

Constituting agency in the delivery of telephone-mediated victim support

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Abstract

This study investigates how call-takers progress delivering support for callers ringing a service for victims of crime and trauma. The research asks how agency is constituted through the linguistic format parties' use to display what can be done and who decides. Using conversation analysis to examine 80 cases where the delivery of support is progressed, the results show that subtle morpho-syntactic variation in the format of interrogatives (i.e. "Did you want to", "Do you want to") display orientations to who can do or decide upon a future course of action. Evidence is presented that the "did you form" tilts the agency towards the Self as something they can progress whereas the "do you" format tilts the balance towards the Other to decide. More obviously the actions can be formulated in terms of the Self committing to an action (e.g., "I'll pop you through") or as clearly deferring to the Other to decide (e.g., "would you like me to"). This study furthers the general intellectual project of discursive psychology by providing an empirical demonstration of the way classic questions about the nature of subjectivity and individual agency can be re-specified as shared practices for accomplishing action in social interaction.

Introduction

The discursive turn produced compelling critiques of widely held psychological theories of the self. Disciplinary models conceptualising the human subject as independent agents were challenged on various grounds including the presumption of the self as a quantifiable entity outside language (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), the dialogic nature of thought (Billig, 1987) and the productive and regulatory nature of discourses that makes distinctions between individual agents and societal structures untenable (Henriques, Hollway,

Cathy, Couze, & Walkerdine, 1984). Theoretical alternatives to understanding social life that have influenced discursive psychology are ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Antaki & Widdicombe, 2008; Edwards, 1995; Potter & Wetherell, 1987) which have a determined focus on the study of social interaction for understanding the methods ordinary members of society use to understand each other and progress courses of action (Garfinkel, 1984; Heritage, 1984; Sacks, 1995)

According to a discursive perspective, who people are to each other is something that is constituted in the service of action, in a dynamic way, over the moment by moment unfolding of interpersonal interactions (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Tilegā & Stokoe, 2015; Wiggins, 2017). This article contributes to discursive psychology by showing how individual agency to progress a future course of action is constituted in the way turns of talk are built. The setting for the research is a victim support helpline. Within each interaction, parties face a practical problem which is to come to a joint understanding on a mutually agreeable course of action that addresses the caller's problem within the institutional remit of service delivery. An analytic focus of the present study is on the grammatical formats that were used to build and display intersubjectivity in the determination of action, a deontic domain that has been identified as organising and structuring social interaction (Stevanovic, 2018; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014).

Helplines are an increasingly pervasive part of social life, and they are institutional interactions where all sorts of psychological business comes to the fore (Baker, Emmison, & Firth, 2005; Edwards, 2007). A comprehensive review of the issues examined in the substantive body of helpline literature is beyond the scope of this article (but see Tennent, 2019). However, lines of inquiry have included the ways organisational policies such as not giving advice, (Shaw, Potter, & Hepburn, 2015; Stommel & Molder, 2018) or being neutral (Weatherall, 2016) are observable in interactional practices, and how callers account for their

own conduct and that of others to justify and legitimate the call (Edwards & Stokoe, 2007). Studies have cast new light on how core psychological topics such as social identities or membership categorisations (Larsen, 2013; Potter & Hepburn, 2003) are played out in the calls. This study addresses the issue of how individual agency is managed in interaction, by examining practices related to social deontics (Stevanovic, 2018; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014) or the rights to determine how action, in the form of delivering support, plays out in the calls.

There are social norms or preferences around asking for help. For example, in mediation (Edwards & Stokoe, 2007) there is a normative expectation that the person with the complaint has previously attempted to resolve the issue. There is good evidence of a social norm where self-help should precede recruiting the help of others at least in Anglo-American cultures (Kendrick & Drew, 2016). One socially shared, practical resource parties can use to build and display who they are to each other in terms of rights to ask for and provide help is grammar. Imperative forms (Lindström, 2005) and negative interrogative requests (Heinemann, 2006), for example, display a high entitlement to ask others to do things. The possible contingencies associated with requests to recruit others is shown through modal forms such as *Can you* or *could you* (Curl & Drew, 2008).

