 will immer schon gern MEHR?>  
already wants more

- 561 J: <<breathy, held gaze>oh ach↑S0::;  
oh I see
- 562 L: und ER sagt immer<<hand gesture, swaying torso  
movement>  
NEE,>  
and he keeps saying no
- 563 so weit bin\_ich NICH,=  
I'm not ready
- 564 =und du mussch mir jetzt ZEIT lassn.  
And you need to give me time
- 565 (0.2) ((L smiles))
- > 566 J: <<high, tense, loud, portamento, smiling,  
frowning>↑o ↑SÜ[:::ß;> ]  
aw süß
- 567 L: [ <<smiling with lips pressed together,  
frowning, nodding>m\_hm::, ]
- 568 (2.2) ((L and J hold gaze, frowning and smiling))
- 569 L: ((high shoulder shrug, giggles))

During this sequence Mark, his male partner, and their behavior as a couple are assessed with prosodically stylized *süß* on five occasions (lines 533, 536, 539, 554, 566). The assemblage at line 554 does not involve freestanding position; instead, it is produced in the form of an exclamatory formulaic phrase, in which the news receipt marker *oh* is followed by an inverted sentence structure found only with this type of strongly valenced expressions (*is das süß*). This instance is one of two cases where prosodically stylized *süß* is not in freestanding position; the other one is the similarly routine expression '*is ja süß*' by the same speaker in a different part of the same conversation. It may therefore be the case that formulaic phrases fill similar sequential slots (Raymond 2013) as do freestanding items.

The first three *süß*-assessments are done by Linda in response to her own talk. Interestingly, on none of these occasions (lines 533, 536, 539) is an actual assessable presented explicitly. Instead, what is being assessed remains implicit to a degree, with tacit reference to the news of Mark's 'admirer' and their travel plans (lines 517-532). All three assessments display some of the features previously described for the assemblage, with the prosodic stylization including changes in pitch register and phonation, held pitch, and vowel lengthening. There are also additional features, including considerable vibrato on the vowel at line 533 and giggling at line 539. Interestingly, vowel frontedness only occurs in Linda's third use of the assemblage (line 539), where the mean  $F_2$  value is 2032 Hz. The first two instances (lines 533, 536) show an even lower mean value than some of Linda's un-stylized uses of *süß*: [y:] in line 533 has a mean  $F_2$  value of 1758 Hz, while line 536 has a mean value of 1726 Hz. Thus vowel frontedness, which seems to occur fairly frequently throughout the collection, cannot be considered a systematic feature, but an optional variation. Further, while vowel frontedness

may have been interpreted as resulting from lip spreading, these instances show that this is not necessarily the case. In addition to these prosodic features, Linda's assessment is accompanied by an exaggerated smiling-frowning facial expression with half-closed eyes, most strongly displayed in the first assessment at line 533 (Still 1).

Julia's first assessment with stylized *süß* (line 554) is offered directly in response to news of the couple's travel arrangements, while her second assessment (line 566) responds to the news that Mark's partner is more sexually interested than Mark himself, and Mark is asking for more 'time' (line 564). Both assessments are produced with strong prosodic stylization. The first one (line 554) includes a change from Julia's prior talk to falsetto voice, an increase in loudness as well as vowel lengthening, and the smiling-frowning facial expression seen in Linda's earlier uses of the assemblage. Line 566 involves the same facial expression, high pitch register, increased loudness, tense phonation, vowel lengthening, and two portamento movements on *o* and *süß*.

All five assessments are extreme variations of the already exaggerated designs seen in earlier examples. All of the assessables describe the behavior of an adult gay couple who have recently met. As extract (7) shows, romantic behavior may indeed be assessed with prosodically stylized, freestanding *süß*. However, while (7) refers to the behavior of a 15 year-old teenager, the referents in this extract are grown men, and their behavior (plans to travel together) less romantically innocent than that of young Sybille (drawing lines on a map). Nevertheless, it would be difficult to identify these assessments in themselves as necessarily related to the difference in membership category (in contrast to Mark and his partner, Linda and Julia are heterosexuals). No explicit references are made to homosexuality or gay stereotypes. Without such references the analyst is left to imagine whether the same exaggeratedly amused reaction would have been displayed if, for example, Linda had spoken of a female friend who told her boyfriend she needed more time before she became sexually intimate. However, the sequence does contain an explicit reference to a different membership category attributed to Mark's partner, who is not German. At line 559 Linda refers to him as 'the little Italian'. The use of 'little' underpins an analysis of *süß* at other places in the sequence as at least in part belittling of third parties who are not of the same membership category (nationality, sexual orientation). That this is done entirely without (displayed) malice can be seen, for example, in the frequent use of straightforwardly positive assessments, such as *und es tut ihm einfach so gut* ('and it's just so good for him', line 546), *och cool* ('aw cool', line 547), and *och toll* ('aw great', line 558).

