



‘Will you or can’t you?’: Displaying entitlement in interrogative requests[☆]

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Abstract

Interrogative structures such as ‘Could you pass the salt?’ and ‘Couldn’t you pass the salt?’ can be used for making requests. A study of such pairs within a conversation analytic framework suggests that these are not used interchangeably, and that they have different impacts on the interaction. Focusing on Danish interactions between elderly care recipients and their home help assistants, I demonstrate how the care recipient displays different degrees of stance towards whether she is entitled to make a request or not, depending on whether she formats her request as a positive or a negative interrogative.

With a positive interrogative request, the care recipient orients to her request as one she is not entitled to make. This is underscored by other features, such as the use of mitigating devices and the choice of verb. When accounting for this type of request, the care recipient ties the request to the specific situation she is in, at the moment in which the request is produced. In turn, the home help assistant orients to the lack of entitlement by resisting the request.

With a negative interrogative request, the care recipient, in contrast, orients to her request as one she is entitled to make. This is strengthened by the choice of verb and the lack of mitigating devices. When such requests are accounted for, the requested task is treated as something that should be routinely performed, and hence as something the home help assistant has neglected to do. In turn, the home help assistant orients to the display of entitlement by treating the request as unproblematic, and by complying with it immediately.

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1. Introduction

It is a well-documented fact, that negative as well as positive interrogatives can be used to implement the same activities, such as, for instance, requesting. This is the case for the following pair, cited frequently in the literature (see, for instance, [Brown and Levinson, 1978](#); [Allwood, 1977](#)).

Could you pass the salt? Couldn't you pass the salt?

As noted by [Brown and Levinson \(1978/1987\)](#) and [Clark and Schunk \(1980\)](#), this similarity does not mean that the two formats are used interchangeably. Nor does it mean that users do not respect constraints on their respective applications. In their much-cited work on politeness, [Brown and Levinson \(1978\)](#) suggest that a request formatted as a negative interrogative is less polite than its positive equivalent. Their analysis is, among other things, based on the fact that the negative interrogative entails a positive presupposition. For the negative interrogative above, this would mean that the speaker displays a belief that the recipient is able to pass the salt. According to politeness theory, assuming something on behalf of the hearer is a threat to that person's negative face (for the distinction between positive and negative face, see [Brown and Levinson, 1978, 1987](#)), and hence impolite.

Following [Brown and Levinson](#), [Clark and Schunk \(1980\)](#) created an experimental setting in which the participants rated the politeness of 18 different types of requests. Among these were those accomplished through the production of positive and negative interrogatives. Their results supported [Brown and Levinson's](#) claim, as the negative interrogatives were rated significantly lower on the politeness scale than their positive equivalents. These findings raise the question of why a speaker would even consider using the negative interrogative format for making a request, when a positive interrogative would presumably do the exact same job, and be more polite, as well. Partly, this issue is addressed in the aforementioned studies. There, it is noted that different levels of politeness may be relevant, depending on the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Furthermore, politeness may be affected by a speaker's wish for having an activity dealt with efficiently.

A shortcoming of both studies is, however, the fact that the results are based (mainly) on native speakers' intuition about what is and isn't polite but say nothing about how, why and to what extent – if at all – the various formats for making requests are used in real life. In a later version of their politeness theory, [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#) suggest a way in which to address this issue. They note that there seems to be a correlation between politeness on the one hand, and the Conversation Analytic notion of preference organization on the other (see also [Bayraktaroğlu, 1991](#)). In Conversation Analysis, 'preference' is a structural denomination, and does not refer to the participants' wishes or intentions. Preferred turns are those that are facilitated by the sequential organization of interaction. Such turns are typically frequent, immediate and structurally simple. In contrast, dispreferred turns occur only infrequently and are typically delayed, mitigated and structurally more complex ([Pomerantz, 1984](#); [Raymond, 2003](#)). Based on these observations, Conversation Analysis has, for instance, demonstrated that agreement is preferred over disagreement ([Pomerantz, 1984](#)), and self-repair over other-repair ([Schegloff, 1979](#)).

[Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#), however, argue that preference is determined by face considerations. They suggest, for instance, that:

“agreement is preferred because disagreement is an FTA [face threatening act]; self-repair because correction by other may imply that self is misguided or incompetent”. ([Brown and Levinson, 1987:38](#))

The current study compares the preference organization of positive and negative interrogatives that are used for making requests. Focusing on Danish interactions between care recipients and their home help assistants, I compare the two formats to investigate whether the participants orient to any constraints on their uses. I demonstrate how, through using a positive interrogative, a care recipient orients to the request as one she is not entitled to make. In contrast, entitlement is oriented to and displayed through using a negative interrogative format for requesting. Through a case-by-case analysis, I demonstrate how this difference between positive and negative interrogatives is enhanced by other features of the interaction. I conclude by discussing how the empirical findings in this study relate to issues such as preference and politeness.

2. Data and sampling

The home help service is a government program that offers assistance to elderly or disabled persons who are unable to manage on their own. One or more home help assistants visit the house of a care recipient to assist her/him with personal hygiene, cleaning and cooking.

The home help service data that forms the basis of this study consists of thirteen visits. Six home help assistants and four care recipients participate in nine and a half hours of recordings. The care recipients are men and women in their early eighties, while the home help assistants are all women, of various ages. The visits were not arranged for the purpose of the study, and all participants had consented to being recorded. The data was collected in accordance with general ethical guidelines. Hence, personal names and references to places have been changed to pseudonyms in the transcript.

The collection that forms the basis for this study consists of 69 requests, 34 formatted as negative interrogatives, 35 as positive interrogatives. Most of these requests are made by the care recipient,¹ and these are the ones focused on in this study. The requests all concern the performance of menial tasks such as closing a door, removing a plate, turning on the light and arranging a pillow. No requests were found in which the task lies clearly outside the legitimate work responsibilities of the home help.

3. Requests and entitlement

In the literature, requests are typically considered a dispreferred activity (Levinson, 1983; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2005). This is supported by empirical evidence where speakers can be shown to avoid making requests, or to mitigate their requests in a manner that displays an orientation to requests as a dispreferred activity (Schegloff, 1979; Lindström, 2005; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2005).

As noted by Lindström (2005), however, there are some social settings where requests are particularly apt. Working with data from the Swedish home help service, she demonstrates how, in this setting, requests are used for shaping social relationships and roles (see Wootton, 1981 for another setting in which requests are of particular relevance). Care recipients require the assistance of a home help assistant to accomplish what would otherwise be considered ordinary tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and personal hygiene. The possibility of making a request thus becomes central to the care recipient, and is one way in which the institutional setting is highlighted and the institutional roles of the participants invoked (Lindström and Bagerius,

¹ In cases where a home help assistant makes a request, it is always directed at another home help assistant.

