Discourse Processes

Bilateral and Unilateral Requests: The Use of Imperatives and Mi X? Interrogatives in Italian

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Bilateral and Unilateral Requests: The Use of Imperatives and *Mi X?* Interrogatives in Italian

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When making requests, speakers need to select from a range of alternative forms available to them. In a corpus of naturally occurring Italian interaction, the two most common formats chosen are imperatives and interrogative constructions that include a turn-initial dative pronoun *mi* 'to/for me', which is referred to as the *Mi X?* format in this article. In informal contexts, both forms are used to request low-cost actions for here-and-now purposes. Building on this premise, this article argues for a functional distinction between them. The imperative format is selected to implement bilateral requests—that is, to request actions that are integral to an already established joint project between requester and recipient. On the other hand, the *Mi X?* format is a vehicle for unilateral requests, which means that it is used for enlisting help in new, self-contained projects that are launched in the interest of the speaker as an individual.

In our social world, we generally do not do everything ourselves. Given the cooperative instincts and the division of labor on which human sociality is based, we continually enlist the help of others to achieve our goals. It has long been noticed that language gives us different ways of making requests. But, why should this be so, and how do speakers select from the range of alternatives that are available to them? This study addresses these questions by focussing on how Italian speakers negotiate low-cost impositions on others for their everyday purposes and needs.

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In a corpus of video-recorded, naturally occurring, Italian interaction, the two most common formats chosen for requesting are imperatives (e.g., *Passami il piatto* 'Pass me the plate') and interrogative constructions that include a turn-initial dative pronoun *mi* 'to/for me', which I refer to as the *Mi X?* format (e.g., *Mi passi il piatto?* 'Will you pass me a plate?'). These two forms appear to be used for requesting similar kinds of actions in similar circumstances, as shown in the following extracts. Examples (1) and (2) are taken from the same family meal, during which an imperative and a *Mi X?* interrogative are both used to request that Aldo pass a plate (see the Appendix for the key to all interlinear glosses in the examples):

(1) PranzoMarani:00.16.56

1 Mum: -> *aldo passami il piatto.*
        Aldo pass-IMP-2s=me the plate
        Aldo pass me the plate.

2 Aldo: ((passes plate to her))

(2) PranzoMarani:00.27.01

1 Aldo: *io sono andato da loro l' altra sera* ((to Friend))
        I be.1s go-PstPp by them the other evening
        I visited them last night

2 Dad: -> *mi p(hh)assi un* [*pia(hh)ttino*, ( ) ((entering the room, to Aldo))
        me-DT pass-2s a plate-DIM
        {will} you p(hh)ass me a pla(hh)te, ( )

3 Bino: [*e:h .hhh no:: io:::* ((to Aldo))
           PCL no I
           we:ll .hhh no:: I:::

4 Aldo: ((gets a plate from the cupboard behind him))

Although both passings of the plate are equally immediate and effortless, and although the social relationships between requester and requestee are very much analogous in the two contexts, sequences like the previous two differ in important interactional aspects. The aim of this article is to show that this is reflected in the way in which the requests are formatted.

Two variables are identified as relevant to a speaker's selection between the two forms. The first concerns the relation of the request to what participants are doing at the moment at which the request is made. The second deals with whether the request contributes to an individually owned or a collectively owned course

of action. The core finding is the following: The imperative format is selected to implement bilateral requests—that is, to request actions that are integral to an already established joint project between requester and recipient (such as a game or the distribution of food at the start of a meal; cf. (1)). On the other hand, the *Mi X?* format is a vehicle for unilateral requests, which means that it is used for enlisting help in new, self-contained projects that are launched in the interest of the speaker as an individual.

After a review of the background literature and the methodology employed, I illustrate the common context in which the two request types are found. Then, two sections are dedicated to a detailed analysis of imperative and *Mi X?* request sequences, where the distinction proposed earlier is supported. The interactional environments in which the two request types occur are also examined in relation to the linguistic properties of the forms themselves. First, I show that the contrast between initiating and furthering a project is reflected in the different degree of common ground assumed in the morpho-lexical construction of imperative and *Mi X?* utterances. Second, I show that the design of the utterances also reflects the individual or collective nature of the project that the request initiates or extends. Finally, I offer an account for why these two specific practices, imperatives and *Mi X?* interrogatives, should be selected to do the jobs that they do—that is, I discuss how these two resources of the Italian grammar, with their core meanings, fit with the environments in which they are adopted. The analysis includes a consideration of the kinds of responses that the two request types make relevant, which further supports their treatment as strategies with a distinct interactional import.

BACKGROUND

Since H. P. Grice's (1957, 1975) work on conversational implicature and Searle's (1969, 1975) theorization of indirect speech acts, the production and comprehension of requests has been of much interest to philosophers, linguists, and psychologists. Much of the early work on this topic went into unravelling the inferential processes underlying the comprehension of requests (Clark, 1979; Clark & Lucy, 1975; Ervin-Tripp, Strage, Lampert, & Bell, 1987; Gordon & Lakoff, 1975). At the same time, researchers in different fields have tried to account for the numerous ways in which requests are made, in search of systematic principles to explain why a speaker should choose one form instead of another. Following Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) theory of politeness, much of this literature has been concerned with the degree of imposition on a recipient that different kinds of requests may involve and with related matters of social distance, power, and institutional roles that may impact the relative indirectness with which requests are made.

In cross-cultural pragmatics, speech act realization patterns have been described for different languages, and formal variation in requesting has been explained by references to politeness scales (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Márquez-Reiter, 2000; Ogiermann, 2009; Rue & Zhang, 2008). The findings of these studies result from questionnaire-based elicitation techniques that, although valuable for their comparative and practical advantages, yield mostly idealized and prescriptive responses (Ogiermann, 2009, p. 195).

In conversation analysis, speakers' choices in requesting behaviors have been investigated on the basis of recordings of naturally occurring interactions (Craven & Potter, 2010; Galeano & Fasulo, 2009; Goodwin, 1990; Heinemann, 2006; Lindström, 2005; Raymond, 2011; Schegloff, 1979; Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006; Vinkhuyzen & Szymanski, 2005; Wingard, 2006; Zinken & Ogiermann, 2011). Studies adopting this approach, like Curl and Drew (2008) and Wootton (1981, 1997, 2005), have shown that patterns of use in the selection of forms cannot be accounted for solely by reference to variables such as the age or status of the recipient or by the burden placed on the requestee (cf. examples (1) and (2) in which such variables are held constant). These studies have made important contributions to research on requesting by bringing to the fore those contingent factors that cannot be appreciated until they are considered within the sequential development of the interaction.

In his study of request forms used by a young child, Wootton (1997) described the selection of an imperative as warranted by the sequential placement of the request after prior alignment has been reached between child and parent on the desirability or grantability of the action requested. Already at the age of three, the child seems to be able to discern such an environment from others in which she is requesting the parent do things "out of the blue" (p. 144) in which case, she shows a preference for an interrogative "Can you X?" format. Wootton's (1997) findings on the linguistic behavior of an English child bear a significant relation to the findings reported in this article on Italian adult interaction.

In this work, requests and their linguistic realizations in Italian are examined through the lens of two key analytic notions: the interactional *projects* to which requests relate and the individual or collective *ownership* of these projects. I now briefly review how these terms and concepts have been handled in conversation analysis and neighboring approaches.

