



Recruitment During Table-Cooked Meals: Foregrounding and Backgrounding Offers and Acts of Assistance Within Multi-Party Talk

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1
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4 **Talk**

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9 Abstract

10 At Japanese yakiniku-style restaurants, customers grill meat at the table and then
11 often offer it to others. Such offers are a form of recruitment—the outcome of
12 various interactional methods for eliciting or soliciting involvement. Drawing on
13 multimodal conversation analysis, this study focuses on sequences of *lingua*
14 *franca* English talk between three Japanese people and their French guest in one
15 such restaurant setting. The analysis explores dual involvements in which food-
16 related offers are interactionally backgrounded in deference to primary talk about
17 other topics. The cooking party times their offers to gaps in the primary talk,
18 sometimes delaying the offer to insert it at a sequentially favorable juncture to
19 better mobilise acceptance from the recipient. The study provides insight into the
20 integrated roles of temporality, embodiment, materiality and participation in the
21 mundane yet finely coordinated accomplishment of attentiveness to the needs of
22 others during table-cooked meals.

23
24 *Keywords:* offers; topic management; multimodal conversation analysis, recruitment;
25 dual involvements
26

27
28 *1. Introduction*
29

30 Anyone who has eaten at a Japanese izakaya will have witnessed acts of hospitality
31 that demonstrate sensitivity to the needs of a guest, such as pouring drinks for others or
32 rearranging their shoes at the door. As in many other countries, being attentive to the needs of
33 others is viewed as a positive trait in Japanese culture, and politeness scholars have specified
34 such attentiveness as a form of offering that is delivered pre-emptively to a benefactor who
35 demonstrates some spoken or embodied need (Fukushima, 2011, 2020; Marui *et al*, 1996).
36 Demonstrating attentiveness involves both inferring a need and acting on it, often without the
37 benefactor explicitly expressing any trouble. Attentiveness is ubiquitous, for example, during
38 the sort of communal cooking and eating that takes place among guests at a *yakiniku*
39 barbeque restaurant, where customers grill meat and vegetables on an open flame in the
40 middle of the table, then serve it directly to others. Such offers of food are timed and
41 delivered to fit seamlessly into the surrounding interaction. They can also be viewed as a sort
42 of *recruitment*—the outcome of a range of interactional methods for soliciting involvement
43 (Kendrick & Drew, 2016a).

44 Drawing on multimodal conversation analysis (CA), this study investigates sequences
45 of *lingua franca* English talk video-recorded between three Japanese friends and their French
46 guest in one such restaurant setting. The analysis explores how food-related talk and
47 embodied conduct (such as cooking, serving and eating) are often interactionally
48 backgrounded in deference to primary talk about other topics. The immediate demands of the

1 cooking activity occasionally give rise to peripheral shifts and schismings in which one
2 participant deals with the food while the others continue talking. The non-cooking party may
3 continue their topical talk even at moments when the food-related talk appears more
4 interactionally salient, therefore working to maintain the primacy of that topic. By examining
5 offers of food and unsolicited acts of assistance in relation to their timed entry into other
6 topical talk, the study offers insight into the integrated roles of temporality, embodiment,
7 materiality and participation in the mundane yet finely coordinated accomplishment of
8 recruitment, particularly in contexts where cooking, serving and eating are omnirelevant
9 involvements.

10 11 2. *Recruitment and dual involvements in dinner-table settings*

13 Conversation analysis research has had a long tradition of recording data at the dinner table,
14 partly because it such a rich site for exploring social practice, interactional order and
15 socialization (Mondada, 2012). In addition to mundane talk about other topics, eating
16 together provides a wealth of opportunities for requests, offers and other acts of assistance.
17 This section begins with a brief overview of recruitment, particularly in relation to offers and
18 anticipatory acts of assistance, then examines how interactants can orient to multiple co-
19 occurring involvements within a single conversation, particularly in dinner-table contexts.

20 Kendrick and Drew (2014, 2016a) argue that a variety of methods for providing
21 assistance, together with methods of requesting assistance, form a cohesive system for
22 navigating and resolving everyday troubles, a notion which they term *recruitment*. They note
23 that

24 “(t)he sheer ubiquity of recruitment in our daily lives cannot be overstated. It is hardly
25 possible to be copresent with others...without needing at some point to enlist
26 someone’s help, or for someone to help, unsolicited, when they think we might have a
27 difficulty.”

28 (Kendrick & Drew, 2016a, p.16)

29
30 The types of assistance that fall under the umbrella of recruitment tend to be those
31 that address tangible and situated difficulties arising in the course of shared activities, such as
32 passing a pen or holding a door open for someone. The here-and-now nature of such
33 assistance provides it with a range of affordances that are not available to offers and requests
34 related to future needs, which tend to rely more heavily on linguistic resources (Heritage,
35 2016).

36 Kendrick and Drew (2014) stress that recruitment is not a social action but an
37 interactional outcome, i.e., it is perlocutionary rather than illocutionary. Recruitments may
38 involve a number of pragmatic actions ranging from explicit requests (self-initiated explicit
39 solicitation of assistance) to offers (other-initiated volunteering of assistance) and pre-
40 emptive acts of assistance. A participant may display a need through direct requests, reports,
41 or trouble alerts, but they may also simply use embodied displays such as visibly searching
42 for something (Drew & Kendrick, 2018), or the benefactor may project a need before the
43 recipient even realises it, such as by moving a chair so that someone can get past.