2002). In short, the care recipient is, because of her role as a care recipient, entitled to make requests of the home help assistant, who in turn is expected to comply with the request. This does not mean, however, that the care recipient can make any request she chooses. Nor does this entail that requests are always treated as unproblematic activities, even if they concern tasks that lie within the institutional responsibility of the home help service.

Lindström (2005) notes that in her data the home help assistants in general are accommodating towards the care recipients' requests. Though refusals are rare, the home help assistants may, however, on occasion express reluctance to perform the requested task. Lindström also demonstrates how the care recipient often orients to the dispreferred nature of the requesting activity, for instance, through providing accounts or making the request less direct. Thus, even though requests may be more recurrent in the home help visits than in ordinary interaction, the participants nevertheless orient to the activity of requesting as dispreferred.

Lindström further demonstrates that even though requests are typically granted in her home help service data, the care recipient may use different formats for making requests. This is done to display whether she believes herself to be entitled to make that request or not. Imperatives, for instance, convey to the recipient that the care recipient is entitled to have the requested task performed by the home help assistant, because of the institutional context of care giving in which it is produced. Or, rather, in formulating the request as an imperative, the care recipient constitutes the task at hand as one that she is entitled to request the home help assistant to perform. In contrast, questions open up the possibility that the care recipient may not be entitled to request assistance with a specific task.

Though she demonstrates that different formats may convey different assumptions about entitlement, Lindström does not distinguish between positive and negative interrogatives. In the following sections, I demonstrate how these two formats also convey different assumptions about entitlement. First, I focus on positive interrogatives, demonstrating how, through this format, the care recipient orients to the request as one she is not entitled to make. Second, I compare these requests with those formatted as negative interrogatives, demonstrating that through this format, the care recipient orients to the request as one she is entitled to make.

4. Positive interrogatives

4.1. Introduction

Requests that are formatted as positive interrogatives have several features that suggest they are oriented to as a dispreferred activity. Such requests are formulated in ways which license the possibility that the recipient may turn the request down. First, this can be done through formulating the request in terms of whether the recipient is willing to perform a certain task, through the use of the construction *vil du* ('will you'). Alternatively, the request can be formulated in terms of whether the speaker is permitted to have a certain task performed, through the use of the construction *må jeg* ('may I'). Second, this type of request is mitigated through the use of items such as *være sød* ('be nice'), and *godt* ('please'). Third, the requested task is oriented to as one which is not routine. And finally, this type of request is resisted by the home help assistant. Together, these four features show the participants' orientation to the request as a dispreferred activity, and the requested task as one that the care recipient is not entitled to ask the home help assistant to perform.

4.2. Positive interrogative requests with ‘will you’

Though all of the four features described above need not be used in conjunction with each other, this is the case in the following fragment. Here, the care recipient requests the home help assistant to tuck a napkin in around her neck. The care recipient is sitting in her living room eating the lunch that the home help assistant has just prepared. The home help assistant has been engaged in the bedroom, but is now passing through the living room on her way to the kitchen.

- (1) Requesting napkin
- 1 P: Det’ dejligt stegt.
It’s lovely cooked.
- 2 (0.7)
- 3 HH1: Det v’ da godt.
Well that’s good then.
- 4 (0.7)
- 5 → P: Ve’ du godt være sød å stoppe den °ned te’ mig?°
Would you please be kind enough to tuck it °down to me?°
 {P points at napkin
 {HH1 stops, turns and
 looks at P
- 6 (0.6)
- 7 P: De:t falder ned. hele ti[den.]
It falls down. all the time.
 {HH1 moves towards P
- 8 HH1: [M’ k]a’ du ikk’ selv
But can’t you get the arm
- 9 HH1: få armen derop da?=
up there yourself then?=?
- 10 P: =Nej.
=No.
- 11 HH1: Nå.
Right.
- 12 (0.3)
- 13 P: Det ka’ jeg ikk’.
That I can’t.
- 14 (2.0)
 {HH1 tucks napkin in and moves away from P
- 15 P: Tak.
Thanks.

When the home help assistant enters the living room, the care recipient compliments her on the preparation of the food (in line 1). As a minimum, this compliment serves to get the home help assistant's attention.² Before the home help assistant can continue towards the kitchen, the care recipient makes her request. The request (in line 5) is done as a positive interrogative. It is an enquiry as to whether the home help assistant would be willing to tuck in a napkin around the care recipient's neck.

As a positive interrogative, the enquiry expects a yes/no answer, with a preference for 'yes' (Raymond, 2003). As a request, it should be responded to in terms of granting/rejection, with a preference for granting (Lindström, 2005). In the home help service, these two types of preferred responses do not necessarily converge. Most requests are for the performing of physical tasks that are of immediate relevance. In such situations, a 'yes' response merely promises to undertake the requested task, whereas granting is accomplished through the home help assistant's non-vocal activities, i.e. performing the requested task (Heinemann, 2005, this study, section 5).

In the case of fragment (1), the request is formulated in terms of the home help assistant's willingness to perform the requested task. This is done through using the modal verb *vil* ('will'). As noted by Clayman and Heritage (2002), questions that are formulated in such a way are more deferential than those which address the recipient's ability (see section 5 for a comparison). In the case of requesting, this means that the construction *vil du* ('will you') licenses the possibility that the home help assistant may turn the request down, simply because she chooses to do so.³ Combining the positive interrogative with the modal *vil* thus conveys that the care recipient does not orient to the request as one she is entitled to make. This is further emphasized by the mitigating *godt* ('please') and *være sød* ('be kind'). The addition of the latter items makes the structure of the interrogative more complex, a typical indication of dispreference (Pomerantz, 1984). It also makes the request less direct. What is being asked is whether the home help assistant is willing to be kind (and that would be achieved in this situation through tucking in the napkin), rather than whether she would be willing to perform the task. The use of *godt* further emphasizes the activity as being a request, while showing the care recipient to be dependent on the kind nature of the home help. These mitigating devices clearly orient to the potential dispreference of the request, displaying that the care recipient does not assume that her request should be complied with just because of the participants' institutional relationship.