Schegloff (2007) used the term *project* to refer to an interactional *leitmotiv* or "theme" (p. 244) that transcends the boundaries of sequences and is pursued over the continuing course of an interaction—for example, "teasing" (p. 246) or "getting together" (p. 144). At the same time, Schegloff (2007) also applied the same term to the description of smaller components of an interaction— for example, as referring to the trajectory or directionality of a pre-sequence (pp. 60, 87, 90, 193). More important, he made it clear that a certain project may be implemented through alternative sequence types. The transfer of an object,

service, or information, for instance, may be accomplished either through an offer or request sequence (Schegloff, 2007, pp. 81–82). This last point is also part of the notion of *project* recently laid out by Levinson (in press), who advocated a distinction between "projects as courses of action" and "the sequences that may embody them." Levinson (in press) emphasized a sense of the term *project* that captures the individual agenda lying behind a speaker's turns. He described a project as a "plan of action" pursued by at least one participant, which surfaces at the sequential level only when a co-participant buys into it.

In this study, I use the term *project*, as well as the phrase *course of action*, to refer to a series of actions or moves coherently articulated to achieve an interactional outcome (cf. Lerner, 1995, pp. 128–129). For example, pouring water into one's glass involves getting hold of the water container, letting the water flow into the glass until filled, and stopping the flow of water. The structure of a project can be conceptualized in terms of means to an end. In the data at hand, the ends in question are mostly outcomes of manipulations of the material environment and of the physical behaviors of people. Although the simplest instance of *project* is best represented by cases such as filling glasses with water (see extract 5), the term can be used to refer also to larger stretches of interaction or to segments of interaction that may not all be contiguous (see extract 7).[1]

The second notion that is central to this work is the "ownership" of the project to which a request relates, which is operationalized as a distinction between individually owned and collectively owned projects.[2] Although not explicitly termed as such, the question of "ownership" of lines of action has already emerged in the conversation analytic literature. In the same study by Wootton (1997) as reviewed earlier, such a category has implications for the child's

[1]However, a project should not be equated with the overall "activity" within which a bit of interaction takes place. "Activity" and "context" appear to be too broad and loose as categories to be used for the analysis of request sequences. The analysis built in this study is, instead, anchored to the relation of the request to specific events taking place in the immediate sequential environment or to past events whose import is renewed at a local level (cf. Wootton, 1997, p. 8). For one or more actions to be part of the same "project," they need to be organized as coherent steps contributing to the attainment of a specific objective. In this sense, an "activity" can be conceptualized as a set of distinct, more or less interrelated, projects (cf. Clark, 2006, p. 128).

[2]In the literature on requesting, the selection of certain forms has been related to the question of who stands to benefit from the requested action (Ervin-Tripp, 1976, pp. 31–32; Schieffelin, 1990, p. 184). For example, in Wootton (1997), *benefit* is presented as an element distinguishing the environments in which the imperative and "Can you X?" request forms occur. Whereas imperatives are employed to request things that are understood to be desirable to both parties, the "Can you X?" format is associated with "self-interested" actions where "the beneficiary [. . .] is clearly going to be the child" (Wootton, 1997, p. 147). I argue that the question of who stands to benefit from the requested action plays "second fiddle" to a deeper question of who "owns" the course of action being engaged in. In this sense, I consider benefit to be subsumed by ownership.

selection between two linguistic forms used to make proposals: "Shall we X?" and "Shall I X?" interrogatives. When handling trouble situations, the former proposes solutions to a problem "that both parties share," whereas the latter are, instead, "constructed as offers of assistance to the other party" (pp. 166–167). As Wootton (1997) put it, the key variable here appears to be "whose problem the problem is" (p. 167). By using the inclusive *we* to handle a shared problem, or to further an activity in which both parent and child are jointly engaged, the child displays a "sensitivity regarding to whom a line of action belongs" (pp. 152–153).

Sidnell (2011) discussed a similar contrast in the context of pretend-play (among 4- to 5-year-old children), where different modes of participation in the activity impact on the forms that the child uses to talk about make-believe characters and events. Whereas the solitary engagement of children in their own independent play allows them to use bare assertions (e.g., "This is a swimming pool"), joint play requires them to negotiate the pretence with co-participants and, thus, resort to proposing formats that invite ratification of the transformative action (e.g., "Let's pretend we were all friends").

When people come to be involved together in courses of action, they can carry them out either as single individuals or "as one"—that is, as different individuals inhabiting the same social unit.[3] When a social union is operative in its fullest sense, two individuals commit to the same course of behavior as their own. As a result, they will both partake of the outcome of the behavior and bear responsibility for it (e.g., two friends baking a cake together will share the praise or blame for how good or bad it turns out). By contrast, an individual can enlist the contribution of another in the accomplishment of an outcome that is "consumable" only by the first individual alone (e.g., a friend asks another friend to pass her some chewing gum). A project can be defined as individual when its launching is imputable to a single person and where other people participate only as a workforce, or "animators" (Enfield, 2011b; Goffman, 1981). Therefore, I define the *owner* of a course of action as the social entity that establishes its trajectory, that is invested in its outcome, and that is accountable for it (in positive and negative senses).

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[3]Enfield (2010, 2011a) and Kockelman (2007b, p. 154; see also Kockelman, 2007a) recently elaborated the idea of multi-individual social units from a semiotic-anthropological perspective (cf. Maine, 1861/2002, pp. 126–128). The relevance of multi-individual social units for interaction has already been shown in conversation analytic work that describes practices of speaking to or for a collectivity (Lerner, 1993). Moreover, patterns of selection between individual and collective self-reference ("I" vs. "we") show that speakers are sensitive to whether they speak and act as single individuals or as members of a multi-individual social unit (Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007). These notions also have important connections with philosophical and psychological work on shared intentions (Searle, 1990) and joint activity (Bratman, 1992; Clark, 2006; Gilbert, 1989; Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005).

The aim of this article is to show that the relation of requests to the projects being pursued in the interaction and the ownership of these projects both have a bearing on the linguistic formulation of requests. Moreover, I show that the choice of a particular request format is motivated by its "core meaning." Core meaning is akin both to the linguistic notion of "semantic invariant" (Wierzbicka, 1996, p. 239) and to the conversation analytic notion of "context-free meaning of a practice" (Heritage, 2010). By *core* I intend a meaning that is present across all uses of a certain action format, regardless of modulations (e.g., conditional mood) and additions (e.g., *please*) on its main constituent (e.g., an imperative or interrogative second-person predication). The meaning of an action format cannot be reduced to a value on a politeness scale (Ervin-Tripp, 1976, p. 59). Politeness scales have been used to explain the relation between linguistic forms along a single, predefined dimension (more or less polite). Instead, the meaning of an action format has to be seen in the relation of its grammatical construction to the alternatives present in the larger system, to the social variables that are stable across its unmarked uses, and to the consequences that its selection has for the progress of the interaction (on formats for person reference, cf. Enfield, 2007; and Stivers, 2007). The core meanings of request forms are, therefore, reflected in the kinds of responses that they make relevant.

The normative organization of responding turns with respect to initiating ones lies at the heart of the sequential development of interaction (Pomerantz, 1984; Raymond, 2003; Schegloff, 2007, p. 78; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Also, the analysis of responses offers an important key into the nature of the action that made them relevant. In a study of directives used by parents with their children, Craven and Potter (2010) discussed a contrast between "asking" and "telling" others to do things and the impact that this has on the kind of behavior that is due next. Craven and Potter argued that, whereas "requests are built as contingent to varying degrees on the recipient's willingness or ability to comply, directives embody no orientation to the recipient's ability or desire to perform the relevant activity" (p. 419). As a consequence, unlike "requests," a "directive does not make acceptance relevant as a next action" but, rather, compliance (Craven & Potter, 2010, p. 426; cf. Goodwin, 2006).