Action formation and ascription are complex matters (Levinson, 2012). One way of formulating the action under investigation in the present study is using the same terms the institution would use. The calls are a first point of contact for 'delivering support'. More technically, the turns targeted in this study fall under what Couper-Kuhlen (2014) described as an extended family of directive-commissive actions which include proposals, suggestions and offers. Couper-Kuhlen argued that the deployment of linguistic forms can be considered action formats because of a clear association between the two. For example, in everyday English conversation they found that the majority of proposals were indicative utterances that

were I-formatted combined with *will, can or could*. Most offers were YOU-formatted interrogatives combined with the verbs *need* and *want*.

Aside from linguistic form, proposals and offers are distinctive in terms of who is the agent and who is the beneficiary of the future action. Couper-Kuhlen (2014) demonstrated participants distinguish between the two with the Self *and* Other being the agents and beneficiaries in proposals but the Self being the agent with the Other being the beneficiary for offers. Clayman and Heritage (2014) noted that further complexities arise depending on the capacities of the speaker and whether the service actually benefits the recipient or not. They showed a *benefactive stance* could be displayed by the use of conditionals or epistemic downgrading in offers, for example, that function to defer to recipients' judgements about what benefits them.

Further complicating the relationship between linguistic format and action formation and ascription is setting and sequential positioning. For example, in politician-constituent interactions Hofstetter and Stokoe (2015) found offers of assistance were delivered over longer sequences designed to establish a mutually agreeable future course of action. A first action they called a 'proposal offer' established what *could* be done with a subsequent 'announcement offer' committing to what *would* be done on the basis of a joint decision. Hofstetter and Stokoe defended their choice of terminology on the basis that who benefits, which was central to the distinction Couper-Kuhlen (2014) made between offers and proposals, was not the relevant for their participants. Rather, in service encounters between politician-constituent the concerns are more about agency. That is, what is within the power of the politician to deliver and whether the constituent agrees to having that happen. The present study aims to further what is known about linguistic practices for building and displaying who decides and acts in interaction by studying how telephone-mediated victim support is delivered.

Data and Setting

The data for the present study were drawn from a corpus of 396 calls (23 hours and 34 minutes of recordings) to a victim support helpline contact centre. Most of the calls (90%, n=356) in the corpus came from a purposive sampling approach where recordings of all calls to the helpline across the first week of December 2016 were collected. There were 14 different call-takers, or 'contact workers' as the organisation would have it. To date 200 calls (11 hours and 21 minutes) have been transcribed using conversation analytic conventions (Jefferson, 2004).

Call-takers provided their written consent to have their calls recorded for university research purposes. Callers heard a pre-recorded message informing them about the recordings. They were invited to inform the call-taker if they didn't want to be included in the research. In the corpus, identifying information has been edited out of the sound files and transcripts have been anonymised by using pseudonyms.

Victim Support is a not-for-profit, New Zealand organisation that provides emotional support and practical help for victims of crime and trauma, largely through a nationwide network of volunteers. The 0800VICTIM helpline is the first point of contact with the organisation. Despite its name, the helpline typically functions as a call-centre. Call-takers have relatively few actions they can progress which includes transferring the caller through to a different service such as telephone counselling or the police and making a referral for the caller to be assigned a volunteer support worker. On the other hand, callers ring with a tremendous variety of issues related to being victims of crime or trauma.

The potential for a mismatch between what a caller needs and what can be done by the call-taker is large, resulting in a practical problem for the parties which is to establish agreement about what can be done to help the caller within the scope of what the service

provides. Sequences establishing what could or would be done to deliver support were the target of the present study. These could all be classified broadly as directive-commissive actions. The analytic focus was on the various linguistic formats of these actions as practices for constituting what support could and would be delivered.

There were 80 cases of the target turns found in 50 calls. Each of those calls was considered in detail by repeated listening to each sound file and reading the associated transcript. In this way a grounded understanding of the callers' problems and how the call-taker worked to resolve them was established. The analysis progressed by considering the sequential position of turns and the ways they progressed a possible and mutually agreeable course of action.

One pervasive pattern in the actions progressing the delivery of support for the caller was they could be formatted with the Self as the subject of the utterance. These I-formatted actions overwhelmingly had one of three forms¹; *I could* (n=14, 29%), *I can* (n=16, 33%) or *I'll* (n=18, 38%) (e.g., *I could give you their number, I can give you the non-emergency number, I'll pop you through*). The YOU-formatted actions were Yes/No interrogatives using either *did you* (n=15, 47%) or *do you* (n=17, 53%) (e.g., *Did you want to speak to the police, Do you want the number, would you like me to pop you through*). Around 60% (n=48) were I-formatted with the remaining being YOU-formatted (n=32). The analysis shows how the different formats were a resource for constituting who, the Self or Other was able to commit to or decide on a course of action.