From the participants' subsequent orientation to the request, it is evident that entitlement is a negotiable matter. Although the home help assistant, upon hearing the request, turns in the direction of the care recipient, there is no immediate evidence (vocally or non-vocally) that she intends to comply with the request. This indicates that she does not understand the request as one she is expected to comply with, as a care provider. Furthermore, her resistance to comply with the request projects a dispreferred response (Pomerantz, 1984). In orientation to this, the care recipient produces an account for making the request (in line 7), explaining that the napkin keeps falling down. Through this account, the care recipient makes a case for why the requested task should be performed in this specific situation. She does not, however, treat the requested task as

² Though this could be simply a genuine compliment, it is also possible that the care recipient in this way attempts to mitigate her subsequent dispreferred activity. The fragment is strikingly similar to an example constructed by Brown and Levinson (1978) where a person knocking on the door to borrow some sugar starts off by complimenting the recipient's roses (see Brown and Levinson, 1978:98).

³ Addressing the request in terms of the recipient's willingness also appears to create some leeway for rejection. The home help assistant can, in principle, reject the request while still producing the preferred answer to the enquiry, for instance, by responding with 'I would like to, but I can't'.

one that she is entitled to have performed as a routine matter (compare to the examples discussed in section 5).

At this point, the home help assistant starts walking towards the care recipient. While doing so, the home help assistant, through a negative interrogative, enquires whether the care recipient would be able to perform the requested task herself. Through using the negative interrogative format, the home help assistant asserts her belief that the care recipient would in fact be able to tuck in the napkin herself (Heritage, 2002; Heinemann, 2005, section 5 this study). She is, in effect, stating that one possible precondition for making the request (that the care recipient cannot perform the task herself) is absent. Consequently, she challenges the care recipient's grounds for making the request.⁴ In response to this, the care recipient takes the position that she is not able to perform the task herself. This is done through disconfirming the home help assistant's assertion with a stressed, emphasized *nej* ('no') (in line 10). Around line 14 the home help assistant finally performs the requested task (though doing somewhat of a botched job). In return, the care recipient acknowledges this through the *tak* ('thanks') produced in line 15. This turn not only expresses her gratitude to the home help assistant but furthermore displays that the activity initiated with her request has now been completed (Lindström, 2005).

4.3. Positive interrogative requests with 'may I'

Positive interrogative requests may also be formulated in terms of whether the speaker is permitted to have a specific task performed. This is done through the construction *må jeg* ('may I'), as exemplified in the following fragment, where the care recipient asks for help in getting comfortable in her chair. Two home help assistants have attempted to get the care recipient to stand up in order for them to change her diaper. After getting up, the care recipient immediately requested to sit down again and is now placed somewhat awkwardly on the edge of her chair. In lines 1–3 the care recipient once again states that she cannot stand up. One of the home help assistants, HH2, responds that the care recipient will consequently be left sitting in her used diaper (line 4). HH2 then walks out of the room, leaving HH1 and the care recipient to deal with the situation.

(2) Requesting to get back in chair

- | | | |
|---|------|---|
| 1 | P: | Jeg <u>kan</u> ikk'. <i>I can't.</i> |
| 2 | | (0.7) |
| 3 | P: | Jeg ryster for mege [t.] <i>I'm shaking too much.</i> |
| 4 | HH2: | [Nå] hm' så må du sidde i det, <i>Well then you'll have to sit in it,</i> |
| 5 | P: | Jerh men så må jeg b[are komme læng]ere ind. <i>Yeah but then I just need to get a bit further in.</i> |

⁴ The particle *da* ('surely') used here has not been investigated in detail. It is typically found in places where a strong epistemic stance is being taken by the speaker (see also fragment (7), line 3), and is strongly contributing to the challenging nature of the turn.

- 6 HH1: [()]
{HH2 picks up the fresh
- 7 (3.1)
diaper and fans it in front of P and HH1. Then she turns away
from P and starts walking away while looking at HH1.
- 8 → P: Må jeg be' om å' komme længere in[d i stolen?]
May I ask to get a bit further into the chair?
- 9 HH1: [Du ka']
You just
- 10 HH1: bare rykke dig,
move yourself,
- 11 P: Jer[h hvis jeg kunne.]
Yeah if only I could.
- 12 HH1: [Jæm' jæ ka' jo'tt hjæ]lpe dig,=
Yes but I can't help you you know,=
- 13 P: Jøh du kan da.
Yes of course you can.
- 14 (1.0)
- 15 P: Du vil ikk' mener du.
You don't want to is what you mean.
- 16 HH1: Jeg kan ikk',
I can't,

In line 5, the care recipient appears to accept that she will not get her diaper changed. Instead, she orients to the fact that she is placed in an awkward position in the chair—and that she needs to change her position. However, her statement does not specify that she needs help with this, and HH1 does not orient to the care recipient's statement as a request. After a 3.1 second gap, the care recipient reformulates her statement as a request for help. As in fragment (1) the request is formatted as a positive interrogative, but in this case through the construction *må jeg be' om* ('may I ask for'). Literally, the care recipient is asking for permission to ask for help. This is a strong mitigation which makes the request come across as a plea. As in fragment (1) it conveys that the care recipient does not believe that she is entitled to ask the home help assistant to help her. Again, this lack of entitlement is oriented to by the home help assistant, who, in overlap with the care recipient's request, asserts that the care recipient can move to a more adequate position herself (lines 9–10). As in fragment (1), then, the home help assistant treats the requested task as one the care recipient should be able to do herself. And, as in fragment (1), the care recipient disagrees with this point of view, by claiming (in line 11) that she is incapable of doing it on her own. In contrast to fragment (1), however, the home help assistant does not comply with the request at this point. Instead, the conflict escalates into a discussion of abilities and willingness, when the home help assistant claims that she is not capable of helping the senior citizen.⁵

⁵ There is a certain degree of truth in HH1's claim that she cannot help, as it takes two people to move the care recipient. The request is eventually complied with when HH2 returns to the room.

4.4. The non-routine nature of positive interrogative requests

In general, requests that are formatted as positive interrogatives are resisted by the home help assistant, as was the case in fragments (1) and (2). Typically, the home help assistant challenges the relevance of the request and consequently these sequences often result in rather aggravated discussions.⁶ But challenging a request need not be done in terms of whether the care recipient herself is able to perform the requested task, as in fragments (1) and (2). In the following fragment, for instance, the request is challenged in terms of whether it is relevant to perform the requested task at the moment in which the request is produced. Here, the home help assistant has just helped the care recipient to her chair. She has arranged a blanket around the care recipient, and is now focusing on the napkin that is to fit round the care recipient's neck.

