

**Online forum advice for carers of people living with dementia: A discursive and
conversation analytic exploration**

Felicity Slocombe

Loughborough University

f.slocombe@lboro.ac.uk

**U415 Brockington Building, Loughborough University, Epinal Way, Loughborough,
LE11 3TU**



Abstract

Advice-giving and requesting is a complex interactional task that has been well-explored by the theoretical and analytical approaches of discursive psychology (DP) and conversation analysis (CA). However, these approaches have not previously been employed to analyse advice in the context of an online forum for carers of people living with dementia (PLWD). In this article I present how DP, with insights from both DP and CA research, can be employed to explore advice in the specific context of peer interaction on the Carers UK online forum. A single extract is presented as evidence for how a troubles-telling format can be employed to request advice in a way which places little obligation upon a potential commenter – a low-contingency request. As found in other research, this format resulted in advice being provided by commenters. The deontic and epistemic authority of the advice given by commenters will be used to display the sophistication with which commenters frame their advice to align to the indirect nature in which the advice was requested.

Introduction

Research in this area is especially important as platforms, such as Facebook and online forums, are increasingly used for seeking advice and information about health (Lawless et al., 2018). This surge in use of online sources to seek health advice and information is perhaps unsurprising as budgets are overwhelmed from demand, with the government having cut funding to local authorities by nearly half over the last eight years (House of Commons, 2019). This also comes as the number of PLWD is increasing, with figures expected to reach nearly one million in the UK by 2025 (Alzheimer's Society, 2019). There are an estimated 1.7 million informal carers needed by 2050, which equates to an 140% increase in the number of informal carers that were needed in 2014 (Lewis et al., 2014). The increasing number of people requiring care is one of the largest economic issues facing the UK

(Buckner & Yeandle, 2015), with informal carers of PLWD providing the equivalent value of £13.9 billion each year in the care they deliver (Wittenberg et al., 2019). Support for informal carers is crucial (Lethin et al., 2019), if less support is coming from local authorities, it must be sought from elsewhere such as online forums which have been shown to provide emotional support for carers and PLWD alike (Johnson et al., 2020).

DP and CA

DP “is a theoretical and analytical approach to discourse which treats talk and text as the object of study in itself, and psychological concepts as socially managed and consequential in interaction” (Wiggins, 2016, p. 4). What this essentially means is that talk and text ‘do things’; they are not passive. Talk and text achieve actions such as in the case of this article, advice-giving. DP treats the interactional context as intrinsic to the interaction – for example how we communicate in an email to our boss is different from how we text a friend. DP also views discourse as constructed (through the particular words we choose) and constructive (what we say, or type brings certain versions of reality into being). See Wiggins (2016) and Edwards and Potter (1992) for a thorough discussion of DP’s core principles and theoretical underpinnings.

CA is a methodological approach to studying naturalistic social interaction, paying particular attention to the sequential order of talk (Lester & O’Reilly, 2019). In CA structural preference is also integral. There are culturally embedded structural preference principles. For example, the preferred response to an invitation is an acceptance rather than a rejection (Pomerantz & Heritage, 2012) – ‘would you like to go into town with me today?’. Conversation analysts have studied the orderly ways of interacting produced in line with principles of structural preference (Pomerantz & Heritage, 2012). For example, that rejections to invitations feature a delay in response, followed by prefaces and accounts (Pomerantz &

Heritage, 2012) – ‘...oh that would be great, unfortunately I’m seeing my partner then’. This response constitutes a dispreferred response as the request is designed for a “yes” as the structural preference (Pomerantz, 1984). See ten Have (2007) for elaboration of CA’s foundations. This article follows the process for DP analysis (Wiggins, 2016) whilst also drawing on insights from both DP and CA research.

