‘I am put on quite a bit’: Recurrent complaining and the ambivalences of multigenerational near-co-residence

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Abstract
Many studies of complaints-in-interaction have examined long sequences. This paper, by contrast, scrutinises a series of complaints produced within the same participation framework across four successive encounters. The data comprise audio-recorded talk between an older woman (the complainant) and her stylist in a hair salon. Drawing on conversation analysis and membership categorisation analysis, I show how the complainant recurrently, but implicitly, implicates her near-co-resident adult daughter as a culpable figure in her complaints. I argue that it is the longitudinal nature of the data that enables this identification of the daughter as the recurrent underlying target. The paper thereby contributes to studies of complaining-in-interaction. It also shows how we might address some of the methodological issues associated with implicitly designed complaints. Furthermore, I argue that through the detail of the way she designs her articulation of her troubles—as complaints, but with the culpability of her daughter often very implicit—the complainant discursively constructs the complexity of her familial relations and living situation. This paper thereby also contributes to sociolinguistic studies of social ageing by offering insights into some of the lived ambivalence of co-residence arrangements in later life.
1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper focusses, as a case study, on successive complaints made by an older female complainant about a non-present third party during four discrete encounters. The complaints are embedded in the freely flowing chat of a small village hair salon in southern England as the stylist shampoos, cuts, and styles the complainant's hair during her regular hair appointments. Examination of complaints can offer insights into both language use and a range of everyday tensions. For example, Stokoe and Edwards (2007, p. 302) study of complaints to neighbourhood mediation centres in the UK and police interviews revealed systematicities in talk about racism and ethnicity, but also offered insights into everyday tensions between neighbours. This paper similarly has two aims.

First, it aims to contribute to interactional, conversation analytic, studies of complaining. Studies of complaining, including of complaints in long sequences in single interactions, abound; the point of departure for this study is its focus on a series of third-party complaints by the same complainant to the same recipient spread across four discrete encounters, the first and last of which are separated by 21 weeks. A methodological challenge in studying potentially ambiguous practices like complaining is that ‘the moral work’ achieved through detailing the circumstances of a possible complainable may be implicit, with none of the participants explicitly displaying their orientation to the matter as a complaint (Drew, 1998, p. 302; Pino, 2015). This paper aims to show how, by studying the possible complainant's detailing work longitudinally, that is, across successive encounters, and by paying careful attention to the minutiae of the design of this detailing work—features like use of reported speech, marked use of reference, category work—we can make a defeasible case (a) that complaining is indeed the interactional practice underway; and (b) that the underlying target of these pieces of detailing work—these signals of complainability—is the same person on each occasion. The paper thereby also shows how a complainant can maintain an ongoing sense of grievance against the same complaint target over several months—and do this without explicitly criticising that target.

Secondly, this paper contributes to the developing body of sociolinguistic research on ageing and later life (Coupland, 2014 [2001]), that sheds light on how a range of aspects of social ageing are discursively constructed in interaction. In this paper, the aspect of social ageing illuminated is mother–daughter relations and ‘near co-residence’ (Isengard & Szydlik, 2012, p. 451) in later life. The (implicit) target of the complaints examined in this paper is the complainant’s adult daughter, who lives in a rural location in a semi-detached cottage adjoining that of her mother. She and her young daughter, on the one side of the building, and her mother (the complainant in this paper), on the other, could be broadly described as ‘near co-resident’ (Isengard & Szydlik, 2012, p. 451), that is, living (nearly) ‘in the same building but in separate households’. Such living arrangements in later life can be full of ambivalence and complexities for both sides (Pillemer et al., 2007). Studies into this kind of living arrangement, typically involving interviews or questionnaires, capture something of that ambivalence, often via explicit elicitation and naming of potential issues. This study, by contrast, offers a linguistically focussed perspective on some of the lived realities and tensions of near co-residence in later life, as, through the ambiguity designed into her complaints (Wilkes & Speer, 2020), the complainant discursively constructs the ambivalence and complexity of her familial relations and living situation (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 127).
COMPLAINTS AND LATER-LIFE RELATIONS

Some forms of conduct, argues Schegloff (2005, p. 449), may be ‘complainable’, that is, conduct towards which a negative stance might be taken. Articulation of that negative stance, for example by expressing feelings like displeasure or anger about the matter in question (Traverso, 2009, p. 2,385), is to engage in complaining. Structurally, some complaints may follow a standard adjacency pair format, whereby one participant produces their complaint and their recipient affiliates or disaffiliates. As Drew and Walker (2009, p. 2405) show, though, any particular explicit articulation of a complaint might have been adumbrated in earlier talk, with a potential complainer having carefully laid the groundwork for their complaint, cautiously ‘inviting’ collaboration and participation from their recipient. Indeed, they show that it is the recipient of the potential complaint who might first make the complainable explicit. Traverso (2009, p. 2386), similarly, shows how complaint sequences may progress in a ‘convoluted and painstaking’ manner, proceeding in fits and starts as parties jostle to have a topic taken up. As she argues, ‘A strictly utterance-by-utterance analysis may not be sufficient for packaging long sequences’ (p. 2387). In short, as Ruusuvuori and Lindfors (2009, p. 2432) suggest, rather than being explicit adjacency pairs, complaints may be gradually developed over a long stretch of talk.

However, just as relationships extend beyond specific encounters, so may complaints be part of a ‘long chain of interaction’ (Briggs, 1998, p. 540). Research into complaints-in-interaction, though, has not previously (to the best of my knowledge) examined complaints longitudinally. So studies sometimes examine a set of excerpts from the same longer interaction and/or include some of the same participants (e.g. Drew & Walker, 2009). In other studies, it is clear that successive interactions within largely the same participation framework are likely to be at issue (e.g. Heinemann, 2009; Laforest, 2009; Pino, 2015). In none of these studies, though, is successivity the focus of the analysis. By contrast, the current study explicitly examines a series of complaints within the same participation framework, across four discrete encounters over 21 weeks.