(3) Requesting blanket tucked in

- 1 → P: Å' ve' du s:toppe den godt ned.
And will you t:uck it well down.
- 2 (1.4)
{HH2 tucks the blanket round P
- 3 P: Jerh tak.=
Yeah thanks.=
- 4 HH2: Erhm det' jo ikk' vinter,
Nyeah but it's not winter you know,
- 5 P: Nej men det' jo Når jeg fryser.
No but you know it's when I'm cold.
- 6 (0.6)
- 7 P: Det' jo det det kommer an på.
That's what it depends on you know.

In line 1, the care recipient makes a request for the home help assistant to tuck the blanket properly around her. In contrast to most other requests formatted as a positive interrogative, the request is, in this case, not further mitigated. Another difference is that the home help assistant in this case complies immediately with the request. As in fragment (1) the requested activity is treated as complied with and complete by the care recipient (through the *Jerh tak* in line 3). Up until this point, both participants have treated the request as being one the care recipient is entitled to make. However, in line 4, the home help assistant addresses the relevance of the request. By stating that it is no longer winter, she implies that the blanket need not be tucked in and that the request is, as a result, ungrounded. That this statement challenges the request is evident from the care recipient's response (in lines 5 and 7), where she defends

⁶ The request sequences in this paper tend to portray the relationship between the care recipient and the home help assistant as somewhat problematic, with the care recipient as a very vulnerable person who is dependent on a rather abusive and even negligent home help assistant. This is not a representative portrait of the home help visits, but a reflection of the sensitive and problematic nature of making requests. During most parts of the visits, the home help assistant and the care recipient interact in a much friendlier manner and in situations where disaffiliation occurs, such as the ones described here, the participants work very hard at re-establishing a more affiliative interaction.

her request by stating that the time of year is irrelevant to whether she is cold or not—and that she needs the blanket tucked in regardless. Both participants thus specify the circumstances under which the requested task should be performed. The home help assistant takes the position that the task should only be performed in the winter, whereas the care recipient takes the position that it should be performed when she is cold. But even though they disagree on what circumstances are required for the request to be relevant, they both treat the requested task as one that should not be routinely performed by the home help assistant. Treating the requested task as non-routine is a typical feature of positive interrogative requests (see also fragment (1)). In doing so, the participants weaken the strength of the request, in terms of entitlement: if a task is not routinely performed by the home help, then its' performance is, in each instance, negotiable.

4.5. Resisting positive interrogative requests

In all of the fragments above, the home help assistant eventually complies with the request, despite her initial resistance to do so. The extent to which the care recipient mitigates the request seems to have no effect on whether the home help assistant challenges the request or not (compare fragments (1) and (2) to fragment (3)). In fact, the mitigated format may in itself be challenged by the recipient, as in the following fragment. Here, the request is complied with immediately. However, upon complying with the request, the home help assistant challenges her own reasons for complying with the request.

(4) Requesting removal of plate

- 1 → P: Ve' du godt ta' den så' du sødç
Will you please take that then you're kindç
 {P points at and pushes the plate
 {HH1 turns head towards P and shifts coffee cup from right
 to left hand
- 2 HH1: Ahm' je- Du vęd jeg ikk' ve' være sød.
Nyeah but I- You know I don't want to be kind.
 {HH1 reaches for plate with hand and lifts it
- 3 P: Jerh. Men ([])
Yeah. But ()
- 4 HH2: [Bente ka'] ikk' li'
Bente doesn't like
 {HH1 places plate on floor
- 5 HH2: å' være sød.
being kind.
- 6 (0.5)
- 7 P: Jo::h hun kã' godt. °sometider°=
Ye::s she does. °occasionally°=⁷

⁷ In Danish this statement is ambiguous as to whether P is saying that HH1 is capable of being kind or whether she likes being kind. The stress on *kã'* ('cãn'), however, indicates that it is the former reading, as does HH2's response.

- 8 HH2: =Ja hun ka' godt være det men hun ka'
=Yes she is capable of being kind but she
- 9 ikk' li' det,
doesn't like to be,
- 10 P: *Jo::v*
Ye::s
- 11 (0.4)
- 12 HH1: Ne[j,]
No,
- 13 P: [Hu]n ka' godt li' når man si'r det.
She does like when you say so.

In this fragment, there are two home help assistants present. Both are sitting in the living room, with the care recipient, drinking coffee. The care recipient is finishing her lunch. In line 1, the care recipient requests the home help assistant sitting closest to her, HH1, to take a plate she has just emptied. At the same time, she is pushing the plate towards HH1. The request is formatted as a positive interrogative, addressed in terms of willingness, and mitigated through the use of *godt* ('please') and *sød* ('kind'). Upon production of this request, HH1 turns her head towards the care recipient and moves her own coffee cup from her right to her left hand. This enables her to have the hand closest to the care recipient's plate free, which will allow her to perform the task requested. She then reaches for the plate, lifts it off the table and finally places it on the floor. Thus, the request is immediately complied with and the requested task is not oriented to as in any way problematic. However, while doing these movements, HH1 in line 2 (jokingly) challenges the grounds she may have for performing the requested task, grounds that have been indicated by the care recipient through the use of *sød*. That is, HH1 emphasizes that she is not performing the task to be kind. By picking up on this issue, HH1 emphasizes the institutional relationship that exists between her and the care recipient, indicating that she performs the requested task because of her obligations as a home help assistant, not because she has any inherent wishes to be kind—or because the care recipient asked nicely. Though this is done in a joking manner and the request is immediately complied with, the home help assistant's response in this manner nevertheless treats some part of the request as problematic, in this case, the format used. And as can be seen from the subsequent contributions, the request evolves into a sequence in which the two home help assistants align with each other, against the care recipient, on the issue of whether HH1 is capable of being kind.

4.6. Summary

Fragments (1) through (4) are typical instances of how positive interrogative requests are constructed and responded to in the home help visits. First, this type of request is either formulated in terms of the home help assistant's willingness to perform a task, or in terms of whether the care recipient is permitted to have the task performed. Second, positive interrogative requests are typically further mitigated through the use of expression such as *være sød* ('be nice'), *godt* ('please'), or *be' om* ('ask for'). Third, the requested tasks are treated as non-routine. And finally, this type of request is resisted by the home help assistant. [Table 1](#)

Table 1
Features of positive interrogative requests

| | | |
|----------------|----|-----|
| Willingness | 26 | 74% |
| Permissibility | 9 | 26% |
| Mitigation | 28 | 80% |
| Non-routine | 27 | 77% |
| Resistance | 28 | 80% |

The table is based on 35 cases.

summarizes the overall distribution of these features in the collection of positive interrogative requests as a whole.