Analysis

¹ Some target sequences had more than one form, and others had more complex grammatical structures including if-then clauses which were included in these frequency counts. Also, not included in these counts were we-formatted utterances or the less frequent forms. In sum, these counts and percentages are not absolute but indicative of the relative frequency of the forms that were I- and you- formatted in the data.

A fundamental aspect of the analytic mentality of discursive psychology using conversation analysis is a focus on ‘participants’ orientations’. The justification that legitimates examining human conduct in a particular way is that parties in the interaction themselves treat that aspect as relevant (Schegloff, 1997). Thus, the analysis begins by showing a case where a *did you* form is repaired to a *do you* form; it is presented to warrant this study which examines how form is a members’ resource for displaying who can progress the future action. Then, each subsequent case is presented to show which formats display who – the Self or the Other as having agency to progress the future course of action. The analysis proceeds by showing that I-formatted actions constitute the Self as committing to a future course of action with the different forms showing stances on ability, contingency and immediacy on the action. A final section of the analysis examines the YOU-formatted actions, where a solution to the puzzle of why repair a *did you* form to a *do you* form is offered. Evidence is presented to show the *do you* form tilts the determination of the progression of the future action to the Other and the *did you* form to the Self.

Formats for determining future actions as a participants’ concern

The first extract shows a case where the call-taker (identified as CONTACT in the transcript) repairs a YOU-formatted action from “did you wanna” to “do you wanna.”

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Extract 1 Sam 16
01 CONTACT: did you want to see if um but you say that
02           you’ve spoken to victim support befo:re,
03           (0.2)
04 CONTACT: .h um: [did you wanna] do you wanna see if your um=
05 CALLER:   [      yep      ]
06 CONTACT: =victim support person is able to talk to you
07           (1.0)
08 CALLER:   yep
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In the above extract the call-taker launches a question about a possible future action at line 01 using the *did you* form. That ‘proposal-offer’, to use Hofstetter & Stokoe’s (2015)

terminology for an early offer of a thing that *can* be done in a service encounter setting, is interrupted with by the question form “but you say that you’ve spoken to victim support before.”. The declarative form of the question displays a shallow epistemic gradient (Heritage, 2012) between the call-taker and the caller. That is, the call-taker shows in the form of the question their knowledge of the likely answer. Furthermore, the content of the question houses the claim that the information was gleaned from something the caller said earlier. As it happens, there is no evidence in the transcript that the caller said any such thing, rather it is likely the call-taker inferred that because there is a record of the caller in system which shows they have been assigned a volunteer support worker. Line 03 shows a slot where the caller could have answered the question but didn’t.

The call-taker self-selects to speak again at line 04 by launching for a second time the previously abandoned proposal-offer. The second-time proposal-offer begins with the same words at the first using a more contracted form “did you wanna”. However, in overlap with the launching of the second-time proposal-offer, the caller responds positively, albeit delayed to the call-taker’s question about previous contact with the service. As a result of the overlapping talk, the call-taker abandons the proposal-offer for a second time and restarts it for a third time at the end of the callers turn of talk. The proposal-offer is changed to use the *do you* form.

The repair from “did you want to see if” (line 01) to “do you wanna see if” (line 04) occurred in a local environment where a presupposition of a possible course of action has not been confirmed. It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that the *do you* form attends to the previous lack of confirmation and subtly shifts the rights to decide on the possible course of action further into the domain of the caller. The analysis presented below supports this conjecture by showing how the formats (I- vs YOU-) and in some cases the verb forms (*did* or *do*) are practices for advancing a joint understanding of who, the Self or Other can

progress the action of delivering support. At the end of the analytic section I will return to Extract 1 to discuss it in light of the findings.