The complaints discussed in this paper relate to aspects of the complainant’s near co-residence with her adult daughter and granddaughter, as described above. This is a kind of living arrangement that is not uncommon in many parts of the world, and studies show that it can bring both positives and tensions (e.g. Aquilino & Supple, 1991; Isengard & Szydlik, 2012; Kim et al., 2017; Postigo & Honrubia, 2010). For example, older mothers in particular may derive satisfaction from engaging in activities with their adult children: the co-residency situation offers them a companion (Aquilino & Supple, 1991). On the other hand, the unmet expectations of parents and their near/co-resident adult children may occasion stress, centring inter alia, on allocation of household tasks, management of money, and, especially, care of grandchildren (Postigo & Honrubia, 2010). Indeed, the expectation by adult children that their parents will provide free childcare is widespread (Anderson et al., 2013; McGarrigle et al., 2018; Thiele & Whelan, 2006).

Such support, particularly by grandmothers to their adult daughters, is often critical, allowing the latter to return to work (McGarrigle et al., 2018; Mitchell, 2008). For many grandparents, care of their grandchildren brings satisfaction, fulfilment and enhancements to wellbeing (Arpino & Bordone, 2017; Thiele & Whelan, 2006). However, studies also highlight that for a substantial minority the additional burden and loss of freedom is unwelcome. Grandparent respondents to research studies recurrently qualify their positive responses about their grandchildren with reports of feeling unappreciated by the parents and having anticipated another kind of life (e.g. Evason et al., 2005; McGarrigle et al., 2018). For example, one interviewee quoted by McGarrigle et al., ‘Rose’, explicitly orientates to the mismatch between her expectations of later life and the actuality, saying:
I thought at this stage in my life that it would be time for me to do things that I want to do and it hasn't worked out that way because the way life has gone, I mean I am very tied with grandchildren and children and everything else and while it is nice and I love to have them but we don't seem to have time anymore.

(2018, p. 9)

As we shall see, the complainant in this case study articulates a similar perspective to ‘Rose’. The complaint stories she recounts relate to a range of issues that occasion more work or make her unduly busy or tired. Underpinning these complaints is the contrast between the complainant's hopes for retirement as a time of rest and new experiences, and its actuality as a time of work and busyness. Close analysis reveals that the complainant recurrently makes her near co-resident daughter relevant not only as a figure in her complaint stories, but also as a figure who is constructed as having some culpability with respect to the mismatch between the complainant’s expectation of retirement and its actuality. As I show, this construction by the complainant of her daughter as a complaint target is done implicitly. I argue that the implicitness is itself partly enabled by the ‘long chain[s] of interaction’ (Briggs, 1998, p. 540) of which each individual complaint is part. I suggest, moreover, that because of this implicitness, it is only by looking at these interactions longitudinally that we, as analysts, can identify the implicit target of these successive complaints.

In the following section I discuss the data and the methods used to collect them, before setting out the case study. The analysis section then examines in detail four of the complaints from the series produced by the complainant.

### 3 DATA AND METHODS

The data for this paper derive from a longer interactional sociolinguistics study investigating older women’s identity constructions through their talk and practices in ‘Joellen’s Hair Palace’. This small independent hair salon in southern England was run by the owner, Joellen, with two members of staff, and attracted a largely older, white British clientele (see Heinrichsmeier, 2020). The choice of hair salon as the site for the wider study was motivated by the significance, for many women, of appearance as they age, and by the role of hair salons for many clients as sites of close relationships (see discussion in Heinrichsmeier, 2020, pp. 18–22). As settings where, stereotypically, chat is central, and in which many clients have built a relationship with their stylist over several years, hair salons also afford many opportunities for examining talk-in-interaction within the same participation framework over time.

The wider study generated 20 hr of audio-recordings of conversations in the salon between the hair-salon workers and nine female clients (aged 55–90) during their hair appointments. (Video-recording was not possible as most participants refused consent for this.) Two to four appointments were recorded for each client participant, resulting in a total of 27 appointment recordings. Ethnographic data in the shape of audio-recordings of interviews with participants (15 hr) and field notes from nearly 2 years' participant observation supplemented the ‘naturally occurring’ salon data. Consent was obtained from all participants and all names are pseudonyms.

The audio-recorded data were transcribed using the conversation analytic notation devised by Jefferson (2004), and the analysis draws on conversation analysis (CA) and membership categorisation analysis (MCA; Sacks, 1995). The former focusses on understanding people’s everyday sense-making methods in interaction, drawing on an apparatus that supports detailed scrutiny of a range of aspects of interaction (see chapters in Sidnell & Stivers, 2013). CA adopts a bottom-up approach to data, scrutinising successive turns-at-talk and participants' emerging interactional goals, with its analysis informed by a rich body of findings relating to practices of talk across different languages.
MCA draws on the way categories of people—mother or daughter, for example—are like storehouses of knowledge about expectable conduct from incumbents of those categories (Schegloff, 2007b). Categories acquire this status through a range of attributes, activities, rights, and responsibilities, which are ‘taken by the common-sense of vernacular culture to be specially characteristic of a category’s members’ (Schegloff, 2007b, p. 470), and which are associated with categories in often nuanced and ambiguous ways.