44 While much of the recent research has been concerned with how people in need
45 recruit assistance from others (Haugh, 2017; Mlynář, 2023; Răman, & Oloff, 2022; Tůma, &
46 Sherman, 2022; van der Ploeg *et al*, 2022), the current study will focus particularly on
47 moments at the dinner table when food is passed to someone who is perceived as needing it.
48 Kendrick (2021) identifies a range of methods used to offer assistance, including conveying
49 attention and availability though embodied means, verbally acknowledging and labeling the
50 problem, giving advice, making offers, and directly intervening to solve the problem. In this

1 study, I am mainly interested in a subset of actions used within recruitment, such as offers
2 and pre-emptive acts of assistance, and I will focus chiefly on needs rather than troubles. That
3 is, at the dinner table, people serve others not because they see them as orienting to some sort
4 of difficulty, but because they view them as potentially hungry, i.e., in need of food.

5 Pre-emptive acts of assistance and offers represent distinct approaches to providing
6 help, primarily differentiated by the timing and initiation of the assistance. Anticipatory
7 assistance, as the term suggests, involves proactively preventing a potential problem or
8 fulfilling a need before it is explicitly articulated by the person who might require assistance.
9 This type of unsolicited assistance (Houen *et al.*, 2020) relies on the ability to anticipate or
10 project the needs of others based on their ongoing actions or the inherent projectability of
11 certain courses of action. For instance, if someone is approaching a door with their hands full,
12 an individual offering anticipatory assistance might open the door for them without any
13 explicit request. Offers, on the other hand, are typically reactive responses to an already
14 recognised or articulated need. They involve proposing a solution or assistance after the
15 individual has in some way made their need apparent, either through explicit requests,
16 reports, trouble alerts, or embodied displays (Kendrick & Drew, 2016b). However, offers can
17 also be initiated by the benefactor after they notice someone struggling, even if that person
18 does not explicitly articulate a bid for help (such as offering to open a difficult packet for
19 someone). At the dinner table, an offer can also be occasioned by someone looking around
20 for food, whereas anticipatory assistance is often unsolicited, meaning there is no prior
21 indication that the recipient needs the offered item (Mandelbaum & Lerner, 2023). Both
22 anticipatory assistance and offers are integral to the broader concept of recruitment, since it
23 encompasses a diverse range of methods through which individuals solicit, elicit, and provide
24 assistance in social interactions. Despite differing in timing and initiation, both contribute to a
25 collaborative approach to resolving troubles and maintaining social cohesion.

26 In a separate line of inquiry, CA researchers have also investigated the question of
27 how individuals manage participation in two simultaneous courses of action, a notion that has
28 been termed *dual involvement* (Raymond & Lerner, 2014) or *multiactivity* (Haddington *et al.*,
29 2014). Such studies are concerned with how talk can be timed to fit in and around some other
30 primary embodied activity. Raymond and Lerner (2014) note that participants use a variety of
31 practices to adjust their actions (such as by suspending, retarding, accelerating or reversing
32 them) in order to deploy their turns in ways that are temporally and topically fitted to the
33 other course of action. Delaying one involvement can also provide time to prepare another
34 future projectable activity even as the speaker continues to monitor current topical talk
35 (Greer, 2016). Multiactivity therefore suggests that a conversation may consist of both main
36 and subordinate involvements (Goffman, 1971) and that talk and other forms of conduct can
37 be forwarded and backgrounded by the participants (Mondada, 2012). In the current study,
38 the backgrounded talk mainly involves offers of food, performed in a manner that is
39 designedly subordinate to the ongoing topical talk.

40 Such research considers the role of talk and embodied behaviour in concert.
41 Stevanovic and Monzoni (2016) maintain that embodied conduct is in fact the default means
42 of managing joint activities with material objects and that participants afford it primacy over
43 talk in such contexts. Kamunen (2020) likewise demonstrates how interactants use their
44 bodies to manage involvement in multiple simultaneous activities by prioritising and
45 switching between competing activities. Kamunen found that participants signal their shifting
46 attention through a variety of embodied actions and through the suspension and resumption
47 of manual tasks. These priority displays communicate the embedded temporal order of the
48 simultaneous activities, revealing how participants negotiate a shared understanding of which
49 activity takes precedence. Within situations that involve serving food to others, such
50 embodiment may involve establishing joint attention (Wiggins *et al.*, 2024), projecting the

1 other's intentions (Sakaida & Suwa, 2015), and tracking bodily trajectories (Mandelbaum &
2 Lerner, 2023; Svensson, 2024), all of which display agency and progress the activity (Tuncer
3 & Haddington, 2020). One issue for participants is how best to time these embodied acts of
4 assistance to other forms of topical talk that may be happening concurrently.

5 The current study draws on this research to investigate the role of recruitment and
6 dual involvements at a yakiniku-style barbeque table, where cooking and talk are ubiquitous
7 and simultaneous activities. As such, the study offers a conversation analytic perspective on
8 one form of hospitality that has yet to be investigated in the recent sociolinguistic and
9 pragmatic literature on izakaya culture (e.g., Allen & Liu, 2022, 2023)—namely acts of
10 hospitality that take place between customers themselves, rather than between staff and
11 customers.

