

[Special Contribution]

## Pragmatics, Cognition, and Language in Action\*

N. J. Enfield  
The University of Sydney

In this article I consider new directions in cognitive approaches to language, which entail a new consideration of topics that are central to linguistic pragmatics research.

### 1. From cognitive linguistics to pragmatics

What is language like? Why is it like that? Why do only humans have it? When cognitive linguists ask these questions, two core commitments are implied. The first is that our answers to these questions should not only appeal to human cognitive capacities, but they should strive to account for language in terms of *more general cognition* before they posit language-dedicated cognitive capacities. The second is that our answers should both explain and appeal to facts of language as it occurs in usage, as captured by the adages of a *usage-based* approach: Grammar is Meaning, Meaning is Use, Structure Emerges from Use. These two commitments are intimately related.

#### 1.1. More general cognition

Langacker (1987:13) uses the phrase ‘more general cognition’ in contrast to the kinds of cognition implied by language-dedicated faculties or modules that nativist accounts of language propose (Chomsky 1965:25; cf. Hauser et al 2002, Chomsky 2011). A parsimonious account of language would be in terms of cognitive abilities that humans are known to possess for reasons independent from language. For example, there is ‘the ability to compare two events and register a discrepancy between them’ (Langacker 1987:6). These are aspects of our general intelligence for interpreting and reasoning about physical domains like space, quantities, and causality. Are such abilities necessary for language? Are they sufficient? Our quest to answer these questions must

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be guided by the knowledge that while other species may have some of what is necessary for language, they do not have what is sufficient.

Cognitive linguistics research has explored ways in which aspects of more general cognition can support the learning and processing of language (Lakoff 1987, Croft 2001, Tomasello 2003, Goldberg 2006, *inter alia*). This has led to the discovery of principles of conceptual structure which provide people with ways to represent or construe the things, events, and states we wish to talk about. These principles also allow people to productively elaborate those representations in creative and expressive ways. They provide generative resources for setting up conceptual correspondences, typically between target ideas (concepts to be communicated) and source ideas (concept used as means for communicating). The principles include analogy, metaphor, metonymy, gestalt thinking, image schemas, conceptual blends, idealized cognitive models, and more.

We can note two key properties of the aspects of more general cognition that have been most widely relied on in cognitive linguistic research. First, they are primarily relational. Second, they are primarily non-social.

#### *Primarily relational*

What does it mean to say that the elements of more general cognition relied on in cognitive linguistics are primarily relational? It means that they provide ways of describing relations between concepts, whether the scope of conceptual relation is an isolated linguistic expression or an entire semiotic system. This makes these aspects of more general cognition especially suitable for capturing conceptual relations within an atemporal/synchronic frame. There are of course other frames, dynamic temporal-causal frames including not only the diachronic frame, but also the microgenetic, ontogenetic, phylogenetic, and enchronic frames (Enfield 2014:9–19; cf. Bybee 2010, see below). Research approaches related to cognitive linguistics, such as psycholinguistics, tend to work within dynamic frames, for example focusing on language production or comprehension (in a microgenetic frame) or language learning (in an ontogenetic frame). Cognitive linguistics is increasingly well linked to fields like psycholinguistics thanks to the efforts of interdisciplinary-minded researchers in both psychology (e.g., Tomasello 2003) and linguistics (e.g., Goldberg 2016, Hurford 2007, 2011).

These collaborations are promising to extend the boundaries of what we understand ‘more general cognition’ to mean. And there are further aspects of more general cognition that have important connections to language, but are yet to be explored within the purview of cognitive linguistics proper. A particularly promising area is bounded rationality, the tool kit of fast and frugal heuristics that balances simplicity and economy with functional efficacy (Gigerenzer et al 2011). Cognitive scientists have begun to explore ways in which this aspect of more general cognition sheds new light on the pragmatics of language (Barr and Keysar 2004). Such work suggests that cognitive linguistics will enrich its account of imagistic thinking by looking at it in the light of heuristic thinking.

*Primarily non-social*

What does it mean to say that the aspects of more general cognition widely studied in cognitive linguistics are primarily non-social? It means that they focus more on how we interpret, conceive, and reason about physical phenomena such as space, quantities, and causality, than on interpersonal phenomena in the social domain.