One of the more frequent kinds of complaining behaviour is where the complaint is done to a third party with the target absent (Heinemann, 2009, p. 2435), and the activities examined in this paper fall into this category. However, specifying just what is a complaint is challenging. As Edwards (2005, p. 7) comments, the way something is characterised as a complaint is integral to the phenomenon itself. With this observation in mind, the wider dataset of audio-recordings was trawled to produce an initial broad collection of nearly 100 candidate examples of instances in which one of the participants is engaged in taking up a negative stance against a specific non-present target. Examination of this initial collection revealed a handful of instances of participants engaged in complaint tellings directed at the same target across successive encounters—a solicitor, boyfriend, son, daughter, and daughter-in-law. The complainant in this case study was one such participant.

4 | THE CASE STUDY

The case study examined here relates to a series of 12 complaints produced by an older widowed client, Mrs France, to her stylist, Joellen. These complaints were made during four of Mrs France’s hair appointments in the hair salon spread over 21 weeks. Mrs France’s daughter, also widowed, lived next door to Mrs France with her small daughter. Mrs France was recently retired, and thanks to a small pension was to some extent financially dependent on her daughter, with the latter—as emerged in talk with both Joellen and Mrs France—paying many of the bills for Mrs France’s home.

Mrs France and Joellen had known each other for more than 30 years; they knew many of the ins and outs of each other’s lives; it was a stable relationship maintained through regular 5 weekly encounters. Complaining and troubles telling (by each to the other) was a regular feature of their relationship, constructing it as a quasi-friendship (Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2007/2005, pp. 162–163); and one recurrent trouble voiced by Mrs France related to the contrast between the expectations she had had of retirement and her current circumstances. This is exemplified in the extract below (see Appendix for transcription notation).

Extract 1 Unfulfilled expectations (Appt2)

1. Mrs France I thought that when I retired
2. I was gonna get (.)
3. Joellen he [he
4. Mrs France [you know be able to do all
5. [+kinds of things for me
6. Joellen [yeah

Here, Mrs France’s unfulfilled expectations, signalled with ‘I thought’ in l.1 (see Kitzinger, 2000, p. 185), are of being ‘able to do all kinds of things’ (ll.4–5). On other occasions her expectations of
retirement relate to being less busy, having more time, being able to ‘have a rest’. Several of her complaints concern aspects of her life that (negatively) affect the realisation of these expectations, for example, the work involved with a new puppy, looking after her granddaughter, and gardening. Table 1 sets out these complaints and the extracts in this paper in which they are discussed.

In all but one of these complaints (Table 1, number 2), her adult daughter, though not always the direct target, is nevertheless brought into the telling more or less explicitly as a figure; as the analysis will show, in all of them, she is inferably the indirect target, the person against whom Mrs France has the grievance, who is constructed as causing or being in some way responsible for Mrs France's state of tiredness and over-busyness.

5 | ANALYSIS

The paper focuses on extracts from four of the twelve complaints set out in Table 1. The first part of the analysis examines in turn one complaint taken in chronological order from each of the first three hair appointments (Table 1, numbers 1, 7, 10), restricting the focus to these due to space constraints. I show how Mrs France's daughter is introduced as a figure in each of these and how Mrs France implicitly constructs her a contributory factor in her grievance. The complaints have been chosen to best exemplify the range of ways whereby Mrs France achieves these outcomes.

In the second part of the analysis I examine a fourth complaint (Table 1, number 2) and show how although the daughter is not introduced as a figure, she is nevertheless the implicit target.

5.1 | Introducing the target as (culpable) figure

The first extract comes from the first of the four recorded appointments. Mrs France has complained of being tired and claimed that despite being retired for 2 years, she is effectively busy and working. The extract starts with Joellen's elaboration on this theme, in which she proposes that those not at work get put on more (ll.1–2).

### TABLE 1 Summary of Mrs France's complaints in which her daughter is implicated

| Appt number | Recording date | Complaint number | Complaint title (analyst ascribed) | Discussed in text as: |
|-------------|----------------|------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Appt1       | 5th June       | 1)               | ‘Put on’                           | Extract 2             |
|             |                | 2)               | ‘Granddaughter’                    |                       |
|             |                | 3)               | ‘Unwanted puppy’                   |                       |
|             |                | 4)               | ‘Smelly puppy’                     |                       |
|             |                | 5)               | ‘Cats’                             |                       |
|             |                | 6)               | ‘Pony’                             |                       |
| Appt2       | 10th July      | 7)               | ‘Roses’                            | Extract 3             |
|             |                | 8)               | ‘Builder chap’                     |                       |
|             |                | 9)               | ‘Drains’                           |                       |
| Appt3       | 21st August    | 10)              | ‘Puppy ran off’                    | Extract 4             |
| Appt4       | 30th October   | 11)              | ‘Not much help’                    |                       |
|             |                | 12)              | ‘Useless mum’                      |                       |
Extract 2 ‘Put on’ (Appt1)

1. Joellen I think you get put on more
2. when you’re: (.)
3. not at work he he [he
4. Mrs France [yeah
5. well (. I I you know
6. I am put on quite a lot
7. Joellen yeah
8. Mrs France um
9. (2)
10. Mrs France and you (..)
11. i::t starts off with
12. <mum could you ju:st>
13. (.)
14. Joellen yeh
15. Mrs France and then it sort of (.)
16. work goes into sort of
17. every da:y (.)
18. and you >several< ho:urs
19. Joellen yeah
20. (.)
21. Joellen ‘s not funny int [it
22. Mrs France [no:: no

After some trouble (hesitations, pauses and reformulations), Mrs France in l.12 uses reported speech (RS) to bring her daughter—briefly—into the frame as the culpable ‘putter on’, signalling her role by using the term of address—‘mum’—she is constructed as using. There is no direct accusation, but the request the daughter is constructed as making, ‘could you just’, casts her as culpable, as initiating a course of action that is presented as doing ‘putting upon’ (‘it’, ll.11, 15; ‘work’, l.16). Mrs France's use of the agentless passive (‘I am put upon’, l.6) and impersonal constructions (‘it starts off with’, l.11, ‘it sort of (. work goes into’, ll.15–16) further contributes to excising the daughter as agent and casts a vagueness over the criticism.
RS has been found to be frequently used in complaints (Holt, 1996). Because it purports to give a verbatim report, RS seems to provide direct evidence of the transgressor’s offence (Drew, 1998, p. 321), which in turn adds ‘veracity and authenticity to a descriptive account’ (Stokoe & Edwards, 2007, p. 339). It is therefore not surprising that Mrs France frequently introduces RS into her complaints. However, unlike in much research into complaints-in-interaction (e.g. Drew, 1998; Haakana, 2007; Holt, 1996), the RS in Mrs France’s complaints is rarely constructed as the main complainable. Rather, Mrs France’s use of RS tends to do other work to support her complaint (see too Heinrichsmeier, 2021).