The same point is also addressed in this article, which makes the construction of requests central to this issue. Here, "asking" versus "telling" is considered a distinction pertaining to the linguistic practice employed to get a recipient to perform an action.

DATA AND METHOD

This study adopts conversation analytic methods (Heritage, 1984; Levinson, 1983; Schegloff, 2007; Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Sidnell, 2010) for the analysis

of the sequences of talk and other bodily behavior in which the two focal request types occur. This approach requires (a) identifying a target phenomenon, (b) collecting a set of cases from a sample of different interactions, and (c) accounting for the distribution of the forms in which the target phenomenon occurs by providing an explanation for the pattern observed and evidence to support it. This approach is combined with a consideration of the formal linguistic aspects of both imperative and *Mi X?* utterances to establish connections between linguistic resources and the kinds of interactional work they are selected to carry out. Such an analysis presumes a fundamental distinction between the *actions* that get done by participants (e.g., a request) and the *practices* used to implement them (e.g., a *Mi X?* interrogative)—that is, the bits of talk and other conduct that have, as an outcome, the production of those actions (Schegloff, 1997; see also Schegloff, 2007, pp. 7–9, 77–78).

A conversation analytic comparison of action formats must be based on a collection of instances in which participants are doing the same thing. In our case, this requires a discrimination of what counts as a request. Requesting has been predominantly treated in either of two ways. On the one hand, it has been classified as a member of a superordinate category of actions called "directives" (Couper-Kuhlen, 2011; Searle, 1976) or "control acts" (Ervin-Tripp, 1976). This approach tends to see requests as a type of action that can be distinguished in principle from other directives, such as commands (e.g., "Put your hands up!") or prohibitions (e.g., "Don't put your feet on the table!"). In other quarters, "requesting" has instead been used as a cover term for a general domain of action in which people get others do to things (Becker, 1982; Gibbs, 1986; Wootton, 1997). Although it may be desirable to maintain a principled analytic distinction between requests and other types of directives, this is not necessary within the scope of this article. For this reason, on practical grounds, this study adopts the second approach.

Here, a request is generally characterized as an attempt by a speaker to enlist another participant to perform a practical action. The action in question involves an exchange of goods (Clark & Schunk, 1980, p. 113; Gibbs & Mueller, 1988, p. 103) from recipient to requester in the form of a service or transfer of object. Such a characterization does not constrain requesting to actions formulated through interrogative grammar (cf. Craven & Potter, 2010), but leaves them open to be implemented through a range of linguistic, as well as nonlinguistic, practices.

This study is based on 10 hr of video-recorded, spontaneous interactions between speakers of Italian living in Northern regions of Italy, with ages ranging from 15 to 92. Twenty-one different video recordings were made in 2009 and 2010. They mostly involve household activities (e.g., cooking, playing cards, etc.) and other interactions between family members or close friends. These kinds of data are representative of informal interactions between peers

and intimates, unconstrained by institutional impositions. From this corpus, all instances of requests were collected, yielding a dataset of more than 200 cases. The dataset includes 70 imperatives, 26 *Mi X?* interrogatives, and a range of less frequent interrogative and declarative formats (e.g., *Hai X?* 'Do you have X?', *Puoi X?* 'Can you X?', and *Bisogna X* 'It is necessary to X'), as well as nonverbal requests (e.g., pointing). In addition to being the two most frequent strategies, imperatives and *Mi X?* interrogatives were found to share a common domain of use, which is illustrated in the next section.

COMMON DOMAIN OF USE

The first observation to be made on the distribution of imperatives and *Mi X?* interrogatives is that they appear to be used for requesting similar kinds of actions in similar circumstances. This has already been illustrated with examples (1) and (2), where the very same action is requested of Aldo during the same family meal by speakers with similar relationships to him. In everyday, informal interactions between intimates, both imperative and *Mi X?* requests are generally for low-cost actions that are relevant to a here-and-now purpose or need (e.g., "passing," "taking," "putting," and "holding"). When the transfer of an object is involved, this is typically not a belonging to the recipient but, rather, a shared good or a good for common use (e.g., a plate, a pen, or a deck of cards) that is readily available in the immediate environment.

   The imperative and the *Mi X?* formats can, therefore, be described as sharing certain usage properties in Italian, which bring them together and distinguish them from other formats operating in different circumstances. For example, equally undemanding transfers of objects may be affected by ownership concerns. When the requested item is a recipient's possession (e.g., a cigarette, a lighter, or a small amount of money) and is, possibly, not readily available for transfer, requests are often implemented in a different way—in particular, through the format *Hai X?* 'Do you have X?' (which occurs 10 times in this corpus).

   With that said, the aim of this article is to show that, within this common domain, imperatives and *Mi X?* interrogatives are not used interchangeably, and that there is a functional distinction between them. The following two sections are dedicated to the analysis of each request type, preceded by a brief description of its grammatical properties.

IMPERATIVES

Grammatical Description

In terms of morphology, Italian second-person imperative forms can be distinguished from present indicative ones (i.e., simple present declarative mood)

only in a limited number of cases. Dedicated imperative marking exists only for the second-person singular of verbs in the first conjugation ending in *-are* (e.g., *spar-a* 'shoot!' vs. *spar-i* 'you shoot', from *sparare*) and for some irregular verbs (Klímová, 2004). As for the negative imperative, whereas the second-person singular is always distinguishable from its declarative counterpart (constructed with *non* 'not' + infinitive: e.g., *non legg-ere* 'don't read!'), the plural is again morphologically ambiguous. However, if morphology helps only in some cases, a reliable cue is the position of the pronominal clitics in the clause:

(3)

Mi   leggi   un *libro*
me-DT read-NnPst-2s a book
"You read a book for me"

(4)

Leggimi   un *libro*
read-NnPst-2s=me-DT a   book
"Read me a book"

Pronouns like *mi* 'to/for me' and *lo* 'it/him' are pre-verbal in the declarative (3) and post-verbal (enclitic) in the imperative (4). The same syntactic principle also applies to negative forms.

Imperative Requests

An initial survey of the distribution of imperative requests in the collection leads to a first empirical observation. Imperative requests frequently occur when participants are engaged in a common activity, such as preparing a meal or playing cards (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 97; and Ervin-Tripp, 1976, p. 35). This fact may already grossly characterize their distribution with respect to that of *Mi X?* requests—a number of which are conversely found in contexts where participants are not closely engaged in any particular task just before the request is made or when they have not been interacting at all.

This initial consideration, however, is not sufficient. Take, for example, extracts (1) and (2). Both passings of the plate are requested in the context of the same family meal, which can be considered a type of common activity. To capture the interactional criteria underlying the selection of an imperative format, we need a finer level of analytic detail. This will hinge on two notions: the *project* being engaged in and the *ownership* of the said project.

In what follows, I show that the imperative format is selected to implement requests that are part of a project jointly undertaken by requester and recipient. A first argument is that an imperative formatting is licensed by the relation

of the request to a larger course of action, within which the mobilization of a certain behavior is a relevant component. A second argument focusses on the ownership of the course of action to which the request relates. Imperatively formatted requests are consistent with, or necessary to, projects that are owned by requester and recipient together. Such a claim is tied to the consideration of earlier interactional events in which agreement or convergence is reached by participants on a common goal.