Our species is the only one with language. What makes this possible? A challenge for cognitive linguistics, given its emphasis on more general cognition, is that so much of our general cognition is shared with other species. Why don't they have language too? To answer this, we must pinpoint what it is about our specific forms and combinations of more general cognition that other species lack. To be clear: Proposing that the cognition involved for language is unique to our species does not entail that this cognition is specifically linguistic. No other species should be capable of the same kind, or perhaps degree, of cognitive capacity in the relevant forms of thinking. Is this because we have unique capacities for analogy, imagery, metaphor, metonymy, and pragmatic inference, among other principles?

There is good reason to think that what really makes language possible is our social cognition (Enfield and Levinson 2006). A recent comparative study of cognition in the great apes argues that general intelligence—as measured using tests in physical domains of space, quantities, and causality—does not greatly distinguish humans from our closest relatives such as chimpanzees. 'Supporting the cultural intelligence hypothesis and contradicting the hypothesis that humans simply have more "general intelligence," we found that the children and chimpanzees had very similar cognitive skills for dealing with the physical world but that the children had more sophisticated cognitive skills than either of the ape species for dealing with the social world' (Herrmann et al 2007:1360). The conclusion? Socio-cultural cognition makes the difference for language. Humans are especially attuned to other minds, and to the cultural construction of group-specific, conventional systems of meaning and practice as shared frameworks for communication and joint action. This is what makes it possible for human populations to foster the historical development of complex systems of shared cultural tradition, of which language is one form.

This does not detract from the demonstrated importance for language of non-social aspects of more general cognition, including those that are clearly shared by other species. Hurford (2007, 2011) has argued that the core principle of predicate-argument organization in the syntactic organization of language—any human language—is based on properties of brain function and anatomy that are shared with many other species. Many species display these same basic properties of neural organization and cognitive processing (specifically, the integration of a 'where' system with a 'what' system, supplying the essential ingredients of argument-predicate relations). So why don't other species have language? Hurford's answer is that they do, it's just that they don't make it public. This in turn, means that conceptual structure does not enter the public domain, and so it is impossible for cultural processes of symbolic community-wide con-

ventionalization, and subsequent grammaticalization, to get started (Bybee 2010, Hurford 2011, Enfield 2015).

## 1.2. Language Usage

As one of a set of functionalist approaches to language, cognitive linguistics does not just analyze linguistic structure, ‘it also analyzes the entire communicative situation: the purpose of the speech event, its participants, its discourse context’; it maintains ‘that the communicative situation motivates, constrains, explains, or otherwise determines grammatical structure’ (Nichols 1984: 97). This orientation is well-grounded in insights dating back to Wittgenstein (1953), Zipf (1949), and beyond. Embracing the idea that language is a tool for thought and action, cognitive linguistics is *usage-based* (Barlow and Kemmer 2000). In this way a strong focus on conceptual representation is increasingly often complemented by close attention to the dynamic, causal, utilitarian underpinnings of language and its structure.

In a usage-based model ‘the process of language use influences the structure of the representation’ (Croft and Cruse 2004: 326–327). Taken together, the three key concepts invoked here—use, influence, and structure—imply a causal conception of language. It is not enough to describe a piece of language structure, a linguistic (sub)system, or a pattern of variance in language. We must ask why it is that way. One way to answer this is to find what has shaped it. ‘Everything is the way it is because it got that way’, as biologist D’Arcy Thompson is supposed to have said (cf. Thompson 1917). Bybee echoes the sentiment in relation to language: ‘a theory of language could reasonably be focused on the dynamic processes that create languages and give them both their structure and their variance’. Seen this way, linguistic structure is ‘emergent from the repeated application of underlying processes’ (Bybee 2010: 1). The aim is to explain structure by asking how structure is created through use.

The goal of unpacking the key concepts of use, influence, and structure—and the relations between these—points to new horizons in cognitive linguistics. If we are going to map those horizons systematically and with clarity, a central conceptual task is to define the temporal-causal frames within which we articulate our usage-based accounts (see Enfield 2014: 9–21). Some of those frames are well established: In a microgenetic frame, sub-second dynamics of psychological processing, including heuristics of economy and efficiency, provide biases in the emergence of structure in utterances; in a diachronic frame, population-level dynamics of variation and social diffusion provide biases in a community’s conventionalization of structure; and in an ontogenetic frame, principles of learning, whether social, statistical, or otherwise, provide biases in the individual’s construction of a repertoire of linguistic competence in the lifespan. Then there is the phylogenetic frame, through which our evolved capacities provide the defining affordances for our species’ capacity for language.