Originally developed for synchronous environments such as face-to-face conversations and telephone calls, the methodological approaches of DP and CA have been adapted for use with asynchronous environments such as online forums (see Meredith (2016, 2019) for a discussion of the benefits of using DP and CA to analyse online data, as well as the differing things they have commonly focused on in research). The approaches of DP and CA have subsequently been established in studying advice in online environments (e.g., Lawless et al., 2018; Smithson et al., 2011; Vayreda & Antaki, 2009). DP was used as the approach for analysing the data in this study as I focused on the rhetorical organisation of talk (how the talk is designed, for example, to construct meanings, or convey knowledge), whereas CA, as previously mentioned, focuses more on the sequential order of talk and text (Meredith, 2016). DP is also more commonly used in studying online interaction as it lends itself more to analysing written text (Potter & Edwards, 2012). Few studies have focused on online advice interaction for carers of PLWD using discursive or interactional approaches (cf. Lawless et al., 2018). Lawless et al. (2018) examined Facebook interactions to demonstrate how DP can be used to analyse requests and offers of advice and information about dementia. They found a DP approach resulted in developing an understanding about the “systematic ways in which people request and deliver advice about health and illness” (p. 49) in this interactional context.

Advice-giving in DP and CA

Advice is defined here as discourse which “describes, recommends, or otherwise forwards a preferred course of future action” (Heritage & Sefi, 1992, p. 368). There are other considerations to include when defining advice: the normative and asymmetric functions of advice; and epistemic and deontic authority. Advice is normative in that it proposes a future action as standard, appropriate, or beneficial (Shaw et al., 2015). Advice is asymmetric in that the advice giver is proposed as more knowledgeable or experienced than the advice recipient (Hepburn & Potter, 2011). Epistemic authority refers to “knowledge claims that interactants register, assert, and defend in and through turns at talk and sequences of interaction” (Heritage, 2013a, pp. 555-556). For example, someone can express themselves as knowledgeable about caring for a PLWD through detailing their level of experience, ‘I have cared for my mother for ten years now, I know all there is to know about it’. People position themselves along a varying gradient of knowing (K+/plus: more knowledgeable) or not knowing (K-/minus: less knowledgeable) known as the epistemic gradient (Heritage, 2013b). Deontic authority is a person’s legitimate power to determine someone else’s future actions: what should be, what is not allowed (Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012; Stevanovic, 2013). There is also a gradient of deontic authority: low deontic authority can be claimed through expressions of possibility, ‘you can try contacting social services’ to high deontic authority, through claims of necessity, ‘you have to put your own health first’ (Stevanovic, 2013). Claims along this gradient are referred to as a deontic stance (Landmark et al., 2015). Stevanovic (2013) dichotomises that “epistemic authority is about knowing what is true” and “deontic authority is about determining what “ought-to-be” – what will be forbidden, obligatory, or permissible” (p. 19).

Furthermore, the social action of giving advice can threaten face or self-image of those receiving the advice (Goldsmith, 2000; Morrow, 2006). In asking for advice, the advice-seeker presents themselves as less competent or knowledgeable than the advice-giver

(asymmetry of advice; epistemic authority), who must then demonstrate that their advice is worth sharing and following (normativity of advice; deontic authority) (Sillence, 2013). By not requesting advice and doing a troubles-telling (presenting a problem) instead, interlocutors place less demand on any potential responder, and this may make a response more likely (Vayreda & Antaki, 2009). This is referred to as a low-contingency request (Curl & Drew, 2008). Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) found in face-to-face interaction that when advice is not requested, it features high levels of hedging (tentative talk). This could be because the advice-giver is aligning to the dispreferred response of giving advice when it was not requested (Smithson et al., 2011). This article will analyse an instance where advice is requested in the title of the post, but not in the main text of the post, demonstrating how commenters do and do not align to the indirect nature in which the advice was requested through the epistemic and deontic authority of their comments.

