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# Dealing with the dual demands of expertise and democracy

## How experts create proximity to the public without undermining their status as experts

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Credible expertise is no longer a given in our contemporary democracy: for knowledge to be authoritative, experts must take into account a wider audience than just scientific colleagues. This study uses conversation analysis and discursive psychology to investigate how experts deal with this role in practice. We show that experts in a Dutch public hearing on GM food orient to ‘speaking on behalf of the public’ without undermining their status as experts. They do this by (1) animating but not overlapping the voices of the public (2) speaking on behalf of ‘the consumer’ and (3) presenting hypothetical public opinions. In this way, experts reconcile what they treat as the dual requirement of distance to support an expert opinion and the proximity to the public required for good democracy. We further discuss what implications this research has for the role of experts in a modern democracy.

**Keywords:** ordinary democracy, public participation, expertise, epistemics, reported speech, conversation analysis, discursive psychology

### 1. Introduction

Scientific expertise today faces many uncertainties, especially when applied to policy issues. For expertise to land socially and become authoritative, it seems no longer enough to remove those uncertainties and let the facts speak for themselves (cf. Prettner et al. 2021). As early as the 1990s, Funtowicz and Ravetz advocated a different approach to the process of quality assurance of scientific knowledge, especially where “facts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes high and decisions urgent” (1993:744). At the core of that approach is the involvement of not only

fellow scientists but a wider group of citizens who are affected by the scientific process in one way or another (see also Hilgartner 2000). The expert's authority can, however, also be undermined by involving that same public, some authors believe. Sociologists of science Collins and Evans call this the "tension between expertise and democracy" (2007: 4), whereby the democratisation of knowledge, and the explicit involvement of a wider public in its quality assurance and creation, can threaten its value and truth. Their colleagues Turnhout, Tuinstra and Halfman identify a "dilemma between distance and involvement" (2019: 223), which they describe as an ongoing practical problem for experts, who have to navigate between engaging citizen perspectives in the context of democratisation processes and distancing themselves from those audiences to ensure the impartiality of their knowledge.

What is less known is how the management of this dual requirement works out in real-world interactions. Some conversation analytical work has been done in institutional settings where distance and proximity are negotiated. Raymond (2010: 90), for example, describes how health visitors strike a balance between "intimacy" and "work" by gathering information about the personal situation of the mothers, giving advice, and befriending the new mothers. Several studies of news interviews show that journalists pursue two conflicting ideals – impartiality and adversarialness – by asking critical questions but never doing so on their own behalf (Clayman and Heritage 2002, Heritage 2002, Clayman 2010, Clayman 2017).

Other studies show how speakers stage the audience such that the suggested proximity to the audience's perspective – laudable from a democratic point of view – somehow benefits their own, other actions. Clayman (2002, 2007), for example, demonstrates how journalists establish themselves as servants of the public by reflecting the public's concerns or critiques. Such a tribune-of-the-public attitude has the effect of legitimizing delicate actions. In this way, journalists can be both neutral in their questioning of public figures and watchdogs who do not simply offer public figures a platform. Mogendorff et al. (2014), in their study of expert board meetings on new technologies, show how experts actively draw on user concerns to gain credibility for what they say. However, by treating these as legitimate but less reasonable or consistent than their own concerns or those of another expert, the experts simultaneously 'override' these user concerns. Buttny (2009) focuses on a public presentation of Wal-Mart representatives, concerning plans to build a large supermarket on an environmentally sensitive site, and shows that these spokespersons, "all experts of a kind" (p. 238), formulate residents' criticism of the plans as concerns. By offering technical solutions to these concerns, representatives not only convey expertise but also neutralize the residents' complaints.

The current study focuses on how experts involve the public in their talk as part of their questioning actions, thereby managing the dual demands of (democratic) closeness and (expert) distance. We use conversation analysis and discursive psychology to investigate how these tensions are managed through the eyes of participants *themselves*, in real-life conversations. For this purpose, we examine a specific case where experts were invited by the organizers of a Dutch nationwide public debate on genetic modification of food to speak *on behalf of the public, to a panel of (other) experts*, in the context of a public hearing. This setting is treated by the questioning experts as creating epistemic tensions. As Heritage (2012: 24) points out in his paper on how action comes to be formatted, relative epistemic status *dominates* morphosyntax and intonation in shaping whether utterances are to be understood as requesting or conveying information. The finding already suggests that asking questions on behalf of the public to another panel of experts will create an epistemic dilemma for the expert speaker in the interaction. To be treated as an authentic requester of information, the expert speaker will somehow have to adopt an ‘unknowing epistemic stance’. At the same time, however, this can be difficult to reconcile with the ‘knowing’ stance that the expert may also ‘want’ to adopt, especially towards fellow experts. As we will show, by somehow speaking on behalf of the public *without* coinciding with it, experts can both base their questions on the public’s concerns (‘democratic proximity’) and reflect their own position (‘expert distance’). It also allows them to ask questions *and* adopt a knowing stance. We begin our study by providing background information on the context of the data and the public hearing during which it was gathered.

## 2. Materials and methods

The materials studied come from a ‘public hearing’ in which a group of experts asks questions of another group of experts on behalf of the public. This type of hearing is different from US public hearings, which consist of speaking slots in which members of the general public speak out and (government) officials listen (see for example Buttny 2010, Buttny 2017, Tracy and Hughes 2014). The public hearing was organised in the context of the Public Debate on Biotechnology and Food (*Publiek Debat Biotechnologie en Voedsel*) in the Netherlands. To organise the debate, the Temporary Committee on Biotechnology and Food (*Tijdelijke Commissie Biotechnologie en Voedsel*) was set up, consisting of “recognised authorities in the domains of biotechnology, communication sciences, ethics and life sciences” (Policy Document on Biotechnology 2000: 23). This expert committee (“Terlouw committee”) consisted of nine members, including

the chair Jan Terlouw (prominent former politician and commissioner, member of the Senate).

As part of their tasks, the committee was asked to organise “a public hearing in which the committee demands, on behalf of the public, an explanation from experts and interested parties about concerns and uncertainties amongst consumers and citizens” (Committee on Biotechnology and Food 2002: 33). Therefore, it was not the public itself (consumer, citizen) that was supposed to demand such an explanation, but the experts, as members of the committee. These experts had to speak on behalf of the public. This was exceptional, since experts are usually invited to public meetings as “consultants” (Buttny 2010: 637), to explain complex matters or answer questions from the public (Buttny and Cohen 2015). As spokespersons for the public, however, the experts submitted the questions of the public to their colleagues on a panel, who sat opposite them. As we will see, this configuration acted as a pressure cooker for the phenomenon we were interested in, namely the tension between ‘distance and involvement,’ as the experts had to maintain their authority both vis-à-vis the other experts and the people for whom they acted as spokespersons. In the following analysis, we will refer to both committee members and panellists as experts because that is how they were included in the debate and referred to by the other participants.