If there is less charted territory, it is in the enchronic frame, the move-by-move flow of interlocking, action-driven, forward-going sequences of linguistic action and re-

sponse in social interaction (Schegloff 1968, 2007, Clark 1996). By orienting to the enchronic frame, recent work in descriptive linguistics has begun to analyze linguistic structures not only in terms of their distribution in relation to morphosyntactic units, or units of discourse, but to structural units that can only be observed and defined in data taken from dialogue (Enfield 2013; cf. also Du Bois 2014). Gipper (2011) sheds new light on the analysis of multifunctionality in evidential marking by comparing the functions of Yurakaré evidentials in differently positioned utterances in conversation; she finds that evidentials can have quite distinct functions depending on whether they occur in initiating utterances (e.g., questions, new assertions) versus responsive utterances (e.g., answers to questions, expressions of agreement). A different kind of outcome from orienting to the enchronic frame in research on language and cognition is that it requires us to confront and explain phenomena that are clearly linguistic but that have hardly been on the map in any form of linguistics until now; key examples include repair (Schegloff et al 1977, Hayashi et al 2013) and turn-taking (Sacks et al 1977, Roberts et al 2015), both of which have significant implications for our understandings of the language-cognition relationship (Levinson and Torreira 2015, Dingemanse et al 2015). Without the usage-based approach, these implications would remain out of sight.

### 1.3. Comment

The challenge now is to further enrich our understanding of the causal influence of use on structure in language, and thus to see better how it is that only human cognition supports language. A first move is to broaden the scope of the key ideas—*influence*, *use*, and *structure*—with a concerted and systematic approach to discovering how the multiple causal-temporal frames of language use operate, both in themselves and in relation to each other. Like the rest of cognitive linguistics, this work is as much about culture as it is about language, for language is not only a form of culture—being a local and historical cumulation of social practice—but it is our main tool for constructing culture itself. These new directions in cognitive linguistics point directly to the link with linguistic pragmatics. We now turn to a case study.

## 2. A Case Study: Recruitments

It is easy to think that ‘an agent’ should coincide exactly with an individual. But this is seldom the case (see Enfield and Kockelman 2017). When Bill gets John to open the door, it is Bill who plans the behavior but John who executes it. Or when Mary reports what a professor said in yesterday’s lecture, it is Mary who speaks the words but the professor who is accountable for what was expressed. With distributed agency, multiple people act as one, sharing or sharing out the elements of agency. One man commits a misdeed against another, and yet revenge is taken years later between the two men’s grandchildren, neither of whom was involved in the original transgression. When someone is held to account for something that someone else chose to do,

agency, with its components of flexibility and accountability, is divided and shared out among multiple individuals. Agents do not equal individuals: the locus of agency is the social unit, and social units are not defined by individual bodies.

In the rest of this chapter I discuss some of the elements of human sociality that serve as the social and cognitive infrastructure or preconditions for the use of requests and other kinds of recruitments in interaction. I use the term ‘recruitment’ in the following sense (Enfield 2011: 5):

Recruitment is a proposed macro-type of social action that can be roughly defined as follows. S produces an utterance (or equivalent communicative move) addressed to A, where this utterance may then result in one or both of the speech act participants then carrying out a course of controlled behavior B (such as passing the salt, delivering a letter, lifting one end of a table).<sup>1</sup>

The notion of an agent with goals is a canonical starting point, though importantly agency tends not to be wholly located in individuals, but rather is socially distributed. This is well illustrated in the case of request-like actions, in which the person or group that has a certain goal is not necessarily the one who carries out the behavior towards that goal. In the remainder of this chapter we focus on the role of semiotic (mostly linguistic) resources in negotiating the distribution of agency with request-like actions, with examples from video-recorded interaction in Lao, a language spoken in Laos and nearby countries. The examples illustrate five hallmarks of requesting in human interaction, which show some ways in which our ‘manipulation’ of other people is quite unlike our manipulation of tools: (1) that even though B is being manipulated, B wants to help, (2) that while A is manipulating B now, A may be manipulated in return later; (3) that the goal of the behavior may be shared between A and B, (4) that B may not comply, or may comply differently than requested, due to actual or potential contingencies, and (5) that A and B are accountable to one another; reasons may be asked for, and/or given, for the request. These hallmarks of requesting are grounded in a prosocial framework of human agency.