I-formatted actions

For I-formatted actions, the speaker displays it is the Self that will progress the course of action. However, the different forms display a stance on the progression of the action. For example, extracts 2 and 3 show the *I'll* form being used and understood as indicating the future action is certain and imminent:

Extract 2 Adrian 3

01 CONTACT: look **so I'll pop you through** to someone called
02 (0.4) Terri
03 (1.2)
04 CALLER: thanks
05 CONTACT: y' through

Extract 3 Monica 3

01 CONTACT: no problem **I'll transfer that call now**
02 (1.0)
03 CALLER: thank you

The above extracts are two of several cases where the call-taker is undertaking to transfer the call, something that they can do which progresses a course of action that has been previously agreed to. In Extract 2, it has been already established that the caller wants to speak to a court advisor. In Extract 3, the parties have previously agreed that the caller's question could best be answered by the police. In both cases, that the caller-taker displays they will progress the action by using *I'll*, its immediacy is further indicated by the use of the term 'pop' (Extract 2) and 'now' (Extract 3). Furthermore, both extracts have a silence where the progression of the future course of action could be altered. However, in both cases appreciation is expressed which indicates acceptance and marks they are the beneficiaries of the action (Clayman & Heritage, 2014).

One way of formulating the action being advanced in the above two extracts is in the terms that the institution would use to describe what the call takers do - progress the delivery

of support. However, as noted in the introduction to this paper, action ascription is a complex matter. In everyday talk Couper Kuhlen (2014) argued *I'll* is a social action format for proposals. Hofstetter and Stokoe (2015) used the term 'announcement offers' that regularly took an *I'll* form where there was a commitment to progress a course of action that had been previously agreed to. In a medical setting the *I'll* format has been called a pronouncement because the physician used it to assert their agency to determine the treatment (Stivers & Barnes, 2018). Issues of nomenclature aside, in this setting the *I'll* form is clearly a practice that constitutes the Self as the agent for progressing a future but imminent course of action.

Extract 4 shows an *I can* form being used in a similar position to *I'll* in the above extracts and also progressing an imminent action . However, in this next case the transfer is contingent on a third party being available to take the call.

Extract 4 Adrian2

46 CONTACT: here we are so I have the number for (0.6) A:manda
47 here **so what I can do is I can give her a call (.) if**
48 **she answers I can (0.6) pop you through**
49 (1.4)
50 CALLER: okay then thank you

In the above extract the call-taker is advancing transferring the call to Amanda who was the caller's support worker in the past. The call-taker uses the *I can* form three times; the first time to describe what is possible, the second time to explicitly state the course of action is and then the final time in the context of explaining the contingency of the transfer. The use of 'pop' in this case suggests that it is an action that can be accomplished quickly and easily.

Extract 5 is another example of the *I-can* form being used to advance a course of action that is within the call-taker's ability to progress. The caller is asking how to get a criminal charge against somebody dropped. The support the call-taker advances is for the caller to talk to the police and she proposes to transfer the caller to the relevant number.

Extract 5 34 Marianne 3

01 CALLER: .hh hi:: um .hh I w- ↑just wanted to make an
02 enqui:r:y on: um .h .h how someone would (0.8) say
03 (0.2) like (0.2) get a charge dropped on a person?
04 (0.4)
05 CONTACT: tch ah >it would be< best to talk to the police about
06 that? **I can: put [you through]** to a non emergency=
07 CALLER: [oh]
08 CONTACT: =police line?
09 (0.8)
10 CALLER: yes please,
11 CONTACT: tch #oka:y# just a moment(h)

The caller in the above extract is seeking information about how to get a police charge dropped (lines 01-03). The delivery of support begins with an assertion that contacting the police is a recommended course of action. Continuing her turn, and to progress that course of action the call-taker says she can transfer the caller. It is after the caller accepts with “yes please” that the transfer is performed. So, in this case the call-taker is advancing a course of action that is not actually delivered until it is accepted by the caller, which defers some agency to the Other to decide.

In the next extract, the caller is concerned that scammers have got her mobile phone number and might be using it to access other kinds of personal information. The caller has just asked whether the scammers can get information from her mobile phone number. Delivering support is made using the *I could* form. In this case, the call-taker explicitly builds that the course of action is contingent on the recipient’s acceptance by asking if it would help (line 11).