Requests could, in principle, consist of a first pair part (the request) and a second pair part (compliance or rejection). But fragments (1) to (4) exemplify that positive interrogative requests instead evolve into longer sequences in which the activity of requesting is highlighted by the participants. This, in turn, causes misalignment between the participants—although the degree of misalignment may vary, from joking disagreement in fragment (4) to outright aggravation in fragment (2). Despite attempts to mitigate her requests, the care recipient clearly puts herself (and the home help assistant) in a problematic and uncomfortable position, when asking the home help assistant to perform a task.

Because of her disabilities, the care recipient is dependent on the home help to perform certain tasks, and on occasion this has to be done by making a request. Hence, she does not always have the choice of avoiding making a request. There are, however, other ways of making requests, among these through the format of a negative interrogative. In the following section, I demonstrate how this type of request is designed, treated and responded to very differently in terms of entitlement and compliance, than are those requests formatted as positive interrogatives.

5. Negative interrogatives

5.1. Introduction

In contrast to the positive interrogatives discussed above, requests that are formatted as negative interrogatives are typically not oriented to, by either participant, as dispreferred. These types of requests typically have four things in common, all of which differ from those described for positive interrogatives. First, the request is formulated either in terms of whether the home help assistant is capable of performing a task, or whether the care recipient is supposed to have a task performed. The former is done through the use of the verb *kan* ('can'), the latter through the verb *skal* ('shall'). Second, this type of request is rarely mitigated. Third, tasks requested through a negative interrogative structure are oriented to as being something that should be routinely performed. Finally, requests formatted as negative interrogatives are usually not resisted by the home help assistant.

5.2. Negative interrogative requests with 'can'

Together, the four features mentioned above show the participants' orientation to a request as unproblematic, and the requested task as one that the care recipient is entitled to ask the home help assistant to perform. This is evident from the following fragment, where the care

recipient uses a negative interrogative to get the home help assistant to turn on the overhead light in the bedroom. The fragment is taken from an early morning visit, where the first task is getting the care recipient out of bed. At this point, the care recipient is still in bed. The home help assistant, having removed the care recipient's diaper is now cleaning the care recipient's lower body.

(5) Requesting light to be turned on

- 1 → P: Ka' du ikk' tænde loftlyset;
Can't you turn on the overhead light;
 {HH2 washes P's lower body}
- 2 HH2: J↓oh,
 Y↓es,
- 3 (2.2)
- 4 HH2: Det vød du det ska' hun ha' a' vide ALti',
You know she has to be told that always,
 {HH2 places disposable cloth in bin bag}
- 6 P: °Jerh/Mm°
 °Yeah/Mm°
 {HH2 turns towards light switch}
- 7 (1.2)
 {HH2 turns light on}
- 8 HH2: Hun gø' ikk' det a' sig s:elv,
She doesn't do it by herself,

The request sequence in the above fragment is very different from those discussed in the previous section. First, the request is constructed with no mitigating features. Second, the home help assistant complies with the request and does not treat the request as in any way problematic, as could be done, for instance, by challenging the grounds for making the request. After responding to the request with *jo* ('yes') in line 2, the home help assistant finishes cleaning the care recipient's lower body, then disposes of the used cloth in a bin bag. Having completed this task, she turns to the light switch and turns on the light. Thus, the home help assistant through *jo* promises that the request will be complied with, though actual compliance is delayed until an appropriate moment, where the requested task is performed non-vocally. In addition, the home help assistant subsequently defines the requested task as being part of the participants' daily routine (in lines 4–7), thus indicating that she ought to have performed this task—without being requested to do so. This suggests that the home help assistant believes the care recipient to be entitled to make the request.

Entitlement and the routine nature of a requested task are also displayed directly through the negative interrogative format. As noted, for instance, by Allwood (1977), a negative formulation is typically used when its complementary affirmative is somehow expected. In the fragment above, this means that the care recipient is not just presupposing that the home help assistant is capable of turning on the light, but is also indicating that she ought to have done so. The home help assistant's own subsequent formulation of the task as being one she always has to be told to do supports this understanding.

In the following fragment, there is no overt orientation to the requested task having been neglected by the home help assistant. However, the request is being made at a point at which it is obvious to the care recipient that the task will not be performed unless requested. The fragment is from an early morning visit, where the home help assistant is helping the care recipient with her morning routine. At this point, the care recipient has been moved to the bathroom, her upper body has been washed and the home help assistant has now started combing the care recipient's hair.

(6) Requesting comb and brush

- 1 HH1: Kr hheh
 2 (3.8)
 {HH1 picks up brush from table and brushes P's hair
 3 → P: Den brune børste å' den brune kam. (0.2)
 The brown brush and the brown comb. (0.2)
 4 → ka' vi ikk' bruge denç
 can't vi use thatç
 5 (0.2)
 {HH1 stops brushing
 6 P: [De-]
 7 HH1: [Hva]'forno'e[t?]
 What?
 8 P: [de] lå derinde i går,
 they were laying in there yesterday,
 9 (0.3)
 {HH1 looks at P
 10 P: Den brune kam å' den grå børste,
 The brown comb and the grey brush,
 {HH1 looks at table
 11 (2.0)
 {HH1 moves towards table
 12 HH1: Hva' det for no'et?
 What's that?
 13 (1.1)
 14 HH1: Der' da det herç
 There is surely thisç
 {HH1 picks something up from table

The request is produced in lines 3–4 and concerns which comb and brush should be used for fixing the care recipient's hair. Through the negative interrogative, the care recipient requests the home help assistant to use the brown brush and comb. This request, however, is produced only

after the home help assistant has already started brushing the care recipient's hair—with a different brush. Because this activity is already initiated, it is obvious to the care recipient that the home help assistant is not going to use the brown brush and comb. The request is, in that sense, a correction of the home help assistant's ongoing activity.

As the only request in the collection, this request is not complied with. Or rather, the home help assistant does not brush the care recipient's hair with the brown brush and comb, as requested. She does, however, attempt to comply with the request. Though she doesn't respond vocally, she stops brushing the care recipient's hair (around line 5) and moves towards the table where the brown brush and comb would be placed. Thus, she displays that she has every intention to comply with the request—and that the request is in itself unproblematic. As she is unable to find the brush and comb, she eventually returns to brushing the care recipient's hair with the brush used before.

5.3. Negative interrogative requests with 'shall'

The degree to which a negative interrogative indicates that the home help has neglected to perform a specific task seems to be connected to how the negative interrogative is formatted. Whereas most negative interrogative requests are formatted in terms of the home help assistant's abilities (as in fragments (5) and (6)), the negative interrogative in the following fragment is formatted in terms of whether the care recipient is supposed to have a task performed. This is done through the use of the verb *skal* ('shall'). In this case, the main function of the negative interrogative is to point out that the home help assistant has neglected to wipe the care recipient's bottom. Of course, by pointing out such neglect, the care recipient also requests a remedy for this.