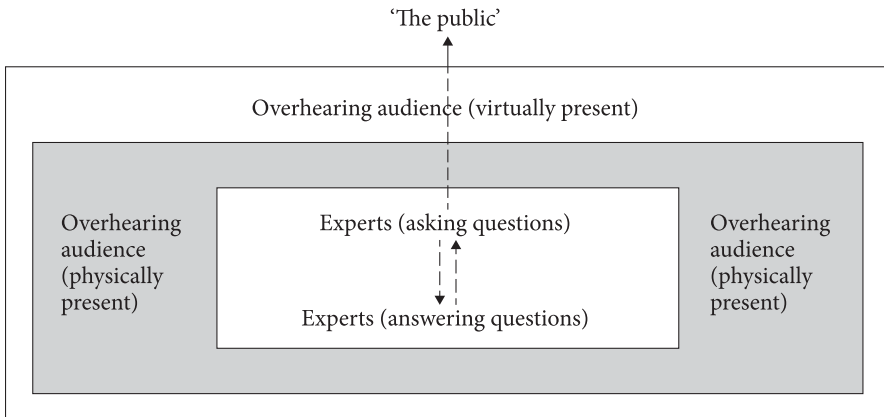
As a starting point for the public hearing, the public’s responses to one of the advertisements in the Netherlands’ main national and regional newspapers were used (Hanssen et al. 2001: 32). These responses were “translated into concrete questions, in response to which an explanation was demanded from the experts” (Committee on Biotechnology and Food 2002: 59). They were addressed in five separate sessions: (1) food safety and health, (2) freedom of choice and labelling, (3) environment and biodiversity, (4) food security and developing countries, (5) the role of the authorities. The expert team for each session was to consist of independent scientists on the one hand and representatives from society on the other (Hanssen et al. 2001: 34). It would eventually turn out that of these expert panels in the public hearing (14 people, all from the Netherlands) half were scientific experts, whereas the other half came from politics, agriculture, retail, and industry.

## 2.1 The corpus

The data for this study consist of approximately 3.5 hours of audio-recorded materials. Prior to the hearing, the organising team consented to the making of these recordings. All the recordings have been transcribed using Jefferson’s transcription system (see Appendix 1), displaying the prosodic, phonetic, and interactional details of what was said. Names and other personal characterisations were

replaced. English translations of the Dutch data are literal, if possible, but often adjusted to English phraseology to come as close to the local, interactional meaning of the original (Hepburn and Bolden 2013: 69). Dutch originals are included in Appendix 2.

The recordings capture the entire public hearing, consisting of five different sessions. The chair starts each session by introducing the topic of the session as well as the participating experts. In addition to the experts there is an audience, only addressed by the chair at the start of the hearing: “I welcome not only you, but also those who are, let us say, virtually present”. Therefore, an overhearing audience is both in the room itself and via a public live stream on the internet. In terms of a participation framework, it looks like this:



**Figure 1.** Participation framework public hearing

The actual talking takes place in the middle field, between participants introduced as (expert) members of the committee asking questions, on the one hand, and on the other hand experts who were invited to answer those questions. Whereas the experts exchange roles of speakers and recipients, the audiences only listen and overhear. In this study, we focus on the experts who designed their turns as questions. We collected 90 questioning turns from all five sessions of the public hearing. It was found that experts referred to the public in 35 out of a total of 90 questions (= 32%), and mainly in the preliminary remarks of their questioning turn (62 references, which is 89% of the total number of references). When the experts include the public’s perspective in their argument, they refer to the public as an absent third (or fourth) party. Experts refer to “the public” and “public debate” in their questions (37% of all 70 references), but also use “consumers” (29%), “citizens” (7%), “people” (11%) or other descriptions (16%).

## 2.2 Analytic procedure

For this study, we focused on the most commonly used form of reference, namely when experts used “the public” and “public debate” in their questions. From a conversation analytic perspective, we studied the practices used in designing questions in which these references were done, with a specific discursive psychological view to how participants draw upon the mental thesaurus (e.g., notice, see, feel) to accomplish their interactional tasks (Potter 1996). In addition to the sequential analysis, we also applied a rhetorical analysis, inspecting utterances for how descriptions (and their inferences) of persons and events provide insight into what is put forward, what is negated, or which otherwise plausible version is in question (Edwards and Potter 2005). Based on these analyses we arrived at three practices that experts use to manage the dual requirements of ‘expertise’ and ‘democracy’. We selected seven extracts that best illustrate how experts deal with the task of giving the public a voice in this particular context. Our aim is not to generalise; we are interested in exploring and analysing the richness of experts’ practical performances in this context, independently of how they may be distributed.

## 3. Analysis

In the coming sections, we will distinguish between different practices adopted to deal with the dual requirement of ‘expertise’ and ‘democracy’. We look successively at how experts demonstrate *proximity* to the public by animating the public’s voice (3.1), by conveying uncertainties or wishes of the public (3.2), and by presenting the public’s hypothetical opinions (3.3), while also suggest *distance* by shifting from assertions of public concerns to their own formulations of questions (3.1), by abstracting to the impersonal category of the consumer (3.2) and by speaking in hypothetical rather than objective terms (3.3). As we will show, the degree of claimed proximity and claimed distancing differs for each practice described.

### 3.1 Animating the public’s voice

In this section, we look at how experts create proximity to the public by producing the public’s question in *direct reported speech*. At the same time however, it is demonstrated how experts create distance, namely by asking questions that are ostensibly grounded in evident public concerns while not necessarily formulating them in the precise ways members of the public have done.

Let us start by looking at how experts display their involvement with the public. In Extract 1, we see how the expert (professor of international cooperation) describes himself as ‘noticing’ (“you s- notice”, line 2) the question of the public. By describing ‘how he knows’ the question of the public, the expert establishes first-hand evidence (Pomerantz 1984: 609). Perceptual terms such as ‘noticing’ present the expert as having picked up the public’s “question” (line 3) and provide for “sensory evidence” (Heritage and Stivers 1999: 1503):

**Extract 1. Asking a question about the world hunger issue**  
**Session 4: food security and developing countries**

(...)  
 01 thank you ·hh (.) uh there is- the subject has actually already been  
 02 → †discussed uh and you s- notice that in †many of the public debates  
 03 → uh “in the Netherlands” ·hh that the question is, (...) “will this genetic  
 04 technology mean something for the (.) world hunger issue or for the  
 05 (.) ·hh uh world food issue ·hh” (.) (...)

