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### **The interactional organization of care: Offers and requests in the Swedish home help service.**

My paper is part of the project on grammar in Swedish conversation that Bengt Nordberg just described. One of our points of departure is the grammar that was published by the Swedish Academy in 1999. I will call it the Swedish grammar. As this panel focusses on grammar and interaction, I will begin by discussing some key differences between my study of requesting and the approach represented in the Swedish grammar. I will not be able to give the Swedish grammar the attention it might deserve as I have not yet read it from cover to cover and do not have full command of the issues treated and perspectives represented there. My contrast points to some issues that could be further explored in other papers. Second, I will situate my work within prior conversation analytic research on pre-requests, requests and directives. Third, I will discuss how my results bears on the CA argument that requests are dispreferred.

In the Swedish grammar, requests (Sw. *uppmaningar*) are discussed under the heading “directive main clauses” (see especially §39-44). Example (1) is taken from the Swedish grammar. Like many examples in the grammar it is a constructed example.

1) *Läs i din bibel lite oftare från och med nu!* (SAG §39 p. 714)

The treatment of requests in the Swedish grammar centers heavily on the syntactic clause, the purported speaker and her intentions. In the discussion of this example the authors' thus list conditions that have to be fulfilled in order for this imperative to be understood as a request or directive. This kind of approach resonates with work in the traditions of the philosophy of language and speech act theory (Austin, 1962, Searle, 1969).

I focus on how requesting is accomplished in naturally occurring real-life encounters. The data are drawn from an institutional setting where requesting is

salient namely the Swedish home help service. The Swedish home help service is a government program that offers assistance to handicapped and elderly persons who are unable to manage on their own. I have made video recordings of 34 visits where a home help provider visits an elderly person to help her with personal hygien, household chores, cooking, and cleaning. The care recipients in the study are women over 70 years of age. Some of them have hearing problems but none are diagnosed with dementia. Henric Bagerius and I made a collection of all the requesting activities in a subsample of this data (Lindström & Bagerius, in press). We found that 68% of all the requesting was initiated by the senior citizen. This finding suggests that the senior citizens take an active role in shaping the assistance provided by the home help. This is also why I prefer to use the term senior citizen rather than care recipient. The requesting that is initiated by the senior citizen is also interesting because it highlights the home help's institutional role as a helping hand in the home. These requests are classic examples of how institutions "are talked into being" to use Heritage's apt phrase (Heritage, 1984, p. 290).

Today's paper then focusses exclusively on requesting initiated by the senior citizen. Karin Ridell and I have made a collection of 143 candidate requesting sequences. The collection was drawn from 17 home help visits involving eight senior citizens and 10 home help providers and spanning a total of 13 hours. The individual visits ranged in length from 17 minutes to one hour and 17 minutes.

Example (2) on your handout shows a request sequence. This episode is taken from a morning visit to a 95-year old woman. The home help has just helped the senior citizen take a shower and the home help is now drying the floor with a rag that she pushes around with her foot. The senior citizen is seated on a board across the bathtub with a towel across her shoulders. The request is done in line 03.

(2) **DRY THE BACK** [VD2:1] SC is sitting on a board across the edges of the bathtub. She has a big towel across her shoulders and is drying herself while the home help is drying up water off the floor with a rag that she is moving across the floor with her foot.

01 HH: °(U) dä:r(hh).°  
there

02 (0.4)

03 SC: ->Du får no <sup>x</sup> to <sup>y</sup> rk[ a me på ry[:ggen.  
You may probably dry me on the back  
You probably have to dry my back

04 HH: [Ja:: a ska göra de(h).

Yes I will do that

05 (14) ((HH dries SC vigorously with a towel))

06 SC:                   <sup>z</sup>  
          °Tack°      tack      så dä:r,=  
                  Thanks    thanks so there

07 HH:           =>Mm:.< ((motherese))

x HH moves toward SC.

y HH puts her hands on the towel on SC's shoulders and starts drying.

z SC leans her head toward HH.

As I noted earlier the approach implemented in the Swedish grammar is heavily centered on speaker intention and syntax. My analysis by contrast focusses on the interactants' orientations as displayed through their talk and nonvocal behavior. Turning to the arrowed line in example (2) we can show that this utterance is a request without speculating about the psychological motives of the senior citizen. That this utterance is produced, interpreted and indeed "intended" as a request is something that we can make out by examining how it is treated by the parties. I have transcribed the onset of some of the home help's bodily orientations and behavior with small letters above the transcribed line. Notice that the home help starts to move toward the senior citizen just after she has uttered the first syllable of the verb *torka* (*dry* in English). The onset of the home help's shift in orientation is not happenstance but precisely placed when the senior citizen's utterance is recognizably complete as a request for assistance (Jefferson, 1983). This is followed by the home help placing her hands on the towel that is laying across the senior citizen's shoulders. She then starts drying her which in effect constitutes a granting of the request. The home help's subsequent promise to undertake the requested task (line 04) may seem unnecessary. However this promise is also placed at a point of recognizable completion but here it is the object of the senior citizen's request that is recognizably complete i.e. that it is her back and not some other part of her body that she wants help with and the home help's promise may register just that.