While the assessments in this sequence display high, even exaggerated commitment to a positive stance towards their referent, the use of the assemblage resonates with its more frequent uses: its reference to children and other small agents, its occurrence in child-adult interactions, and its mitigating function assessing the complainable behavior of adult referents. It is these resonances that introduce a potentially belittling stance towards non-members of the same categories, even if the explicit talk itself displays high levels of commitment to friendship and social intimacy. The assemblage thus not only performs positive assessments of third party referents, but it assigns the referents to a non-

membership status by treating them interactionally as either child-like or deviant when in fact neither attribute applies.

#### 4. Concluding observations

This paper has presented an analysis of a single assemblage of lexical, prosodic and sequential cues. An analytical decision was made not to approach the phenomenon as a word (*süß*) that is accompanied by certain prosodic or sequential features (stylization, freestanding position). Instead, the whole bundle of features was presented together as equally significant. In doing so the analysis committed itself to that bundle, but not to other uses of a) *süß*, b) prosodic stylization, or c) freestanding turn design. The term 'assemblage' was chosen to refer to such bundles because it carries the notion of an emergent, active assembling of cues, which is well-fitted to the analysis of spontaneous talk.

A claim was made that the precise nature of the prosodic stylization is not as interactionally relevant as the presence of stylization itself. This conclusion was reached after a detailed prosodic analysis of stylized, first-position assessments with *süß* showed only a single stable feature, which was vowel lengthening. With the exception of vowel lengthening, all other features showed wide variation, including unmarked patterns. Pitch contour, where considerable variation would be possible in theory, showed two main formats, level and portamento, with a number of exceptions. Table 1 shows prosodic variations of all 15 cases of stylized *süß*. 13 are freestanding, two are part of a formulaic construction (LJ6, LJ8).

Ex.	Duration	Voice quality	Contour	Pitch register	Loudness	Lips	F <sub>2</sub>
LM1	vowel	creaky	level	default	quiet	default	2039Hz
LM2	sound	breathy	level	default	quiet	spread	N/A
LM5	sound + vowel	tense	level	default	quiet	spread	N/A
LJ1	sound + vowel	modal	level	default	default	rounded	1921Hz
LJ3	sound + vowel	tense	level	high	default	spread	1758Hz
LJ4	vowel	tense	level	high	default	spread	1726Hz
LJ5	vowel	breathy	level	high	default	spread	2032Hz
LJ6	vowel	falsestto	rising	high	loud	spread	N/A
LJ7	vowel	tense	portamento	high	loud	spread	N/A
LJ8	sound + vowel	modal	fall-to-mid	low	default	default	N/A
LMi1	vowel	modal	level	high	default	default	1990Hz
LIS1	vowel	tense	portamento	high	default	spread	N/A
LBS3	sound + vowel	modal	fall-to-mid	default	default	spread	2074Hz
LBS4	vowel	modal	level	default	default	spread	N/A
LBS5	vowel	modal	rising-falling	high	default	spread	1999Hz

**Table 1:** Prosodic variation of stylized *süß*

All items have in common that they implement the same category of social action: affiliative, positive assessments in first position. What defines them prosodically is that they stand out, often prominently, from the surrounding run of talk. They do not continue whatever prosodic design was used before, and the talk following them does not continue their prosodically stylized design. Their most fundamental characteristic is that they are different from what came before. Precisely how they are different, however, does not seem to be a major factor with regard to the social action and commitment they accomplish. Similar observations have been reported with respect to pitch by Kaimaki (2011), who finds that for non-valenced news receipts rising and falling pitch contours are in free variation. This is not to say that individual and specific changes in prosodic design are meaning- or functionless in specific interactional environments. There may indeed be links between, for example, certain prosodic designs and degrees of affective involvement (see Kupetz, this volume). However, with regard to the overall accomplishments of talk what matters most seems to be how a prosodic design relates to its prosodic surroundings. For the public display of strong affiliation with *süß* what appears to be most relevant is an exaggerated break from previous prosodic designs. For other social actions, the opposite may be the case. For example, in the case of return greetings, continuing a previously established prosodic pattern is the defining factor (Szczeppek Reed 2006, 2009a, b).

Thus, two ways of approaching prosody in interaction present themselves to the analyst: the worthwhile detailing of specific prosodic features and their individual interactional functions; and the exploration of prosodic features more broadly as a resource for implementing categories of actions and sequential structure. This chapter has presented a contribution to the latter.

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## 6. Appendix

Adaptations from Couper-Kuhlen and Barth-Weingarten (2011)  
Suprasegmental and embodied information

<<low>>	low pitch register
<<high>>	high pitch register
<<loud>>	increased loudness
<<quiet>>	decreased loudness
<<nodding>>	
<<smiling>>	
<<frowning>>	

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