By producing the public’s question in ‘direct reported speech’ (cf. Clayman 2007), the expert formulates this question as authentic: “will this genetic technology mean something for the world hunger issue or for the world food issue” (lines 3–5). The quoted format of the question implies the “re-enactment” (Holt 1996: 241) or “the accurate replaying of a former locution” (Holt 2000: 425). This suggests that the talk is factual, exact, and authentic as it is set up as a literal version of what the audience said (Holt 1996, Holt and Clift 2006, Potter 1996, Wooffitt 2001, Stokoe and Edwards 2007, Heinrichsmeier 2021). From the perspective of ‘footing’ (Goffman 1979), the expert shows his alignment with the public. Through animating or ‘voicing’ the public’s talk in lines 3–5, and thereby bringing the public ‘on stage’, the public is established as both the author (formulating utterances) and the principal of the talk (proposing beliefs) (Goffman 1979, Couper-Kuhlen 1999). Clift and Holt (2006: 5) suggest that direct reported speech in English typically focuses on the *reported speaker*, like in ‘he says (that) [quote]’. These so-called ‘quotatives’ consist of the elements ‘pronoun + say’ or ‘pronoun + tell / go / be like’ (ibid.: 5). In our data, this is different, as we have seen in Extract 1: ‘you notice (that the question is) [quote]’ (line 2). Here, quotatives look like ‘pronoun + notice’ and the focus is on the speaker who is the *reporter*. By “noticing” the public’s question, the expert builds the identity of *witness*, “establishing access to the witnessed scene” (Potter 1996: 165). As a witness of what the public has said, the expert is strictly accountable for representing his experience only (Pomerantz 1984: 607). Moreover, by presenting himself as part of a generic “you” (line 2), it is implied that the experience is not exclusive or limited to himself, but open to anyone in a position to observe the audience.



More distance to the public was created by ‘installing’ a *preface* to the public’s question. Here, after reporting the question from the public (lines 3–5), the expert performs the transition to the next turn component by adding: “(...) and to this end I would like to formulate the first question for you as follows (...)” (lines 5–6). By announcing the upcoming talk as “the first question” (line 6), the expert in retrospect constructs the preceding talk as a question preface. Such prefaces provide relevance for the questions that follow (Clayman and Heritage 2002, Heritage 2002):

**Extract 1a. Asking a question about the world hunger issue**

**Session 4: food security and developing countries**

**Addressed expert (line 11): assistant director-general for food and agriculture, UN’s FAO**

(...)  
 01 thank you ·hh (.) uh there is- the subject has actually already been  
 02 ↑discussed uh and you s- notice that in ↑many of the public debates  
 03 → uh \*in the Netherlands\* ·hh that the question is, (.) “will this genetic  
 04 → technology mean something for the (.) world hunger issue or for the  
 05 → (.) ·hh uh world food issue ·hh” (.) uh and to this end I would ↓like to  
 06 → (.) formulate the first question for you as follows, ·hh (0.6)  
 07 what do you feel are (.) uh the most important or to your knowledge  
 08 >the most important current ↑causes of hunger in poor countries.  
 09 is that a matter of< distribution >in other words there is enough food  
 10 but it is wrongly distributed? (0.5) or is it >or is it slowly starting  
 11 to become< more and more a matter of production. madam [Postma]  
 12 what does ·hh the research you are doing in the FAO say about ↓it. (...)

The expert refers to the public’s question as the context for the upcoming question (“and to this end...”, line 5), thus claiming that the question for the invited expert (lines 7–9) derives from or is grounded in the concerns of the public. However, he then proceeds to his own expert formulation of the question (“I would like to formulate the first question...”, lines 5–6), thereby accomplishing ‘distance’ from that same public. The ‘footing shift’ (Goffman 1979) allows the expert to bring the public ‘on stage’ without overlapping with the content of their questions.

Note how the question from line 7 onwards reinforces the epistemic status of both the questioner and the respondent as an expert. The “replacing” (Schegloff 2013: 43) of the phrase “what do you feel” (line 7) with “to your knowledge” (line 7) explicitly addresses the recipient as an expert. By performing the act of questioning, the questioner establishes himself as being in a K- position (Heritage and Raymond 2005). However, the expert elaborates on the question by presenting two candidate answers: “is that a matter of distribution (...) or is it (...) a matter of production” (9–11). This alternative construction presupposes the correctness of one of the two candidates (Heritage 2002), by which the expert is upgrading this K- position again.

In Extract 2, a professor of human genetics claims direct access to the public's questions by using perceptual terms: "I have noticed... that..." (lines 1–2). He also immediately distances himself by building a contrast between these "questions" (line 3) and "professional know-how" (line 5):

**Extract 2. Asking a question about health risks**

**Session 1: food safety and health**

01 → (...) wish to complement *that*. ·hh u::h I have noticed in the nine months  
 02 → that u::h this Terlow committee has been at work that there is still a  
 03 → big distance between the questions (0.5) at least between some questions  
 04 that exist among the public, and things that we ·hh I am a heredity expert  
 05 → (0.4) almost take for granted uh (0.6) as professional know-how. (.) (...)

Whereas the expert attributes the feature "questions" to the public (lines 3–4), he attributes "professional know-how" to "we" (lines 4–5). The "we" (line 4) is specified directly: the expert suspends his talk by parenthetically inserting: "(...that we) I am a heredity expert (almost take for granted ...)" (lines 4–5). This footing shift allows the expert to construct himself as belonging to the category of experts (who have professional knowledge), as opposed to those who belong to the category of the public (who have questions).

In the remainder of Extract 2, the expert establishes the public's question as directly experienced by himself as a member of the category of experts ("we"), again suggesting immediate, first-hand access: "we regularly hear the question ..." (line 6). He then describes the question in reported speech: "is there no danger that if you eat genetically modified food your own genes will then be changed" (lines 6–8). Note how he finally provides 'online commentary' (Heritage and Stivers 1999) on the public's speech in lines 8–9:

**Extract 2a. Asking a question about health risks**

**Session 1: food safety and health**

**Addressed expert (line 16): professor of environmental science**

05 (...) (0.4) almost take for granted uh (0.6) as professional know-how. (.)  
 06 → for instance (0.6) we regularly hear the question (0.5) "is there no  
 07 → danger that if you eat genetically modified food (0.5) your own genes  
 08 → u::h will then be changed." well for an expert such as myself  
 09 → that is >an an < absurd idea (.) but it exists nonetheless,  
 10 (.) ·hh uh one does not realise apparently (...)  
 [4 lines omitted, talk on eating genetically modified food]  
 15 (...) could find expression. but more generally, (0.4) I would  
 16 like to ask mister [Jansen] (0.9) is there currently (.)  
 17 any evidence in medical literature (1.0) that genetically modified food  
 18 ·hh (1.0) causes health problems? (0.5) relatively because because  
 19 of course I also read (...)