## 2.1. Flexibility in the pursuit of goals

In the opening pages of his *Principles of Psychology*, William James (1890) notes the special flexibility of cognizant behaviour. Iron filings, he notes, will be drawn to a magnet, but they cannot choose how they reach that goal. If a paper card covers the magnet, the filings will just press against the card. Thinking beings are different:

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<sup>1</sup> This notion of ‘recruitment’ owes much to the collective input of research collaborators in the ‘Recruitments’ sub-project within the *Human Sociality and Systems of Language Use* project (MPI Nijmegen 2010–2014). See Floyd et al (2014).

Romeo wants Juliet as the filings want the magnet; and if no obstacles intervene he moves towards her by as straight a line as they. But Romeo and Juliet, if a wall be built between them, do not remain idiotically pressing their faces against its opposite sides like the magnet and the filings with the card. Romeo soon finds a circuitous way, by scaling a wall or otherwise, of touching Juliet's lips directly. (James 1890: 7)

This means-ends flexibility is our forte. We try to reach a goal, and if this is frustrated, we seek or invent new means. 'The pursuance of future ends and the choice of means for their attainment are thus the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality' (James 1890:8). A certain mentality is always involved in the pursuit of goals, but that is not our point of interest here. We want to focus on what results from this mentality: namely, our enhanced flexibility in selecting means to ends.

To see how we refine and elaborate our choices of means for ends, just look at the instruments and tools of human technologies (cf. Zipf 1949, Suchman 1987, Lave 1988, Norman 1988, Clark 2008). But possibly our most important, and most ancient, means toward ends are *other people*. Rather than doing everything ourselves, or even doing things just with the help of tools, it is often other people that we use to help us reach our goals.

This should not be taken to mean that people are solely interested in exploiting others for our own ends. Situations in which one person uses another as a tool are not based in selfishness alone. One reason is that we are apparently just as willing to offer *ourselves* as tools to serve *others'* individual goals. We hold doors open for strangers. We alert people when we notice they have dropped their keys. We give away our spare change on the street. We open doors for people when we see their hands are full. Another reason is that we *share* goals with others. So, when I behave in a way that looks like it's *for you*, it may in fact be *for us*. Tomasello (2008) argues that this is the mechanism whereby altruistic behaviour can evolve in a selfish world. Once individuals are able to share a goal, a behaviour that is *for us* is thereby, ultimately, also *for me*.

## 2.2. Language as a tool for mobilizing others

We do not manipulate people in the same direct way that we grasp a hammer or a pen. If we are going to get others to do things for us, we need the mediating tools of communication. As Bloomfield (1933) put it, when a stimulus evokes a response (e.g., when Jane sees an apple on a tree and wants to pluck it), language can be used as a sort of tool of transference, to elicit that response in another person (she tells Jack that the apple is there, and asks him to pluck it for her). We influence other people by taking the tools provided by our language and culture and using them to persuade those other people to willingly act on our behalf. This is the essence of what we are doing when we make requests. Our speech acts have deontic powers: with speech acts we bestow our reasons for action onto other people.

Humans have by far the most complex communication systems of all creatures. Our languages are generative in nature, meaning that we can combine words and constructions to produce entirely novel utterances at will. These verbal utterances may be further creatively combined with accompanying visible bodily behaviour. We shall use the term *language*<sup>+</sup> (pronounced ‘language plus’) to refer to the enriched set of semiotic resources that includes not just words and grammatical constructions but intonation, gestures, facial expressions and more (Kendon 2004, McNeill 2005, Sidnell and Stivers ed 2009, Enfield 2009).

Now while the set of semiotic means we have for getting others to do things is, in principle, infinite, in fact we often use recurring and readily recognized strategies in making requests (*Could you pass the salt?*, *Could you open the window?* *Could you shut the door?*). We now consider some of the types of strategies that recur in a single language community. The following cases are taken from video-recordings of conversation among speakers of Lao, the national language of Laos (Enfield 2007, 2013). Here are three simple examples of ways in which people use language to get others to do things for them, or to help them, in Lao.

In the first example, two women are in a kitchen, where one of the women needs some leaf extract that the other has been preparing. The first woman says ‘grab (it and) come (here)’, meaning ‘bring it here’:

- (1) INTCN\_030731b\_192570\_0:03:13
- 1 A qaw3 maa2  
 grab come  
*Bring it here (referring to a bowl of leaf extract)*
- 2 B Slides bowl with extract in direction of A

In this case, the requester uses a stripped-back linguistic construction that does nothing more than refer directly to the action being requested. The action—to fetch something—is idiomatically expressed in Lao as a combination of ‘grab’ and ‘come’. The object being referred to—the leaf extract—is understood from the context.

