Interaction between careworkers and people with intellectual impairments in residential care

How are directives designed?

Taina Valkeapää, B.Soc.Sc
University of Helsinki, Finnish Centre of Excellence in Intersubjectivity in Interaction

Introduction

People with intellectual impairments often need some type of support in their everyday life. Many adults with intellectual impairments get residential care. This means that they live in an institutional setting where they get professional help in their daily tasks. Previous research [1] outlines that the careworkers face an institutional dilemma of getting the action done by the resident and, at the same time, doing it so that the adult resident’s independence is respected. The study on a British residential home shows that the staff designed their requests as to emphasize the action to be done at the expense, for example, of taking into account the resident’s potential trouble and inability in doing the action. Requests were designed in most cases in bald imperative form, which shows high entitlement and pays little attention to possible contingencies. [see 2: entitlement and contingency].

In this study, the aim is to explore how careworkers direct adult residents to take care of the daily tasks in Finnish residential homes. The research questions are: How are the directives designed? How does the design of the directive vary across contexts? The term directive covers a wide range of actions, e.g. requests, suggestions, orders and advices, which are seen as an attempt to get a recipient to perform (or not to perform) some action. [e.g. 3] Analysis here is based on the previous studies on directives: The design of the directive utterance reflects the social organization [4], such as epistemic and deontic orders [5], between participants.

Data and Method

- Data is collected from two residential homes, altogether 4 careworkers and 13 residents.
- The residential homes have existed about 30 years with almost same residents.
- The careworkers live with the residents: institution with an equal setting where they get professional help in their daily tasks.
- Video and audio recordings (about 30 h), ethnographic notes.
- Corpus: 175 verbal directives presented by the careworkers.
- The careworkers manage the whole project and especially the timing of the next action.
- Participants have a shared commitment to the project and follow the actions of the other careworkers.
- Different contexts, respect the independence of the adult recipient, and also recognize a potential problem or inability in doing the action.

However, in this data there is a differing format, interrogative, that in most cases is used to direct an on-going project, in this data particularly cooking.

Conclusion

In this study, the imperative formatted directive is the most general form. The result is similar with the study on British residential home [1]. Imperative [6][7], declarative [8] and phrasal formatted directives are in most cases used to direct an on-going project, in this data particularly cooking.

Cooking in this environment is an established practice, in which social roles, especially careworkers authority, are more or less obvious. Participants have a shared commitment to the project and directed actions are parts of the bigger task, and need to be done here and now. By these directives careworkers manage the whole project and especially the timing of the next action [8]. These straightforward, task-oriented forms display careworkers’ epistemic and deontic authority, and high entitlement.

In this institutional setting, the careworker has responsibility and authority over the resident and it’s important to ask, whether requests made by authority leave open any real possibilities to decline to doing or trying to do the requested action. Still, these preliminary results point out the sensitivity of the careworker’s high epistemic and deontic status.

References:

Contact me:
Email: taina.valkeapaa@helsinki.fi
Twitter: @TainaValkeapaa
Phone: +358 50 3185714

Finnish Centre of Excellence in Intersubjectivity in Interaction