Here we see how the expert, after *animating* (Goffman 1979) the question in lines 6–8, provides an evaluation of the public’s talk: “that is an an an absurd idea...” (line 9). However, he describes this evaluation as coming from a different identity: “well for an expert such as myself (that is an an an absurd idea...)” (lines 8–9). Self-categorisation not only makes his professional identity relevant, but also makes clear that the evaluation should not fall under his identity as a spokesperson for the public (cf. Whitehead 2020) and that it is not preferable to quote *and* critically address the public (cf. Holt 2000). In this way, the expert shows that he reports directly on what the public has said but, in addition, does not treat their concerns as valid when his expert knowledge indicates that they are not, thus observing both distance and proximity.

Furthermore, we see how the expert moves on to the next turn component (“but more generally I would like to ask mister [Jansen]...”, lines 15–16), by constructing the preceding talk as a question *preface*. Again, this preface is used as a means of moving from a direct account of what publics have said to the question the speaker is now asking, which, by repackaging, creates distance. By projecting the upcoming question as a request for information, the expert suggests a K- position. However, he also ensures his position as an expert by asking the responding expert about scientific evidence and then qualifying that question: “relatively because because of course I also read (...)” (lines 18–19).

In this section, we have seen how experts show their closeness to the public by animating their voices, suggesting that they know their ideas and concerns first-hand. At the same time, the reporting makes visible that the experts do not overlap with these ideas and concerns, an effect reinforced by using the preface to the question as a tool to move from the public’s concerns to a formulation reflecting an expert position.

### 3.2 Speaking on behalf of ‘the consumer’

In the following, we demonstrate how experts use a two-step practice to create both distance and engagement. We see how the experts first describe themselves as experiencing and having learnt about the public’s doubts and desires. Grounded in these descriptions, the experts then proceed to a more abstract, impersonal level, by asking a question in which they present themselves as speaking on behalf of ‘the consumer’. In this way, experts can demonstrate engagement with the public without coinciding with that same public.

Extract 3 shows how the expert (chairman of the board, industrial services company) bases his question on public concerns by suggesting first-hand experience of these concerns (lines 1–2):

**Extract 3. Asking a question about labelling****Session 2: freedom of choice and labelling****Addressed expert (line 10): head of quality and product sustainability, international retail group**

01 → (...) to do that with you (.) ·hhhhh and from †that what we understand  
 02 → from the public is (.) that actually the †question freedom of  
 03 choice †is not an issue at all. one wants a freedom of choice  
 04 (0.4) ·hh there is no one who does †not want that (0.9) and if you  
 05 want to have a freedom of choice ·hhh then you †must be (.) well  
 06 informed (0.5) you cannot choose (.)·hh if you are not  
 07 well informed ·hh and my fi- first question would then be  
 08 (.) ·hh if we look at the current regulations (.) ·hh uh::  
 09 IS (.) that a †guarantee for the consumer (0.8) and when he  
 10 reads that label (.) at †yours (.) madam [Huisbergen] ·hhh that it  
 11 is †genuinely (.) free (.) of GMO (.) do you have that guarantee? (...)

The expert starts by presenting himself as a member of a group (“we”, line 1), establishing the perspective from which the public was perceived. He then attributes to the public a clear-cut desire for freedom of choice in various terms: “the question freedom of choice is not an issue at all” (lines 2–3), “one wants a freedom of choice” (line 3), “there is no one who does not want that” (line 5). The extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986) “(not) at all” (line 3), “one (wants)” (line 3) and “no one (does not)” (line 4) emphasize the absoluteness and unanimity of these wishes, but without providing further evidence (compare the expert quoting the public’s talk in Section 3.1). We see how the expert claims proximity to the public by presenting his ideas as arising purely from his (direct) observations of this public.

In lines 4–7 the expert moves towards asking the invited expert a question on labelling. By producing an if-clause (“and if you want to have a freedom of choice”, lines 4–5), the then-clause makes the consequence available (“then you must be well-informed” lines 5–6). The if-then formulation is subsequently upgraded to a general principle: “you cannot choose if you are not well informed” (lines 6–7), suggesting that good information is in the interest of and a necessary condition for all citizens.

In the next step, the expert is distancing himself from the public by retrospectively constructing the preceding talk about the public as a ‘mere’ preface to the question he is now posing (“and my first question would then be...”, line 7), at the same time shifting his footing from “we” (line 1) to “my” (line 7). His question, ostensibly based on public concern, asks the invited experts to assure him that the current regulations are adequate “for the consumer” (lines 8–9), followed by a second question about labels that guarantee that products are “genuinely free of GMO” (lines 9–11). While the preface features an ‘understood’ public desire, the

expert has now reformulated that desire into a demand of the impersonal, generic “consumer”, further delineating it from his own possible considerations.

In Extract 4, we also see an expert showing commitment with the public, only now the public constitutes a problem to be solved. The expert (professor of human genetics) presents his questioning turn as an elaboration of the preceding expert answer (“so you...”, line 1), describing himself as perceiving “uncertainty... about this food safety” in the public debates (lines 2–3):

**Extract 4. *Asking a question about food safety and labelling***

**Session 1: food safety and health**

**Addressed experts (lines 10–11): chair of association biotech companies, associate of food and safety institute and professor of environmental science**

(...)  
 01 → so you don't find it ↑surprising that we in the public debates  
 02 → (0.6) often still experience uncertainty about (.) this  
 03 → food safety and my question ·hh although the topic  
 04 labeling comes up for discussion as a separate ·hh theme I want in  
 05 rela- in rela- especially in connection with that with that food  
 06 safety and the and the perception thereof by the public ask you  
 07 (.) ·hh and I don't specifically have a choice of (.) ·hh uh  
 08 whether that should be mister [De Vries] or mister ↑[Bosman] or or [Martin  
 09 Jansen]. ·hh (.) do you believe that labelling (1.3)  
 10 ↑helps towards (0.4) the consumer's (.) sense of trust, (.)  
 11 ·hh ↑and (0.4) since my since my emeritus status I have to go ↑shopping  
 12 myself more often now. (.) ·hh and at that supermarket I look at how  
 13 quickly people grab their things and I never see anyone there with  
 14 their glasses on reading all the things it says on those labels and my  
 15 ↑question is (.) ·hh uh (1.0) do you then also see a difference (0.4)  
 16 in requirements (.) with regard to that labelling in the cases of  
 17 genetically modified food and, (0.9) food that is ↑not genetically modified (...)