One thing achieved by the RS here is to point to the daughter as target without explicitly casting her as such. Further, though, it also instantiates the nature of the ‘putting on’ in which the daughter is engaged; it does ‘showing’ not just ‘telling’ (Benwell, 2012). So with ‘just’ (l.12), the daughter is constructed as minimising her request to her mother, implying that she is not asking for much. The egregiousness of this positioning is then highlighted by what Mrs France next says (ll.15–18), where casting the activity as ‘work’, alongside the extremeness of ‘every day’ and the long hours, implies a contrast with the (arguably disingenuous) minimisation implicit in ‘just’. That is, the daughter is constructed as habitually escalating her demands (‘it starts off with… and then work goes into’, l.11, 16); as such, Mrs France constructs this not as a complaint of a one-off event, but as an ongoing issue that contributes to the tiredness, with mention of which Mrs France had started the appointment.

The RS here (and elsewhere in the collection) allows Mrs France to present her daughter in the act of doing ‘putting on’, revealing her agency in (continually) increasing Mrs France's workload as she seeks to accommodate her daughter’s requests. The RS also allows Mrs France to present her daughter’s culpability without making a direct criticism. This implicitness allows the recipient, Joellen, to offer just a brief expression of affiliation (l.21) that targets the general situation to which Mrs France refers.

The next extract derives from Mrs France’s second recorded appointment and sees her making the briefest of references to her daughter (ll. 37, 40) during a long sequence in which she tries and eventually briefly succeeds in launching a complaint about the gardening she is ‘trying to get done’ (ll.1–2).

**Extract 3 ‘Roses’ (Appt2)**

1. Mrs France I’ve (.) um been trying
2. to get (. ) gardening done and ( . )
3. ts the ROses this year are fan[tastic
4. Joellen [I know
5. they’re <beautiful> aren’t they
6. Mrs France yeh
7. Joellen I must have taken about twe:nty
8. dead heads off of just one £little£
9. ro(h)se th(h)e othe(h)r da(h)y=
10. Mrs France =yeh
11. Joellen that’s really a
12. sur[prise they’re ↑huge ]
The sequence starts with Mrs France initiating a new topic, gardening (ll.1–2), after a short hiatus. However, she does this in a way that adumbrates complainability (‘I’ve been trying’ suggests lack of success). Joellen works hard not to position herself as complaint recipient. She picks up on Mrs France’s positive evaluation of the roses (l.3) and develops that theme in similarly positive vein (ll.5, 11–12, 18, 24). Mrs France’s responses to Joellen’s talk, though, are minimal (ll.6, 10, 17, 20), suggestive here of exhibiting ‘a preparedness to shift from recipiency to speakership’ (Jefferson, 1983, p. 4).

In l.25, Mrs France regains the floor, and having produced further utterances that resonate complaint (about her health and what she can’t do, ll.25–27, 29), she explains what she can do (ll.30, 32), including deadheading (referring to Joellen’s mention in l.8, and her own overlapped utterance of ll.13–14). She now (l.35) partially recycles her initial topic proffer of ll.1–2. This, ‘I’ve been trying’, again implies lack of success; and that implication of lack of success is carried forward with a contrastive ‘but’ (l.37) that projects an account for Mrs France’s lack of success in her gardening and dead-heading. It is in this trouble-premonitory and accounting environment that Mrs France introduces a character, ‘she’ (ll.37, 40).

This is the first time in this appointment that anyone has been mentioned to whom ‘she’ could refer, but sequential and ethnographic data allow us to infer that the only person to whom ‘she’ could reasonably refer is her daughter. Schegloff (1996, pp. 450–458) argues that in English, in ‘locally initial position’ as here, a ‘locally initial reference form’ like name or recognitional description (e.g. ‘my daughter’) would be the unmarked way of doing referring. Mrs France’s use of ‘she’ is thus marked; it is potentially doing something more than just referring; and one key

13. Mrs France [well (.)] that’s now my
14. job
15. Joellen they’ve grown so
16. (.)
17. Mrs France ye[ah
18. Joellen [tall as well haven’t they
19. [as well as
20. Mrs France [‘nyeah
21. (.)
22. Joellen everything else
23. (0.5)
24. Joellen [but they are beautiful]*=
25. Mrs France =well I can’t sort of (.) do much
26. gardening now
27. I can’t [lean over
28. Joellen [no::
29. Mrs France my knees won’t (.) let me
action achieved by such uses is to claim that she is ‘maintaining a shared prior focus’ (Kitzinger et al., 2012, p. 122). Mrs France’s utterance, accounting for her lack of success, constructs her daughter as at least a contributory factor in that lack of success: it is ‘she’, her daughter, who has ‘got’ so many of the blooms that Mrs France is ‘trying’ to dead-head (‘but she’s got’, l.37; and ‘she’s got so many (. ) roses now’, l.40); as such, her daughter is also, inferably, a contributory factor in the work in which Mrs France has been (unsuccessfully and time-consumedly) engaged. By using the marked form ‘she’ in locally initial position instead of her daughter’s name Mrs France displays her orientation to her daughter as being continually on her mind (Kitzinger et al., 2012), as (continually) a source of more work for her.

