

Responding to pre-requests: The organisation of *hai x* ‘do you have x’ sequences in Italian



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Abstract

Among the strategies used by people to request others to do things, there is a particular family defined as *pre-requests*. The typical function of a pre-request is to check whether some precondition obtains for a request to be successfully made. A form like the Italian interrogative *hai x* ‘do you have x’, for example, is used to ask if an object is available — a requirement for the object to be transferred or manipulated. But what does it mean exactly to make a pre-request? What difference does it make compared to issuing a request proper? In this article, I address these questions by examining the use of *hai x* ‘do you have x’ interrogatives in a corpus of informal Italian interaction. Drawing on methods from conversation analysis and linguistics, I show that the status of *hai x* as a pre-request is reflected in particular properties in the domains of preference and sequence organisation, specifically in the design of *blocking responses* to the pre-request, and in the use of *go-ahead* responses, which lead to the expansion of the request sequence. This study contributes to current research on requesting as well as on sequence organisation by demonstrating the response affordances of pre-requests and by furthering our understanding of the processes of sequence expansion.

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Keywords: Requests; Pre-requests; Interrogative; Italian; Preference; Sequence organisation

1. Introduction

Any language provides its speakers with multiple ways of making requests. This has long been a topic of interest in various areas of linguistics, psychology and sociology, where much research has been dedicated to understanding how and when different requesting strategies are used (see [Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014](#); [Rossi, 2015a](#) for a recent review). In the vein of this research, the present article examines a requesting strategy referred to as a *pre-request* ([Sacks, 1992:685](#); [Schegloff, 1980:114](#); [Levinson, 1983:356](#); [Schegloff, 2007](#): ch. 4), focussing in particular on the Italian form *hai x* ‘do you have x’ — an interrogative construction asking if the requestee is in possession of an object. This form is

Abbreviations: 1, first person; 2, second person; 3, third person; A, accusative; CMP, complementiser; CN, connective; COND, conditional; D, dative; DIM, diminutive; EX, existential; F, feminine; GER, gerund; IMP, imperative; INF, infinitive; IPF, past imperfect; ITJ, interjection; M, masculine; N, nominative; NAME, proper name; NPST, non-past; P, plural; PCL, particle; PRT, partitive; PST, past; PSTP, past participle; REL, relativiser; S, singular; SCL, subject clitic.

In the absence of other tense/aspect/mood glosses (GER, IMP, INF, IPF, NPST, PSTP), the unmarked verb inflection is Present Indicative (simple present).

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illustrated below, in comparison to two other common forms in Italian informal interaction: the imperative and the simple interrogative (see Rossi, 2012).

Extract 1 DopoProve09-2_293350 (simplified)

1 Magda hai un goccio di latte
 have-2s one drop of milk
 do you have a bit of milk?

2 Ada mh mh:: ((nods))

3 ((walks to kitchen to get milk))

Extract 2 MaraniPranzo_1000470

1 Mum Aldo passami il piatto
 Aldo pass-IMP.2s=1s.D the plate
 Aldo pass me the plate

2 Aldo ((passes plate to Mum))

Extract 3 CampUniTaboo01_172458

1 Beata mi dai anche a me un pezzo di scottex
 1s.D give-2s also to 1s.D one piece of kitchen.paper
 will you give a piece of kitchen paper to me too?

2 Franco sì ((turns to get kitchen paper))
 yes

Different forms of requesting have different interactional properties that make them appropriate in certain contexts and not in others. An imperative form, for example, makes relevant the immediate fulfilment of the request and is used when the requester can assume the requestee's compliance (Wootton, 1997; Craven and Potter, 2010; Rossi, 2012; Zinken and Ogiermann, 2013). A simple interrogative, on the other hand, is a form that is legitimately responded to with acceptance before fulfilment or with a negative answer. Such a form conveys that the requestee's compliance is not assumed (see also Searle, 1975:74–75; Ervin-Tripp, 1976:60; Brown and Levinson, 1987:172, among others).

A *hai x* 'do you have x' utterance is similar to other interrogatives in that it makes the fulfilment of the request contingent upon the requestee's response. At the same time, *hai x* differs from other request forms in the kinds of objects it targets. Whereas forms like imperatives and simple interrogatives are used to request objects that are known to be available — the object is usually visible in the immediate environment, as in Extracts 2 and 3 — *hai x* is used when the requested object is not visible and its availability is uncertain. The *availability* of an object is a necessary requirement for it to be transferred or manipulated — a material as well as social contingency that enables a prospective transaction, and related to other interactional dimensions investigated in this special issue such as *ownership* and *control* (see Dixon, 2015; Zinken, 2015). Without availability, no request can normally be made about an object. The function of a *hai x* interrogative is therefore to check a precondition for a request — in other words, to make a *pre-request*.

But what does it mean exactly to make a pre-request? What difference does it make for the interaction compared to issuing a request proper? In this article, I show that the status of *hai x* 'do you have x' as a pre-request is reflected in special properties in the domains of preference and sequence organisation.

In section 3.2, I illustrate a first property concerning negative responses. Answering 'no' to *hai x* does not tender a rejection of the request, but indicates that the precondition upon which the request is contingent does not obtain — this is analysed as a *blocking response* (Schegloff, 2007:30). The finding here is that, even though blocking responses to *hai x* are structurally dispreferred, they are not designed as such — that is, they lack features such as delayed production, turn-initial prefaces, hesitations, and accounts (see Heritage, 1984:265–280; Schegloff, 2007: ch. 5; Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013).