The expert introduces himself as member of a group (“we”, line 1), adding some contextual details: “(we) in the public debates...” (line 1). Within this context, the expert describes the “we” in terms of what they have sensed: “often still experience uncertainty (about this food safety)” (lines 2–3). Whereas “often” strengthens the legitimacy of the experience, “still” suggests an undesirable situation as to the experienced “uncertainty”. This “uncertainty” (line 2) concerning food safety is only loosely related to the public: it is presented as originating from “the public debates” (line 1) and replaced by “the perception (thereof by the public)” (line 6). The expert thus foregrounds his experience of sensing ‘uncertainty’ without further substantiating his claims (compare the expert quoting the public in Section 3.1).

Subsequently, the expert addresses the invited experts (lines 8–9), asking whether they “believe that labelling helps towards the consumer’s sense of trust” (lines 9–10). We see how the expert shifts footing from speaking as part of a “we”

(line 1) to “I” (line 4). Simultaneously, the expert distances himself from the public, by constructing the preceding talk as a preface to the upcoming question (see “I want... ask you...”, line 4 and 6). By drawing on an “empiricist” description (Potter 1996:152–153), the expert turns the aforementioned self-experienced uncertainties during public debates into a generalised need for “trust” on the part of “the consumer” (line 10). He displays himself as a mere bystander in what is now an abstract ‘consumer feature’, with the facts taking on a life of their own, completely detached from the speaker. By doing this, the expert invites his fellow experts to address a general consumer issue in order to remedy the perceived undesirable state of the public.

Whereas the expert adopts an ‘unknowing stance’ by asking a question (“do you believe that labelling helps towards the consumer’s sense of trust” (lines 9–10)), he upgrades his K- position by providing an answer to the question himself. We see how the expert invites the fellow experts to either confirm or disconfirm the claim “labelling helps towards the consumer’s sense of trust”. Such a yes/no interrogative makes relevant a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’ as an answer (Raymond 2003). However, the expert continues his talk (“and”, line 11) by describing himself as a ‘retired academic’ (“since my emeritus status”, line 11), visiting the supermarket more regularly. In his capacity as a customer in a supermarket, he describes himself as observing “how quickly people grab their things” (line 12–13) without reading the labels (lines 13–14). Since these comments imply a ‘no’-answer to the question, the expert establishes a ‘knowing stance’ as to the claim. By announcing “and my question is do you then also see a difference....” (lines 14–17), the preceding talk again is dealt with as a question *preface*.

In this section, we have seen how experts show their engagement with the public by claiming access to the public, based on their own perceptions. Fellow experts are then invited to address the public’s demands or undesired state. Again, the question design (two-step, including a preface) demonstrates how the public is mobilized to justify asking a question in expert terms. And again, we see how experts manage the epistemic dilemma of having to take an ‘unknowing stance’ by subtly upgrading their knowledge position towards their fellow experts.

### 3.3 Presenting the public’s hypothetical opinions

In this section, we show how experts create proximity by ascribing opinions to the public. By presenting these opinions in a hypothetical construction, the experts simultaneously create distance to the public. Experts deal with these (hypothetical) opinions of the public as the ground for asking a question in expert terms.

Extract 5 is illustrative of such a hypothetical construction. The expert (chairman of the board, industrial services concern) in lines 1–2 describes the public as

accepting of the “one percent” (in GMO-free food, a GMO “pollution” of 1% is officially permitted – authors): “the public accepts also accepts that one percent”. This description is preceded by “let us suppose (that the public...)” (line 1):

**Extract 5. *Asking a question about monitoring***

**Session 2: freedom of choice and labelling**

**Addressed expert (not in extract): head of quality and product sustainability, international retail group**

(...)

- 01 → okay ·hh let us suppose that that uh the public also accepts that  
02 → one percent ·hhh then then this actually brings you to the  
03 next question (.) and that is ·hhh if we if we look at (...)

We see how the expert produces the public’s view on GM food as hypothetical (Noordegraaf, Van Nijnatten and Elbers 2008, Speer 2012, Bognelli et al. 2020). Experts produce the public’s opinion as a “hypothetical scenario” such as “let us suppose (that the public...)” followed by a “question component” (Bongelli et al. 2020: 1). In Extract 5, the expert produces a hypothetical construction, consisting of a two-part structure. First, there is the hypothetical scenario: “let us suppose that the public also accepts that one percent” (lines 1–2). The second part announces the question to the invited expert as a consequence of the first part: “then this actually brings you to the next question...” (lines 2–3). This format allows the experts to present the public’s opinions without being held responsible for the content of these opinions. As Ford (1997: 393) states in her study on conditionals, a hypothetical if-clause is appropriate “when one wants to gain entry but does not have a strong epistemological basis for doing so”. Here, the construction allows the expert to suggest engagement with the public, while keeping that same public at bay.

In Extract 6, the expert (former politician and commissioner, member of the Senate) begins a follow-up question consisting of a claim about the (Dutch) public: “(...) the Dutch public is having none of it (...)” (line 3). Agency is attributed to the public, by presenting the public as an actor who has an opinion about GM food. However, since these opinions are embedded in a hypothetical construction (“but just suppose suppose (that we conclude...)”, lines 1–2), the expert’s proximity to the public is avoided:

**Extract 6. Asking a question about governance****Session 5: the role of the authorities****Addressed expert (not in extract): former minister, member of the senate and EU commissioner**

- (...)
- 01 → [mm but just ↑suppose ↑suppose that we (0.3)
- 02 → ↑conclude from our public de↑bate and r↑eport to the cabi↑net and to the
- 03 → ↓house h↑h that the Dut↑ch public is having none: of it, (...)
- [4 lines omitted, talk on the biodiversity debate]
- 08 (... and suppose the cabinet de↑cides accordingly. (0.9) would you then: say
- 09 with your European experience >yes lads you can you can say that< ↑but there
- 10 is no ↑po:↑ssi↑billi↑ty keeping that within those borders. hh or do you say
- 11 >well then that's what you should do.< (...)