12 3. Background to the data

13 The data analysed in this paper were self-recorded in August 2019 in a restaurant in
western Japan. The restaurant specialises in *Jingisu Kan*, a barbequed lamb dish that is
cooked on a hot plate or grill located in the centre of the dining table in a similar way to that
of *yakiniku* (Korean barbeque). The meat and vegetables are grilled over an open flame and
handed to others at the table with tongs. The meat is placed in individual dishes then eaten
with chopsticks. Yakiniku dipping sauce (“tare”) is usually poured into a small side plate
 (“kozara”), separate to the plate on which the meat is placed. The meat is dipped in this sauce
just before it is eaten. In theory anyone at the table can participate in the cooking and
distribution of the meat, but in practice there is often an unequal distribution of labour
between self-appointed cooks and eaters.

14 The sequences we will examine involve four participants: Juri, Hiro, Ruka, and Esme
15 (all pseudonyms). Esme was French and the other participants were all Japanese, although
16 they spoke mainly in English with each other throughout the recording. They were all
17 university students. The recording was made as part of a weekend drive, during which they
18 stopped at the lamb barbeque restaurant. Informed consent was received from each
19 participant before the recordings were made and the researcher was not present at the time of
20 recording. Juri and Esme are seated on the left side of the table and Hiro and Ruka are on the
21 right, as shown in Figure 1.

22 *Figure 1.* The participants



1 The data were analyzed using a multimodal CA approach (see Lilja, 2022). The
 2 video-recordings were subjected to repeated listenings and transcribed according to
 3 Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 2004). Following Nanbu and Greer (2022), embodied
 4 aspects of the talk are indicated in grey font below the talk tier, and each tier is identified
 5 with the participant’s initial and a code indicating the locus of embodiment (e.g., -gz for gaze,
 6 -px for proximity, -bh for both hands, and so on). The onset and completion of the embodied
 7 action are located relative to the talk tier via a vertical bar (|). See the appendix for further
 8 details.

9
 10 *4. Analysis*

11 The detailed sequential analysis in this section provides an emic account for several recurring
 12 interactional practices found in this dataset. I begin by illustrating attentiveness as it appears
 13 during instances of pre-emptive acts of assistance. I then go on to document examples of one
 14 form of recruitment in the data, namely mobilising acceptance for an unsolicited offer in
 15 backgrounded talk.

16
 17 *4.1 Unsolicited offers*

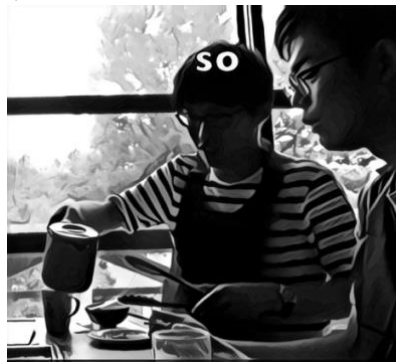
18 This sub-section will focus on offers and acts of assistance that are unsolicited, a form of
 19 recruitment that has been under-analyzed in both the pragmatics and CA literature to date.
 20 Excerpt 1 occurs toward the end of the meal, at a point when Ruka’s dipping sauce is
 21 apparently empty. Hiro notices this and offers to fill it up for Ruka.

22
 23 *Excerpt 1: Your sauce*

24 01 HIRO |eh you you pick up. |pick it up.
 25 h-rh |meat to own plate |~~~~~>
 26 h-gz |at meat-----|grill----->
 27
 28 02 RUKA |ah |thank you |very |
 29 r-hd |bow |bow
 30 h-rh |tongs to grill--~~~~~|
 31 h-gz |grill/meat-----~~~~~|
 32
 33 03 HIRO [hai]
 34 yes
 35
 36 04 RUKA |[much]::.
 37 h-rh |meat to RUKA’s plate
 38 h-gz |meat/RUKA’s plate
 39
 40 05 HIRO→ |°you (h) r-° |your sauce
 41 h-rh |points |reaches for sauce-->
 42 fig |#2 |#3



1
 2 06 (0.5)
 3 07 RUKA [°last (one)°]
 4 08 HIRO→ |[your sauce] |is very little.
 5 h-rh |picks up sauce |moves toward RUKA-->
 6
 7 09 [so]
 8 10 RUKA |[ah] thank you. eh |heh heh heh
 9 h-rh |-----|~~~~~>
 10 fig |#4



11
 12
 13 11 ESME |should I-
 14 h-rh |pours sauce-->
 15 e-gz |to JURI
 16
 17 12 RUKA |[okay] |[°thank you°]
 18 h-rh |,,,,,|~~~~~to JURI-->
 19
 20 13 JURI [yeah]
 21 14 ESME [put them on]
 22 15 HIRO |okay? are you ok[ay]?
 23 h-rh |---to JURI----->
 24 fig |#5



25
 26
 27 16 RUKA [ma]ybe
 28 17 |[we can do]:
 29 18 JURI |[ah un]
 30 CoS yes
 31 j-hd |nods
 32
 33 19 RUKA |rock scissor paper?
 34 h-rh |,,,places sauce on table
 35