A second example shows the common strategy in Lao of adding a ‘softening’ sentence-final imperative particle *nè̀̀1* to the basic action being requested (see Enfield 2007:66 and passim for description of a paradigm of particles whose meanings code imperative illocutionary force). In addition, the speaker makes a pointing gesture in the direction of the thing she is asking for:

- (2) INTCN\_030731b\_196430\_0:03:16
- 1 A qaw3 qanø-nii4 nè̀̀1  
 grab CLF-this IMP.SOFT  
*Grab this thing (for me; referring to prepared food in a sieve; Pointing in direction of the food that she is asking B to pass)*
- 2 B Turns to reach out for the food, grabs it and passes it to A



In a third case, the speaker is busy with food preparation in the kitchen. She uses a circuitous or indirect strategy, with more embellishment of the basic request being made than we saw in the last two examples. She addresses the requestee explicitly (calling him ‘father’—he is her father), and rather than stating the action she wants him to carry out (i.e., pass her the knife), she asks whether the knife is behind him:

(3) CONV\_020723b\_RCR\_970010\_0:16:10

1 A phòd1 miit4 thaang2 lang3 caw4 mii4 bòd3  
 father knife direction back 2SG.P have QPLR  
*Dad is there a knife behind you?*

2 B nii4 nii4  
 here here  
*Here, here (Finds a knife behind himself, passes it towards A)*

It is clear that she doesn’t simply want to know whether there is a knife behind him. The question makes sense in terms of her current goals. She is asking because she wants the knife, and so he hands it to her.

Now look at what these three cases have in common. Person A wants to get hold of some entity that is nearby but out of reach. Rather than go and get it herself, Person A says something to Person B, with the result that Person B gets the thing and passes it, thus carrying out a bit of behavior that Person A would otherwise have had to carry out herself. In this way, A has *recruited* B’s help.

These examples give us a simple look at the kind of role that language plays in manipulating the behavior of others in order to get them to contribute to, or comply with, our own goals. The examples show that different formulations are possible. And they show that such cases are not only about getting others to act on our behalf, but may also be about getting others to desist from some behavior that then allows us to proceed with our goal. Either way, B complies with a low-cost imposition.

The request-like cases we have just considered reveal a defining feature of human sociality, namely the distributed nature of our agency (see above, and Enfield 2013:115 and passim; see also Kockelman 2013, Gell 1999). This is related to the notion of distributed cognition, familiar from research by authors such as Goody (1977), Suchman (1987), Lave (1988), Norman (1988), Hutchins (1995, 2006) and Clark (2007), who have all shown ways in which tools and artifacts can be extensions of the human body and mind (see also Enfield 2009, Chapter 6). Students of language have long argued that language is a kind of tool for getting others to do things. Some, including Zipf (1949), have gone further, saying that *other people* are tools for us as well (see also Goodwin 2006 on this point in relation to language). Along these lines, Pagel (2012: 275–6) has recently compared language to a remote control device ‘When you speak, you are using a form of telemetry, not so different from the remote control of your television. ... Just as we use the infrared device to alter some electronic setting within a television so that it tunes to a different channel that suits our mood, we use our lan-

guage to alter the settings inside someone else's brain in a way that will serve our interests.'

Sometimes it appears as if this were really true. In the following example, one person uses speech to get another person to turn the television on, just as she might otherwise have used a remote control device to do from a distance:

- (4) INTCN\_111204t\_818990\_0:13:39
- 1 A peet5 tholathat1 beng1 mèt4  
open television look IMP.UNIMPD  
*Turn on the television (for us) to watch*
  - 2 B peet5 bðø daj4 tii4  
open NEG can QPLR.PRESM  
*It doesn't work (it can't be turned on), I think*
  - 3 A daj4-caw4 kaø peet5 beng1 thaø mèt4  
can 2.POL TLNK open look PCL IMP.UNIMPD  
*Yes it works—you turn it on and see*
  - 4 B Moves towards the television and reaches and switches it on

Then half a minute later:

- (5) INTCN\_111204t\_850175\_0:14:10
- 1 A mòðt4 mòðt4 laø mèt4  
turn.off turn.off PRF IMP.UNIMPD  
*Switch it off, switch it off.*
  - 2 B Moves towards the television and reaches and switches it off.

It is an inviting analogy: asking someone to do something for us is like pressing buttons on a remote control device. But like all analogies (as Pagel of course knows), it is imperfect. As we shall now see, its imperfections are instructive. The following sections consider the ways in which the analogy between words and remote control devices breaks down.