We can observe in line 1 how the expert starts a hypothetical scenario (“just suppose suppose that...”). Within this scenario, the public is portrayed as having an opinion about GM food: “the Dutch public is having none of it” (line 3). The hypothetical construction of the public’s opinion prevents the expert from being associated with this opinion even more than when he would present ‘opinions’, because he can only be held accountable for identifying *possible* opinions. Describing the public’s opinion as hypothetical releases the expert from presenting evidence for these opinions. The projected question part is delivered in lines 8–11: “would you then say...”. By announcing the upcoming question, the preceding talk is dealt with as a question preface, allowing the expert to treat the public’s opinion as the steppingstone for asking the question to the invited expert.

In Extract 7, the hypothetical construction of public opinions demonstrates the delicate character of involving the public in expert talk. We see how the expert (professor of food and epidemiology) describes the public’s stance in a hypothetical construction: “the public may have a positive more positive attitude towards biotechnology for food production...” (lines 3–4). Note that this description is also presented as coming from a previous speaker (“you have also just heard mister [Willems] saying it that....”, line 2) implying that the expert is merely animating the talk (see also Section 3.1):



**Extract 7. Asking a question about benefits****Session 1: food safety and health****Addressed expert (not in extract): chair of association biotech companies and organizations**

(...)

01 ·hhh yes I would like to uhm address >my first question to mister< [De ↑Vries]  
 02 → (0.8) t- uh you have also just heard uh mister [Willems] saying it, that uhm  
 03 → (.) uh the public uhm (0.5) may have a positive (0.7) uh more positive uh  
 04 → >attitude towards biotechnology< uh for food production ·hhh uh  
 05 if its ↑value to the consumer can be uh unequivocally (0.6) demonstrated  
 06 (1.0) and that is also the exact ↑promise of the  
 07 <genetic modification of food crops> actually (0.6) that that value uh (0.3)  
 08 is clear to the consumer (1.7) well um there are some examples of that one  
 09 is to reduce >the use of< eh chemical  
 10 >crop protection< products (1.3) some examples (0.3) of  
 11 health↑ benefits that gm food could bring to the consumer  
 12 (0.5) ·hhh but so how do you actually a↑ssess:: these benefits. uhm (1.0) do  
 13 you believe that they are currently or perhaps in time: uhm (0.4) clear  
 14 enough. and comprehensive enough as well. (0.9) for convincing consumers and  
 15 also citizens of the benefits. (...)

The public's "positive attitude" (lines 3–4) is presented as the outcome of accomplishing the following if-part: "if its value to the consumer can be unequivocally demonstrated" (line 5). After transforming the public's attitude into generalised consumer traits (see also Section 3.2), the expert elaborates on this by describing "examples" (lines 8 and 10) of the benefits of GM food in terms of this abstract "consumer" (lines 8 and 11). The expert thereby adopts a 'knowing stance', as the prelude to his question in lines 12: "so how do you actually assess these benefits". In the second instance, this question is elaborated on by adding "for convincing consumers and also citizens" (lines 14–15) as the benchmark for determining these benefits. In this way, the expert treats the question to the invited expert as rooted in hypothetical opinions of the public on GM food, allowing him to raise opinions without being responsible for these opinions, not even for their actual existence.

In this section, we have seen how the experts bring in public opinions as part of a hypothetical construct. We have discussed these constructions as distancing techniques that allow the experts to make claims related to the public without being held accountable for these claims. The expert thus foregrounds the (possible) opinion of the public as a motive for asking a question. The construction again shows how the public can be mobilized – in this case just enough – to raise an issue that also reflects the expert position.

#### 4. Conclusion and discussion

This study has shown how experts on the one hand actively orient to democratic demands by engaging with perspectives of the public, taking an unknowing stance on their behalf. On the other hand, experts distance themselves from that same public, suggesting a knowing stance by which they maintain their expert status vis-à-vis their fellow experts. By (1) animating the public's voice in reported speech, the expert provides evidence for the questions of the public without being (held) responsible for those questions. By (2) speaking on behalf of an impersonalized consumer, the expert cannot be held accountable for perceived public's doubts and desires. And by (3) presenting public's opinions as hypothetical, some knowledge is suggested, but no certain knowledge, and thus no responsibility, is claimed. These techniques allow experts to treat citizen concerns as if they can be directly accessed – heard, seen, known, read, or hypothesized– by them. By providing evidence, experts build the right to speak on behalf of the public and gain credibility as spokespersons. At the same time, however, experts keep the 'public' at a distance in various ways, minimizing their own involvement in the content of the public's concerns. For example, they side-line the public by critically evaluating their questions and inserting such comments from their position as experts. Notably, they turn preceding talk about citizen concerns into the preface to their question in expert terms. As such, while the question that is formulated is claimed to follow from or be grounded in the concerns of the public, it is also distanced from them through its (re)formulation. Furthermore, they avoid alignment with the content of the public's concerns by treating the opinions as hypothetical or known consumer characteristics.

These practices demonstrate how experts present themselves as dealing with two tasks – speaking on behalf of 'the public' on the one hand and fulfilling their role as an 'expert' on the other. While not treated as categorically incompatible, they are clearly treated as potentially in tension with each other. If we compare this with journalism (Clayman 2007, 2010), we see how journalists engage the public to provide critical commentary, in order to fulfill their role as watchdogs. The same is true for health professionals (Raymond 2010): nurses resist the responsibility of asking certain questions to the new mothers precisely in order to do their job as nurses. In our study, however, we see how experts treat the distance-involvement tasks as coexisting, as parallel roles that do not sit each other well. They demonstrate, on the one hand, that they listen to the public and, on the other, that their authority as experts is relevant. The analysis suggests that experts struggle to reconcile these dual demands but also try to connect citizen and expert concerns (cf. Sprain, Carcasson and Merolla 2014).

One observation is that the public is characterised primarily in terms of supposed needs and concerns. Known for his illuminating study of the “public mistrust of science”, sociologist Brian Wynne (2006) noted how scientists systematically and often ignorantly hold the public accountable for its lack of trust in science. Wynne explains how experts deal with the public as incompetent, as not understanding scientific knowledge and processes. The experts in our data have similar, but slightly different orientations. By attributing features as ‘having questions’ and ‘being uncertain’, the experts present the public as less knowledgeable or having particular feelings, not so much to ridicule or convince them of the value of GM-food per se, or their own righteous position, but to pave the way for requesting information about food safety, food security and labelling *on their behalf*, mainly invited to do so by the (prescribed) design of the meeting.