1 This excerpt actually involves several acts of assistance, so I will examine each of them in
2 turn. First, as Hiro moves some meat from the grill to Ruka's plate (lines 1-4), he seems to
3 notice that Ruka's dipping sauce is low, initially via gaze shift (line 4) and then
4 interactionally through an embodied noticing sequence (lines 5-8). He begins with a gesture-
5 talk package (Eskildsen & Wagner, 2018), pointing to Ruka's dish as he formulates a cut-off
6 "your" (line 5). But then as he extends this to "your sauce" in the same turn, his right hand is
7 already reaching for the dipping sauce, which is located in a small jug on the far side of the
8 table. That is, Hiro has begun the physical action of topping up Ruka's sauce even before
9 Ruka has acknowledged a need. Hiro continues his turn-in-progress in line 8, repeating the
10 subject "your sauce" as his hand reaches the jug and moving the jug toward Ruka as he
11 completes his turn ("is very little"). Thus the interactional noticing is timed with an embodied
12 solution to the perceived problem, even before an offer has been made. In fact, in this case,
13 the offer never actually comes: As Hiro produces the clausal conjunction "so" in line 9, Ruka
14 responds in overlap with "thank you" (line 10), which appears to be a second-pair part (SPP)
15 acceptance to an offer that has been elided or that is inferable from Hiro's bodily action, and
16 Hiro begins pouring the dipping sauce in line 11. Indeed, rather than an elided offer, it may
17 be more accurate to consider Hiro's action here as a pre-emptive act of assistance—seeing a
18 need and acting on it in an unsolicited fashion.

19 The visibility of serving one person becomes an account for further serving another
20 (Mandelbaum & Lerner, 2023). Having poured the dipping sauce for Ruka, Hiro then turns to
21 Juri, who is seated in front of him, and formulates something that is more clearly an offer
22 ("are you okay?") as he holds the sauce jug in front of her (lines 12, 15). In this case, Hiro
23 has not paid any attention to Juri's dish (either visibly or interactionally), but instead launches
24 straight into the offer. Juri declines the offer in line 18 and Hiro places the jug on the table
25 without pouring any sauce into Juri's dish. Although this is more clearly an offer, it can still
26 be considered as attentive to the possible needs of others. It also constitutes a second
27 sequence, since Hiro redirects the offer that he has just completed with Ruka.

28 The fact that Hiro does not offer sauce to Esme at this point can likewise be
29 understood via the details of the interaction. In fact, there is a schisming at play (Egbert,
30 1997), in which Esme simultaneously initiates a different offer to put more meat on the grill
31 (lines 11 and 14). As indicated by her gaze, Esme's offer-in-progress "should I" is directed
32 primarily toward Juri, who accepts it with "yeah" (line 13) even before it is syntactically
33 complete. It could be that Juri is able to project the trajectory of Esme's turn here in terms of
34 the co-occurrent embodiment: Esme is already moving her tongs toward the raw meat as she
35 starts her offer in line 11, much like the way Hiro did earlier with the sauce.

36 In short, attentiveness to the needs of others can take the form of unsolicited offers
37 and pre-emptive acts of assistance, and this may give rise to successive offers. In addition, it
38 is worth noting that for this brief moment the involvement of assisting others with food
39 becomes the foregrounded topic, and any other topical talk is temporarily made subordinate.

40

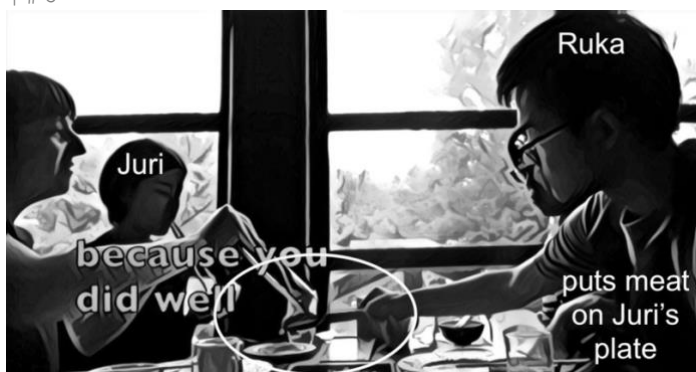
41 *4.2 Mobilising acceptance in backgrounded interaction*

42 In the previous section, all the participants were focused on the business of serving or
43 receiving food in one way or another, but this is not particularly common throughout the
44 broader dataset. Rather, what usually happens is that two or more of the participants are
45 engaged in topical talk (which they treat as the primary or foregrounded involvement) and
46 food-related recruitments are accomplished in a secondary or backgrounded manner. In the
47 remainder of the analysis, I will examine such examples of recruitment that take place while
48 the rest of the group is talking about something else. In doing so I will account for ways that
49 an unsolicited offer (of food) mobilises a sequentially responsive action from its recipient,
50 such as an acceptance or rejection of the offer.

1 These recruitments are often accomplished in a discreet way that does not disturb the
2 topical talk, i.e., they are audibly quieter and visibly less noticeable. At its most extreme, a
3 pre-emptive act of assistance can be carried out without any talk at all, as is the case in
4 Excerpt 2.

5
6 **Excerpt 2: Home tutor**

7 01 ESME so you like it?
8 02 HIRO yeah:. (0.8) uh:: when I::,
9 03 tell something;
10 04 and student- (0.6) |
11 r-rh |
12 05 |er says |understand it,
13 r-rh |to tongs |flips meat--->
14
15 06 I: feel happy.
16 07 ESME >uh(h) -u(h) -uh<
17 r-rh -----
18
19 08 ESME ¥because you did |well.¥
20 r-rh→ -----|to JURI's plate
21 fig |#6



22
23
24 09 JURI |yea[h: (I)]
25 r-rh |,,,,,,
26 j-rh |rice to plate-->
27
28 10 ESME |°[mm=mm]I get it°
29 e-hd |nods
30
31 11 |(0.6)
32 j-rh |flips rice-->
33