Among the request forms occurring in this data, *hai x* ‘do you have x’ interrogatives are not very frequent (3.5%, $n = 12/339$) if compared to high-frequency forms like imperatives (36.6%, $n = 124/339$). They are however the second most frequent interrogative form, following simple interrogatives (‘will you x’, 6.2%, $n = 21/339$). This count is based on a core 5-h sample (15-min segments from 20 different recordings), representative of a broad range of settings and speakers, in which all requests were identified ($n = 339$). In the rest of the article, the statistics reported are based on a larger sample, which includes the 20 recordings of the core sample as well as 25 other recordings, for a total of 25 h of interaction. This sample yields 36 *hai x* ‘do you have x’ interrogatives and 79 simple interrogatives.

I draw on methods from conversation analysis and linguistics to analyse the sequences of action in which *hai x* interrogatives occur and the language used within them. The analysis focuses on *hai x* interrogatives in relation to two domains of social organisation: *preference* and *sequence* organisation.

3. Analysis

3.1. The *hai x* ‘do you have x’ form

The *hai x* form refers to a construction built around the auxiliary verb *avere* ‘have’ inflected for second person — literally, ‘you have x’. In standard Italian, the interrogative nature of the construction is formally marked by intonation. A description of the contours used in the variety spoken in the present corpus can be found in Rossi (2015b). In some of the Romance languages that coexist with Italian, however, interrogatives may also be marked morphosyntactically (see Lusini, 2013). In the Trentino language, for example, which is occasionally spoken in this corpus, this is done by moving subject pronominal elements from pre-verbal (*te gai* ‘you have’) to post-verbal position (*ga-t* ‘do you have’). Examples of this can be found in Extracts 9, 10, 14, and 17 below.

3.2. Blocking responses are not constructed as dispreferreds

The organisation of *preference* is one of the cornerstones of social interaction (Heritage, 1984:265–280; Schegloff, 2007: ch. 5; Pomerantz and Heritage, 2013). Underlying the concept of preference is the fact that participants have options: they can design turns in different ways, produce different types of actions, initiate or promote different sequences of action. Crucially, these alternatives, at any given point of an interaction, are not symmetrical (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973:314). Preference organisation refers to the principles that regiment people’s choices among nonequivalent alternative conducts and forms of conduct.

An important domain regimented by preference is the construction of responses to first pair parts. Actions such as questions, requests and assessments make relevant at least two response types, one of which aligns with the action of the first pair part (answer, fulfilment, agreement), and is thus *preferred*, and another which does not align with it (non-answer, rejection, disagreement), and is thus *dispreferred*. The basic normative principle of this organisation is that preferred and dispreferred responses take different shapes. Dispreferred responses are structurally more complex than preferred ones: they are typically delayed, prefaced by linguistic components that mark their dispreferred status, and include an account of why the preferred response cannot be delivered. This contrasts with the concise and “unvarnished” design of preferred responses (Heritage, 1984:266).

Consider the following two examples, illustrating rejections of requests formatted as simple interrogatives (‘will you x’).

- Extract 6** BiscottiPome01_1884369
- 1 Azio Furio mi presti le chiavi del garage
NAME 1s.D lend-2s the keys of-the garage
Furio will you lend me your garage keys
- 2 (3.6)
- 3 Azio non ce le ho
not EX 3P.A have-1s
I don't have mine
- 4 (0.3)

5 Furio eh uh eh sono mi- anche le mie chiavi di cat- di casa
 PCL uh PCL be.3P also the my keys of of house
well uh well they're m- also my c- house keys

Extract 7 CampGioPrep_2666154

1 Paola mi prendi un bicchiere di acqua
 1s.D take-2s one glass of water
will you fetch me a glass of water?

2 (1.1)

3 Clara ma mm c'è l'Orfeo per questo
 but mm EX=be.3s the=NAME for this
but mm there's Orfeo for this

These examples illustrate the typical features of dispreferred responses: the rejection turn includes an account for not complying, it is preceded by prefatory particles (*eh* 'well', *ma* 'but') and contains hesitations (*uh*, *mm*); in Extract 6 it is also noticeably delayed, which prompts the requester to pursue the request by giving a reason ('I don't have mine', line 3). What we see here is in line with the findings of many other studies looking at the design of rejections and other dispreferred responses (see [Atkinson and Drew, 1979:58–61](#); [Heritage, 1984:265–266](#); [Pomerantz, 1984](#); [Raymond, 2003:947–950](#); [Schegloff, 2007:63–73](#); [Kendrick and Torreira, 2014](#)).

Now compare the rejections just examined with the following negative responses given to *hai x* 'do you have x' interrogatives.

Extract 8 CampGioPlatea_1145281

1 (2.3)

2 Paolo non è che avete un fazzoletto
 not be.3s CMP have-2P one handkerchief
don't you guys happen to have a handkerchief?

3 (0.6)

4 Pamela io no
 1s.N no
I don't

5 Carla usat (hh) o
 used
{a} u(hh) sed {one}

Extract 9 Circolo01_2718316

1 Silvia suo ((points to Clara))
 hers
it's hers

2 (0.6)

3 Flavia uh ti ghe nat ((to Bianca))
 2s.N EX PRT=have-2s=2s.SCL
uh do you have any?

4 Bianca [no ((shakes head))
no

5 Clara [mi ghe n'ho uno
 1s.N EX PRT=have-1s one
I have one

Extract 10 Circolo01_1279726

1 Silvia ((plays a card))

2 Flavia gat da nar avanti ((points to card combination))
 EX=have-2s=2s.SCL to go-INF forward
do you have anything to go on {here}?