Having said this, we saw how experts in portraying the public also, reflexively, constructed their own expert identity (cf. Locke and Edwards 2003). In our analysis, we observed how experts not only treated the public as questioning and uncertain – reflexively self-identifying as well-informed and confident – but also as people with concerns that do not belong to the expert realm. When presenting these concerns to the invited experts, the (questioning) experts distanced themselves by delivering them as not their own, both in terms of content and of form. In its most explicit form, experts commented ‘online’ and in technical terms, on what they presented as the public’s worries. In doing so, experts built themselves as responsible for raising these concerns but also used them as a steppingstone towards presenting them to their fellow experts, as questions in expert terms. These practices also support the idea of the questioning and answering experts “catching up again” (Hanssen et al. 2001: 6).

We do not want to argue that experts’ handling of the distance-involvement tension in this setting is objectionable. Instead, we hope to have shown that being a democratic expert requires hard work and constant practical solutions, as democracy and expertise are treated as ‘frenemies’: friend and foe at the same time. It is important to make trainee experts aware of this tension, and to explore which organisational infrastructure might suit the management of this tension best. The latter will have to focus in particular on studies of expert-public interactions ‘in the wild’, because many of the considerations are not conscious and must be studied in ‘real time’.

This study obviously has its limitations, in particular due to the unique context in which the studied interactions took place, but this context also made it possible to examine the tension between democracy and expertise in a magnified form, and to conclude that an undeniable sincere desire to citizen participation does not necessarily make for a democratic summer.

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## Appendix 1. Transcription system

Transcription symbols based on the Jefferson transcription system (2004)

[	square brackets: indicate start of overlap of successive talk
=	equal signs: indicate latching of successive talk, no silence between talk
(1.0)	numbers in parentheses: indicate pause in (tenths of) seconds
(.)	period in parentheses: indicates micropause, shorter than 0.2 seconds
?	question mark: indicates strongly rising intonation in final unit of talk
,	comma: indicates slightly rising intonation in final unit of talk
.	period: indicates falling intonation in final unit of talk
↑	up arrow: indicate sharp high pitch shift in following syllable
↓	down arrow: indicate sharp low pitch shift in following syllable
WORD	upper case: indicates louder volume than surrounding talk
°word°	degree signs: indicate softer volume than surrounding talk
<u>word</u>	underlining: indicates emphasis in syllable
wo:rd	colon(s): indicate(s) stretching of preceding sound
wo-	hyphen: indicates a cut-off
>word<	right/left carats: indicate speeding up, compared to surrounding talk
<word>	left/right carats: indicate slowing down, compared to surrounding talk
“word”	quotation marks: indicate reported speech
·hh	period-prefixed row of ‘h’s: indicates inbreath
hh	row of ‘h’s: indicates outbreath
(word)	talk in parentheses: uncertain hearing
( )	parentheses: inaudible talk
(...)	three periods in parentheses: omitted talk in same turn
[comment]	square brackets, italicized: transcriber’s comment
[Jansen]	name in square brackets: pseudonym of one of the experts
→	arrow in front of line: focus of discussion in analysis

## Appendix 2. Original Dutch extracts

### Extract 1. *Asking a question about the world hunger issue*

#### Session 4: food security and developing countries

(...)  
 01 dank u. ·hh (.) eh er is- 't onderwerp is eigenlijk al aan de forde  
 02 → gekomen ehm en je z- merkt dat in ↑veel van de publieksde↓batten  
 03 → eh "in Nederland" ·hh dat de vraag is, (.) "gaat deze g<sup>te</sup>chnologie wat  
 04 betekenen voor het (.) wereldh<sup>o</sup>ngervraag↓stuk of voor het  
 05 (.) ·hh eh wereldv<sup>o</sup>edselvraag↓stuk ·hh" (.) (...)

### Extract 1a. *Asking a question about the world hunger issue*

#### Session 4: food security and developing countries

#### Addressed expert (line 11): assistant director-general for food and agriculture, UN's FAO

(...)  
 01 dank u. ·hh (.) eh er is- 't onderwerp is eigenlijk al aan de forde  
 02 gekomen ehm en je z- merkt dat in ↑veel van de publieksde↓batten  
 03 → eh "in Nederland" ·hh dat de vraag is, (.) "gaat deze g<sup>te</sup>chnologie wat  
 04 → betekenen voor het (.) wereldh<sup>o</sup>ngervraag↓stuk of voor het  
 05 → (.) ·hh eh wereldv<sup>o</sup>edselvraag↓stuk ·hh" (.) ehm en daarvoor zou ik  
 06 → (.) de eerste vraag als volgt ↓willen eh formuleren bij u, ·hh (0.6)  
 07 wat zijn naar uw gevoel (.) eh de belangrijkste of naar uw kennis >de  
 08 belangrijkste foorzaken van honger op 't ogenblik in arme landen. is dat  
 09 een kwestie van <ver↓deling >met andere woorden d'r is voldoende voedsel  
 10 maar 't is fout verdeeld? (0.5) of is het>lof begint het langzamerhand  
 11 te worden< steeds meer een kwestie ↑van productie. mevrouw [Postma]  
 12 wat zegt hh het onderzoek waar u mee bezig bent in de FAO d'r ↓over. (...)

### Extract 2. *Asking a question about health risks*

#### Session 1: food safety and health

01 → (...) dat willen aanvullen. ·hh e::hm ik heb gemerkt in de ↑negen maanden  
 02 → dat e::h deze commissie Terlouw aan het werk is dat er ↑toch nog een  
 03 → grote afstand is tussen de vragen (0.5) althans tussen sommige vragen die  
 04 bij het publiek leven, en wat wij als ·hh ik ben erfelijkheidsdeskundige  
 05 → als (0.4) vakkennis bijna eh (0.6) betkend veronderstellen. (.) (...)

### Extract 2a. *Asking a question about health risks*

#### Session 1: food safety and health

#### Addressed expert (line 16): professor of environmental science

05 (.) als (0.4) vakkennis bijna eh (0.6) betkend veronderstellen. (.) zo  
 06 → (0.6) horen wij regel↑matig de vraag van (0.5) "zou het nou geen gefv<sup>a</sup>ar  
 07 → kunnen als je genetisch gemodificeerd voedsel ↑teet (0.5) dat dan je  
 08 → eigen genen e::h ver↑anderd ↓worden." nou dat is voor een deskundige  
 09 → zoals ikzelf >een een een< onzinnige gedachte (.) maar hij is er toch,  
 10 (.) ·hh eh men realiseert zich kennelijk niet (...)  
 [4 lines omitted, talk on eating genetically modified food]  
 15 (...) ↑tuiting zou kunnen komen. ↑maar meer in het algemeen, (0.4) zou ik  
 16 aan de heer ↑[Jansen] willen vragen. (0.9) is er nu in de (.)  
 17 medische literatuur (1.0) evidentie dat genetisch gemodificeerde voedsel  
 18 ·hh (1.0) gezondheidsproblemen oplevert? (0.5) in verhouding want  
 19 want natu<sup>u</sup>urlijk lees ik ook (...)