34 Here all four interactants are engaged in a foregrounded topic (“working as a tutor”). As the
35 topical talk reaches an intra-turn pause in line 4, Ruka begins to move his right hand toward
36 the meat and then proceeds to flip the meat as Hiro continues his telling (line 5). As Esme
37 receipts Hiro’s telling (line 7) and proffers an account (line 8), Ruka picks up the meat and
38 places it on Juri’s plate. In line 9, he then retracts the tongs as Juri formulates an agreement
39 turn that is part of the foregrounded topical talk. She does not acknowledge the fact that Ruka
40 has just put some food on her plate. This is, therefore, not an offer sequence but a pre-
41 emptive act of assistance, i.e., an involvement which, in its most minimal form, requires
42 neither language nor recipient acknowledgement and that is addressed to the other’s
43 perceived need. In that it does not interrupt the topical talk at all, it also constitutes a

1 secondary involvement. Such brief moments of serving others abound within settings where
 2 cooking and eating are done relatively simultaneously, and interactionally backgrounding
 3 them is one way of handling them smoothly without interrupting the other ongoing activity.

4 However, these backgrounded offers require both the offerer and the recipient to be
 5 attentive to the recruitment, and may fail when not adequately timed to the foregrounded talk.
 6 In Excerpt 3, for example, Hiro offers Juri some cabbage, but then retracts it when he realises
 7 she has not noticed the embodied offer because she is speaking with Esme.

8
 9 **Excerpt 3: The Rock**

10 01 JURI when I drink alcohol at the
 11 02 first time, I went to: (.)
 12 03 >↓international bar.<
 13 04 ESME ↑woah ↓!
 14 05 JURI yeah |[h' h']
 15 06 ESME |[in san]|nomiya?
 16 j-gz |to RUKA |to ESME-->
 17
 18 07 °or somewhere else°
 19 08 JURI |in sannomiya.
 20 j-gz |to ESME---->line 11
 21
 22 09 HIRO |he[:gh]
 23 h-rh |flips cabbage-->
 24
 25 10 ESME [wha]t's the name?
 26 11 (0.6)
 27 12 JURI |u:::hn ↓ I forgot it bu:t
 28 j-gz |up/right----->
 29 j-px |leans away
 30
 31 13 |the ma|ster is (.) s- s- spain-
 32 j-gz |up---~|to ESME-->
 33
 34 14 spanish m[an.]
 35 15 HIRO |[o:n] on-on.
 36 yeah yeah yeah
 37 h-rh |lifts cabbage-->
 38
 39 16 RUKA heh:
 40 17 ESME |is it the rock?
 41 h-rh→ |holds cabbage toward JURI-->
 42 fig |#7



43
 44

45 18 | (0.6) | (0.2)

1 h-rh→ |waves cabbage |returns it to grill
 2 fig |#8



3
 4
 5 19 JURI °eh u:h | (maybe)°
 6 j-lh |points to ESME
 7
 8 20 ESME the rock i[s uh]: near to::=
 9 21 HIRO [o:gn]
 10 uhuh
 11
 12 22 ESME =when you go to kitano?
 13 23 the [(rock sports)]
 14 24 JURI [ah >yeah yea]h yeah yeah<
 15 25 ESME |it's the [rock.]
 16 e-rh |points chopsticks at JURI
 17
 18 26 RUKA [.heh] h' ha
 19 27 ESME it's really nice.
 20 28 JURI oh real[ly]
 21 29 RUKA [yo]u kn]o(h)w
 22 30 HIRO [(ii na)]
 23 (sounds good)
 24
 25 31 RUKA ¥you know too much.¥ ah h' h'
 26 32 ESME I like (0.3) [going ou]t with my=
 27 33 RUKA [(aright)]
 28 34 ESME =frie[nd and drin]k at bars so.
 29 35 RUKA |[y a h a]
 30 r-hd |nods
 31
 32 36 (1.2)/((flames rise in grill))
 33 37 HIRO ah faiya: (("fire"))
 34 38 ESME |and the owner is really n[ice].
 35 39 RUKA |°[he:]:gh°
 36 j-hd |nods
 37 j-gz |at ESME-----|to rice-->42
 38
 39 40 |(0.4) |(0.6) |(0.2)
 40 h-rh→ |picks up cabbage |to JURI-->
 41 h-gz |at cabbage -----|to JURI-->
 42 fig |#9



1
2
3 41 RUKA |how |about the |[japane]se (.)
4 h-rh→ |drops on plate
5
6 42 JURU |[nyeah]
7 j-hd→ |nods
8 j-gz |rice~|cabbage----->
9 fig |#10



10
11
12 43 RUKA nomiya?
13 bar
14
15 44 |(0.6)
16 j-hd |chopsticks to food-->
17 e-hd |tilts head
18
19 45 RUKA °nomi-° izakaya?=
20 Japanese pub
21
22 46 JURU =izakaya?
23

24 Juri has launched a story about a bar she went to (line 1), and Esme asks her details
25 about the name and location of the bar (lines 6-30). Throughout this talk Juri's gaze is
26 primarily toward Esme, who is sitting to her right, and not at Hiro, who is seated in front of
27 her. At line 14, Juri's response to Esme's question reaches a potential point of closure, when
28 she says she does not remember the name of the bar but the bartender was Spanish. Hiro
29 provides several uptake tokens in line 15 as he begins to reach for the cabbage on the grill. At
30 first, this would appear to be a suitable juncture at which to launch an offer of food and he
31 holds out some cabbage toward Juri in line 17. However, at the same moment, Esme self-
32 selects to enquire further about the name of the bar (i.e., she continues the sequence of topical
33 talk), and Juri does not appear to see Hiro's outstretched hand. In the silence that follows

1 (line 18), Hiro first waves the cabbage a little, perhaps inviting Juri to notice it (Kendrick,
 2 2021), but also perhaps reintentionalising the action (Lerner & Raymond, 2017) to make it
 3 seem like he was only examining the cabbage rather than offering it. He then retracts his hand
 4 and puts the cabbage back on the grill. This momentarily suspends his projectable assistance,
 5 since the conditions for its successful completion (i.e., Juri's attentiveness to Hiro's
 6 outstretched tongs) are not in place.