Joellen’s response (l.38), which comes in overlap with Mrs France’s first introduction of her daughter, is in line with her complaint–recipient resistant project throughout. However, it is not entirely unaffiliative. She recycles Mrs France’s prior casting of the dead-heading as her job (ll.13–14) at precisely this point, just when Mrs France has made her daughter relevant as implicated in her (Mrs France’s) lack of success in this ‘job’ of hers. In so doing, she tacitly displays her (Joellen’s) recognition of the daughter’s very implicitly signalled role in Mrs France’s complaint; that is, she arguably makes the inference that the designation of this as Mrs France’s ‘job’ might come from her daughter. At the same time, her laughter helps prevent any further expansion of the complaint that has been hovering under the surface all this while (Holt, 2012). Joellen’s move is successful. Although Mrs France recycles ‘she’s got’ and completes the utterance, thereby implicitly implicating her daughter, she does not pursue it, instead recycling her own assessment of the roses from the start of this sequence (‘fantastic’, ll.3, 42). Talk then shifts into a discussion of the reasons for this profusion.

In the third recorded appointment, Mrs France spent some time describing the ravages wrought by a new puppy. As Joellen would know—and as we, as analysts, also know, thanks to access to audio-recordings over successive encounters—this puppy is recurrently brought up as the subject of complaints in talk with Joellen, including two other complaints in which the daughter is implicated as a complaint target (Table 1, numbers 3 and 4). Mrs France’s complaints about this puppy centre on the trouble and extra work it causes. However, as she also recurrently states, she had not wanted it in the first place, a point she reiterates in the extract below (ll.39–40, 43). In fact, she had stressed in her first audio-recorded appointment that she had ‘had [her] arm twisted’ (inferably by her daughter) to keep this puppy for her granddaughter. A condition of keeping it, she had reported, was that her granddaughter would ‘have to help with her’ (‘Unwanted puppy’, Table 1, number 3). What had emerged, however, is that this help—arguably something the daughter would be expected to police—had not been forthcoming. Instead, she has herself been the target of complaints about the puppy from her daughter (‘Smelly puppy’, Table 1, number 4).

As the extract starts, Mrs France embarks upon a further story about the trials the puppy occasions.

**Extract 4 ‘Puppy ran off’ (Appt3)**

1. Mrs France and she run off the other night
2. and never came home
3. Joellen oh my good[ness]
4. Mrs France [and I went to bed
5. and left my front door wide open
6. (.)
7. thinking that she might come home
8. (.)
9. >and the gate< (.)
10. I shut my kitchen door you know
11. um ts (.) oer
12. so the Other dog can-
13. couldn’t get out
14. but er (1)
15. I >unbeknownst to< me
16. she went and (.) knocked
17. on my daughter’s door at midnight
18. and she let her in
19. and she stayed in her kitchen
20. Joellen ha
21. Mrs France °all night° but erm
22. Joellen she thought she’d go and see her
23. he [he he
24. Mrs France [*yeah*
25. (2)
26. Mrs France but I sat up till half past eleven
27. and I thought (.) I’m not letting
28. this dog (.)
29. ruin my (.) rule my life
30. I’m going to bed
31. Joellen (ts)
32. (3)
33. Joellen oh: (.) dear (.)
34. *think you’re going to have
35. trouble with that one*
36. (1)
37. Mrs France *yeah*
Overtly, this story is a complaint about the puppy and Mrs France's frustrations with it, marked by the extremeness of ‘run off… and never came home’ (ll.1–2). In the middle of this complaint story she brings her daughter into the story as a figure (l.15–19): ‘unbeknownst to me she went and (.) knocked on my daughter’s door at midnight and she let her in and she stayed in her kitchen.’ Further grievances are enumerated as she describes waiting up to a late hour (l.26) before going to bed (l.30) not knowing what had happened to the puppy; and in fact, she can only have known what happened to the puppy when her daughter recounted this to her, presumably the next day. In l.29 Mrs France then upgrades the potential effect of the puppy on her life, with another extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986) (‘ruin’), which she then repairs to a more moderate assessment (‘rule’).

Bringing her daughter into this story as a figure (ll.15–19), Mrs France chooses to refer to her with a kinship term in place of her daughter's name, ‘Sally’. CA studies using English-language data have shown that the preferred or unmarked way of referring to individuals is name rather than ‘recognitional description’ (Schegloff, 1996, p. 460; Stivers, 2007, pp. 69, 72), where this is possible with a particular recipient. Furthermore, as access to successive recorded interactions allows us to observe, this is also Mrs France’s own practice: across the four audio-recorded appointments recordings, she refers to her daughter in talk with Joellen 15 times as ‘Sally’, compared with just three uses of ‘my daughter’; and Joellen always refers to her as ‘Sally’ (e.g. l.46). These practices therefore point to Mrs France’s use in l.17 as marked and doing more than ‘referring simpliciter’ (Schegloff, 2007a, p. 124).