Two initial extracts, (5) and (6), are now examined together. In extract (5), Olga and Tina, two elderly grandmothers, have just sat down at the dining table with other family members. As Olga pours water in her own glass, she offers to also pour some for Tina (line 1). Line 3, by Rosa (their niece), is not part of the relevant sequence:

(5) Albertonipranzo:00.42.35

1 Olga: *vuoi acqua?*
            want-2s water
            {do} you want water?

2 Tina: [((gazes at her own glass))

3 Rosa: [*che bello <u>scia</u>lle nonna* ((to Tina))
            what beautiful shawl grandma
            what a beautiful <u>sha</u>wl grandma

4 Tina: *sì ma:: ho paura: che:*, ((grabs her glass and gazes at bottle))
            yes but have.1s fear that
            yes bu::t I fea:r tha:t,

5 Olga: -> *metti giù.*
            put-NnPst-2s down
            put {it} down.

6 Tina: ((sets the glass down on the table))

7 Olga: ((pours water in Tina's glass))

8 Tina: *grazie*
            thanks

In overlap with Tina's gazing at her own glass in line 2 comes an assessment by Rosa addressed to Tina. This assessment is not taken up, as Tina is already engaged in the sequence just initiated by Olga. In line 4, Tina responds to the offer by simultaneously grabbing her glass and verbally anticipating some trouble that might hinder the unfolding course of action, hinting at her unsteady grip on

the glass (which, by that point, she is holding up). By requesting that she set down the glass, Olga remedies the possible trouble that may have compromised a safe pouring of the water.

A similar sequence is contained in the following extract, where Greta is having her hair dyed by her friend Sergio. A third friend, Dino, is also present in the room. As the dyeing proceeds, Dino notices that Sergio has a runny nose (line 1), which he cannot easily wipe, as his hands are occupied in the dyeing process. The sequence develops as Dino volunteers to do "this terrible thing" (lines 3 & 4)—that is, to help Sergio blow his nose:

(6) Tinta:00.07.50

 1 Dino: *ti sta pende(hh)ndo una goccia di- hhh*
               you-DT stay-3s hang.down-GER one drop of
               you've got a drop hanging do(hh)wn from- hhh

 2 Sergio: ((sniffs)) *lo so adesso me la tolgo*
                       it know-1s now me-DT it remove-1s
                       I know now I'm going to take it away

 3 Dino: ((leans forward to get some kitchen towel from the table))

 4 Dino: *madò mi tocca fare questa cosa tremenda*
               Madonna me-DT touch-3s do-INF this thing tremendous
               my god the fate fell to me to do this terrible thing

 5 Dino: ((raises paper to Sergio's nose))

 6 Sergio: ((brings free hand to nose))

 7 Sergio: ((positions dye bottle in a way suitable for Dino to grab it))

 8 Sergio: -> *tieni questo,*
               hold-NnPst-2s this
               hold this,

 9 Dino: ((grabs the bottle))

10 Sergio: ((blows nose))

After having remarked on Sergio's runny nose, Dino sees that Sergio is not in a position to take immediate action on it because his hands are busy with Greta's hair. Dino then decides to help him (lines 3 & 4). As Sergio joins the course of action initiated by Dino, it becomes clear that he cannot clean his own nose with just one hand, which makes it necessary to hand the bottle to Dino (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1   Frame from Extract 6, line 8 (color figure available online).

In the two previous examples, both imperative requests occur in a particular kind of interactional environment in which a joint project has developed prior to the request being made[4]:

1. *Initiation* of a joint project by one of the participants: Olga's offer in line 1 (example 5) and Dino's volunteering his assistance in lines 3 through 5 (example 6).
2. *Commitment* to a joint project by the co-participant: Tina's acceptance token *sì* 'yes' in example (5) verbally confirms her commitment to the ensuing pouring of the water, whereas in example (6), Sergio demonstrates his commitment by taking a grip of the napkin raised to his nose by Dino.
3. *Request sequence*, where the requested action is part of the already-committed-to joint project: Both *metti giù* 'put it down' (5) and *tieni questo* 'hold this' (6) refer to actions that contribute to the progress of the larger course of action in which they are embedded.

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[4]For a discussion of analogous sequences in English parent–child interactions, see Wootton (1997, pp. 63–66).

4. *Completion* of the joint project: In lines 7 and 8 of (5), Olga's pouring of the water is followed by Tina's *grazie* 'thanks', which sanctions the closure of the offer sequence. In line 10 of (6), Sergio is finally able to blow his nose.

Both requests arise out of the progression of a goal-directed project, where steps are taken by both parties toward the attainment of an objective (Wootton, 1997, p. 62). The request emerges as one of the relevant steps to be taken, built in as integral to a successful completion of the course of action (cf. Galeano & Fasulo, 2009, pp. 271–272).

The second important point is that the course of action within which the request emerges has been previously committed to by both parties. Requester and recipient jointly constitute the social unit that establishes the trajectory of the course of action, that is invested in its outcome and which is accountable for it. In both cases, an action on the part of the recipient is mobilized by the requester not as a self-directed action, but as a contribution to a shared goal. It is true that both setting down the glass and holding the dye bottle are somehow "good for the speaker" (Wierzbicka, 1991, pp. 159–160). Pouring water is easier for Olga if Tina's glass is set on the table, rather than in midair, and having the dye bottle grabbed by Dino allows Sergio to blow his nose with two hands, rather than one. At the same time, however, the actions requested are also in the interest of both participants, as they are functional to the completion of a course of action that has jointly been undertaken.

Offer and help sequences, such as the previous two examples, are not the only types of environments where imperative requests are found. Extract (7) exemplifies a joint project in the form of a game—in this case, playing cards. Clara, Flavia, and two other friends have just finished a round of cards, and are about to start a new one. While they are chatting about the games played so far, Flavia is gathering the cards that are spread on the table:

(7) CircoloAnzia1:00.53.02 (in a North-Eastern dialect)

1 Clara: *ti te sei* ((to Flavia))
you SbClt be-2s
it's your turn

2 Flavia: ((finishes gathering cards and starts shuffling))

((2 minutes omitted during which
Flavia continues shuffling the cards))

3 Clara: *da' chi che te le le:vo vei*
give-IMP-2s here that you-DT them lift-1s PCL
give them here so that I cu:t them for you

4   ((no uptake by Flavia who is calling out to a
              friend on the other side of the room))

          ((15 seconds omitted))

5 Clara: *da' chi che levo dai*
           give-IMP-2s here that lift-1s PCL
           give {them} here so that I cut

6 Flavia: ((stops shuffling))

7 Flavia: -> *alza.* ((puts the cards in front of Clara))
           lift-IMP-2s
           cut.

8 Clara: ((cuts the cards))

In line 1, Clara enacts the game's rules in the talk (cf. Wootton, 1997, p. 8), and makes explicit the course of action to follow, where Flavia's shuffling will be followed by Clara's cutting, as she is the player on Flavia's right. A few lines later, Flavia's target request (*alza* 'cut') mobilizes Clara to perform a relevant component of this larger course of action. The same can also be said of two turns that are addressed by Clara to Flavia earlier in the sequence (lines 3 & 5). Although the design of these turns may partly characterize them as offering a service (*da' chi che te le le:vo vei* 'give {them} here so that I cu:t them for you'), the first relevant next action they mobilize is that Flavia stops shuffling and passes the cards to Clara. Before line 3, Flavia has been shuffling for 2 min already while the players' chatting has been holding up the progress of the game. Clara's turns in lines 3 and 5 can, therefore, be analyzed as requests made to move the project forward, to both of which an account is appended articulating the organizational structure of the project itself (*che te le le:vo vei* 'so that I cu:t them for you' and *che levo dai* 'so that I cut').[5]

Participants' joint commitments to structured bits of everyday interaction apply not only to games, but also to other routinized moments of social life, such as the start of a meal. Let us go back to example (2), reported here in extended form as (8). When the extract begins, Aldo has momentarily gone to the kitchen to bring back some crockery from the dining room. Mum has started putting stewed lamb on the plate of one of the diners, which is held up by Agata (Aldo's sister):

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[5]The same function (enacting the organizational structure of an underlying project) can be assigned to 22 analogous accounts appended to as many imperatives in the collection (the remaining 48 are bare imperatives). The presence of these accounts cannot be gone into here. An analysis of why, in a minority of cases, the speaker "points out" the reason for action will, no doubt, bring further insight into the social mechanisms governing imperative formulations of requests.