(7) Requesting being wiped

- 1 → P: Så ska' jeg tørres=>Ska' jeg ikk' tørres
Then I'm getting wiped=>Aren't I getting wiped
{HH1 stops pulling potty chair
- 2 → bagi?<
in the back?
- 3 HH1: Har jeg ikk' gjort det da?
Haven't I done that then?
- 4 P: Nej.
No.
- 5 (1.3)
{HH1 pushes potty chair slightly forwards, back into bathroom
- 6 P: Det har du ikk'.
You haven't.
- 7 HH1: A' du nu sikker på det,
Are you really sure about that,
- 8 P: Du har hverken tørret mig foran. eller bagi.
You haven't wiped me either in front. or in the back.

Here, the participants are in the bathroom, completing the care recipient's morning routine. The care recipient is sitting in a potty chair. The fragment begins with the care recipient making a statement (in line 1). Through this statement, the care recipient declares that the next step in her morning routine is to get her bottom wiped. Such a statement may at the same time serve as a request (Lindström, 2005). As the home help assistant at this point starts pulling the potty chair (with the care recipient) out of the bathroom, it is, however, apparent that she is not about to wipe the care recipient's bottom. Furthermore, her action indicates that all the tasks that needed to be performed in the bathroom have now been completed. As wiping the care recipient's bottom is such a task, the home help assistant's movement indicates that this task will not be done at all. Realizing this, the care recipient latches a negative interrogative onto her statement, now enquiring whether it isn't the case that she is supposed to have her bottom wiped.

Because of its sequential position and its negative framing, the interrogative does not only request the home help assistant to wipe the care recipient's bottom. The care recipient at the same time asserts that this is a task that ought to be performed, and that her understanding is that the home help assistant has neglected to do so. This is further emphasized by the way in which the negative interrogative is produced, faster and louder than the preceding turn, with stress on *törres* ('be dried') and with rising intonation. These features together indicate disbelief. As a whole, the turn manages to interrupt the ongoing (non-vocal) activity, the home help assistant pulling the care recipient out of the bathroom.

The home help assistant also orients to the negative interrogative as pointing out her neglect. In her response she questions whether it is in fact the case that she has neglected to wipe the care recipient's bottom. This is done through a negative interrogative, through which the home help assistant asserts that she has in fact performed that task, thus challenging the care recipient's claim that she has neglected this.⁸ What is challenged in this fragment, then, is not whether the care recipient is entitled to have her bottom wiped, but rather, whether this task has or hasn't been performed. When the care recipient insists that she hasn't had her bottom wiped, the home help assistant accepts this claim and displays non-vocal behavior which indicates that she is now orienting to the negative interrogative as a request. Around line 5, she pushes the potty chair a few centimetres back into the bathroom, and though continuing to discuss what has and hasn't been done, she eventually wipes the care recipient's bottom, performing the task that she had initially neglected.

5.4. The routine nature of negative interrogative requests

The negative interrogative produced by the care recipient in the above fragment is making a particularly strong claim of neglect on behalf of the home help assistant. This is possibly due to the use of the verb *skal* ('shall'), rather than *kan* ('can'). But even in the cases where a negative interrogative request is formatted with *kan* (as in fragments (5) and (6)), the requested task is treated as something that should have been routinely performed—and which the home help assistant has neglected to do. Obviously, such implications strengthen a request in terms of entitlement: if a task is routinely done, then it is not negotiable.

The fact that issues of routine and neglect are relevant for the strength of a request is evidenced by the way in which the participants may orient to these issues overtly. In fragment (5), for instance, the home help assistant herself indicated that 'turning on the light' was a

⁸ As in fragment (1) this challenge is emphasized through the use of the particle *da* which enforces the positive presupposition of the interrogative.

routine task which she ought to have done without being asked. In the following fragment, it is the care recipient who overtly orients to the requested task as routine. The fragment is one of the few instances where a negative interrogative is formatted in terms of the recipient's willingness. This, however, is the only similarity that the request has to those formatted as positive interrogatives. As is typical for negative interrogative requests, there are no mitigating features, nor is the request challenged in any way. Most importantly, however, is that though the care recipient does produce an account following her request, this account differs from those used after positive interrogative requests, in that it specifies the requested task as one that should be routinely performed, but hasn't. Hence, the care recipient's account is strengthening her entitlement to have the task performed, rather than orienting to the possible dispreferred nature of her request.

(8) Requesting pillow

- 1 → P: Ve' du ikk' gi' mig en pude til i ryggen,=jeg:
Won't you give me one more pillow in the back,=I
 {HH1 carries a tin of biscuits to kitchen table
 {HH1 places tin on table and
 freezes all movements
- 2 → P: (0.2) har ikk' fået den(t)=som jeg plejer
(0.2) haven't got the one=that I usually
 {HH1 lets go of tin and walks towards P
- 3 → å' få når jeg spiser,
get when I eat,
- 4 HH1: Krhmm
- 5 (1.4)
- 6 P: (Fra skamlen)
(From the chair)
- 7 (1.2)
 {HH1 picks up pillow
- 8 P: Jerh tak.
Yes please.
- 9 (.)
- 10 HH1: Uhhu::hphuhhh Jeg har sove' alt for meget,
Uhhu::hphuhhh I've slept way too much,
- 11 P: Har du det?
Have you?
- 12 HH1: Det' mærk'li' man å' ka' det,
It's strange that that's possible,
 {HH1 places pillow behind P

- 13 P: M' det ka' man godt.
Well it is.
- 14 (0.7)
- 15 HH1: Så[,]
There you go,
{HH1 lets go of pillow
- 16 P: [T]ak.
Thanks.
- 17 (0.4)
- 18 HH1: Vær'sgo',
You're welcome,

Here, the home help assistant is in the kitchen, getting coffee ready for the care recipient, who is sitting in the living room. The request (in line 1) is produced while the home help assistant is moving a tin of biscuits from the fridge to the workbench. Upon completion of the request, the home help assistant places the tin on the workbench, then immediately turns her body in the direction of the living room. This indicates that she intends to comply with the request. As these movements can be viewed by the care recipient, one may wonder why she nevertheless provides an account for making the request (in lines 2–3). But the first part of her turn (the *jeg* ('I') in line 1) is latched onto the request. This means that the account is initiated before it is evident to the care recipient whether the home help assistant will comply with the request or not. The account, in this case, does not appear to be produced in orientation to a potential rejection of the request.

