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# Sequence and turn design of invitations in Finnish telephone calls

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## Abstract

We focus on invitations extended during Finnish telephone calls to demonstrate how language and sociocultural practices affect the ways in which Finnish speakers extend invitations. This analysis is based on 42 invitation sequences containing 42 first invitations; these were drawn from a large corpus of naturally occurring telephone calls among friends and family. Invitations were identified in terms of their linguistic design, sequential position, and recipient responses in the framework of conversation analysis. We categorized first invitations into three different types. New invitations and reissued invitations that are often delivered as the reason for the call generate an interaction; interactionally generated invitations emerge from an ongoing interaction and are not presented as the reason for the call. As to the linguistic formation of invitations, we discovered that the declarative format is used most frequently; however, invitations are also delivered in the interrogative and imperative formats. In addition, the morphosyntactic formats are related to the type of invitation: the declarative format is typically used in new invitations; the interrogative format, in reissued invitations; and interactionally generated invitations favor the interrogative and declarative formats. While some languages may use a verb of volition in invitations, Finnish speakers use the conditional mood. Furthermore, these invitations are constructed so that the inviter may be the agent and the invitee is not overtly obliged.

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## 1. Introduction

Extending and receiving invitations are ordinary activities in everyday life that are motivated by the human need to connect and interact with others, and therefore, they occur and are recognized in multiple cultures and languages. As a social activity, invitations act as a request from the inviter to the invitee to spend time together for the participants' mutual benefit (Eslami, 2005; Bella, 2009; Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014:6). Different languages provide different sets of resources to implement these actions (Sidnell and Enfield, 2012). Thus, while invitations are common activities, their design and how they are interpreted may be both language- and culture-specific (see, e.g., Wolfson et al., 1983; Drew, 1984; Isaacs and Clark, 1990; Barraja-Rohan, 1994; Garcia, 1996, 1999; Eslami, 2005; Salmani-Noudoushan, 2006; Bella, 2009).

Invitations are complex activities in many respects. First, they are seldom delivered and completed in either a simple adjacency pair or during one turn. Instead, they form an extended sequence of multiple turns (Drew, 2005; Schegloff, 2007). Second, studies on invitations have shown that, at least in the English language, invitations cannot be formatted with one

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particular design that would deliver them invariably; instead, they are delivered using varying forms and lexical elements (Davidson, 1984; Drew, 1984). In fact, the details of linguistic design reflect upon the contingencies of a particular context; this is also true for other actions such as self-repair and requests (see Drew et al., 2013; Drew and Couper-Kuhlen, 2014:2). Finally, invitations involve issues of formality, the level of (in)directness and imposition, the timing of issuing an invitation in relation to the occasion, and the decision to invite someone somewhere. Because of the multiplicity of these issues and the linguistic resources used in different languages, the utterances used to extend invitations require (if intuitive) knowledge of native speakers' preferred patterns of communication (see Wolfson et al., 1983; Garcia, 1996, 1999), as demonstrated later in this study. According to Couper-Kuhlen (2014:624), these preferred patterns, which she calls "social action formats", are semifixed patterns with specific lexical and morphosyntactic elements that cluster and are not freely interchangeable.

We focus on invitations extended during Finnish telephone calls to demonstrate how language and sociocultural practices affect the ways in which Finnish speakers carry out social actions when they interact. Our data are drawn from a large corpus of telephone conversations between family members and friends. Below, we provide representative examples of turn-designs that are used for extending invitations.

(1) Youth hostel

C: (Joo 'tä) .hh Tuota meiän tupaantuliaiset on  
PRT PRT PRT we-GEN house-warming party be.3SG  
kaheskymmenes- yheksäs päivä<, mhh[hh  
29th day  
(Yea 'at) .hh Well our house-warming party is on the twenty-ninth<, mhh[h

(2) Moving

C: [.hhOotteks te tulossa illalla meille vi-  
Be-2PL-Q-CLI you way-INE evening-ADE we-ALL  
[.hh Are you sti- coming to our place in the evening

(3) Packing

R: tuu tänne ens yöks ni (.)sitte v-  
come-IMP.2SG here next night-TRA PRT then  
come over here for the night so (.) (we'll)  
lähetään täältä aikaseen aamulla.  
leave-PAS here-ABL early morning-ADE  
leave here e- early in the morning.

The above turns appear as (1) an announcement constructed as a declarative sentence, (2) an inquiry formed as a polar question, and (3) a request formed as an imperative clause. Our intention is to show that all these formats are delivered and are heard as invitations in their contexts.

In the sections below, first, we describe our approach in the field of conversation analysis and interactional linguistics. Second, we use our collection of naturally occurring Finnish invitations to systematically analyze how native Finnish speakers construct and understand invitation sequences in everyday conversations. Finally, we discuss the reasons for the division of syntactic designs in Finnish first invitations, and we reflect on the implications of our results for second language learning.

## 2. Background

Conversation analysis is a methodological framework that is used for understanding the mechanisms of talk-in-interaction that enable people to perform social actions in collaboration. Initially, studies within conversation analytic framework considered the cross-cultural validity of core organizations as an empirical issue (Sacks et al., 1974:700, fn. 10). Although numerous linguistically oriented studies since the early 1990s have investigated the link between the organization of interaction (at different levels) and language specificities in different languages, conversation analysis has mainly focused on a methodological analysis of interactions and not drawn conclusions about language as a vehicle of

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