7 Instead, Hiro tends to the grill while monitoring the foregrounded conversation for a
 8 more suitable slot in which to initiate his offer. This comes about 18 seconds later (line 39),
 9 once the foregrounded talk has reached another point of possible completion and Juri's gaze
 10 has moved from Esme back to home position (lines 39). In the silence in line 39, Hiro again
 11 takes the cabbage from the grill and moves it toward Juri with his tongs (Figure 9). At first,
 12 her gaze is on the rice she is holding (lines 39, 42), but it shifts to the cabbage just as Hiro
 13 drops the cabbage on her plate (line 42). Juri treats the food in Hiro's tongs and his extended
 14 hand as an offer by delivering a brief acceptance token ("yeah") along with a nod in line 42,
 15 precisely at the moment Hiro drops the cabbage on her plate (Figure 10). This means that
 16 even though Hiro is nominatively mobilising Juri's acceptance of his offer, he is able to give
 17 her the food even without her acknowledgement, just as Ruka did in Excerpt 3. The
 18 difference here is that Hiro seems to adjust his timing of the recruitment to an open slot in the
 19 foregrounded talk.

20 Conversely, in Excerpt 4, Ruka offers some food to Esme while she is engaged in
 21 unrelated topical talk and this interrupts her talk for a moment, although it does not derail the
 22 conversation in any significant way.

23

24 Excerpt 4: Arigato

25 01 ESME I think it really depends as well.

26 02 JURI mm mm

27 03 | (0.8) | (0.6)

28 e-gz |down at plate-->

29 r-gz |down~|to ESME

30 r-rh |flips meat with tongs

31 → |raises meat to ESME-->

32

33 04 ESME †anoth|e:r- (one of-)| °↓arigato°

34 *thank you*

35

36 r-rh→ -----|meat towards ESME's plate

37 |meat on plate

38 fig |#11



39

40

41 05 RUKA †eh heh [heh]

42 06 ESME [°um°]

43 07 RUKA? (too [ki:nd])

1 08 ESME | [one of] | [my friend-,]
 2 r-rh |raw meat to grill
 3 e-gz |RUKA-----|~~to JURI-->
 4
 5 09 HIRO [h' heh]
 6 10 ESME uh this year that's leaving- uh:
 7 11 she's Japanese?
 8 12 JURI mm,
 9

10 In line 1, an extended spate of topical talk from Esme (not shown) reaches a point of possible
 11 conclusion. Juri gives a minimal uptake token in line 2, but during the ensuing silence, Esme
 12 looks down at her plate (line 3). It is at this point that Ruka reaches for some meat from the
 13 grill and holds it out to Esme. Without any perceivable acknowledgement from Esme, Ruka
 14 goes ahead and puts the meat on her plate (line 4) just as Esme appears to be initiating a new
 15 thread of topical talk. She self-selects to say “another one of-” and then quickly delivers a
 16 Japanese gratitude token (“arigato”) that acknowledges Ruka’s act of giving her the food
 17 (Figure 11). Ruka treats this as laughable in next turn (line 5), perhaps due to the unexpected
 18 code-switch, and Esme goes on to continue her telling in line 8. In this excerpt then, we can
 19 see that the mobilisation of acceptance became misaligned in that the recipient (Esme) began
 20 another action just at the same moment that the embodied offer was being launched. Even so,
 21 it could be dealt with by momentarily suspending the foregrounded topical talk.

22 In Excerpt 5, we again see an instance of a mistimed offer owing to the prioritisation
 23 of the ongoing topical talk. Hiro attempts to give Esme some meat, but Ruka asks her a
 24 question at the same time. In this instance, the potential offer is aborted and Hiro ends up
 25 eating the meat himself.
 26

27 Excerpt 5: Financial consultant

28 01 ESME mm I will enter master
 29 02 RUKA | [>ah master<]
 30 r-hd |nods
 31 e-hd |nods
 32
 33 03 HIRO [a : : h ma]sters
 34 04 RUKA wow!
 35 05 (0.4)
 36 06 HIRO you are very >in[telligent]<
 37 07 RUKA [so:, you:]
 38 08 ESME no(h)o(h)o. [I mean it's (another:)]
 39 09 RUKA [you'll be a: : :]
 40 10 | (0.8)
 41 e-rh |food to mouth
 42 h-rh |tongs to grill
 43
 44 11 HIRO→ ♪↑oka:y♪
 45 12 | (0.3)
 46 h-rh |clicks tongs
 47
 48 13 RUKA you |are- will be finance-sh:al (0.4)
 49 r-rh |points to ESME
 50
 51 14 marketing
 52
 53 15 | (0.8)

1 e-hd |nods
 2
 3 16 ESME marketing.
 4 17 RUKA hoh-oh-|orh::
 5 h-rh→ |lifts meat-->
 6
 7 18 |(0.8)
 8 h-rh |---->
 9
 10 19 HIRO |[°so: we:°]
 11 h-rh→ |holds meat, turns it toward ESME
 12 fig |#12