(8) PranzoMarani:00.16.36

  1 Mum: *incomincio con un primo giro.*
            begin-1s with a first round
            I'll begin with a first r<u>ou</u>nd

  2   (1.3)/((continues to put lamb on plate))

  3 Mum: *o:h,* ((to Agata))
            hey,

  4 Agata: ((passes plate to her neighbour))

  5 Mum: [*incomincio con un primo giro¿*
            begin-1s with a first round
            I'll begin with a first round¿

  6   [((Aldo walks back into the dining room))

  7 Agata: ((holds up her own plate while Mum puts lamb on it))

  8 Mum: *dopo ve ne do un altro* (*giro*)
            after you(p)-DT PrtClt give-1s one other round
            then I'll give you another (round)

            ((10 seconds omitted during which Aldo takes
              his seat and lays his table napkin on his lap))

  9 Mum: -> *Aldo passami il piatto.*
            Aldo pass-IMP-2s=me the plate
            Aldo pass me the plate.

10 Aldo: ((passes plate to her))

            ((16 seconds omitted))

11 Mum: ((passes plate back to Aldo))

12 Aldo: grazie
            thanks

In line 1, Mum publicly announces her role as the distributor of the food. A few seconds later, in line 5, she calls attention again to the ongoing portioning while Aldo is walking back into the room. Notice that a "first round" projects that all diners are about to get a portion. Given that both Agata and her neighbor (a guest) have received their meals (lines 4–7), and excluding Mum and Dad (who is still in the kitchen), Aldo can be expected to be the next in line to be served. By the time Mum utters line 9, Aldo has taken his seat and has laid his table napkin on his lap. Immediately prior to the request, this bit of Aldo's behavior

is a basis for Mum to assume his compliance, as it renews the valence of Aldo's commitment to start-of-meal procedures and publicly displays that he is attuned to the next relevant step of the activity.

Before moving to one last example, an important aspect of the previous request turns should be emphasized. The kind of environment in which imperative requests occur, a joint project, is often characterized by the projectability of the actions in progress and by the already-established focus of participants on their online development. This has a bearing on the linguistic design of the utterances deployed to manage what is being done. In the prior examples, the request utterances *metti giù* 'put down' (5), *tieni questo* 'hold this' (6), *alza* 'cut', and *da' chi* 'give here' (7) either do not contain an overt object or encode it with a deictic pronoun. Over 60% ($n = 43$ out of 70) of the imperative requests collected involve the pronominalization, or ellipsis, of the arguments of the action verb. This fact directly reflects the greater common ground generally assumed by requesters in these sequences, and is evidence of the joint engagement already established with their requestees. This contrasts, as we shall see, with the way *Mi X?* requests are constructed and, therefore, emerges as an important form of evidence for the distinctive interactional configurations that underlie the usage of the two strategies. In this regard, compare the two requests for a plate in (1) and (2). The use of the definite article *il* 'the' to refer to the plate in example (1) signals that Aldo's plate is identifiable by him as the only relevant one. On the other hand, the use of the indefinite article in *un piattino* 'a (small) plate' in (2) indicates that the referent was not previously known, focussed on, or salient to the recipient (among others, see Chafe, 1994, pp. 98, 284).

The final example in this section allows us to expand our discussion of the collective ownership of the projects to which imperative requests relate. In extract (9), participants are involved in the preparation of a large family dinner. Furio is grinding Parmesan cheese beside Mirko. After about 30 s of grinding, in line 1, Furio asks Mirko whether the cheese has been ground finely enough:

(9) CucinaCavour:00.37.48

1 Furio: *così Mirko?*
             like this Mirko?

2 Mirko: *basta basta*
             suffice-3s suffice-3s
             enough enough

3 Furio: ((switches grinder off))

4 Mirko: -> *me- mettilo in un barattolo di quelli di vetro* ( )
                 put-NnPst-2s=it in one jam.pot of those of glass
             pu- put it in one of those glass jars ( )

5 Furio: *dove sono?* ((looks up at the shelf))
        where be.3p
        where are they?

6 Mirko: (*quassù o*) ( ) ((looks up at the shelf))
        (up here or) ( )

7 Furio: *bè 'scolta lo mettiam dopo*,
        PCL listen-IMP-2s it put-1p after
        well listen we'll put it in later,

8 Mirko: *vabè come vuoi*
        PCL as want-2s
        alright as you want

After Furio switches off the grinder in compliance with Mirko's assessment (lines 2 & 3), Mirko's imperative (line 4) mobilizes Furio to the next move that is relevant at that point. Following the participants' joint search for glass jars in lines 5 and 6, the design of Furio's proposal in line 7 (*lo mettiamo dopo* 'we'll put it in later') contains an important element signalling the shared nature of the task. The first-person plural inflection is evidence that he understands grinding the Parmesan as a project that he and Mirko are doing together. Also, it offers an example of how the collective ownership of a project can be displayed. *Lo mettiamo dopo* 'we'll put it in later' leaves unspecified whether Furio or Mirko is going to complete the job, thus evidencing that both of them may be responsible for it. Not only is the cheese owned by both of them, so is the set of actions that need to be taken on it (cf. Lerner & Kitzinger, 2007; and Wootton, 1997, pp. 152–153).

    Throughout my collection of imperative requests, other similar details of the talk orient to the "togetherness" of what is being done and to the fact that the requested behavior is contributing to goals that are shared by participants. As another example, recall the account in line 3 of extract (7): *da' chi <u>che te le le:vo vei</u>* 'give {them} here so that I cu:t them for you'. Here, Clara uses the dative particle *te* 'for you', which directly encodes an other-than-self beneficiary of the project of which the request is part. In the analysis of requests (5) and (6), too, it was noted that, although the actions requested may be "good for the speaker" in a most immediate sense, they are also in the service of a common achievement. By contrast, as we see in the following section, *Mi X?* requests launch individual projects that serve unilateral outcomes. This is reflected, first and foremost, in the explicit marking of their self-directed nature through the turn-initial dative pronoun *mi* 'to/for me'.