Methodology

Data collection

The 'Dementia' section of the Carers UK forum was used, accessed through their website (<https://www.carersuk.org/forum/specific-disabilities-conditions/dementia>). Carers UK is a charity that provides information, support, and advice to carers throughout the UK. The forum is public to view, but an account needs to be made to post to the forum. The forum was chosen due to its popularity, with many active members and recent postings. Online forums provide a naturalistic environment where the researcher has no influence over what is discussed (Seale et al., 2010) and aligns with the preference within DP and CA research for using naturally occurring data (Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Schegloff, 1987). Forum users were either past or present carers for PLWD. Comment threads were on various subjects including accessing support/funding, difficult behaviours and care home suitability.

This research was approved by the university's ethics approval (human participants) sub-committee. The personal details of forum users were redacted, and names replaced with pseudonyms. References to place names, profile photographs and location tags were removed. The number of times each forum user had posted, and the time and date of each comment was left visible on the data screenshots to indicate how active each forum user was and to display the timespan of the interaction.

Ethical considerations

As a public online forum, Carers UK can be accessed by anyone, and the data used here can be found online. To anonymise the data any further would have involved changing the wording of comments which would have gone against the study of naturally occurring data which is highly valued in DP and CA research (Potter & Hepburn, 2005; Schegloff, 1987). Forum users posted about personal issues in their lives. To protect forum users from harm, Carers UK has moderators who check the content posted and forward anything worrying onto the Carers UK staff team who will then follow the safeguarding procedure. Additionally, if I had personally seen a post that worried me about a forum user's physical or mental health, I could have reported this to the staff team.

Single case analysis

The dataset comprised of five comment threads from the Carers UK online forum, taken from a larger corpus of 20 threads collected over UK summertime 2019. The dataset featured three original posts that performed a troubles-telling (where there is no request in the original post for potential commenters to provide advice, information or help). Instead, a trouble is presented, such as dealing with difficult behaviour and the focus is on the "teller and his experiences" (Jefferson & Lee, 1981, p. 411). The two other original posts featured a request for advice/help in the title, but within the main text of the original post, a troubles-telling

format is followed with no request for advice. This analysis presents one of these instances, an extract titled “Help!”, as evidence for troubles-telling formats achieving a low-contingency request (Curl & Drew, 2008). By not requesting advice in the main text of their original post, forum users place less imposition on any potential commenters, which has been shown to increase the likelihood of others commenting (Vayreda & Antaki, 2009). The evidence of the low-contingency request is seen in the responding comments to the original post: advice was given, even though it was not specifically requested in the main text of the original post.

The analysis of one extract is known as a single case analysis, and is commonly employed in interactional research (Schegloff, 1993). This form of analysis demonstrates the analytical effectiveness of interactional approaches in examining the details of a single episode of interaction (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998; Schegloff, 1987). The extract was chosen as the title of the opening post features an explicit request and the main text features a troubles-telling format with no requests. This mismatch makes the extract analytically interesting as it displays the author of the original post requests ‘help’, even though the content of their original post follows the same format as the other three troubles-telling original posts that did not feature any requests. The comments responding to the original post will be the focus, discussing how the epistemic and deontic authority of commenter’s advice provides evidence that troubles-telling formats perform a low-contingency request.

Analytic method

The analysis I undertook followed the six stages of a DP analysis outlined by Wiggins (2016), with insights from DP and CA research. I began by (1) reading through the dataset to become familiar with the text, noting recurring features, such as use of imperative formulations. I then (2) described the data, making initial detailed and descriptive notes of

what is happening in the text. This helps base descriptions in the content of the text. (3)

Identifying social actions and psychological constructs is the crucial stage that most characterises a DP analysis. This stage looks at the three core principles of DP: how discourse is constructed and constructive of the world, how it is situated, and the action-orientation of discourse. In this stage, I detailed how social actions (e.g., advising) are achieved through discursive practices/devices. I then (4) focused on the comments that exemplified instances of a variety of epistemic gradients and deontic stances. This involved reorganising my notes into documents containing categories relating to high and low deontic and epistemic authority. I then (5) collected all instances of the analytical focus by searching systematically through the dataset and compiling them in a document. The final stage is to (6) focus and refine the analysis: going back to the third stage of identifying social actions and psychological constructs, identifying patterns and deviant cases in my selected analytical issues.