3 Bianca ((shakes head))

What is immediately apparent is that negative responses to *hai x* lack the features that characterise rejections of simple interrogative requests, and of other requests more generally. In Extract 8, Paolo's *hai x* ('don't you guys happen to have a handkerchief?') is responded to by one of the requestees with a simple negative phrase (*io no* 'I don't'), while the other requestee says that she only has a 'used' handkerchief, which amounts to having no usable one. In both Extracts 9 and 10, Flavia asks Bianca if she has a certain card for her to make a move. In the first case, Bianca responds with a bare 'no', accompanied by a head shake; in the second, the response consists only of a head shake. All these negative responses are packaged as one brief unit, produced with no noticeable delay, and without prefaces, hesitations or accounts for not complying. This pattern, and the way it contrasts with the construction of rejections of simple interrogative requests, is quantitatively supported, as shown in Table 1.¹

Simple and *hai x* interrogatives are both used for requesting objects. Both forms are relevantly responded to by providing an object for the requester, which leads to a successful completion of the sequence. In terms of preference as a property of sequence structure, negative responses to simple and *hai x* interrogatives are both dispreferred, as they do not support the accomplishment of the activity (Heritage, 1984:265; Schegloff, 1988:453, 2007:59–63). Why, then, are dispreferred responses to *hai x* not designed as such? Although people do sometimes produce undelayed and unmitigated dispreferred responses in order to add a special meaning to their action (e.g. convey annoyance or distress), this is not the case here. Social solidarity is not threatened in any of the above examples. Rather, responding with a simple and immediate 'no' appears to be the normatively expected, default way to halt the progression of a *hai x* sequence.

The answer to this puzzle, I argue, lies in the specific nature of the action performed by a *hai x* interrogative. While the business of a sequence initiated by *hai x* is to request an object, the particular action implemented by *hai x* is not a request but a *pre-request*. The typical function of a *pre-request* is to check whether a precondition obtains for a request to be made successfully (Levinson, 1983:346–347). This allows the requester to avoid rejection by withholding the request if the precondition is not met (Levinson, 1983:357; Schegloff, 2007:31). What this means is that a negative response to a *pre-request* such as *hai x* is not a response to the projected request, therefore not a rejection. Answering 'no' to a *hai x* interrogative is instead best analysed as a *blocking response* (Schegloff, 2007:30), which conveys that the precondition for the request is not satisfied (i.e. the object is not available). A blocking response to *hai x* is not about the disposition of

¹ The numbers reported here refer to cases in which the requestee clearly conveys that they are not going to fulfil the (projected) request. Cases in which the request was not heard, ignored, or otherwise dealt with (e.g. 'wait a second') are not included. As for the design features, prefaces include turn-initial components such as *eh* 'well', *ma* 'but' and *uhm*, while hesitations include inter-turn *uh*, *uhm*, and pauses; finally, accounts refer to the provision of a reason for not fulfilling the (projected) request or — in responses to *hai x* — for not having the requested object. The differences in the use of prefaces and accounts are statistically significant ($p < .05$, Fisher's exact test). This quantitative survey does not include measurements of delay, as this is methodologically more complex to implement (Kendrick and Torreira 2014), all the more so with face-to-face interaction data. However, tendencies are visible on the basis of the measurements made by hand for transcription.

Table 1

Negative responses to *hai x* interrogatives lack the features that characterise rejections, which are instead abundantly found in negative responses to simple interrogatives.

Negative responses	Prefaces	Hesitations	Accounts
to simple interrogative ($n = 10/79$)	60.0% ($n = 6$)	40.0% ($n = 4$)	90.0% ($n = 9$)
to <i>hai x</i> interrogative ($n = 12/36$)	8.3% ($n = 1$)	16.7% ($n = 2$)	25.0% ($n = 3$)

the requestee towards the foreseeable request, but about a state of affairs that precludes the accomplishment of the activity. As such, it does not have the same status as other dispreferred responses.

Other interrogative forms like the simple interrogative ('will you x') and *puoi x* 'can you x' do not have the same response affordances as *hai x* 'do you have x' because they do not function as pre-requests. These forms are not understood as enquiring about a precondition upon which the request is contingent. This is evidenced also by the fact that they cannot be normatively responded to "literally" – that is, with only a confirmation that the precondition they formally question obtains (i.e. the requestee's willingness or ability to do something). Such a response option is a prerogative of pre-requests, as we see in the next section.

3.3. Go-ahead responses lead to sequence expansion

In this section, I look at two types of responses that support the accomplishment of the course of action initiated by a *hai x* interrogative: (1) the immediate fulfilment of the projected request, and (2) the *go-ahead* response (Schegloff, 2007:30). These two types of responses give rise to alternative types of sequences: a minimal sequence and an expanded one. Before going into their analysis, however, it will be useful to introduce some of the key concepts from the literature on sequence organisation (Schegloff, 1968, 2007; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; Levinson, 1983: ch. 6).

An adjacency pair such as a request sequence can be *expanded* to include additional sequences. There are three main types of additional sequences, which are defined on the basis of their structural position: a *pre-sequence* takes place before the base sequence; an *insert sequence* takes place between the first pair part and the second pair part of the base sequence; and a *post-expansion* (or *post-sequence*) takes place after the second pair part of the base sequence. These three types of additional sequences have distinct interactional functions.

A pre-sequence generally prepares the ground for a prospective base sequence to be produced. This includes obviating potential obstacles that may affect the successfulness or appropriateness of a prospective action. A pre-invitation, for example, checks the availability of the recipient for an activity (e.g. *are you doing anything tonight?*) (Sacks, 1992:685–692), while a pre-announcement can check the newsworthiness of a certain piece of news before a telling is made (e.g. *you know what happened today?*) (Terasaki, 2004 [1976]). Preliminary actions such as these allow their producer to avoid an infelicitous prospective action if conditions are not met (e.g. the invitee is busy or the recipient already knows the news) and enable the responder to anticipate what is coming. The occurrence of the prefigured action is conditional on the response given to the pre-sequence initiating turn, where the responder has the opportunity to either encourage or discourage the subsequent production of the base first pair part (Schegloff, 2007:41).