    There are cases in which first-person singular pronominal elements enter into the construction of imperative requests, too. However, rather than index a self-

directed transaction, their function here seems to be constrained to the argument structure requirements of the predicate. By contrast, the *Mi X?* collection includes several cases where the *mi* pronoun is not grammatically required, and is exclusively inserted to encode the speaker as instigator and recipient of the requested behavior (more on this later). This extra-argumental use of *mi* is absent from the collection of imperatives. In the dataset used for this article, all cases where *-mi* is part of an imperative construction (15 out of 70) are cases where it is required as a dative object of the verb. This is shown in Mum's request *passami il piatto* 'pass me the plate' in example (8), which arises as part of her serving the diners and which is publicly acknowledged as such by Aldo's *grazie* 'thanks' in line 12. The *-mi* clitic pronoun in Mum's turn is grammatically motivated by the construction of the verb *passare* 'to pass', which normally requires a dative object.[6]

In this section, I have discussed the bearing of two intertwining interactional dimensions on the formulation of here-and-now, low-cost requests. The first concerns their level of integration into a larger course of action, and the second concerns the latter's ownership. The imperative format is used when a request grows out of a project that is already committed to by both requester and recipient. By "signing up" to a joint project, a participant signs up for all congruent behaviors that are implied by it[7] and will, therefore, be expected to comply with an action requested by a co-participant that is consistent with or necessary to its accomplishment. A speaker's selection of the imperative format is fitted to such an interactional environment in that an imperative calls for neither verbal acceptance nor refusal, but simply for nonverbal compliance. This is discussed in the last section as the core meaning of an imperative predication, and it is supported by the fact that imperative requests are followed by their immediate fulfillment, without any linguistic response (examples 5, 6, 7, & 8) or by other kinds of next-position actions that are neither acceptance nor refusal tokens (e.g., the repair initiation in (9)).

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[6]A preliminary survey conducted on a new and larger dataset (30 hr of video recordings) revealed that the imperative can, in fact, be used with a benefactive *-mi* (not required by the argument structure of the predicate). Although still furthering an action trajectory that is already on the table, in these cases, the request appears to serve a more unilateral outcome. These limited cases form a marked subset of imperative requests. This is evidenced by the fact that their turn design includes mitigating devices such as *per piacere* 'please', *un'attimo* 'one second', and others, which are absent from the collection of bilateral imperatives examined in this article. These cases will need to be accounted for in further analyses. However, the fact that speakers systematically mark the bare imperative construction with pragmatic mitigators indicates that they constitute a different category from the larger set of imperatives described here.

[7]Thanks to Nick Enfield for suggesting this terminology.

MI X? INTERROGATIVES

Grammatical Description

Much of the work on interrogative requests (Curl & Drew, 2008; Heinemann, 2006; Searle, 1975; Wootton, 2005) has focussed on "yes/no" questions constructed with modal verbs (e.g., "can/could" and "will/would"). These constructions literally question the ability or willingness of the recipient to perform an action, and can be used for requesting in Italian, too. The interrogative construction that is in focus here, however, is a different type of yes/no question. A *Mi X?* utterance does not contain any modal verb. Rather, it simply questions an act on the part of the recipient. In addition, it contains a turn-initial dative pronoun *mi* 'to/for me' expressing that the action in question is one directed to the speaker:

(10)

Mi   leggi   un libro
me-DT read-NnPst-2s   a   book
"{Will} you read a book for me?"

The turn-initial *mi* can function as the indirect (or, in a few cases, the direct) object of the verb. At other times, it is inserted as an extra-argumental particle in which case, it can be described as an "ethical dative" or a "benefactive" marker encoding reference to the person who will gain from, or who is most directly concerned about, the action in question. The verb always comes after *mi*, and is inflected for the second-person (singular or plural) present indicative (i.e., simple present declarative mood) or conditional.

The interrogative nature of the construction is formally marked by the intonation contour with which it is normally uttered. The contour is typically either a *low rise* or a *rise–fall*, both of which are employed to ask yes/no questions in Italian and are distinct from the *falling* contours used in delivering declarative utterances (M. Grice & Savino, 2003; Rossano, 2010; Rossi, 2011).[8]

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[8]Excluding extra-sentential, turn-final elements like tags, the Italian language lacks any syntactic or morphological means for distinguishing polar interrogative from declarative sentence types. For this study, an analysis was carried out, both perceptual and acoustic, of the intonation contour of *Mi X?* utterances (for which I am indebted to Francisco Torreira and Giusy Turco, Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen, The Netherlands). Of the 26 instances collected (leaving aside 3 cases where noise made a reliable judgment impossible), 12 were produced with a *low rise* and 10 with a *rise–fall* contour.

Mi X? Requests

As discussed earlier, the *Mi X?* format shares with the imperative a common domain of use: They are both normally employed to request low-cost actions that are relevant to a here-and-now purpose or need, or to request for the transfer of shared goods. In this section, within the context of this commonality, I argue that *Mi X?* interrogatives appear in sequences of interaction that differ in important ways from those in which imperative requests occur.

Although a number of *Mi X?* requests appear when participants have been disengaged from each other, others occur in situations where requester and recipient are already effectively doing something together. As evidenced by example (2), which is taken from the very same context as example (1), the way in which equally immediate and effortless actions relate to the current business of the participants needs to be assessed in fine analytic detail. Being closely engaged in a task is not in itself a basis for expecting that a request will be imperatively formatted. Rather, the crucial factor is how exactly the request relates to what is already being done. A *Mi X?* format conveys that what is requested is not part of an undertaking that is already shared with the requestee but, rather, that is part of something which is independently initiated by the requester. This means that when this request type is used in a context where participants are already both involved in doing something (e.g., chatting), the requested action (e.g., passing some chewing gum) is not integral to what is ongoing, but is part of a new, unrelated project.

In example (11), Anna and Diego (a couple) are talking about recent get-togethers with friends at a pub:

(11) Diego&Anna:00.51.20

1 Diego: *no: il venerdì*
          no the Friday
          no: on Friday

2   (0.4)

3 Anna: [*(cè ma)*
          PCL but
          (I mean but)

4 Diego: [*cè mercoledì e venerdì sarà* [( )
          PCL Wednesday and Friday be-FUT-3s
          I mean it should be Wednesday and Friday ( )

5 Anna: [*eh allora il venerdì*
                                  PCL then the Friday
                                  well then on Friday

6   (1.4)

7 Anna: *era il venerdì: e:::,*
               be-IPF-3s the Friday and
               it was on Friday and:::,

8   -> *mi dai mi passi una:: i-a- vigorsol?* ((points))
               me-DT give-2s me-DT pass-2s one Vigorsol
               {will} you give {will} you pass me a::: i-a- Vigorsol?[9]

9 Diego: ((turns, reaches out and gets the pack of chewing gum))

               ((17 seconds omitted of jokes about the owner of the pack
               of chewing gum, their host, who is not present in the room))

10 Anna: *bè al massimo siamo contenti di riveder Roberto no,*
               PCL at maximum be-1p glad of see.again-INF Roberto no
               well in any case we'll be glad to see Roberto again won't we,

A few minutes before the beginning of the extract, Anna has started telling Diego about a mutual friend. During the telling, some disagreement arises between Anna and Diego on the matter of which day of the week this friend used to go to the pub. By line 5 of extract (11), the issue is settled, and in line 7, Anna resumes the telling. At this point (line 8), a turn is inserted that is sequentially disjunctive with what comes before (Schegloff, 2007, p. 98). Anna's request to pass her a piece of chewing gum is completely detached from what the two participants are currently dealing with. This is evident from its emergence in the midst of her ongoing telling, which gets interrupted. After the request is granted, Anna does not return to the previous, unfinished turn. Moments later, however, she resumes the interrupted line of talk (line 10).

The unrelatedness of the request to the current project of the participants limits the recipient's ability to anticipate any aspect of the new course of action being initiated. Unlike sequences in which an already-established mutual focus allows participants to heavily rely on common ground, in these cases, the requester needs to provide the requestee with all the new information required to understand what the goal is. This weaker projectability of the requested action is directly reflected in the fact that in more than 80% ($n = 21$ out of 26) of *Mi X?* utterances, the arguments of the action verb are constructed with full noun phrases (see examples 11, 12, 13, & 14), rather than more presupposing forms, such as pronouns. This neatly contrasts with what we find in imperative sequences, where arguments are often pronominalized or ellipsed (see the previous discussion of this topic).