Extract 6 44 Monica8

06 CONTACT: um not as far as I kno:w um: but **what I could do is I**
07 **could transfer you to the police information li:ne**
08 and they might be able to give you a bit more
09 information?
10 (0.5)
11 CONTACT: .h do you think that would help?
12 (2.0)
13 CALLER: yep any- anything that could help i:s a big hand for
14 me. (.) per[fect] (.) thank [you]
15 CONTACT: [oh] [oh no] problem

In the above extract the caller is unable to provide the information being requested but proposes a course of action that might help that she is able to do. Some contingency is indicated in the proposal preface “what I could do is” and more in its formulation “I could transfer you to the police information line”. Further evidence of the contingency associated with the course of action is where the call-taker hedges the ability of the police information line to give the information as something “they might be to” do (lines 08-09). The call-taker’s request for confirmation that that the caller thinks it might help (line 11) is makes it explicit that the delivery of the course of action is also contingent on the caller agreeing to it being helpful.

In the final extract of this section on I-formatted proposals, all three forms are used. Here part of the contingency of the progression of the course of action rests on the caller providing the name of her support worker.

Extract 7 03 Adrian4
 49 CONTACT: right (0.2) so (0.2) ah (0.2) **I I can pop you** through
 50 to her (.) number (0.2) if if I could grab her (0.2)
 51 name?
 52 (1.0)
 53 CALLER: .hh oh
 54 (2.4) ((noise in background))
 55 CALLER: Laleagh (0.4) (to come-we come as a-) .h l-a-h-e-a-
 56 g-h
 57 (3.4)
 58 CONTACT: alrighty (0.6) here you are **I'll (0.4) I'll pop you**
 59 through alright?

In the above case the call-taker has the ability to transfer the call. The *I-can* form claims it is something he is able to do. However, progressing that course of action is contingent, indicated both by the *if* form of the proposal and the *I could*. The caller has some agency in progressing this course of action if she fulfils the conditions necessary by providing the name and spelling it out. With that information the call-taker undertakes to immediately progress the proposed course of action using the *I'll* form which is claiming agency to

undertake the action immediately. The tag question “alright” defers some of the agency back to the caller to decide.

To summarise the analysis so far. In all the above cases the I-format of the course of action being progressed claims the Self has agency to progress the course of action. In addition, the different forms of the I-formatted actions indicate additional stance on the delivery of the support. The *I could* form claims the action is conditional; *I can* claims an ability to progress it and the *I'll* form is the strongest assertion that the Self will progress the action and imminently. Although the I format builds an understanding that the Self will progress the course of action, some agency is deferred to the caller to decide because the action was not actually progressed until some form of agreement was made. The idea that the turn design is a resource for displaying or deferring agency to progress an action also underpins the analysis of the YOU-formatted proposals where I suggest the *do you* form defers more rights to the Other to progress the course of action than the *did you* form.

YOU-formatted courses of action

YOU-formatted courses of actions were all designed as Yes/No interrogatives or polar questions. They were overwhelming of two types beginning either with *did you* or *do you*. Having the grammatical format of an offer in everyday talk (Couper-Kuhlen, 2014), they clearly defer agency to the recipient or Other to progress the course of action. The conjecture I want to investigate is that the *do you* form defers more agency towards the recipient and the *did you* form, claims more agency for the Self. The analysis below offers three forms of evidence in support of the conjecture. First, the *did you* form tended to be used close to where the proposed action was progressed by the self (call-taker). Second, when the *do you* form occurred, it came before the *did you* form, suggesting it defers more agency to the Other to decide about the progression of the action. The final form of evidence that the *do you* form

is more other deferring in terms of agency is the greater variety of cognitive verbs it occurred with. For example, *do you need*, *do you feel* and *do you want*. In contrast the *did you* form was overwhelmingly used with the verb *want*.

Extract 8 is an example where the *did you* form comes close to the actual progression of action. Thus, the call-taker is displaying the Self as strongly agentic in the progression of the course of action, should it be agreed to by the Other.

Extract 8 Claire11

01 CONTACT: um: so I'll make sure that ah Amanda
02 gets this information and she can um:
03 get in contact with you,
04 (0.6)
05 CALLER: oh good o[kay] [great] [thank tha-]
06 CONTACT: [alright?] [.hh] [did- did-]
07 CONTACT: **[did you want me to] see if she's available at the=**
08 CALLER: [(so much)]
09 CONTACT: **=moment (hh) ?**
10 (0.4)
11 CALLER: um: ↑yes that-that'd be great thank you?
12 (0.8)
13 CONTACT: #o#ka:y (0.2) ju(h)st hold on a wee tick,