### 2.3. Hallmarks of recruiting

What is the difference between using a person and using a device as a means to get something done? The answer: With people, both parties are goal-driven and socially accountable beings, and there is a social relationship between them. Here are some features of the interpersonal manipulations shown in the above examples that are not observed in the use of an electronic remote control device:

1. Even though B is being manipulated, B wants to help.
2. While A is manipulating B now, A may be manipulated in return later.
3. The goal of the behavior may be shared between A and B.
4. B may not comply, or may comply differently than requested, due to actual or

potential contingencies.

5. A and B are accountable to one another; reasons may be asked for, and/or given.

There are of course other differences. But these will serve as points of focus for us to consider the hallmarks of recruiting in humans, within the simple framework of goal-directed social agency outlined in the above sections.

*B wants to do the recruited action*

A remote control device is a robot. It responds to instruction but it doesn't offer to help you or otherwise independently anticipate your needs. People, by contrast, may want to help. Think about the above examples. In no case would we want to say that someone was being coerced or seriously imposed upon. The requestees cooperate without any resistance or comment. People are so willing to help that we often see them offer assistance without their having to be asked.

Consider an illustration of the kind of situation in which a person needs something to be done for them, and gets the help they need from another person without having to ask for it or otherwise signal the need. This recording is taken in the kitchen verandah of a Lao village house. The floor of this space is raised high above the ground of the village compound. To get up into the house, one walks up a steep galley-style ladder. A man is sitting where one of these ladders provides entry onto the raised floor of the house. The area where the ladder provides entry onto the floor is blocked by a low gate, designed to prevent toddlers from falling down the ladder. While the gate is not completely closed, it is closed enough so as to hinder entry for somebody who does not have a free hand with which to open the gate. At the moment of interest, another man is at the bottom of the ladder, about to go up into the house. This man is holding a large plastic laundry basket full of clothes, which he is about to bring up into the house. He reaches the half-closed gate at the top of the ladder: at this moment, the man reaches forward with his right hand and pushes the gate open enough to allow the other man to walk up into the house unhindered.

(6) INTCN\_1112031\_243630\_0:04:04

- 1 A begins walking up ladder approaching closed gate with washing basket in hand
- 2 B reaches out to gate as A comes to top of ladder and pushes open gate for A to walk through unhindered

This is not a request sequence, rather it can be seen as an instance of the more general action of *recruitment*: a sequence in which a first move by A occasions a helping action by B. Like in request sequences (see the above examples), A's behavior makes it clear that he needs help, and then B helps accordingly, in line with a general cooperative stance in human interaction. But in this case A's behavior, which makes it clear that he

needs help, cannot be said to have been an intentional manipulation of B to help A in achieving his goal. Here, person B stepped in to help A upon anticipating a potential problem. The point here is that request sequences all presuppose the more general prosocial, cooperative orientation and desire to help that is sometimes simply volunteered in cases like this one.

*Roles may be reversed*

In the kinds of social contexts we spend most time in—i.e., informal social interaction in familiar environments with people we know well—the kinds of things we ask others to do are the kinds of things we are willing to do for them. I expect you to pass me the salt when I ask, just as when you ask for the salt, you can expect that I will pass it. Obviously there are asymmetries, especially when interactions are more formalized, but the general principle is reciprocity. This is obviously not the case with remote control devices.

*The goal may be shared*

The recruitments we have considered so far involve situations in which person B is asked to help person A with something related to their current goal. But many things that we might want to call recruitments or requests occur in contexts where both people involved are jointly committed to the same goal. Rossi (2012) compares two kinds of request sequence in Italian interaction. In one kind, A has a goal, not currently shared with B, and asks B to help (e.g., ‘Pass me the chewing gum’). In another kind, A and B currently share an overarching goal, and A asks B to do something that they have effectively already committed to within that overarching goal (e.g., ‘Deal the cards’). The idea of joint commitment, and everything that implies (Clark 2006), is clearly irrelevant to the relationship between people and remote control devices.

The fact that people make joint commitments to goals means that, similar to the ‘gate at the top of the ladder’ example above (example (6)), cooperation can be assumed, and may be offered without having been prompted. And when there are shared goals, it can become impossible—and in fact irrelevant—to say whether a sequence involved a request or an offer.

In the following example, two people are cooking a dish together. A man has been heating jugged fish on the fire, and at this moment the jugged fish needs to be strained. The man emerges from the fireplace with the pot of heated jugged fish, and he is getting another pot, into which to strain it. Seeing this, a woman who is present extends her arm forward with the sieve that she has in her hand. Next, the man walks over, holds the empty pot underneath the sieve, and pours the jugged fish into the sieve, thus straining it.