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[9]A brand of chewing gum.

The next case gives us a direct comparison with an example from the previous section on imperatives. In example (6), we encountered Sergio, Dino, and Greta chatting in a room while Sergio is dyeing Greta's hair. Example (12) is taken from earlier in the same interaction, before the dyeing process begins. A *Mi X?* format is used by Sergio in line 4 to ask Dino to take over the shaking of the dye bottle:

(12) Tinta:00.02.46

1 Sergio: *e per quanto devo:: shakerare?* ((referring to the dye bottle))
               and for how.much must-1s shake-INF
               and for how long should I keep shaking?

2 Greta: *ma: non c'è scritto <finché non è:: be::n:: (0.5) e::hm::*
             but not ExClt be.3s written until not be.3s well
             well: it isn't specified <until it is:: properly:: u::hm::

3   (0.4) *ma capito no?=*
               but understood no
               well {you} understood me right?

4 Sergio: -> *=dino mi dai il cambio?*
             Dino me-DT give-2s the change
             Dino {will} you take over for me?

5   (0.3)/((Dino raises his gaze to Sergio))

6 Dino: ↑*sì*↑ ((nods))
         ↑**yes**↑

Although at later stages of the same interaction Dino gets actively engaged in the operations surrounding the dyeing task, this excerpt is taken from the very first stages when Dino has not yet become involved. From the moment they arrived in the room, the three participants have been chatting and gossiping while Greta and Sergio have been preparing the tools for the dyeing. Shortly before extract (12), the talk becomes dyadic between Greta and Sergio, focussing on the dye bottle that Sergio is shaking. In line 2, Greta responds to Sergio's enquiry by suggesting that he shake until the content of the dye bottle is well mixed. During their consultation, Dino's lack of involvement in the dyeing operations is evidenced by his body orientation. He is sitting with the upper part of his body sprawled on the table, with one hand holding his head, gazing down (see Figure 2). Dino raises his gaze only after Sergio's request in line 4, which is, in fact, the first occasion in which Dino's help is mobilized. Given his complete disengagement with the dyeing process so far, what Sergio requests of him is

FIGURE 2   Frame from Extract 12, line 3 (color figure available online).

not integral to a shared course of action. Sergio requests that Dino take over doing something that he has been individually engaged in for several minutes (see line 1: *e per quanto devo:: shakerare?* 'and for how long should I keep shaking?')—that is, Sergio requests that Dino relieve him of what has been, until then, his job.

Mi X? requests launch new, independent trajectories that serve individual outcomes. Evidence for this can be found in their linguistic design. The presence of the turn-initial *mi* encodes the self-directed character of the request in the grammatical format itself. In 9 out of 26 cases in the collection, the *mi* pronoun is not required as an argument of the verb, and is specifically inserted to encode the speaker as the beneficiary of the requested behavior (e.g., *mi tiri su la manica?* '{will} you roll up the sleeve for me?' and *mi tagli questo qua?* '{will} you cut this for me?'). Moreover, *Mi X?* sequences often contain further cues, indicating that they are initiated in the interest of the requester as an individual. To illustrate this, we return to example (2), which is reported here in an extended version as (13). Dad's request in line 2 is produced as he walks into the dining room and realizes that there is no saucer for the fruit left for him on the table:

(13) PranzoMarani: 00.27.01

1 Aldo: *io sono andato da loro l' altra sera* ((to Bino))
           I be.1S go-PstPp by them the other evening
           I visited them last night

2 Dad: -> *mi p(hh)assi un* [*pia(hh)tt<u>ino</u>,* ( ) ((entering the room, to Aldo))
           me-DT pass-2s a plate-DIM
           {will} you p(hh)ass me a <u>pla</u>(hh)te, ( )

3 Bino: [*e:h .hhh <u>no</u>:: io:::* ((to Aldo))
                            PCL no I
                            we:ll .hhh <u>no</u>:: I:::

4 Aldo: [((gets a plate from the cupboard behind him))

5 Bino: [*è: da:: da da lunedì che studio giorno e notte*
            be.3s from from Monday that study-1s day and night
            it's:: since:: since I've been studying day and night since Monday

6 Dad: [((chuckles)) *£cenerino è rimasto senza£*
            Cenerino be.3s remain-PstPp without
            £there's none left for Cenerino£

In line 2, Dad interjects into an ongoing conversation between Aldo and his friend Bino, initiating a sequence that has nothing to do with what Aldo is currently doing. The self-directed nature of the request crops up in the jovial account Dad provides in line 6. *Cenerino* is a nickname used by Dad to refer to himself as the "Cinderella" of the household.[10] After having shouldered the burden of distributing the saucers for the fruit to all of the diners (before extract 13 begins), Dad now finds himself without a saucer for himself. The gist of his witty remark is to emphasize this fact. More important, because the lack of plates is registered as affecting only *Cenerino* (i.e., Dad himself), such an account singles him out as the individual promoter and recipient of the transaction.

Consider this last example involving the same speaker, Furio, previously encountered in (9). This time, Furio is in his kitchen with his brother, Michele, and his girlfriend, Sofia. When the extract begins, there is a lull in the talk between Furio and Michele:

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[10]*Cenerino* refers parodically to the fairytale character "Cinderella": a person bound to work for others without receiving any appreciation for it.

(14) BiscottiPome01:00.25.35

1   (4.4)

2 Furio: ↑*mm hhh* ((while chewing))

3   (0.8)/((Furio continues chewing))

4 Furio: -> *Sofia* (.) *mi* ↑*por*↓*ti u-* ((chewing))
            Sofia   me-DT bring-2s
            Sofia   {will} you bring me a-

5   (0.5)/((Furio continues chewing))

6 Sofia: *sì dimmi.*
            yes say-IMP-2s=me-DT
            yes tell me.

7   (0.9)/((Furio finishes chewing and swallows))

8 Furio: -> *un'altra for*↑*che*↓*tta*
            one other fork
            another fork?

9 Sofia: *sì* ((nods))
            yes

10   (0.6)

11 Sofia: *non ti* ↑*pia*↓*ce quella lì,* ((the fork in Furio's hand))
            not you-DT please-3s that there
            you don't like that one?

12 Furio: *no ne voglio due,*
            no PrtClt want-1s two
            no I want two,

13 Sofia: ((chuckles))

In line 4, Furio begins a *Mi X?* turn while chewing his mozzarella, which is left incomplete as he continues chewing (line 5). After Sofia's uptake in line 6, he adds the second part of his unfinished request, which receives an immediate *sì* 'yes' in line 9. Before carrying out the requested action, however, Sofia takes the chance to comment on the fact that Furio already has a fork in his hand (*non ti* ↑*pia*↓*ce quella lì* 'you don't like that one?'), which prompts an account by him in line 12: *No ne voglio due* 'No I want two [forks]'. By asking *non ti* ↑*pia*↓*ce quella lì* 'you don't like that one?', Sofia proffers a possible motive

for Furio's action, thereby displaying less-than-complete access to his motives and, thus, possibly calling these motives into question. This account sequence (lines 11–13) brings to the surface the interactional dimension of ownership.

In terms of ownership, the selection of a *Mi X?* format indicates that the requester is the only participant accountable for the project set forth by the request. Although the requestee takes an active part in the project, her role is limited to serving as the accomplisher of an outcome set out by, and for, the requester alone. The fact that Furio is called on to provide a reason, and the framing of his account in terms of first-person singular volition (*ne voglio due* 'I want two'), points to the fact that the responsibility for having initiated the project is entirely his own, which is also the basis for Sofia's judging and laughing at *him* when she finds that wanting a second fork to cut food is rather awkward (line 13).