13
 14
 15 20 ESME [and then i]t's still
 16 21 japa|nese and english as well.
 17 h-rh→ |meat to grill
 18 h-hd |tilts down
 19 fig |#13



20
 21
 22 22 JURI [mm:]
 23 23 RUKA [uhuh] so, (0.5) (you wi:ll)
 24 24 work at (0.5) |bank? |or something?
 25 r-hd |tilt
 26 e-hd |shakes head-->
 27
 28 25 (0.6)
 29 26 ESME um no, it's more |(0.6)
 30 e-hd |tilt
 31
 32 27 as a consultant?
 33 28 RUKA |uhuh (0.3) |pee |and jee? ((P&G))
 34 r-hd |nods
 35 j-rh |.....|lifts meat

1 h-rh |flips meat
 2 grill |flames rise
 3
 4

5 At this point, the participants have been discussing Esme’s future study and work. Line
 6 1 is Esme’s SPP response to a question from Ruka (not shown), and this receives a variety of
 7 acknowledgements and assessments from Ruka and Hiro (lines 2-4), which close that
 8 particular sequence. In line 6, Hiro then formulates another positive assessment directed at
 9 Esme (“you are intelligent”), which Esme deflects with disagreement in next turn (line 8). In
 10 overlap with that, Ruka begins another turn, but they both drop out due to the one-speaker
 11 rule (Sacks *et al*, 1974). Although the talk is clearly unfinished, a significant silence ensues in
 12 line 10 during which Esme takes a bite and Hiro tends to the grill, providing for the
 13 possibility of an imminent food-related recruitment. In line 11, Hiro self-selects to formulate
 14 a high-pitched “okay” in a slightly sing-song voice, which projects a possible topic shift, and
 15 along with his subsequent clicking of the tongs (line 12), it seems as though he is about to
 16 offer the others more food from the grill. However, in line 13, Ruka appears to ignore this
 17 trajectory and instead reformulates the abandoned turn he started in line 9, which makes a
 18 SPP response from Esme conditionally relevant, and therefore effectively usurps the turn
 19 from Hiro. He does, however, continue the embodied element of his projected action, picking
 20 up some meat from the grill (line 17) as Ruka provides uptake to Esme’s turn. Hiro then
 21 holds the meat toward Esme (line 18, Figure 12) as he produces talk that is hearably
 22 incremental to the “okay” he started earlier.

23 In other words, Hiro is attempting to time his offer to the primary talk, but is unable to
 24 do so successfully in this instance. In overlap, Esme apparently ignores Hiro’s projectable
 25 offer and instead goes on to further Ruka’s topic (line 20), leading Hiro to return the meat to
 26 the grill (line 21), tilting his head as he does so in a manner that is interpretable as a display
 27 of disappointment. This excerpt suggests that even when launched “in the clear” (line 11),
 28 acts of assistance can fail if they are not recognized as such by others. As with all interaction,
 29 recruitment are co-constructed, and when they are produced in competition with other threads
 30 of talk, they may not receive adequate acknowledgement from the intended recipient.

31

32 5. *Discussion*

33 Dual involvements are a common feature of co-present multi-party interaction, and to
 34 successfully navigate them entails careful attention to the unfurling details of temporality,
 35 embodiment, materiality and participation frameworks within the talk. Serving others relies
 36 heavily on timing offers to sequential gaps and lapses in the main thread of talk. Determining
 37 an appropriate juncture at which to initiate the offer is predicated on the ability to judge the
 38 trajectory of the primary topic of conversation and gain the attention of the intended
 39 recipient, both of which can be particularly challenging actions for participants who are not
 40 yet fully competent members of the English-speaking community. This may be because
 41 offers involve more spoken language as well, whereas unvoiced acts of assistance are a far
 42 more interactionally economical solution to such issues. Recall Excerpt 2 in which Ruka
 43 simply put some meat on Juri’s plate without using any language or even receiving embodied
 44 mutual acknowledgement. Such backgrounded recruitments generally happen smoothly:
 45 because they do not involve spoken interaction, they do not have to be fitted to gaps in the
 46 foregrounded talk and can happen simultaneously. They may even project an air of
 47 comfortable familiarity, since the offerer and the receiver do not have to ask or acknowledge
 48 the delivery of such a small favour. When spoken offers are launched amid another topic,
 49 they may have to be delayed or suspended in order for their deployment to result in
 50 appropriate uptake from the recipient. Recruitments like these therefore display the

1 participants' treatment of them as subordinate to the main conversation, even if they
2 temporarily become foregrounded for the moment it takes to perform them.

3 By way of contrast, elements of the cooking talk can also be abruptly foregrounded,
4 such as when warnings like "Fire!" (Excerpt 3, line 36) become immediately salient due to
5 shifting environmental conditions beyond the interaction. In such cases, the cooking talk is
6 momentarily prioritised due to its urgent relevance to a particular event. However, the other
7 participants can interpret the consequentiality of such a warning and downgrade its
8 importance via the way they treat it in ongoing talk, such as by choosing not to comment on it
9 at all, as became the case in Excerpt 3.

10 But even in less dramatic instances, the affordances of the yakiniku table, with its
11 open flame and grill in the center, make cooking, offering and eating omnirelevant activities.
12 These related activities have their own timelines and constraints—when the meat is done it
13 must be taken off the grill or it will burn, and this puts into place a series of subsequent next-
14 actions, including offering it to someone, receiving acceptance, transferring it to their dish,
15 and preferably eating it before it goes cold. In order to arrive at that goal, the other steps must
16 happen in a timely manner, and may therefore sometimes take priority over other topical talk.