Pre-requests are another type of preliminary action whereby the requester checks whether some precondition obtains for a request to be made successfully (Levinson, 1983:357; see also Merritt, 1976). When wanting to support the course of action initiated by a pre-request such as *hai x* 'do you have x', the responder has two main alternatives.² One is to give a *go-ahead* response (Schegloff, 2007:30), illustrated in the example below (from Merritt, 1976:324).

Extract 11 (Merritt 1976:324)

- 1 A Hi. Do you have uh size C flashlight batteries?
- 2 B Yes sir
- 3 A I'll have four please
- 4 B ((turns to get))

² The response alternatives to a pre-request include also pre-emptive offers (Sacks, 1992:685; Schegloff, 1979a:49) and hedging responses (Schegloff, 2007:31). Since neither type occurs in my data, they are not discussed here.

In line 2, the responder confirms that the target object is available, and therefore that the questioned precondition on the request obtains. In so doing, he forwards the sequence to the request proper (*I'll have four please*), which is then fulfilled. Since early analyses of such cases (Merritt, 1976), it has been observed that, in lieu of playing out this four turn sequence in full, the responder may short-circuit it by fulfilling the request in next position, as in the following example fulfilling the request in next position, as in the following example (from Sinclair, 1976:60).

Extract 12 (Sinclair, 1976:60)

1 S Have you got Embassy Gold please?

2 H Yes dear ((provides))

Cases like 12 have been described as “elliptical” (Merritt, 1976:326) or “truncated” sequences (Levinson, 1983:362, 2013:111). Such an analysis implies that the four turn sequence in Extract 11 is the baseline structure: the unmarked, “canonical” way (Levinson, 1987:88) in which a sequence initiated by a pre-request unfolds. Consequently, reduced two turn structures like 12 should be seen as departures from the baseline. At the same time, however, it is widely agreed that a minimal sequence in which the projected request is fulfilled in next position is the *most preferred* one, as it pre-empts the need to make a request proper (Levinson, 1983:361; Schegloff, 2007:90).³

So the standard analysis of pre-request sequences points to a mismatch between preference and structural markedness. The least preferred form of these sequences is also the “full canonical form”, whereas the most preferred one is contracted and therefore marked. But is it really so? Does this generally reflect the structural organisation of the actions that follow a pre-request?

The standard analysis of Merritt and Levinson is based on pre-request sequences occurring in service encounters. In cases like Extract 11, it may not be possible for the server to fulfil the request until the customer specifies how many batteries she wants. This seems to be common in encounters where the quantity or variety of the good wanted cannot be anticipated (Merritt, 1976:340; Levinson, 1983:362–363; see also Clark, 1979). When we look at pre-request sequences in informal settings, however, a different picture emerges. In everyday interaction among family and friends, the requests projected by pre-requests are mostly transparent, which means that they can be immediately fulfilled.⁴ Here, the immediate fulfilment of the projected request is not only the most preferred but also, I argue, the unmarked trajectory. The evidence for this comes from the fact that, whereas minimal sequences run off in an unproblematic and straightforward way, non-minimal sequences exhibit interactional turbulence. Here, forwarding the sequence to a request proper becomes a way to defer fulfilment and expose a lack of alignment between participants. So, rather than minimal sequences being *truncations* or *contractions* of the canonical form, it is non-minimal sequences that are best analysed as *expansions* of the unmarked and most preferred form. In what follows, I support this argument with examples of both sequence types, starting with minimal ones, which are the most frequent.⁵

In Extract 13, a group of people are hanging out in the living room. Snacks and drinks are on the table, including beer and juice, but not milk.

Extract 13 DopoProve09-2 293350

1 Magda Ada
NAME
Ada

2 Ada ((looks up))

3 Magda hai un goccio di latte
have-2s one drop of milk
do you have a bit of milk?

³ An analogous argument is made for self-identifications on the telephone (Schegloff, 1979a, 2007:88–90).

⁴ This applies to all cases in my dataset, and arguably to the majority of cases in informal everyday interaction.

⁵ Minimal sequences account for 30.6% of all *hai x* cases ($n = 11/36$), whereas non-minimal sequences account for 22.2% ($n = 8/36$). The 47.2% ($n = 17/36$) of cases that are not classified as either minimal or non-minimal sequences include all 12 cases of negative response (see Table 1), as well as 5 cases that cannot be assigned to any of the other categories, either because the response is not clearly audible, or because it implements an alternative action (the requestee tells the requester where to find the object rather than physically providing it), or because the sequence gets derailed.

4 (0.5)

6 Ada mh mh[:: ((nods))

7 Mina [vuoi il succo ((to Magda))
want-2s the juice
do you want juice?

8 (0.5)

9 Magda [no grazie ()
no thanks ()

10 Ada [((stands up and walks to kitchen))

In line 1, Magda addresses Ada — the group's host — and, after having established eye contact with her (line 2), asks if she has milk, which is not among the beverages available on the table. Ada responds to Magda's *hai x* with a positive polar element (*mh mh*, line 6), accompanied by nodding, and shortly afterwards proceeds to fulfil the request (line 10).

In this context, Magda's question ('do you have a bit of milk?') projects a specific course of action: getting the milk for drinking. Though not currently on the table, milk is a conventional beverage that can be easily asked for among friends. As host of the gathering, Ada can be expected to be aligned with a request that fits into the ongoing activity of consuming refreshments. Given the unproblematic nature of the projected request, there is no reason for Ada not to bring the course of action immediately to completion.