In this short bit of interaction then we can see that the home help organizes her non-vocal and vocal activities in a way that demonstrates that she has understood the senior citizen's prior turn as a request. This can in and of itself provide sufficient grounds to analyze line 03 as a request. However in this sequence we have another piece of evidence of the interactants' orientation toward line 03 as a request and that is the senior citizen's expression of gratitude in line 06. This turn is placed in third position, i.e. after the second pair part in

the request sequence. Schegloff (1992) has shown that third position is one strategic place for the achievement of intersubjectivity in that it provides a slot where a speaker can ratify or reject a co-participant's displayed interpretation of a prior turn. The senior citizen's expression of gratitude thus ratifies the home help's interpretation of line 04.

This is a rich sequence and I would like to quickly comment on two other issues that are relevant for the study. The first has to do with the placement of the request. The senior citizen initiates her request shortly after the home help has shown that she is done drying the floor. It appears in other words that the senior citizen times the initiation of her request in such a way so as not to disrupt the ongoing activities of the home help. This seems to be a general phenomenon in the corpus. The second issue has to do with the senior citizen's "thank thank there" in line 06. This turn may have a dual function. In addition to ratifying the home help's interpretation of line 03 this turn may represent an attempt to bring the requested activity to a close. The latter interpretation hinges particularly on the *där* which you may notice is also used in line 01 where the home help was finishing drying the floor. What I am suggesting is that the senior citizen's "thank thank there" also implements a request-like action. At this stage of the analysis I have not included these types of utterances in the collection.

One difference between my approach and the Swedish grammar then is that the analysis centers on sequential and interactional organization rather than syntax and speaker intention. A second and perhaps more fundamental difference is that the aim of my analysis is to figure out how the senior citizen implements the social activity of enlisting assistance from the home help rather than for example mapping syntactic structures to function. It is the social activity rather than the linguistic structure that is my starting point. This is one of the reasons why I use the term requesting rather than requests. Arguing on the basis of studies of anglo-american data, Schegloff and others have shown that the preferred way of getting someone else to do something is not necessarily to make a request but rather to initiate what in CA is referred to as a pre-offer (in the early literature it is referred to as a pre-request). Example (3) shows a pre-offer.

The senior citizen and the home help are in the kitchen. Since the kitchen was long and narrow I could only capture the home help on the video. You will see the senior citizen toward the end of the excerpt. She is drying her hair with a hairdryer. The home help is tidying the kitchen. The lemon bottle in line 01 refers to a plastic container with lemon extract. The pre-offer is in line 01-02 and 05.

(2) LEMONBOTTLE [IIIA1:1:18]

01 SC: De står en citronflaska därinne : (0.2)

It stands a lemonbottle therein  
*There is a lemonbottle in there*

02        i   dörren   däruppe men ja får inte upp den,  
           in the door thereup but I can not up it  
           *in the door upthere but I can't open it*

03   HH:   Mm:?  
              Mm

04        (0.2)

05   SC:   (Se) om du e [stark (i fingrarna),  
              (See) if you are strong (in the fingers)  
              (See) if you have (strong hands)

06   HH:                                [.hh De ska ja hjälpa dej me se  
    That will I help you with see  
    I'll help you with that

07        (.)

08        de går bra de hh. (.) .h[h:  
              that goes well that  
              no problem see

09   SC:                                [Ser du den  
    See you it  
    Do you see it

10        (.)

11   SC:   högst upp,  
              highest up  
              up on top

In lines 01-02 the senior citizen first tells the home help where the lemon bottle can be found (“in there in the door up there”). She then goes on to tell the home help that she is unable to open the bottle (“but I can’t open it”). The specification of the location of the bottle coupled with the senior citizen’s assertion of her own inability to open makes the turn hearable as a pre-offer. As I mentioned earlier the home help is supposed to assist the senior citizens with personal hygien and household tasks that they are unable to manage on their own. The requested action is presented as just such a task in this example. If we just read the transcript there seems to be minimal uptake from the home help. However her upward intonation in line 03 may mark readiness as does the fact that she finishes up her ongoing activity of wiping down the sink and turns around toward the refrigerator. The senior citizen continues with a turn that literally translates into something like “see if you are strong in the fingers” and may be idiomatically rendered as “if your hands are strong.” In addition to

describing her own inability to accomplish the requested task the senior citizen has now alluded to the home help's ability and strength. The pre-offer is responded to with an offer to help by the home help in lines 6 and 8.