17 In that sense, the two involvements in this dataset (cooking and chatting) are ongoing,
18 and each of the participants is well aware that both activities are happening, so they do not
19 orient to offers of food as unexpected. They are, as it were, in a state of incipient serving,
20 rather than offering assistance to some novel trouble. A first offer has happened early in the
21 meal and others are likely to follow as the meat is cooked piece by piece. As with
22 interactional histories (Deppermann, 2018), the first iteration may be conducted more
23 explicitly but as they fall into a routine of actions and roles, the offers are likely to become
24 less vocalised and more expected. In this sense, Zinken and Rossi (2016), note that some
25 forms of engagement may be thought of as "contributing to a shared course of action, rather
26 than assisting" (p. 26). Undoubtedly, offers of food are a specialised kind of offer, since they
27 are not designed to assist someone in trouble, but someone (perceivably) in need.

30 6. Concluding remarks

31
32 Like cafes (Laurier, 2008), *izakaya* are social spaces where friendships and relationships are
33 forged and maintained through a host of sociopragmatic and interactional episodes (Allen &
34 Liu, 2022, 2023). As one form of *izakaya*, the yakiniku-style restaurant provides for a
35 particular form of hospitality, in which the customers themselves take on the role of the chef
36 and waitstaff to a certain extent. Basic acts like cooking and serving become the domains of
37 the guests themselves, leading them to negotiate responsibility and procedurality for how best
38 to carry out such activities on a turn-by-turn basis. As this study has shown, a key element of
39 this involves tending to the needs of others in the party by providing them with food at
40 opportune moments.

41 It is likely that timing offers of food to other ongoing involvements is an interactional
42 practice that can be found in other settings too, but table-cooked meals possess at least some
43 practical contingencies that do not exist in the sort of gatherings where one person serves
44 everyone at the start and then everyone eats from their own plate. First, the presence of the
45 grill means that cooking is a constant part of the meal, and given that the number of tongs is
46 often limited, often just one or two of those at the table take charge of the grilling at any
47 particular moment. Second, the portions consist of individual mouthfuls of finely cut meat
48 designed to be eaten in an ongoing and timely manner (i.e., while they are hot), so the cook is
49 continually offering food to the others. As such, these offers are not necessarily occasioned
50 by conventional displays of need. Instead, the cook can often judge a "need" based on an

1 empty plate in front of someone. This sort of interactional setting may therefore provide an
2 original perspective on what constitutes a display of “need” within recruitments.

3 Finally, it is worth considering the sort of identity categories that are invoked through
4 such ongoing rounds of service to others. Hiramoto (2024) suggests that offers can be framed
5 as acts of assistance to progress the talk in ways that benefit the offerer, such as when sales
6 staff formulate acts of selling as acts of assistance. In cooking for others and formulating
7 repeated offers of food, the cook at a yakiniku table is invoking their role as host and, by
8 association, possibly casting the recipient of the food as guest, at least to a certain extent. It is
9 perhaps telling, for example, that Hiro and Ruka did most of the cooking in the current data
10 set, while Esme and Juri did most of the eating. Although beyond the specific scope of this
11 study, it is important to remember that social identities are ultimately made up of turn-by-turn
12 actions.

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22 **Appendix. Transcription conventions**

23 The transcripts follow standard Jeffersonian conventions (Jefferson, 2004), with the
 24 following additions:

- 25 ¥yes¥ Smiley voice is embedded in Yen symbols
 26 reachⁱ Japanese vowel marking is shown in superscript
 27 in charge Dotted underscore denotes staccato voicing
 28 ^{wh}what^{wh} Talk embedded in superscripted ^{wh} is whispered.

30 Embodiment features of the interaction are depicted via a simplified version of the
 31 conventions developed by Mondada (2018). The embodied elements are positioned in a series
 32 of tiers relative to the talk and rendered in grey.

- 33 | The onset of an embodied action is marked with a vertical bar
 34 |---> The action described continues across subsequent lines
 35 ---->| The action reaches its conclusion
 36 Preparation of the action
 37 ---- The apex of the action is reached and maintained
 38 , , , , , Retraction of the action
 39 ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ The action moves or transforms in some way.
 40 NAO The current speaker is identified with capital letters

42 Participants carrying out embodied action are identified relative to the talk by their initial in
 43 lower case in another tier, along with one of the following codes for the action:

- 44 -gz gaze
 45 -lh left hand
 46 -rh right hand
 47 -bh both hands
 48 -px proximity
 49 -hd head

1 -ts torso

2

3 Framegrabs are positioned within the transcript relative to the moment at which they were
4 taken.

5

6 Japanese talk is rendered into English over two tiers: a literal gloss in italics and/or a
7 vernacular translation in a different font.

8

9

10 *Figures*

11

12 Figure 1. Participants

13 Figure 2. Excerpt 1 line 5

14 Figure 3. Excerpt 1 line 5

15 Figure 4. Excerpt 1 line 10

16 Figure 5. Excerpt 1 line 15

17 Figure 6. Excerpt 2 line 8

18 Figure 7. Excerpt 3 line 17

19 Figure 8. Excerpt 3 line 18

20 Figure 9. Excerpt 3 line 40

21 Figure 10. Excerpt 3 line 42

22 Figure 11. Excerpt 4 line 4

23 Figure 12. Excerpt 5 line 19

24 Figure 13. Excerpt 5 line 21

25