The next example is taken from a card game, in which cards are played by joining them into combinations on the table. Before the extract begins, Clara has passed several cards to her teammate Silvia to be played. While sorting the cards to pass, Clara has temporarily placed some of them on the side. As she comes to the end of her turn, two of these cards — two kings — are still left on the table unplayed. Upon noticing this, Bianca (a member of the opposing team) asks if Clara has three kings.

Extract 14 Circolo01_2250009

1 Clara t'hai fat bem ((to Silvia))
2s.SCL=have-2s do-PSTP well
you did well

2 (0.3)

3 Bianca gat tre- tre re ((tapping on the two kings on the table))
EX=have-2s=2s.scl three three king
do you have three- three kings?

4 (0.6)/((Clara is busy inspecting her cards))

5 Clara me tegn- sì sì ghei dago subito
1s.D keep-1s yes yes 3s.D=3P.A give-1s immediately
I'll kee- yes yes I'll give them to her right away

6 (.)

7 Clara [tre re ((puts cards on the table))
three kings

8 Silvia [ecco
ITJ
there

In order to count for a score, kings must be played in triplets. By asking Clara if she has three kings, Bianca invites her to complete the triplet and play it. In response to Bianca's *hai x*, Clara proceeds to carry out the projected action straightaway. After cutting off the beginning of an unrelated turn ('I'll kee-'), she confirms that she has all the three kings ('yes yes') and commits to giving them to Silvia for them to be played ('I'll give them to her right away'), shortly after which she passes the cards (line 7).

Once again, fulfilling the projected request in next position seems to be the unmarked way to realise the course of action initiated by a *hai x* interrogative. Having previously selected two kings to play, Clara is evidently in accord with Bianca on the need to complete the triplet and end the move. Her response reflects her full alignment with getting the activity accomplished. Note that, both here and in the previous example, fulfilment is preceded by confirmation ('mh mh', 'yes yes yes'). This shows people's understanding of *hai x* as an enquiry to be responded to verbally. *Hai x*, in other words, has a dual nature; it is a request for information that projects a request for action (see Searle, 1975; Clark, 1979:434–436; Schegloff, 2007:76; Levinson, 2013:119, among others). In the data at hand, requestees verbally answer the question in about half of the minimal sequences ($n = 5/11$). The criteria for giving confirmation before fulfilling the request lie beyond the scope of this study, but see Clark (1979) for a model of how this might work.

Consider now a third example, where Aldo and Bino are hanging out after lunch at Aldo's place.

Extract 15 Aldo&Bino_2973469

1 (1.0)

2 Aldo andiamo a fumare un zait intanto
go-NPST-1P to smoke-INF one cigarette meantime
let's go smoke a cigarette in the meantime

3 (0.9)

4 Aldo tu ne hai
2s.N PRT have-2s
do you have any?

5 Bino sì
yes

6 Aldo grande
big
great

7 ((both walk out to hall))

Aldo's *hai x* comes up in the context of a proposal to smoke a cigarette together. Bino responds by confirming that he has cigarettes for both. Shortly after this, the two of them walk out to the hall, where Bino has left his jacket and cigarettes. What is notable in this sequence is Aldo's third-position turn in line 6 ('great'). Before Bino stands up and goes to get the cigarettes, Aldo acknowledges his compliance with the projected request. In so doing, Aldo orients to fulfilment as forthcoming even before he has full evidence of it — in other words, he takes Bino's 'yes' as a commitment to give him a cigarette. This shows an understanding of the sequence as being complete without the need for him to produce a request proper.

In the three cases we have examined so far, the course of action initiated by *hai x* is realised through a two turn structure. After *hai x* is produced, the requestee confirms the availability of the target object and provides it straightaway, that is, in next position. I argue that this sequence type is not only the most preferred (Levinson, 1983:361; Schegloff, 2007:90), but also the canonical way in which a *hai x* pre-request is dealt with in everyday interaction. This status of unmarked sequence type emerges even more clearly when we compare cases such as 13, 14 and 15 with others in which the requestee confirms the availability of the target object in next position but does not proceed to provide it, thus leading to a non-minimal sequence.

Extract 16 is taken from a bit earlier in the same interaction as Extract 15. Aldo and Bino are making plans for an excursion on the snow with friends. Before this extract, they have been talking about the equipment that some of them will bring, including skis for Aldo.

Extract 16

Aldo&Bino_2798871

1 Bino e Silvio o sci o ciaspole vab- vabè quello
 and NAME or skis or snow.shoes PCL PCL that
and Silvio either skis or snow shoes, wel- well that

2 (0.9)

3 Bino tu ce l'hai la slitta con gli sci sotto
 2s.N EX 3s.A=have-2s the sledge with-the skis under
do you have the sledge with the skis underneath?