One thing that the ‘kinship term’ ‘my daughter’s’ does here that ‘Sally's’ would not do is point to the relationship between Mrs France and the person who was actually responsible for the puppy, or at the very least, the person who should have been policing the granddaughter's ‘help’. This person is not just anyone; it is the other half of the ‘relational pair’, mother and daughter (Sacks, 1995, pp. 326–327); that is, someone who stands to Mrs France in a relationship involving a range of reciprocal rights and responsibilities. Stivers
(2007), discussing ‘alternative recognitionals’ such as kinship terms in place of names, where names can be used, shows the way these can point to the complaining aspect of an utterance. That is what we see here. Mrs France has made no direct accusation against her daughter. However, by using the kinship term ‘my daughter’ instead of her daughter’s name, Sally—a marked usage for this speaker—, Mrs France implicitly points to the fracturing of some aspect of those reciprocal rights and obligations between mother and daughter; she thereby implicitly points to the complainable aspect, her daughter’s culpability. There is a mix of resentment and irony in Mrs France’s utterance of ll.15–19, as she recounts how the troublesome puppy ran off, and how, although she herself took action (responsibly) for its return (ll.5–7), it instead went round to the very person—that is her daughter—who had, inferably, first ‘twisted [Mrs France’s] arm’ to keep the puppy, only then to shrug off her responsibilities. So the daughter has been introduced as a figure in a sequence in which Mrs France complains about the severe impact on her life of a puppy; and this puppy is a complainable for whose presence in Mrs France’s life her daughter is culpable—and brought in implicitly as such.

Here Joellen’s response initially treats Mrs France’s story light-heartedly (ll.23, 34–35, 41), a stance of half-way affiliation (Holt, 2012) that is resisted by Mrs France. Joellen also targets the puppy rather than the daughter with her negative evaluations (ll.34–35). In response, Mrs France restates the nub of her grievance: it’s not ‘really’ her dog and she hadn’t wanted it in the first place (ll.39–40, 1.43). This redirects culpability—more clearly than before but still without explicit accusation—to the person whom she constructs the dog as ‘really’ belonging to, her daughter. Following a substantial gap, Joellen produces a ‘bright-side’ observation (ll.45–46) that, whilst not explicitly saying so, displays that she does indeed understand at whom Mrs France’s complaint is directed: there is something of a ‘it would serve her right’ in Joellen’s comment. Her suggestion is not only met with emphatic agreement by Mrs France (l.49) but also with a claim—in stark contrast to her previous more fed-up tone—that that had indeed been what she thought (1.50).

In the complaints discussed so far, Mrs France has introduced her daughter as a figure in the story in various ways. These encompass use of reported speech (RS), where her daughter is marked as the speaker, for example through her use of the term of address ‘mum’ (Extract 2, and also e.g. table 4, number 11 [see Heinrichsmeier, 2021]); impersonal constructions, where her daughter is the only possible agent (Extract 2); and various reference forms (like ‘my daughter’ or ‘she’ in locally initial position (Extracts 3 and 4)) that, as a body of CA literature argue and Mrs France’s own practices show, are marked forms. These features recur in Mrs France’s other complaints in this collection. On one occasion, though, she inferably implicitly targets her daughter without bringing her into the story as a figure. This, Table 1, number 2, is the final complaint we examine.

5.2 | Implicating the target without introducing her as a figure

This complaint occurred around 2 min after Extract 2, in which Mrs France had complained about being ‘put on’. Immediately prior to the complaint below, Joellen had mentioned a client who was looking after her grandson following the death of the child's father. The client, says Joellen, is ‘still working’. This prompts Mrs France to come in with a her-side story (‘I mean’, 1.1)
Extract 5 ‘Granddaughter’ (Appt1)

1. Mrs France yeah I mean you know
2. it’s lovely
3. when you’ve got grandchildren
4. it’s really nice to have them
5. Joellen yea[h
6. Mrs France [um (.)
7. but sometimes you find that (.)
8. they get (.)
9. they >specially at sort of [{???
10. Joellen [(too
11. much at times) he [he he
12. Mrs France [yeah
13. (1)
14. Mrs France when you’ve had them
15. <all day lo[ng>
16. Joellen [yeah
17. Mrs France and then you have them all night
18. and you’re on your own (.)
19. with [them
20. Joellen [yeh ((Mrs France continues

with a story illustrating the trials
of sole grandchild care))

In the way she designs her utterance, with praise (‘it’s lovely’, l.2; ‘it’s really nice’, l.4) followed by ‘but’ (l.7), Mrs France projects a complaint (Sacks, 1995, p. Vol.1:359). Further, although she designs both the praise and qualifier as universal truths (‘you’, l.3, l.7), she produces these assertions with unmitigated epistemic authority. This constructs Mrs France as speaking from personal experience, inferably as a grandmother herself. The praise components, though, help her construct herself as a good grandmother, inferably attending to a widely circulating stereotype in many Western societies that grandparents, perhaps particularly grandmothers, are supposed to love having their grandchildren around (e.g. Soden, 2012).

As she moves into the but-initiated caveat, though (ll.7–9), Mrs France displays trouble, with hesitations, pauses and repairs, as she qualifies her assertions about the joy of grandchildren. This trouble displays her forthcoming utterance as being what we might describe as a ‘dispreferred opinion’, something that runs counter to the stereotypes of grandparents, and which might risk positioning her as an unnatural grandmother. In effect, she is constructing the attribute ‘not wanting grandchildren around’ as something that is not an attribute of grandmothers except in specific and occasional circumstances (‘sometimes’, l.7, ‘specially’, l.9) that she has not quite articulated.
In fact, Mrs France herself doesn’t come out with the criticism at all; rather, it is Joellen who completes it (ll.10–11). She thereby makes herself complicit in the counter-cultural activity of qualifying the unadulterated pleasure of having grandchildren, collaborating in an ambivalence towards them that surfaces in many studies focussing on Western societies (e.g. Evason et al., 2005; McGarrigle et al., 2018; Peterson, 1999).

Although Mrs France agrees with Joellen’s statement she does not accept Joellen’s invitation to laugh (Jefferson, 1979). Instead, after a gap, she introduces a special case where grandchildren might be ‘too much’, namely, having them all day (l.15), all night (l.17), and on your own (l.18). Mrs France again generalises these circumstances (with ‘you’). However, the circumstances she itemises are designed to fit her situation perfectly; and the extreme case formulations help legitimise her complaint about that situation (Pomerantz, 1986).