Finally, we can appreciate the interactional import of Furio's *ne voglio due* 'I want two' by comparing it to a turn by the same speaker analyzed in the imperative request sequence (9). Here, in contrast to a first-person singular to state an individual reason, the first-person plural marking of Furio's proposal in line 7 (*lo mettiamo dopo* 'we'll put it in later') reflects the shared ownership of the project he is jointly pursuing with Mirko.

To sum up, this section has shown that the *Mi X?* format is used to launch new, self-contained projects that are individually owned by, and imputable to, the requester. Unlike bilateral requests made in jointly committed environments, in *Mi X?* sequences, recipients are recruited to cooperate in a project that is not their own, that they have not already subscribed to, and that, therefore, they cannot be assumed to be compliant with. The interactional meaning of a *Mi X?* interrogative consists of two fundamental components that are fitted to requesting in such an environment: the self-directed nature of the project (*mi* pronoun) and the lack of certainty on the part of the speaker as to whether the recipient will comply with it (interrogative predication). Finally, the interrogative nature of the request also has an important bearing on the kinds of responses that are made relevant next. As illustrated by examples (12), (14), and by another 11 cases in the collection (in total, 50% of the instances; $n = 13$ out of 26), a *Mi X?* request is oriented to as a polar question, which formally allows the requestee to respond to it with acceptance or refusal tokens.

CONCLUSION

Grammatical formats for action can be seen as customary, practiced solutions to recurrent problems in social life (among others, see Thompson & Couper-Kuhlen, 2005). Analyzing speakers' selections between different formats involves identifying the interactional dimensions that are most relevant to those

TABLE 1
System Properties of Imperative and *Mi X?* Requests in Informal Contexts

Low-Cost, Here-and-Now Requests	*Bilateral = Imperative*	*Unilateral = Mi X?*
Relation to what participants are doing	Integral to an already-established project	Launches a new, self-contained project
Ownership	Collective	Individual
Design features	Pronominalization and ellipsis (greater common ground assumed)	Full noun phrases (less common ground assumed)
		Mi 'to/for me'
	Details orienting to collective outcome and shared ownership of the project	Other details orienting to self-directedness and requester's sole ownership of the project
Core meaning	Imperative = A expects B only to comply	Interrogative = A does not know if B will comply
		Mi 'to/for me' = the project is individually owned by A
Relevant response	Immediate fulfillment	Affirmative answer before fulfillment or negative answer

problems. This article has investigated a particular recurrent problem: recruiting others' help in the day-to-day business of informal interaction. More specifically, it has focussed on low-cost, here-and-now requests among Italian intimates and peers, which can be formatted either as imperatives or as *Mi X?* interrogatives. The analysis has shown that, in this context, the selection between the two forms is not motivated by participants' kin relationships or by other kinds of permanent statuses (e.g., age differences).[11] Instead, the relation of the requested action to what participants are doing (i.e., whether the action initiates a new project or furthers an ongoing one), together with the individual or collective ownership of the project to which the action relates, defines two categories of requests. These can be referred to as *bilateral* versus *unilateral* requests (see Table 1).

In the literature, the use of imperatives has already been related to situations where an activity is ongoing (among others, see Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 97; Ervin-Tripp, 1976, p. 35). For the most part, however, this has been superficially motivated by the general "activity-oriented" or "task-focussed" nature of the interaction. As shown on multiple occasions (recall examples 6 and 12 & 8 and 13), a collaborative context is not in itself a basis for expecting that requests will be imperatively formatted. Rather, the crucial variable is the specific relation of

[11]Recall, for example, extracts (6) and (12), where requester and recipient are the very same participants; or examples (8) and (13) where, in both cases, the relation is parent to adult son.

each request to (and its level of integration with) what is already being done by participants. This variable interacts with a second variable, which relates to whether the requested action contributes to *my* (individual) or *our* (collective) course of action—that is, whether it is something that I request *only for me* or *for me and you* together. This point highlights the centrality of a pervasive "me/us problem" in everyday social cooperation (Enfield, 2011a).

I now discuss in more detail the results of this study in terms of the relation between interaction and grammar. Once the function of the imperative and the *Mi X?* formats have been analyzed, an account remains to be given for *why* these specific linguistic resources should be used for these specific functions and not others.

The selection of an imperative for requesting rests on the existence of a joint project that the recipient has previously committed to. This licenses the requester to expect recipient compliance. An imperative predication fits with this in that it anticipates neither refusal nor acceptance, but simply that the request be complied with.[12] This is supported by the fact that <10% (*n* = 6 out of 70) of imperative requests in the data are followed by yes/no tokens.[13] Instead, they are typically followed by the immediate fulfillment of the request, without any linguistic response, or by other kinds of next-position actions that are neither acceptance nor refusal tokens (e.g., repair initiation).

In contrast, 50% (*n* = 13 out of 26) of *Mi X?* requests are followed by yes/no tokens.[14] This suggests that, in *Mi X?* sequences, recipients treat the formal status of the request as a polar question, which can legitimately be answered in either way. When independently initiating a course of action as one individual, a speaker cannot generally assume the recipient's alignment to it. A *Mi X?* format is fitted to such a circumstance in that, whereas the turn-initial *mi* 'to/for me' encodes the self-directed nature of the request, the choice of an *interrogative* format presents the speaker as not knowing whether the recipient will comply. Mobilizing a polar response leaves the sequence formally open to go in both directions (Wootton, 1997, p. 148), which is a way to "give options" to the recipient (cf., among others, Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 172; Ervin-Tripp, 1976, p. 60; Searle, 1975, p. 74; and Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 159).

Request formats are tools for mobilizing cooperation in complex social settings, where different circumstances require different devices to efficiently

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[12]A form which conveys that "A expects B only to comply" potentially fits with another interactional environment: one in which the speaker has the right to impose an action on the recipient by virtue of higher authority. A clear example of this is the parental directives described by Craven and Potter (2010). "A expects B only to comply" is, thus, a meaning that remains constant across different situations and can, therefore, be argued to constitute the core meaning of an imperative.

[13]Three of these yes/no tokens were affirmative (*sì* 'yes'), and three were negative (*no* 'no').

[14]For the yes/no tokens, there were 10 instances of *sì* 'yes', 1 instance of *certo* 'sure', and 2 instances of *no* 'no'.

achieve pragmatic goals while maintaining social affiliation (Enfield, 2009). From this perspective, if I give you the option to grant or refuse your participation in a project that is exclusively mine, I treat you as having a say on your own acts. On the other hand, assuming your compliance with an action required by our project is a way to convey my "trust that you are going to do your part" (Clark, 2006, p. 127). Both approaches—unilateral and bilateral—are pro-social in the right contexts. Italian grammar affords its speakers two devices, imperatives and *Mi X?* interrogatives, to readily encode the two interactional standpoints.

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APPENDIX

Key to Interlinear Glosses

1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, DIM = diminutive suffix, DT = dative, ExClt = existential clitic, F = feminine, GER = gerund, IMP = imperative, INF = infinitive, IPF = imperfect, M = masculine, NnPst = non-past tense, p = plural, PCL = particle, Pr = present tense, ProClt = pronominal clitic, PstPp = past participle, PrtClt = partitive clitic, s = singular, SbClt = subject clitic.

In the absence of other glosses (GER, IMP, INF, IPF, NnPst, and PstPp), the unmarked verb tense is present indicative (simple present declarative).