4 (0.5)

5 Aldo sì
yes

6 Bino integra
intact?

7 Aldo sì (.) però è un po' pesantuccia
 yes but be.3s one bit heavy-DIM
yes but it's a bit heavy

8 (0.7)

9 Bino eh [perché io stavo pensando che se] c'è se adesso è fresco
 PCL because 1s.N stay-IPF-1s think-GER CMP if EX=be.3s if now be.3s fresh
well because I was thinking that if there is, if it's fresh now

10 Aldo [()]

11 (0.6)

12 Bino cè la neve è fresca io c- le mie son tutte da:::
 PCL the snow be.3s fresh 1s.N the my be.3P all for
I mean {if} the snow is fresh, I- my {sledges} are all for:::

13 Aldo mh

14 Bino casomai potresti prestarmela
 in.case can-CND-2s lend-INF=1s.D=3s.A
could you maybe lend it to me?

15 (0.4)

16 Aldo sì sì (.) è che pesa solo quello
 yes yes be.3s CMP weigh-3s only that
yes yes it's just that it's heavy, that's all

17 Bino ma da tirare in su dici
 but to pull-INF in up say-2s
to drag along you mean?

- 18 Aldo eh
PCL
right
- 19 (1.0)
- 20 Aldo eh adesso te la faccio sentir giù
PCL now 2s.D 3s.A make-1s feel-INF down
now I'll bring you downstairs to feel it

Bino's *hai x* is produced in the context of listing the snow gear that each friend will bring to the excursion (line 1). The pre-request clearly projects a request to borrow the sledge with 'skis underneath' from Aldo, a request that can therefore potentially be granted in next position, just like in all cases seen above. This time, however, while confirming the availability of the target object, the requestee does not yet undertake to provide it.⁶ That Aldo is withholding a granting of the projected request becomes even clearer in the follow-up pre-request sequence (lines 6–7), where Bino asks if the sledge is in a sufficient state of repair. Once again, Aldo responds positively to the pre-request ('yes'), but does not show compliance with the projected request. Instead, he raises a potential problem with using the sledge ('but it's a bit heavy'). At this point, Bino begins to build a request proper, starting from the reason why he wants to borrow Aldo's sledge: the snow is fresh and Bino's own sledges do not work well on it (lines 9–12). Note that, after Bino presents his reason, Aldo has yet another opportunity to show compliance, but limits himself to a minimal acknowledgement (*mh*, line 13). At last, Bino comes to delivering an explicit request ('could you maybe lend it to me?'). While eventually accepting the request ('yes yes'), Aldo reiterates his concern about taking that particular sledge, which may be heavy to carry up the mountain.

This example illustrates how the interactional dynamics of a non-minimal pre-request sequence differ from that of a minimal one. Even though the request is transparent, the requestee withholds an immediate granting. He does so by exploiting the response affordances of pre-requests, which — unlike requests — allow him to advance the sequence by giving only a go-ahead. A go-ahead response forces the requester to do extra work to secure compliance. In this case, Bino first produces another pre-request checking on the usability of the sledge, then provides a reason for wanting to borrow it, and finally delivers a request proper. Forwarding the sequence to these additional steps is a way for Aldo to defer granting and allows him to exhibit a lack of alignment with the projected request. Aldo reveals the reason for his hesitance when giving the go-ahead to the second pre-request ('yes but it's a bit heavy', line 7) and then again when granting the request (line 16).

The next example is taken from the same card game as Extract 14. The interaction revolves again around selecting cards to play.

Extract 17 Circolo01 1345578

1 Clara ((discards a card))

2 (2.7)

3 Bianca gat en do ((to Flavia))
EX=have-2s=2s.SCL one two
do you have a two?

4 (0.4)

5 Flavia no (.) gò un uh e- el jolly gò
no EX=have-1s one uh the the joker EX=have-1s
no I have a uh I have a joker

6 (0.9)

⁶ Although the provision of the object cannot physically happen in the next few seconds, it is relevant in the here and now of the interaction, if only slightly delayed. At the end of the extract (line 20), Aldo says that he will 'now' bring Bino downstairs to inspect the sledge.

7 Bianca no ma gat
 no but EX=have-2s=2s.SCL
no but do you have

8 (0.7)/((Bianca points to discard pile))

9 Bianca per cia- per torla quella lì no
 for get- for take-INF=3s that there no
{one} to ge- to take that one, do you?

10 Flavia una ghe nò
 one EX PRT=have-1s
I have one

11 (1.1)

12 Flavia una con en jolly
 one-F with one-M joker
one with a joker

13 (0.8)

14 Bianca e allora (.) ghe n'è dentro do trei ((points to drawing deck))
 and then EX PRT=be.3s inside two three
well then there still two or three in

15 (0.8)

16 Flavia bom ((lays one card))
 PCL
alright

17 ((lays another card))

18 mi fago quel che te me disi ti
 1s.N do-1s that REL 2s.SCL 1s.D say-2s 2s.N
I do what you tell me to

After Clara discards a card, it is Flavia's turn, and her teammate Bianca asks if she has a 'two' to play. The course of action initiated by Bianca's *hai x* is initially blocked by Flavia ('no'), who however hints at another possible move by asserting that she has a 'joker'. Flavia's response turns out to reveal an apparently problematic understanding of Bianca's pre-request and prompts Bianca to do a third position repair (Schegloff, 1992): she reformulates the pre-request and specifies its aim, which is to get hold of the last card on the discard pile (lines 7–9). At this point, Flavia has all the information needed to proceed to fulfil the projected request. But she still does not get on with it. Instead, her response is limited to confirming that she is in possession of the target card ('I have one'), and then, after a silence, to reconfirming that she has both the target card and a joker ('one with a joker'). This puts Bianca in a position to pursue Flavia's compliance (line 14). By asserting that there are still two or three cards of a particular type in the drawing deck, Bianca tries to persuade Flavia that the move she is inviting her to perform is a good one. Note that the fact that Bianca does not specify what move this is indicates that Flavia knows it already, and therefore that Flavia has given a go-ahead response in an environment in which she could have carried out the projected request straightaway.

As we saw in the prior example, a go-ahead response allows the requestee to defer fulfilment while not precluding it. By putting the requester in a position to pursue compliance, the requestee conveys her hesitance about the projected request. The issue here is that Flavia is not keen on using a joker — a valuable card — for this move. This is seemingly resolved by Bianca's pointing out that there are still two or three jokers in the drawing deck (line 14), which induces Flavia

to eventually comply ('alright'). Her acquiescence comes as a result of a negotiation, which has been realised through the expansion of the pre-request sequence. Flavia's final remark ('I do what you tell me to') is a further indication of her reluctance, which has been overcome only by Bianca's persistence.