There is no mention in this complaint of Mrs France’s daughter. However, as noted, this complaint comes just 2 min after Mrs France had complained of being ‘put on’, introducing her daughter as a figure. One category of persons regularly regarded as ‘put on’, as emerged in general chat in the salon, are parents by their adult children; and the nature of that ‘putting on’ was sometimes seen as relating to expectations about grandchild-care. The following extract from an interview with another participant makes the association clear.

**Extract 6 ‘Put on’ explained (interview)**

1. Rachel what’s it like being retired then
2. Client oh it’s lovely
3. Rachel yeah? (.)
4. [cos some people say they just get put on more
5. Client [oh yeah
6. (0.5)
7. Client well (.) as you see we haven’t got any children
8. so there’s no grandchildren so (.) no:
9. Rachel so you don’t get all that
10. Client no: don’t get all that you see

Here the interviewer, Rachel, asks the client interviewee how it is to be retired. With her ‘oh’-prefaced response, the client treats the question as problematic (Heritage, 1984, 1998). This prompts Rachel to account for having asked the question in the first place, as she suggests that getting ‘put on more’ might be a possible downside of retirement (l.4). Importantly, she leaves it open as to who might do the ‘putting on’. The client’s response, though, displays her orientation to ‘putting on’ being an activity associated with the category ‘adult children with offspring’ (ll.7–8). Inferably, the nature of the putting on understood by this participant is that retired people will be (unreasonably) expected to care for their grandchildren. This client’s view resonates with a view often aired in the media and lifestyle blogs, namely that the expectations on grandparents to supply unpaid (grand)childcare is burdensome (McGarrigle et al., 2018; Moore & Rosenthal, 2014, p. 3), a perspective made clear in the titles of contributions to blogs and discussion fora like ‘Need a Babysitter? Don’t Count On Grandma’ (Jayson, 2016).

It is in this local (salon) context and wider cultural context that Mrs France makes her complaint about caring for her granddaughter; and she makes it in a sequential context of complaint about being
‘put on’ by her daughter. These layers of context, supported by ethnographic data, point to the daughter as the target of Mrs France’s complaint in this extract: after all, how else is it—other than at her daughter’s behest or need—that Mrs France finds herself looking after her granddaughter alone for such extended periods? Put another way, constructing herself as ‘put on’ grandmother, with the ‘putting on’ involving long periods of grandchild care, makes relevant as target the parent who does the ‘putting on’, that is Mrs France’s daughter. In short, although overtly complaining about care for her granddaughter, Mrs France in this extract, too, is implicitly complaining about the work, tiredness and busyness occasioned by her daughter.

6 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Prior research has shown how complaints often emerge collaboratively over a long sequence of talk (e.g. Drew & Walker, 2009; Ruusuvuori et al., 2019; Ruusuvuori & Lindfors, 2009; Traverso, 2009). The novel aspect of this case study, which builds on that prior research, has been to focus on a series of complaints across successive discrete encounters. We have seen how the complainant, Mrs France, in her regular chats with her stylist in the hair-salon, recurrently complains about a range of immediate complainable matters that are represented as causing Mrs France extra work and busyness, in contrast with her oft-stated expectation of retirement as a time when she would ‘be able to do all kinds of things’. Although the immediate causes of her tiredness and busyness are presented as various—care for her granddaughter and a range of animals, trying to do gardening, for example—the analysis has shown how Mrs France recurrently introduces her daughter as a figure in these complaint stories. Indeed, the daughter is constructed not just as a figure but as a more or less culpable figure, one who is cast as wholly or partly responsible for the immediate complainable. The analysis also showed that even where the daughter was not introduced as a figure, she was nevertheless inferably the implicit target of the complaint (Extract 5). As such, the daughter is also constructed as an underpinning cause of Mrs France’s unwanted tiredness and busyness and so also implicated in the foundering of her expectations of retirement.

Edwards (2005, p. 24) notes that ‘complaining will sometimes be overt and obvious but it is also likely to be a subtle business.’ As we have seen, Mrs France’s complaining in this case study was indeed subtle. Part of what enables her to make the target of complaining so implicit, I suggest, is that each complaint in which her daughter is an implicit target is itself part of a ‘long chain[s] of interaction’ (Briggs, 1998, p. 540); it is part of a long quasi-friendship; and friends can make more implicit, oblique references that others don’t understand (Pomerantz & Mandelbaum, 2007/2005, pp. 164–165). This, though, presents challenges for analysts; and the issue of identifying complaints as complaints when they are implicitly designed, when there is no explicit orientation by participants to the ‘moral work’ (Drew, 1998, p. 302) being done in the detailing of some matter, has been widely discussed in the research literature (Drew, 1998; Edwards, 2005; Pino, 2015; Schegloff, 2005).

In some of the complaints examined here both the extract’s status as a complaint and the daughter’s status as target are quite clear (e.g. Extract 2). In others, though, this is not the case. In such instances, access to the ‘chain’ of complaints that comprises this case study, knowledge of Mrs France’s practices of talk derived from the four recorded appointments, and wider ethnographic knowledge, allow us, variously, for example: to confirm whether a particular use (e.g. ‘my daughter’, Extract 4) is indeed marked; or to identify the referent (e.g. of ‘she’, Extract 3). More especially, though, access to the longer ‘chain’ of complaints gives us, as analysts, something of the same ‘back story’ that Joellen has: seeing where Mrs France on some occasions more overtly (and complainingly) attributes what she constructs as her excess workload to her daughter (e.g. Extract 2), allows us to understand where similar more
below-the-surface attributions are being made (e.g. Extracts 3, 4 and 5). In short, this paper contributes to studies of complaints-in-interaction by showing how analysis of successive complaints, combined with access to wider ethnographic data, enables us to make a defeasible case (a) that each of these extracts is indeed a complaint; more particularly, (b) that each is indeed part of a chain of complaints, in and through each of which the complainant, Mrs France, sustains her sense of grievance against her daughter. The paper also contributes to CA studies of complaining in showing how we might address some of the methodological issues associated with more implicitly designed complaints.