As noted above, the request, though negatively framed, is formatted in terms of the home help assistant's willingness. Whereas the care recipient, through the use of the negative interrogative format displays the stance that she is entitled to have the requested task performed, this stance is downgraded through the use of the verb *vil* ('will'). The position taken on entitlement is, in this way, weaker in this fragment than in fragments (5), (6) and (7), though it is stronger than if the request had been formatted as a positive interrogative. In this context, producing an account immediately after the request, before any indication of resistance, works as an upgrade of displayed entitlement. By stating overtly that the requested task is otherwise routinely performed and now lacking (note the use of *jeg plejer å' få* ('I usually get')), the care recipient presents her request as one that she is not only entitled to make, but furthermore one that she should not have had to make, had the home help assistant not neglected to perform the requested task.

As in the other fragments where requests are being done through the format of a negative interrogative, and where a strong stance is being taken on entitlement, the home help assistant treats the request as unproblematic. Having turned in the direction of the care recipient, she walks straight towards her (in lines 3–6), picks up the pillow, then walks to where the care recipient is seated and arranges the pillow. Having placed the pillow, she vocally suggests that the task has now been completed (in line 15), and this is subsequently confirmed/accepted by the care recipient through the *Tak* ('Thanks') in line 16.

Table 2
Features of negative interrogative requests

| | | |
|---------------|----------------|------|
| Ability | 28 | 82% |
| Supposed | 4 | 12% |
| Willingness | 2 ^a | 6% |
| Unmitigated | 32 | 94% |
| Routine | 28 | 82% |
| Complied with | 34 | 100% |

The table is based on 34 cases.

^a In both these deviant cases, the care recipient upgrades the strength of her request by overtly orienting to the requested task as routine. See fragment (8).

5.5. Summary

As the fragments in this section attests, requests that are formatted as negative interrogatives differ dramatically from those formatted as positive interrogatives. Table 2 summarizes the overall distribution of the various features present in the collection of negative interrogative requests as a whole.

Through designing the request as a negative interrogative, the care recipient presupposes that the home help assistant can (or will) perform the requested task. Thus, the care recipient takes the stance that she is entitled to have the requested task performed, and that she is entitled to make the request. This stance is further strengthened by the lack of mitigating devices (such as *være sød* ('be kind') and *godt* ('please')) in the majority of these requests. Through the negative interrogative format, the care recipient in addition treats the requested task as a routine task. By requesting the performing of such a task, she implies that the home help assistant has neglected to perform the task. The participants often orient overtly to the fact that the requested task should be routinely performed, something, which further strengthens that, the care recipient is entitled to make the request.

That the care recipient is in some way entitled to make the request is also reflected in the home help assistant's response. Requests that are formatted as negative interrogatives are typically complied with immediately, adequately and without any challenge from the home help assistant. In contrast to the requests accomplished through positive interrogative, their negative counterparts do not result in aggravation or other types of disaffiliate interaction. Instead, these requests are simply dealt with as they occur, the requested task is performed, and the interactants can turn to other matters.

6. Discussion

The previous sections have demonstrated that negative and positive interrogatives are used and treated differently by participants; though both formats accomplish requesting. Requests formatted as positive interrogatives are typically formulated in terms of the recipient's willingness, they are mitigated and the requested task is treated as non-routine. This type of request is frequently resisted and challenged by the recipient. In contrast, negative interrogatives are typically formulated in terms of the recipient's ability, are unmitigated and the requested task is treated as routine. This type of request is typically complied with immediately, and without any challenge to its relevance.

Table 3 summarizes the differences between positive and negative interrogative requests.

Table 3
Features of positive and negative interrogative requests

| | Positive interrogatives | Negative interrogatives |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Willingness/permissibility (%) | 100 | 6 |
| Ability/supposed (%) | – | 94 |
| Mitigated (%) | 80 | 6 |
| Unmitigated (%) | 20 | 94 |
| Non-routine ^a (%) | 77 | – |
| Routine (%) | – | 82 |
| Resistance (%) | 80 | – |
| Compliance (%) | 20 | 100 |

The table is based on 69 interrogative requests, 35 positive and 34 negative.

^a For both positive and negative interrogatives, some tasks are not overtly oriented to, either as routine or non-routine. If a task is oriented to, it is always treated as non-routine in the case of positive interrogative requests, and as routine in the case of negative interrogative requests.

Assuming that there is a connection between preference and politeness, as suggested by [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#), the empirical findings in this study support their observations. Through the positive interrogative format, the care recipient displays a greater orientation to the dispreferred nature of the request than she does through the format of the negative interrogatives. Hence, the positive interrogative format is a more polite way of making a request. However, treating the differences between positive and negative interrogatives in terms of politeness fails to account for the difference with which the two formats are responded to. Intuitively, one would expect that being polite would be rewarded, and that polite requests would be complied with more often than their less polite counterparts (for an experimental study confirming this, see [Clark and Schunk, 1980](#)). As the fragments of previous sections attest, this is not the case. Of course, it could be the case that the care recipient uses the more polite format for making requests in cases where it is less likely that the request will be complied with in the first place—and that this is why positive interrogative requests are often challenged by the recipient.

One thing which could effect whether a request is complied with, or not, is if the recipient is engaged in another activity at the point at which the request is produced. A closer look at the sequences in which requests are produced does not support this suggestion. In most of the fragments in which a positive interrogative request is being made, the home help assistant is not engaged in any activities—or at least not in any that is institutionally relevant. In fragment (1), for instance, the home help assistant is passing through the living room, on her way from the bedroom to the kitchen, when the request is produced. She may have been engaged in some activity in the bedroom and she may be about to engage in some activity in the kitchen, but while passing through the living room she is doing nothing more than that. Crucially, the care recipient does not summon the home help to make the request, but waits until she is physically available—and observably not engaged in another activity.

In fragment (4), the home help assistant is engaged in another activity when the request is made, that of drinking coffee. This activity is specifically not an institutionally relevant task, but one that the home help assistant engages in to pass the time until the next institutional task can be performed (helping the care recipient making a call to the grocery store).

In contrast, in most of the fragments where a negative interrogative request is being made the home help assistant is observably engaged in another activity, performing a task that is institutionally relevant and which often involves handling the care recipient's body. In fragment (5), for instance, the home help assistant is washing the care recipient's lower body when the

request is produced, in fragment (6) she is combing the care recipient's hair and in fragment (7) she is helping her out of the bathroom. Sequentially, requests that are formatted as a negative interrogative thus seem to be more interruptive than their polite, positive counterparts.

