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Sanctioning misconduct with content questions

a cross-linguistic perspective

Keywords: accounting; content questions; contrastive analysis; conversation analysis; interactional linguistics; interrogatives; sanctioning

It is a ubiquitous phenomenon of everyday interaction that participants confront their co-participants for behaviour that they assess as undesirable or in some other way untoward. In a set of video data of informal interaction from the PECII corpus (Parallel European Corpus of Informal Interaction), cases of such sanctions have been collected in English, German, Italian and Polish data.

This study presents work in progress and focuses on interrogatively formatted sanctions, in particular on non-polar interrogatives. It has already been shown that interrogatives can do much more than ask questions (Huddleston 1994). They can also function as directives (Lindström et al. 2017) or, more specifically, as requests (Curl/Drew 2008), as invitations (Margutti/Galatolo 2018) or reproaches (Klattenberg 2021), among others. What makes them interesting for cross-linguistic comparison is that the four languages that are considered provide different morphological and (morpho-)syntactical ressources for the realization of interrogative phrases. For example, German provides the option of building in the modal particle *denn* that reveals a previous lack of clarity and obliges the co-participant(s) to deliver the missing information (Deppermann 2009). Of course, the other three languages have modal particles, too (e.g. *allora* in Italian or *though* in English), but they do not seem to convey the same semantic and interactional qualities as *denn*. From an interactional point of view, one could think that interrogatives are a typical and effective way of solliciting accounts, since formally they open up a conditionally relevant space for an answer or a reaction. But as the data shows, this does not guarantee that they are actually responded to. Another relevant aspect in the context of sanctions is that the interrogative format seems to carry a certain ‚openness' that might be seen as a mitigating effect and thus provides an interesting point of comparison with other mitigating devices.

This study uses the methods of conversation analysis and interactional linguistics. It is based on a collection of 148 interrogative sanctions (out of which 84 are non-polar interrogatives) covering the four languages. I draw on coded data from roughly 1000 cases to get a first overall idea of how the interrogative format might differ from other formats, and how it might interrelate with specific features – for example, if subsequently an account is delivered. Going more into depth, the interrogative sanctions will then be analyzed with respect to their formal design (e.g. polar questions vs. content questions vs. tag questions, Rossano 2010; Hayano 2013) and to their pragmatic implications. I also analyze reactions to such sanctions – both formally (cf. Enfield et al. 2019, 279) and, again, from an interactional perspective (e.g. accep-

tance/compliance vs. challenging/defiance, Kent 2012; Cekaite 2020). A more detailed zooming in on the sequential unfolding of some particularly interesting instances of sanctioning interrogatives will make the picture complete.

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