At the beginning of the above extract, the call taker is informing the caller of what she will do, which is to pass on the information to Amanda, a support worker. The caller appreciates that course of action as one that will benefit her (Clayman & Heritage, 2014). The call-taker then follows up with a suggestion, which would mean the just agreed-upon course of action could be brought forward in time. It seems reasonable to suggest that as a follow-up to a just agreed upon course of action, the “did you want” form displays a high degree to certainty of agreement and less reliance on it being agreed to by the caller. As it turns out, it was a confidence that was well placed because that course of action is accepted. The call-taker then progresses the delivery of the agreed upon support by asking the call to hold on for a moment while she checks whether Amanda, the support worker, is available.

The next extract shows the *do you* form occurring with the cognitive verb *need*. It is evidence that the *do you* form occurs in an environment where the call-taker is less certain about the acceptability of the proposed course of action which supports the claim that the *do you* form tilts more agency towards the recipient as a sense of need is more within their own psychological realm. The extract begins with the caller asking if the call-taker works with a particular district court.

Extract 9 Samuel2

01 CALLER: do you work with the victim support
02 at Omakau district court
03 (0.8)
04 CONTACT: oh at Omakau dis- a district court um: a-**are you**
05 **wanting speak to perhaps a court victim advisor**
06 (1.0)
07 CALLER: pardon
08 (0.6)
09 CONTACT: **do you need to speak to a court victim advisor at**
10 Omakau district court
11 (0.6)
12 CALLER: yeah

Heritage (2012) established that *ohs* in responsive position mark a question to be inapposite in some way. The call-taker's *oh* prefaced response is because court support workers are not affiliated with victim support but are associated with the Ministry of Justice, an entirely separate organisation. At line 04-05 the call-taker displays an inference that the caller wants to speak to the court victim advisor, which is the name of the support worker associated with the court system.

The polar question form "Are you wanting" indicates a steep epistemic cline (Heritage, 2012) between the call-taker and the caller. That is the call-taker is showing her question to be one from a position of not knowing (K-) albeit with a question formulating that it might be what the caller would be wanting. The caller initiates repair in the next turn using an open class repair initiator (Drew, 1997) which provides very little information to the trouble source speaker what the problem is. Typically, in open class repair sequences the

trouble source turn is repeated with changes between the trouble source turn and the repair solution being analytically interesting for what they indicate about the displayed orientations of the parties to the talk (Schegloff, 2004). In the above case the repair solution adjusts the epistemic gradient of the question so that it indexes less of a difference between the speaker and the recipient. That is, in reformatting the questions from *Are you wanting* to *Do you need* the call-taker is upgrading their display of knowledge. However, the relevance of this for the analytic argument is that it shows the *do you* form being used in a local environment where the call-taker is relatively uncertain, therefore deferring more decision making rights to the caller to confirm that the course of action is one they want to progress.

A final piece of evidence that the *do you* form defers more agency to the Other than the *did you* form is that the *do you* forms typically occurred before the *did you* forms in the overall trajectory of the call. Extract 10 is an example where the *do you* form is used first, as the call-taker is working to establish what could be done to help. Not shown in the extract is that the caller offers a police reference number, which is used by the call-taker to infer that a possible outcome of the call is transferring it to the police.

Extract 10 Samuel 29
01 CONTACT: okay ah this is victim support >**do you need to speak to**
02 **someone** at the police cause I can put you through to
03 them if you like
04 (1.6) ((voices in background))
05 CALLER: oh okay I-I-I just received a letter if I wanted to um
06 (.)speak to somebody
07 (0.4)
08 CONTACT: okay um j-w- was it victim support you were wanting or
09 >**did you wanna w-ah ask about the ah about the crime**
10 (1.0) ((voices in background))
11 CALLER: I'm just yeah enquiring about yeah um my report and
12 that I've got the vehicle back?
13 (1.0) ((voices in background))
. .
. ((7 lines missed, confirmation sequence))
. .
21 CONTACT: it'll be the police you'll need to talk to **I'll put you**
22 **on to them okay?**

23 (0.6)
24 CALLER: okay thank you

At line 01 the caller-taker asks whether the caller needs to speak to the police as part of a proposed course of action which the call-taker is able to progress, that is a transfer to the police. The contingent hedge “if you like” at the end of the *do you* form of the proposal shows the call-taker strongly is deferring the decision to the speaker. In response to the proposed course of action the caller justifies her contact with Victim Support, which is she got a letter suggesting contact with them after reporting the crime of having her vehicle stolen, which is part of a more general procedure that happens for all victims of crime reporting the incident to the police to inform them of where to go if they feel they need emotional support or practical help.