In a last example, a group of friends, members of a vocal ensemble, are hanging out after their weekly rehearsal. While they are drinking and eating snacks, Magda and Bruna fill out a tax form related to the vocal ensemble. Note that the object requested here, a social security number, is something that every citizen must have. The *hai x* interrogative then refers to whether the requestee has the number *with him* or not.

Extract 18

DopoProve09-2 236068

1 Mina aggiungo 'l Pietro che gò 'l codice fiscale
 add-1s the NAME CN EX=have-1s the code fiscal
I'll add in Pietro, for whom I have the social security number

2 Bruna ah beh ma allora aggiungi anca lori basta domandarghelo
 PCL PCL but then add-NPST-2s also 3P suffice-3s ask-INF=3P.D=3s.A
oh well then add them in too, we just need to ask them for it

3 (1.0)

4 Bruna ce l'avete voi il codice fiscale cari ((to Furio))
 EX 3s.A=have-2P 2P.N the code fiscal dears
do you have the social security number, dears?

5 Furio ((nods))

6 Bruna non carri cari
 not carts dears
not tears, dears

7 Furio ((laughs))

8 ((nods))

9 sì sì
 yes yes
yes {we do}

10 (0.5)

11 Bruna ma da::i hanno un codice fiscale
 but PCL have-2P one code fiscal
no wa::y, they do have a social security number!

12 (0.5)

13 Bruna [pensa tu
 think-IMP.2s 2s.N
fancy that!

14 Mina [ce l'hai a memoria uh (no- o no)
 EX 3s.A=have-2s to memory uh (no or no)
do you know it by heart uh (no- or not)

15 Furio ce l'ho qua però ((puts cake down on table))
 EX 3S.A=have-1s here though
 {no} but I have it here

16 ((searches for social security card in his wallet))

When the extract begins, Mina and Bruna have arrived at a section of the form requiring them to list the founding members of the vocal ensemble, together with their personal details and their social security number. In line 2, Bruna prompts Mina to 'add them in too', by which she refers to Furio and his two brothers — the youngest members of the ensemble. Then, continuing her turn, she anticipates the making of a request for their social security number ('we just need to ask them for it'). After a brief silence, Bruna goes on to produce the target *hai x* interrogative. Although the utterance is addressed to a plurality ('dears'), Furio is the only actual recipient, as his brothers are momentarily not present in the room. Furio is sitting across the table from Bruna, eating cake. Upon hearing Bruna's pre-request, he raises his gaze to her and responds by nodding — confirming that the precondition being enquired about obtains. In lines 6–7, a side sequence takes place in which Bruna topicalises her use of the word *cari* 'dears' and makes a pun on its similarity to another word (a minimal pair). Furio responds to the pun with laughter, after which he reiterates the go-ahead response to Bruna's pre-request ('yes we do', line 9). In so doing, Furio passes up a second opportunity to proceed to fulfil the projected request (giving his social security number to Bruna and Mina).

What happens next sheds further light on the marked status of go-ahead responses in the organisation of everyday pre-request sequences. Seeing that no fulfilment of the projected request is forthcoming, Bruna produces a tease based on the very relation between Furio's response and that which was expected. By producing a mock news receipt ('no way, they do have a social security number!'), she humorously recasts the *hai x* sequence as information-seeking. Under this scenario, Furio has just given her a trivial piece of information, in that every citizen must have a social security number. What is crucial is that the humour arises from a contrast between Bianca's parodic reinterpretation of the foregoing *hai x* sequence with its real purpose: getting the social security number from Furio. Bruna's jovial mockery displays her understanding of Furio's go-ahead responses (lines 5, 8–9) as flouting the normal development of the sequence — that is, as delaying a fulfilment that was expectable in next position to the pre-request.⁷ The course of action comes to a close after Mina pursues Furio's compliance by asking if he knows his social security number by heart (line 14). At this point, Furio responds by fulfilling the projected request.

4. Discussion and conclusion

Hai x 'do you have x' interrogatives have a specific function in the Italian request system: they launch a sequence aimed to request an object possessed by the requestee that may or may not be available. The potential unavailability of the object is a real contingency upon which the request is conditional. This makes the action performed by *hai x* interrogatives a *pre-request* (Sacks, 1992:685; Schegloff, 1980:114; Levinson, 1983:356). In this article, I have been concerned with how the status of *hai x* as a pre-request is reflected in the domains of preference and sequence organisation.

Hai x sequences exhibit two special properties that are not found in other request sequences. The first relates to negative responses to *hai x*, which are defined as *blocking responses* (Schegloff, 2007:30). The finding here is that blocking responses are not designed as dispreferreds. This suggests that, even though — from a structural point of view — blocking responses do not align with the action of the first pair part (Schegloff, 2007:59), they do not have the same status as other dispreferred responses. Why should this be so? The answer seems to lie in the nature of preliminary actions and in their relation to the actions they are preliminary to.

A request proper — implemented, say, through a simple or *puoi x* 'can you x' interrogative — makes compliance contingent on no prerequisite other than the willingness or disposition of the requestee. Rejecting or denying a request is therefore done on the basis of the requestee's choice, however motivated. And if the choice is compelled by reasons beyond the requestee's will, these need to be introduced into the interaction and explained. As such, rejections require qualifying and justifying what would otherwise be a potential infringement of social solidarity (Heritage, 1984:265–280; Brown and Levinson, 1987). A pre-request like *hai x*, on the other hand, anticipates by its very design the possibility of a condition preventing the realisability of a course of action. Blocking such a course of action is not done on the basis of the requestee's individual reasons, but on an eventuality that is already understood by the requester as precluding compliance — which the blocking response simply reports.