More than one third of all the requesting activities in the collection were done as pre-offers. Excluding pre-offers from the analysis would thus provide a skewed picture of how the senior citizen goes about enlisting assistance from the home help. What I am getting at here is the rather obvious and often unstated point that the research question(s) and method go hand in hand.

Research on requests and related actions such as directives has a long tradition in linguistics, anthropology, and sociology. What follows is a sketch of some issues that bear on the study at hand. Looking at the early work on requests and directives, it is a bit tricky to figure out the intellectual lineage of some findings. Schegloff (1979) gives Harvey Sacks credit for the idea that offers are structurally preferred as a way of getting transfers accomplished. Levinson acknowledges debt to published and unpublished work by several other authors including Paul Drew, John Heritage, and Emanuel Schegloff in his extensive discussion of pre-requests and requests in *Pragmatics*.

The early CA research on requests focussed largely on the organization of preference. The aforementioned text by Levinson made a compelling argument that utterances that might be conceptualized as indirect speech acts would be better described as pre-requests. (I should note here that Levinson's pre-request corresponds to what I call a pre-offer. Pre-offer seems a more apt term since the preferred outcome of these sequences is an offer rather than a request). Heritage (1984) focussed on responses to requests. Drawing on Labov and Fanshel (1977) he outlined some of the grounds that are commonly used to reject or put off a simple request and he noticed that their common denominator was their "no fault" quality (Heritage, 1984, p. 271). Many of Levinson's examples were drawn from audio recordings of co-present interactions and Heritage's examples were drawn from telephone conversations.

Later work on requests and directives have linked them to social organization and social development. I will mention two studies that have influenced my way of thinking about requests. Candace Marjorie Goodwin's book *He-said-she-said* (1990) is based on audio recordings of children in an African-American neighborhood. Goodwin argued that directives are a means for coordinating action and constituting social relevances. She found that directives were used differently among boys and girls. The boys in her study used directives to create differential hierarchical relationships while the girls used directives in task-oriented activities and tended to formulate them in a way that downplayed

differences in social status. There are some similarities between the girls' directives in Goodwin's study and the senior citizen requests in the home help data.

Anthony Wootton's book *Interaction and the development of mind* (1997) is based on videorecordings of interactions between a toddler named Amy and her parents. Wootton used requesting as a lens for exploring children's social and cognitive development. There are many parallels between Wootton's data and the home help data. Like the senior citizens in the home help study, Amy has a complimentary relationship with her parents in that she requires their assistance to achieve certain ordinary tasks. Many of Amy's requests concern what Wootton calls supportive actions such as being assisted in getting out of a high chair. As you may have gathered by the two examples I have shown the senior citizens' requests enlist help with similar kinds of activities. Although Wootton reports some "distressing incidents" the interactional environment seems cooperative. Amy's parents are accommodating toward their daughter and they rarely refuse her requests. This also seems to be the case in the home help data that I have examined. Wootton argued that the ability to formulate a request is central to the communicative armory of the child. This argument can also be relevant for the elderly. Once an individual has lost the ability to formulate a request she has lost an important resource for shaping her immediate social environment.

Like Goodwin and Wootton I want to explore how requesting helps constitute social relationships and social contexts and in particular how the institutional context is highlighted or downplayed in requesting sequences. My work also draws on the earlier research on requests and the organization of preference. Since I have a fairly large collection of videorecordings I hope my research can make a contribution on this front.

My preliminary analysis provides massive support for the idea that requests indeed are dispreferred. As reported earlier, more than one third of the requesting activities in the home help data were done as pre-offers. 54 of the 143 requesting activities were done as pre-offers. In the remaining 89 cases that were done as requests 56 cases or 63% included some kind of mitigation. Only 23% or 33 cases of the requesting initiated by the senior citizen were done straightforwardly without any kind of mitigation. This finding is striking in light of the fact that the institutional framework of caregiving ought to give the senior citizen full license to make requests. One way to understand this distribution might be that the types of help the senior citizens request lie outside the legitimate responsibilities of the home help service. However in the materials that I have examined the requested tasks are treated as appropriate. Other explanations

could be that the requests can be heard as threatening the competence of the home help or that the senior citizens want to preserve an egalitarian relationship with the home help and therefore do not want to formulate the request in a way that emphasizes differences in power. I am not comfortable with any of these explanations and at this stage I am more interested in examining how the mitigation is accomplished.



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