(7) INTCN\_030731b\_267220\_0:04:27

1 A Holds out sieve for straining jugged fish

- 2 B Brings and places jugged fish and pot for jugged fish to be strained into

In this instance we can't say whether this sequence involves an offer or a request (nor do we need to; see Enfield and Sidnell 2017). The terms 'offer' and 'request' presuppose that the relevant behavior is 'for' one or the other of the two parties. If A offers to do something, it's *for B*. If A requests that B does something, it's *for A*. But in many cases like this one, the behavior being precipitated is a sub-part of a routine to which both parties are already committed, and thus share as a goal.

*B need not comply*

If a piece of technology is in working order, it will do what you want. A person, on the other hand, may ignore your request, refuse to comply, or do something other than what you asked. The lives of people are full of contingencies, actual or potential, which often intervene (cf. Curl and Drew 2008).

In the following example, a husband and wife are in a kitchen, skinning catfish. They have been doing this for a while, and the husband has one more fish left to skin, but complains that his back is sore from sitting and working. He holds the fish out towards his wife for her to take and skin:

- (8) INTCN\_1112031\_689141\_0:11:29
- 1 A cêp2 qèw3 lèw4  
hurt back PRF  
*My back hurts*
- 2 bùt2 diaw3  
a moment  
*(It will only take) a moment*
- 3 qaw3 qaw2  
grab grab  
*Here take it (holding out fish for her to take)*
- 4 B mm2  
nope  
*No.*

Her refusal is not surprising. The couple, who in this culture are of equal standing in a setting like this one, have each been working for the same amount of time doing the same task. The wife's back is no doubt also sore from sitting and working, and she treats the request as unwarranted. There's no good reason why she should do it for him.

*One may need to give B reasons why they should do the requested action*

A remote control device never needs or wants to know why you want it to do

something on your behalf, but a person often does. We saw in the last section that people who are asked to do things may give reasons for refusal or delay in complying. Here we shall see that people who ask others to do things will sometimes give reasons as well. (We saw a case where the man reasoned that because his back hurt, his wife should finish his task.) This happens, for example, when a person is asked to do something but delays their response, or otherwise resists. Giving a reason for a request is a way to pursue, strengthen, or help make sense of what is being asked.

Let us look at an example. Here, Speaker A starts by issuing a directive to a group of three people (two are her children, one is her daughter-in-law) who are preparing food in the kitchen of her house. She asks them to toss the rice. This is a procedure in the preparation of glutinous rice. When rice has been steamed and is now cooked, because of the shape of the steamer used it will be cooked more in some spots and less in others. Tossing the rice is a way of evening out the texture of it before serving:

- (9) INTCN\_1112031\_425170\_0:07:05  
 1 A suaj3 khaw5 mèè4 suu3  
 toss rice IMP.UNIMPD 2PL.B  
*Toss the rice you lot*

She uses the second person plural pronoun *suu3* in formulating this request. This means that she does not select any one person to do the job. As it happens, none of the three young people in her immediate vicinity volunteer to act upon her request. It is clear that they are fully occupied with other duties. She then calls out to a fourth person—her son-in-law whose name is *Nyao*—to come and do it instead. At this moment, *Nyao* is away from the scene, doing something else in the compound outside the house, but within earshot. Her move (shown in (10)) begins with a somewhat elaborate request in line 1: she selects him explicitly by name, telling him to stop what he is currently doing and to come and toss the rice, adding also that it's 'for her'; she also uses the imperative sentence-final particle *mèè4*, which implies that the addressee is 'unimpeded' (often implying 'Why aren't you already doing it?'; cf. Enfield 2007:63), and she immediately adds two reasons: the first, why it has to be done, and fast ('the pot will burn'), and second why *he* has to be the one to do it ('the others are all busy here'):

- (10) INTCN\_1112031\_427440\_0:07:07  
 1 A bak2-ñāaw2 paq2 vaj4 han5 maa2 suaj3 khaw5 haj5 kuu3  
 M.B-Ñ abandon put there come toss rice give 1.B  
 mèè4  
 IMP.UNIMPD  
*Nyao, drop that and come and toss the rice for me*  
 2 maj5 mòd5 dêj2 niø - khaw3 khaa2 viak4 met2 thuk1  
 burn pot FAC.INFORM TPC 3PL stuck work all every

khon2 niø  
 person TPC  
*the pot will burn - they're all busy here*

- 3 B Stops what he's doing and walks up the ladder into the food preparation area, goes into the kitchen to toss the rice (it takes 13 seconds before he reaches the kitchen)

Note that Nyao would otherwise not have been expected to be involved in the behavior of tossing the rice, since he was, relative to four other people including the speaker, the furthest from the place where the task needed to be done. It is by providing explicit reasons that Speaker A in (10) is able to mobilize his help. In this way, we see language clearly serving as a tool for creating deontic powers: specifically, for transferring reasons for acting onto other people.