Analysis

Original post features

The opening post in the data extract below exemplifies common features across the five extracts in the dataset. This included the use of; narrative structures (e.g., “I last posted 4 years ago”, “today I visited” and “years and years”), dispositional formulations (e.g., “my 90 year old capable, but can’t stop complaining Mum”), extreme case formulations (ECFs) (“Total stress”) and first-person pronouns (“I feel pressure from them all to be this daughter I can no longer be”). These discursive features and devices function to build accountability and defend decisions original posters have already made (narrative structures, Andersen, 2017), construct behaviours as if predictable and routine (dispositional formulations; Wiggins, 2016) and present troubles as legitimate (ECFs; Pomerantz, 1986). The use of first-person pronouns presents the discourse as something experienced personally (Goffman, 1979), something an

original poster has an epistemic right to know about: they have experienced it and no one else has (Heritage, 2013a).

Alex asks for ‘Help!’ in the title of the opening post below, but similarly to research findings from Vayreda and Antaki (2009), this is not framed as a request for advice within the main text of the comment. Vayreda and Antaki’s (2009) research into an online forum for people with bipolar disorder found forum user’s requests tended to be undemanding or vague, requesting little from a potential responder such as “I’d like to learn about this illness” (p. 936). Unlike Vayreda and Antaki’s (2009) research, the extract analysed here features no requests within the main text of the opening post. This creates a ‘low bar’, by which Alex is not asking for potential commenters to solve all their problems, for example, by saying ‘How can I sort this out? Should I stop caring for my mum?’. The low-contingency request (Curl & Drew, 2008) that Alex’s opening post produces allows the following commenters to construct the authority of their advice in a way that aligns to both the explicit call for ‘Help!’ from the title, and the troubles-telling which does not feature a request of any kind.

Data extract. Original post titled 'Help!' by Alex and the subsequent comment thread.

Help!	
Alex:	Sun Jul 28, 2019 7:49 am
Posts: 7	<p>I last posted 4 years ago and I'm still struggling. I've withdrawn from my 90year old Mum for my own sanity but keep in touch for my integrity.</p> <p>Today I visited my 90 year old capable, but can't stop complaining Mum. I gave her a gift. As soon as my husband left the room she was onto me. How had the quilt that was missing get back into the airing cupboard? I knew where this was going. She's accused me many times, it can only be me, no one else can have done it. Although she did ask who else has got a key to her house when I go through all the names she discounts and excuses everyone else saying things like no she wouldn't do that etc.</p> <p>I explained it wasn't me why would I do that? She says who else could it be. Bla bla I've heard it all before.</p> <p>The affect on me. Total stress, feeling bad about myself. Going over old painful childhood memories. Not wanting to discuss with siblings due to their lack of support in the past and assuming they won't see this accusation as irrational.</p> <p>I am not the daughter that should be caring. That one died sadly. I was the odd one out who became the rock for my parents and relentlessly cared for years and years. My siblings remained at arms length. Suddenly after my Dad died my siblings moved away and I felt alone. I struggled and I reached out to them for support. Eventually I burnt out I had nothing left and I had to look after me.</p> <p>Now the dynamics have changed. The siblings (4) have all been made powers of attorney and executors and I've been pushed down the line below my younger sister. I feel hurt. Even though I'm aware I can't care as I once did. I feel pressure from them all to be this daughter I can no longer be. They don't understand what I go through when I see Mum. It's as if as soon as I arrive she has an axe to grind and she's onto me. I take my husband mainly but even this didn't help me yesterday.</p> <p>I keep going back for more, as if it's still the same or it may get better but it never does.</p> <p>My Mum complains about everything and accuses me and I react so badly to it. It takes me a few days to recover from each encounter.</p>
Re: Help!	
Taylor:	Sun Jul 28, 2019 8:47 am
Posts: 20520	<p>Do you have a phone that can record mum? I'd do this a few times, and make her aware of what you are doing, then play it back to her, and ask if she thought it was acceptable behaviour? Or play it to your sisters, or her GP. I don't know why you keep "going back for more". I'd walk out the moment she started on at you.</p>
Re: Help!	
Charlie:	Sun Jul 28, 2019 10:41 pm
Posts: 34	<p>Trying to argue or discuss things with a person who has dementia won't work as the mental ability to do 'reason' gets lost.</p> <p>It's sad, but too often true, that a person with dementia may fixate on someone as being the reason for all their ills and confusion. This fixation can often result in these accusations.</p> <p>If you do an internet search for 'Compassionate Communication with the Memory Impaired by ((name)) you will find a list of tips that may be useful to you.</p>