**Extract 3. Asking a question about labelling**

**Session 2: freedom of choice and labelling**

**Addressed expert (line 10): head of quality and product sustainability, international retail group**

01 → (...) wil ik dat met u doen ·hhhh en uit ↑datgene wat wij  
02 → uit het publiek begrijpen is (.) dat eigenlijk de ↑vraag keuzevrijheid  
03 helemaal nie' aan de orde is. men wil een keuzevrijheid  
04 (0.4) ·hh er is niemand die dat ↑niet wil (0.9) en als je een  
05 keuzevrijheid wil hebben ·hhh dan ↑moet je dus (.) goed geïnformeerd  
06 zijn (0.5) je kunt niet kieze (.) als je niet  
07 goed geïnformeerd ben ·hh en mijn ee- eerste vraag zou dan ook zijn  
08 (.) ·hh als we naar de huidige regelgeving kijke (.) ·hh eh::  
09 IS (.) dat nou een ↑garantie voor de consument (0.8) en als die  
10 dat etiket leest (.) bij ↑u (.) mevrouw [Huisbergen] ·hhh dat ie dan  
11 ook ↑werkelijk (.) vrij is (.) van GMO (.) heeft u die garantie? (...)

**Extract 4. Asking a question about food safety and labelling**

**Session 1: food safety and health**

**Addressed experts (lines 10–11): chair of association biotech companies, associate of food and safety institute and professor of environmental science**

(...)  
01 → dus u vindt het niet zo ↑gek dat wij in de publieksdelbatten  
02 → (0.6) vaak toch onzekerheid ervaren over (.) die  
03 → voedselveiligheid en mijn vraag ·hh alhoewel het onderwerp  
04 etikettering als apart hhh thema aan de orde komt wil in  
05 verh- in verh- juist in verband met die voedselveiligheid  
06 en de en de beleving daarvan door het publiek aan u vragen  
07 (.) ·hh en ik heb niet specifiek een keuze aan (.) ·hh uh  
08 of dat nou aan de heer [De Vries] of de heer ↑[Bosman] of of [Martin  
09 Jansen] moet zijn. (.) bent u van mening dat etikettering (1.3)  
10 ↑helpt bij (0.4) een (.) gevoel van vertrouwen van de consument, (.)·  
11 hh ten (0.4) ik moet sinds mijn emeritaat zelf vaker ↑boodschappen doen  
12 nu. (.) ·hh en ik kijk dus in die supermarkt hoe  
13 snel de mensen hun dingen pakken en ik zie daar nooit iemand met z'n  
14 brilletje op staan lezen wat er allemaal op die etiketten staat en mijn  
15 ↑vraag is (.) eh (1.0) ziet u dan ook nog verschil (0.4)  
16 in eisen (.) wat betreft die etikettering als het gaat om genetisch  
17 gemodificeerde voeding en, (0.9) ↑niet-genetisch gemodificeerde voeding (...)

**Extract 5. Asking a question about monitoring**

**Session 2: freedom of choice and labelling**

**Addressed expert (not in extract): head of quality and product sustainability, international retail group**

(...)  
01 → okay ·hh lawe es aannemen dat dat eh het publiek die één  
02 → procent ook aanvaardt ·hhh dan dan kom je eigenlijk bij de  
03 volgende vraag (.) en dat is ·hhh als we als we nou 's kijken (...)

**Extract 6. Asking a question about governance****Session 5: the role of the authorities**

**Addressed expert (not in extract): former minister, member of the senate and EU commissioner**

- (...)
- 01 → [mm maar ↑stel ↑stel nou es dat wij (0.3)
- 02 → uit ons publieke de↑bat ↑krijgen en melden aan 't kabinet en aan de
- 03 → ↓kamer hhh dat het Ne↑derlandse publiek er niets: van ↑wil weten, (...)
- [4 lines omitted, talk on the biodiversity debate]
- 08 (...) en stel dat het kabinet aldus be↑sluit. (0.9) zegt u dan:
- 09 met uw Europese ervaring >ja jongens dat kun je wel zeggen< ↑maar dat hou je
- 10 met geen ↑mo:↑ge↑lijk↑heid binnen die grenzen. hh of zegt u
- 11 >nou ja dat moeten jullie dan maar doen<. (...)

**Extract 7. Asking a question about benefits****Session 1: food safety and health**

**Addressed expert (not in extract): chair of association biotech companies and organizations**


- (...)
- 01 ·hhh ja ik zou uhm m'n >eerste vraag willen richten aan de heer< [De ↑Vries]
- 02 → (0.8) t- eh u heeft het ook eh meneer [Willems] net al horen zeggen, dat ehm
- 03 → (.) eh 't publiek ehm (0.5) mogelijk positief (0.7) eh po si tie↑ver eh
- 04 → >ten opzichte van biotechnologie< eh voor de voedselproductie staat ·hhh eh
- 05 als echt het ↑nut voor de consument eh onom↑stotelijk (0.6) kan worden
- 06 aange↑toond (1.0) en dat is eigenlijk ook de hele be↑lofte van de
- 07 <genetische modificatie van voedselgewassen> (0.6) dat dat nut eh (0.3)
- 08 helder is voor de consument (1.7) nou ehm zijn daar wat voorbeelden van één
- 09 is het terugdringen van >het gebruik van< eh chemische
- 10 >gewasbescherms↑middelen (1.3) enkele voorbeelden (0.3) van
- 11 gezondheids↑voordelen die gm-voedsel voor de consument zouden kunnen opleveren
- 12 (0.5) ·hhh maar hoe ↑schat u nou eigenlijk deze voordelen in. eh (1.0) vindt
- 13 u dat zij op dit moment of misschien op termijn: eh (0.4) duidelijk
- 14 genoeg zijn. en ook om↑vangrijk genoeg zijn. (0.9) om de consument en
- 15 ook de burger te overtuigen van het nut. (...)

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**Henrike Padmos** is lecturer – researcher at the Center for Language and Cognition of the University of Groningen. This study is part of her research project on science – society relations in public meetings on GM food, using Conversation Analysis and Discursive Psychology. She is particularly interested in the interactional work participants perform in dealing with double, often conflicting demands.

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