It may, of course, be the case that orientation to politeness is discarded exactly in those situations where a request is interrupting an ongoing activity. That is, to get a task performed in a context in which the home help assistant is already doing something (institutionally relevant), the care recipient must be more direct (and less polite) in order to ensure a successful outcome of her request. Again, this suggestion does not explain the contrasting ways in which negative and positive interrogative requests are received and responded to. Certainly, the home help assistant does not treat the negative interrogative requests as being more interruptive than their positive equivalents, nor does she orient to what she is doing at the moment in which the request is being made as something that would prevent the request from being complied with.

A second issue, which might explain the different formats and their responses, is the type of task requested. One might expect, for instance, that the task being requested through the more polite format, a positive interrogative, is one that the care recipient is not institutionally entitled to have performed. In turn, the reason for the home help assistant's reluctance to comply with the positive interrogative requests could be grounded in the fact that the tasks requested through this format are ones that she is not, as a care provider, expected to perform. However, as noted in section 2, none of the tasks requested by the care recipient appear to be outside the scope of the institutional, care-giving context. From the perspective of a bystander, it is difficult to fathom that the care recipient is entitled to have the light turned on or having an extra pillow placed behind her (both requested through a negative interrogative), but not to have a napkin or a blanket tucked around her (both requested by a positive interrogative).

Furthermore, as noted in the previous sections, the care recipient's entitlement to having a specific task performed is something that is negotiated between the participants within the request sequence. What is of relevance to the participants is whether, and to what extent, they each through their contributions display that the care recipient is entitled to make the request. Entitlement, then, is not a predefined category which is oriented to through the use of various formats. Instead, entitlement is suggested, implied, negotiated and ultimately constituted through the way in which the participants format their contributions.

Through formatting her request as a negative interrogative, the care recipient displays the stance that she is entitled to make the request (and have the requested task performed). This stance is strengthened by the lack of mitigating devices in the request, and by defining the requested task as part of the home help assistant's routine. In turn, the home help assistant aligns with the stance by complying with the request. Both participants thus treat the request as one that the care recipient is entitled to make.

Through formatting the request as a positive interrogative, the care recipient does not take the stance that she is entitled to make the request. This lack of stance is further oriented to through the mitigating devices used in the request, as well as by treating the requested task as non-routine. In turn, the home help assistant aligns with the lack of stance on entitlement, by not complying with the request immediately, and by challenging the grounds for making the request. Neither of the participants thus treats the request as one that the care recipient is entitled to make.

For both negative and positive interrogatives, then, the participants are aligned in taking similar stances on whether the care recipient is entitled to make the request she is making. The different ways that negative and positive interrogative requests are responded to by the home help assistant thus appear to be a direct consequence of the different stance that is displayed through the two formats. In terms of preference, we can say that though both formats are designed to

prefer compliance, positive interrogative requests are less so than their negative counterparts. Or rather, through making a request with the format of a positive interrogative (with all that this entails), the care recipient sets up her request in a manner that orients to a potential rejection. This suggests that non-compliance is less dispreferred when produced in response to a positive interrogative request than when responding to a negative interrogative request.

As with most studies of language in use, the patterns described in previous sections and the conclusions drawn from these are, for the moment, both very general and very specific. Though negative and positive interrogatives have been described as contrasting in the way in which they accomplish requests, the reality is that they should rather be positioned on a continuum of displayed entitlement. Negative interrogative requests can on occasion be mitigated, just as their positive counterparts can, on occasion, be produced without mitigation. The care recipient, in producing her request, thus has the possibility of modifying the strength of the stance taken through either of the polar formats, upgrading her stance on entitlement through not mitigating her positive interrogative request, or downgrading her stance through mitigating her negative interrogative request. Furthermore, the stance displayed can also be changed subsequently, through the way in which the requested task is treated as either routine or non-routine.

For the moment, the findings and conclusions of this study are valid only for a particular language, Danish, and a particular context, home help service visits. Though many languages can construct both positive and negative interrogatives and use these formats for making requests, it may very well be the case that the language spoken has an impact on how requests are formatted and distributed in the data. Because of the institutional context and the relationship between the home help assistant and the care recipient, it is also very likely that requests formatted as negative interrogatives are over-represented in this data, compared to, for instance, ordinary interaction. The care recipient is dependent on the home help assistant to perform certain tasks. This may influence the way in which she formulates requests, so that she has a stronger tendency to display entitlement than what would normally be done. Until further research has been applied to other interactional settings and languages, it is impossible to predict the final outcome.

Despite the shortcomings of this study, investigating requests as they are applied in interaction has proven to be a very productive approach. It is only in this way that we can truly determine what the difference is between using a negative and a positive interrogative when making a request, while still capturing the variety with which such activities can be formatted.

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Appendix A. Transcription conventions

The symbols used in the transcriptions are based on the system developed by Gail Jefferson for conversation analytic research, with a few additions.

1. Temporal and sequential relationships

[Overlap onset
] Overlap ends

| | |
|-------|---|
| = | Latched speech |
| (0.4) | Silences, approximately represented in tenths of a second |
| (.) | Micro-pause, less than 2/10 of a second |

2. Aspects of speech delivery

| | |
|------------|--|
| . | The punctuation marks are used to indicate intonation |
| . | The period indicates a falling, final intonation contour |
| ? | A question mark indicates strongly rising intonation |
| , | A comma indicates rising intonation |
| ¿ | The inverted question mark indicates a rise stronger than the comma but weaker than the question mark |
| :: | Colons are used to indicate the prolongation or stretching of the sound just preceding. The more colons, the longer the stretching |
| - | A hyphen after a word or part of the word indicates a cut-off sound |
| <u>nej</u> | Underlining is used to indicate emphatic stress |
| NEj | Upper case indicates loud talk or pitch reset |
| °nej° | The degree sign indicates that the talk is markedly softer and lower than the talk around it |
| >nej< | Indicates that the talk is markedly faster than the surrounding talk |
| * | Indicates ‘creaky’ voice |
| ↑↓ | The up and down arrows mark sharp rises or falls in pitch |
| hh | Audible aspiration is shown by the letter ‘h’ |
| .hh | Indicates an audible inhalation |
| .nej | Indicates that the word is said with an inbreath |
| (h) | h in parenthesis within a word indicates aspiration, often laughter |

3. Other markings

| | |
|---------|--|
| (bodel) | Words within single parentheses indicate that this is the likely hearing of that word |
| () | Empty parentheses indicate that something is being said, but that no hearing can be achieved |
| { } | Curly brackets indicate where in the talk a described non-vocal activity is initiated or completed |

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