Re: Help!

Sam:

Sun Jul 28, 2019 11:00 pm

I decide some time ago ...

To no longer get involved in peoples problems. I have help many family and friends. As I have gotten older it's taken a while to realise. I was a good listen and didn't make judgements. However I began to recognise people just dumping the problems on to me and feeling better themselves. I was left depressed and fed out. So now I do not allow anyone to dump or share anything that's negative. I surround myself with happy people.

Try to step and stay away. This is better for you health and sanity. Let the others take it on good luck to them. Perhaps it's they turn.

You sounds like you did all you could and nothings going to change.

Surround yourself with golly peaceful people and think happy thoughts.

To much negativity drags us deep down.

Posts: 603

Re: Help!

Robin:

Sun Jul 28, 2019 11:10 pm

May I suggest one practical thing if you do want to keep visiting? Leave the room every time your husband does. If he goes to the loo, discover you must fetch something from the car. If he is given a job to do, go and watch. That way you avoid the diatribes that start the minute you are left alone. (Can you tell I have had some practice at that?!)

Posts: 99

Epistemic and deontic authority of comments

In the subsequent comments to Alex's original post, advice was given. The advice varied in its content, but also in its epistemic gradient (where the epistemic stances of interactants positions them along a gradient of knowing about the topic in question; Heritage, 2013b) and deontic stance (the right or power someone has to propose, decide or announce the future actions that others take; Stevanovic, 2013). The epistemic gradient and deontic stance of commenter's advice will be used as evidence that Alex's original post featuring a request in the title and a troubles-telling format in the main text of the post produced a low-contingency request. For reasons of space, not all comments are discussed.

High epistemic and deontic authority

Charlie makes a strong deontic claim about something that “won’t work”: “Trying to argue or discuss things with a person who has dementia won’t work as the mental ability to do ‘reason’ gets lost”. The advice from Charlie is imperative (“won’t work”), indicative of a strong deontic gradient (Stevanovic, 2013). This presents the approach Alex has taken in combating their mother’s accusatory behaviour is not a normative course of action. This deontic stance is evidenced by the following epistemic stance in Charlie’s advice-giving, that “the mental ability to do ‘reason’ gets lost” and that PLWD “may fixate on someone as being the reason for all their ills and confusion” which can lead to accusations. The advice is presented in a factual and objective manner, indicative of a high epistemic gradient.

The advice given by Charlie is unusual in that advice usually refers to something the recipient should do (Shaw et al., 2015) and not something the recipient should *not* do. Charlie’s comment also functions to reject the normativity of the advice Taylor has given in the previous comment suggesting that Alex record their mother’s behaviour and play it back to her. Charlie displays that Taylor’s advice will not be possible as Alex’s mother will not be able to “reason” and she may be ‘fixated’ because of her dementia. This functions to foreground the normativity of the advice that Charlie then suggests following the first two paragraphs. Charlie also makes an epistemic claim, that Alex did not know that PLWD can become fixated on one person as “being the reason for all their ills and confusion”. This presents an asymmetry where Charlie presents themselves as K+ (more knowledgeable) and Alex as K- (less knowledgeable; Heritage, 2013b). In instances of high epistemic and deontic stance such as the first three sentences in Charlie’s comment, there is little displayed acknowledgement of the possibility that the advice may not be wanted, owing to it not being requested by Alex in the main text of their comment. This suggests commenters viewed Alex’s troubles-telling as request for advice, and they could have used the title of ‘Help!’ as evidence for this in face of the lack of a request from the main text of Alex’s post. If