This examination of a series of complaints directed at the same (implicit) target—in this case a family member—over a long period also gives us insights into the daily lived complexity of near-co-resident family relationships, and as such contributes to sociolinguistic studies of social ageing and the emerging area of ‘discursive gerontology’ (Nikander, 2009). Emerson and Messinger (1977, p. 123), in an early influential paper focusing on the interactional processes whereby interpersonal or relationship troubles are recounted, comment that resolution of interpersonal or relational troubles ‘raises issues concerning the distribution of rights and responsibilities in that relationship’. They go on to note the way complaints are rooted in and derive from the situation complained about. As many studies have shown, living in near co-residence with family members may bring pleasures as well as stresses (e.g. Postigo & Honrubia, 2010); just as has been reported in other research (e.g. Aquilino & Supple, 1991), Mrs France (as may be inferred from other of her conversations in the salon) seemed to benefit from the companionship offered through her living situation. At the same time, though, in situations of co-residence with family, the ‘distribution of rights and responsibilities’ of which Emerson and Messinger (1977) speak may be particularly put under strain. Tensions may arise, for example, from different expectations about financial, household, childcare and other contributions that each party should make to the running of the household (McGarrigle et al., 2018; Peterson, 1999; Postigo & Honrubia, 2010), any or all of which may lead the older parent to feel taken for granted, imposed upon, or, in Mrs France’s terms, ‘put on’. Mrs France’s complaints can be seen as reflecting just this sort of complexity.

Further, though, as Emerson and Messinger (1977) also argued, complaining is a way of negotiating different accounts of just what the trouble is. As Drew and Holt (1988, p. 399) observe, ‘in this sense complaints are constitutive features of the trouble they report’. That is, without denying there are aspects of Mrs France’s life that she finds problematic, there is an extent to which she discursively constructs her troubles as troubles through articulating them as complaints. Moreover, through the way she designs the complaints, she discursively constructs these aspects of her living situation and her relationship with her daughter as imbricated in tensions and ambivalence. Let us examine this.

The wider collection of complaints from which this case study is derived, together with ethnographic knowledge of the site reveals that Mrs France was quite capable of making the target of her complaints overt; so her construction of her daughter as a sometimes implicit complaint target, with no ‘overtly expressed (moral) indignation about what … [she] has done’ (Drew, 1998, p. 309), is a choice. Equally, Mrs France could have eliminated the sense of grievance altogether in talking of aspects of her life. But she adopts neither of these approaches; instead, as we have seen, she constructs her talk of her situation as complaints, but at the same time she makes her daughter only an implicit target of these complaints.

I suggest that in Mrs France’s cautious design of her complaints that implicitly target her daughter we see her orientation to, and management of, what she inferably constructs as conflicting sets of rights and obligations bound to the relational pair, mother and daughter (Sacks, 1995, pp. 326–327). So on the one hand, complaining about aspects of her life that make her unduly busy and cause her work, and constructing her daughter as at least partly culpable in these matters, displays her orientation to (what she constructs as) obligations of adult daughters to mothers: for example, not to ‘put on’ or impose on
their mother, not to recurrently occasion more work. On the other hand, through the implicitness with
which she designs her complaints we can see an orientation to solidarity with her daughter. In contrast
to the findings reported in some other research (e.g. Drew, 1998, p. 315ff), Mrs France avoids con-
structing her daughter's transgressions as done deliberately. Rather, her daughter is constructed as dis-
ingenuous, thoughtless, but not as intentionally seeking to offend. This mitigates the ‘moral character’
of her conduct (Drew, 1998, p. 319), and attends, too, to Mrs France's familial obligations of loyalty, a
loyalty potentially complicated through Mrs France's partial financial dependence on her daughter. So
in the detail of the way she designs her articulation of her troubles—as complaints, but with the culpabil-
ity of her daughter often very implicit—Mrs France displays the ambivalence of her stance towards
her living situation and discursively constructs the complexity of her relationship with her daughter.

Schegloff (2005, p. 450) observes that ‘complaining about something is …one way of taking up a
stance toward it, and a negative stance at that’. In producing complaints that only implicitly implicate
her daughter, Mrs France recurrently displays a complex stance, what we might call a concealed neg-
ative stance, towards aspects of her life and her daughter's behaviour. In examining the detail of these
complaints we see the multiple small fractures in the relationship, the points that need attention; we
see how troubles are (recurrently) problematised; we see how the morality of another's conduct—here,
Mrs France's daughter's—is implicitly negotiated (Drew, 1998); and we see how the sometimes con-
tradictory stances people may hold towards of aspects of (near) co-residence arrangements and family
relationships in later life are managed in talk.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST
None.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Due to privacy and ethical considerations, and given the sensitivity of the subject matter the data that
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ENDNOTE
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APPENDIX

Transcription key (from Jefferson, 2004)

(0.0) Pause (seconds/half seconds)
(.) Micro pause
= Latched talk
[ ] Overlap onset/cessation
__ Stress on underscored syllable
↑ Pitch step down/up in following syllable
WORD, *word* Louder/softer, relative to surrounding talk
< > > < Slower/faster, relative to surrounding talk
word Syllable stretched out.
.h In-breath
fwordf ‘Smile voice’
wo(h)rd ‘Plosiveness’ (here, exclusively laughter)
(???) Transcriber unable to determine what was said
(word) Best guess at unclear word/phrase
((word)) Transcriber’s descriptions