The drawing of attention to a reason for acting alone has long been recognized as an indirect way of requesting (cf. 'It's cold in here' as a way of getting someone to close the window). Here is a case in which Speaker A draws attention to a problem that needs attending to, namely the fact that some live fish in a pot don't have sufficient water to keep them alive and fresh:

(11) INTCN\_1112031\_601081\_0:10:01

- 1 A paa3 man2 siø bðø taaj3 vaa3 qaaj4 dong3  
 fish 3.B IRR NEG die QPLR.INFER eB D  
*The fish, aren't they going to die, Dong? (Pointing in direction of large pot with live fish)*
- 2 B qanø-daj3 (.) qoo4 qaw3 nam4 maa2 saj1 ( ) maa2 saj1  
 what Oh grab water come put ( ) come put  
 mèè4  
 IMP.UNIMPD  
*What? Oh, put some water in there ( ) put some in*

It is also often the case that a reason is given in combination with an explicit request. Here is an example, in which an imperative command is followed quickly by a reason. Speaker A is sitting next to a large pot with live fish in the bottom of it. A fresh load of water has just been poured into the pot, and the fish are splashing about so much that water is spilling out of the pot and onto him:

(12) INTCN\_1112031\_629110\_0:10:29

- 1 A ñðð4 nii3 (.) man2 diin4 phoot4  
 lift flee 3.B jump too.much  
*Take it away - they're splashing too much (leaning back from the pot)*
- 2 B Walks around behind A in direction of the pot, comes and picks up pot and moves it away.

By providing a reason for the request to ‘take the pot away’, Speaker A helps to clarify for B precisely what is being asked of her. There could be a range of reasons why A wants her to take the pot away, and each would imply a different way of complying. For example, how far away should she take it? Here, he makes it clear that he merely wants the pot to be placed far enough away that the splashing water won’t reach him.

### 3. Conclusion

The concept of agency has long been central to many lines of research that touch on human interaction, in fields ranging from law and sociology to anthropology and linguistics. Importantly, the word ‘agency’ does not refer to a one-dimensional ‘degree of assertiveness’ or similar. Its use should reflect the nuances of empirical and theoretical findings of research in this multi-faceted and dynamic domain (Kockelman 2007, Enfield 2013: Chapter 9; cf. Davidson 1963, Duranti 1990, 2004, Gell 1998, Ahearn 2001). Conceptual tools for understanding agency are central to the analysis of any social action, not least requests and their ilk. The behaviour of doing things for others is also supported by a set of psychological and interpersonal resources grounded in human sociality, including the elements of social intelligence, distributed cognition, normative accountability, and cooperative motivations (Enfield and Levinson 2006, Enfield 2013). These resources form part of a foundational infrastructure for social interaction (Levinson 2006, Enfield and Sidnell 2014). Our aim here has been to highlight some hallmarks of recruitment sequences in light of certain defining elements of agency and the infrastructure for interaction. In the sequences we have examined, three of these elements come to the fore.

The first is that we assume that people behave in accordance with goals that they are pursuing. Their behavior makes sense in terms of those goals and in terms of the reasons that may be given for their behavior. This is clear in any recruitment sequence. Second, there is a mismatch between the fact that in the physical realm people are immutably distinct from one another (we have separate bodies), while on the other hand in the realm of social accountability we may either be treated as inhabiting separate units (such as when one person pursues a goal unilaterally) or as being elements of a single, shared unit (such as when two people have made a joint commitment to a shared course of action; cf. Clark 1996, Rossi 2012). Much of social life involves tacking back and forth between different distributions of flexibility and accountability of behaviour, in a process of fission-fusion agency (Enfield 2013:104). Recruitments always imply the sharing or distributing of action. And third, thanks to the special prosociality of our species, we are motivated to help others, and we tend to assume that others have the same cooperative motivations toward us. Recruitments both presuppose and display these mutual prosocial motivations and assumptions.



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