⁷ One plausible reason for Furio to delay fulfilment here is that he is busy eating his cake. Responding with only confirmation is consistent with not halting his current activity to engage in another (retrieving his social security card). This is supported by the fact that Furio keeps eating his cake throughout the sequence, and that he eventually puts it down only after Mina pursues his compliance (line 15).

The status of such a responding action can also be captured in terms of reduced *agency*. In most cases of everyday interaction, not being in possession of particular objects — handkerchiefs, lighters, sweets, specific playing cards — is a condition that is beyond a person's control. This means that the requestee's flexibility to determine the outcome of the sequence, and their accountability for it, is much reduced (Kockelman, 2007; Enfield, 2013: ch. 9). In other words, if I do not have an object and I'm not accountable for lacking it, I do not need to qualify or motivate my inability to provide it.⁸ Similar principles may play a role in the design of blocking responses to other types of preliminary actions (e.g. pre-offers and pre-invitations) — a worthwhile avenue of future research.

In section 3.3 of this article, I have been concerned with the organisation of sequences that are successful in soliciting the transfer of an object. In my data, there are two types of responses that support a *hai x* pre-request: (1) the immediate fulfilment of the projected request, and (2) the *go-ahead* response (Schegloff, 2007:30) — a confirmation that the target object is available. These two responding actions give rise to two different types of sequences: (1) a minimal two turn structure, and (2) a non-minimal structure in which the go-ahead is followed by (at least) a request proper and its fulfilment.

Previous literature analyses minimal sequences as a *truncation* or *contraction* of the full non-minimal form (Merritt, 1976:326; Levinson, 1983:362). This terminology is justified when comparing the two sequence types at a surface level: a two turn sequence is reduced relative to a larger sequence of four turns or more. But if our purpose is to define the structural relation between the two sequence types from an interactional point of view — that is, from the point of view of the participants that construct them — the analysis needs to be revised.

In the informal everyday interactions examined in this study, the request projected by *hai x* is always transparent. This being the case, the fulfilment of the request should normally occur in next position. Examples like 13, 14 and 15 show that a two turn structure is the canonical, unmarked way in which *hai x* sequences unfold. This is in keeping with a widespread preference for progressivity in interaction (Schegloff, 1979b:268; Stivers and Robinson, 2006; Heritage, 2007), which favours actions that facilitate the accomplishment or advancement of an activity over actions that disrupt it (cf. Levinson, 1987 on minimisation). On this account, a responding action that delays the fulfilment of the projected request is a symptom of some interactional difficulty or friction. And indeed, as examples like 16, 17 and 18 show, go-ahead responses are associated with a lack of alignment between participants. While the reasons for this vary across cases, what is common to them is that forwarding the sequence with a go-ahead is a way for the requestee to defer compliance, as this forces the introduction of at least two additional actions (the go-ahead itself and the subsequent request proper). This puts the requester in a position to do additional work to secure compliance. Given the possibility of complying in next position, this larger sequence is best characterised as an *expansion* of what could have been a minimal sequence.

This resembles the interactional outcomes of other kinds of sequence expansions, and in particular the way in which other-initiated repair *insertions* can operate as *pre-rejections* and *pre-disagreements* (Schegloff et al., 1977:380; Drew, 1997; Schegloff, 2007:102–106). The expansion of a pre-request sequence presents obvious differences from “pre-dispreferred” insertion sequences. For one thing, a repair initiation works retrospectively by establishing a backward sequential relation to the repairable turn (Schegloff, 2007: ch. 11), whereas a go-ahead response is made relevant prospectively as a legitimate second pair part to the pre-request. Also, whereas pre-rejections and pre-disagreements are harbingers of dispreferred base second pair parts, most pre-request sequences furthered with a go-ahead response are eventually completed by a preferred second pair part to the request. Yet the two types of sequence involve a common structural operation: pre-dispreferreds and go-ahead responses both break contiguity between a first pair part and the accomplishment of the course of action initiated by it. Referring to both phenomena as cases of *expansion* is therefore motivated by the displacement of a sequentially implicated next action (Schegloff, 1979b:267–268).

In sum, the *hai x* ‘do you have x’ form functions as a pre-request, an enquiry about a precondition for a request to be made. Recipients always have the possibility to take it at its face value and respond to it only as a question. But when the projected request is transparent, they should not stonewall. If they do, it is for a reason.

This mechanism is arguably not restricted to pre-requests in the *hai x* ‘do you have x’ form. Nor is it restricted to pre-requests for practical actions. A pre-request for information like ‘do you have the time?’ cannot be normally responded to with only ‘yes I do’ — such a response would be taken as deliberately uncooperative (Clark, 1979). What this article has shown, then, is a general principle that potentially applies to a wide range of preliminary actions in everyday interaction.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Kobin Kendrick for much help from the early stages of this study, for pushing me to go deeper, and for inspiring some of the ideas presented here. Thank you also to Nick Enfield for his careful reading of earlier drafts, and to

⁸ This is another possible point of divergence between *hai x* sequences in informal everyday interaction and in institutional service encounters, where merchants do sometimes account for not having certain goods in stock (Merritt, 1976).

two reviewers for their commentary and constructive critique. Finally, I wish to thank the editor of this special issue, Eva Ogiermann, for her advice, assistance and patience. This work was supported by the European Research Council (grant number 240853) and was carried out in the Interactional Foundations of Language Project, within the Language and Cognition Department, at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics.

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