The call-taker displays their understanding that regardless of the letter advising about victim support, the citation of the police reference number means they are the appropriate contact. That understanding is evident where the call-taker goes on to offer two interrogative forms of possible support (lines 08-09). Contiguity is a basic principle in turn design and so the second supporting action is being promoted over the first alternative (Antaki & Kent, 2015). Note that the second action is produced with the *did you* form, which the analysis so far suggests indexes more certainty that it is the relevant course of action over a *do you* form, thus tilting the agency more towards the speaker.

In sum, both the *did you* and *do you* forms for progressing the delivery of support defer the rights to decide to the recipient. However, the above extracts provide evidence that the two forms display slightly different stances on whose agency is most relevant. The *do you* form defers the decision to progress the action slightly more towards the other party, whereas the *did you form* tilts it slightly more towards the speaker. With the above analysis at hand, the repair shown in extract 1 and re-presented below again can now be better understood.

Extract 1 Sam 16

01 CONTACT: **did you want** to see if um but you say that
02 you've spoken to victim support befo:re,
03 (0.2)
04 CONTACT: .h um: [**did you wanna**] **do you wanna** see if your um=
05 CALLER: [yep]
06 CONTACT: =victim support person is able to talk to you
07 (1.0)
08 CALLER: yep

It seems reasonable to suggest that the *did you* form of the of the course of action initiated in lines 01 and 04 builds and understanding that it is the one to be progressed and not one that is heavily reliant on the caller making a decision. However, the self-interruption at line 01 for the parenthetical insertion “but you say that you’ve spoken to victim support befo:re” casts doubt on whether it is a relevant course of action. Given the previous contact, if the caller had wanted to talk to their support person, they could have requested that directly. So the repair solution, which uses *do you* form more clearly builds an understanding that it is something for the caller to decide upon.

Discussion

The analysis has shown that variants of the I- and YOU- formatted proposals differently display and claim agency to act. The I-formatted proposals used by the call-takers in this study were used to show the Self would act. A stance was associated with the different forms of the I-formatted turns with *I'll* forms strongly marking agency, *I can* forms less so and *I could* forms hedging agency by building contingency into the proposed course of action, which is consistent with Curl and Drew's (2009) on forms of requests. In contrast, the YOU-formatted turns were interrogatives and deferred agency to the caller to decide. A subtler constitution of agency was found between the *did you* and *do you* forms with the *did you* form tilting agency towards the Self and the *do you* form towards the Other.

Figure 1 presents a visual summary of the results showing the different action formats and their relative strength for displaying agency for the Self or deferring it to the Other. The *I'll* form strongly claims agency and the *Do you* form defers it most to the Other. While clearly representing the results, a danger with representing the finding in this way is it could be misunderstood as suggesting the management of agency simply rests on linguistic form. However, that is not the case. Who can do or decide about something is just one dynamic shaping the progression of action in social interaction with epistemics and affectivity being two other important drivers (Stevanovic, 2018; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2014). Other aspects of turn design and as well as the position of utterances are also crucial to how action is advanced by parties. In co-present interactions embodied practices are also central to the building, understanding and co-ordination of action (Mondada, 2018)

Figure 1: Action format and displaying agency

Self <-- <i>I'll</i> <i>I can</i> <i>I could</i> <i>Did you</i> <i>Do you</i> --> Other

Issues of agency and subjectivity are core concepts in psychology which are used to explain why humans act. Stevanovic (2018) proposed that power and agency can be conceptualised in terms of social deontics, that is who has the authority to make things happen. Furthermore she points to the structures that organise social interaction as an important locus where deontic authority and stance play out. This study shows the grammatical format of turns in terms of the Self or the Other is one of the structures. The selection of verb form is another.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the intellectual project of discursive psychology by identifying a practice that participants use to claim or defer agency to progress action. More broadly it is a further demonstration that the distinctive approaches of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis which give theoretical primacy to social

interaction provide a strong theoretical basis for respecifying psychological phenomena that avoids the pitfalls of identified by discursive critiques.

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