commenters did not view Alex's troubles-telling as a request for advice, they may have provided something else, for example, sympathy.

Low epistemic and deontic authority

The deontic stance of Charlie's text is lessened in their advice using hedging (Wiggins, 2016): "If you do", and through use of the modal verb (Locher, 2006) 'may' in "that may be useful to you". This indicates Charlie recognises Alex's epistemic rights to know what is "useful" to them. Conversely to Charlie's earlier text, this demonstrates an alignment to the possible face-threatening nature of the advice and of giving advice when there is the possibility that it is unwanted.

Advice-implicative interrogatives (Butler et al., 2010) used by commenters display their awareness of Alex's epistemic rights. Advice-implicative interrogatives are questions the advice-giver asks the advice-seeker to establish the applicability of an advice suggestion (e.g., 'do you have a support group nearby?' may be asked before advising joining a support group; Butler et al., 2010). Advice-implicative interrogatives therefore soften the asymmetry and normativity of advice-giving (Butler et al., 2010). The advice-giver cannot know whether their suggestion is relevant or worthwhile to the advice-seeker's situation, whether the advice has already been tried or whether the advice-seeker has the capacity or possibility to employ the advice (Butler et al., 2010).

An advice-implicative interrogative is seen again in Robin's comment: "May I suggest one practical thing if you do want to keep visiting?". This text shows the advice is contingent upon Alex still wanting to visit their mother: "if you do want to keep visiting?", displaying Robin's epistemic gradient as low. Robin cannot claim to know something in which Alex holds primary knowledge: their own wants and feelings. Robin therefore reduces the asymmetry of their advice by treating Alex as K+ (Heritage, 2013b). This functions to

reduce the face-threatening nature of advising someone what to do (Locher, 2006), especially using the word “suggest”, the following advice is less imposing and instructive than that which is given earlier by Taylor. Robin’s advice-implicative interrogative features more hedging displayed using the modal verb “May” than the imperative format used by Taylor in “Do you have a phone that can record mum?”. The mitigated construction of Robin’s advice continues with the repeated use of “if” as a hypothetical case (Madill et al., 2001). This displays Robin’s text is constructed with alignment to the possible unwantedness of the advice they are giving.

Although Taylor’s advice is more imperative in its format, there is still evidence that they orient to the face-threatening nature of giving advice and of ‘telling someone what to do’ (Locher, 2006) through the text “I’d do this a few times, and make her aware of what you are doing, then play it back to her, and ask if she thought it was acceptable behaviour? Or play it to your sisters, or her GP”. The advice is imperative in its format (“I’d do”, “make her aware” and “then play it back”) indicative of a strong deontic stance. However, the advice is framed as an advice-implicative interrogative, acknowledging Alex’s epistemic rights to know the normativity of the advice to their personal situation. This is further evidenced by the or-prefaced repair in “Or play it to your sisters, or her GP”. The use of constructing alternatives can digress from the previous text without an explicit rejection of it (Jefferson, 1986). This could display Taylor’s acknowledgement that it may not be appropriate for Alex to play the recording back to their mother, as it could cause further argumentation and upset. The advice Taylor gives here shows the balance achieved between ‘telling someone what to do’ but in a way that is not assuming Taylor knows the best course of action for Alex’s personal situation and could be designed in this way to align to the tentative nature in which the advice was requested through the troubles-telling.

Discussion

This article utilised a DP approach to analysis, drawing on research findings from DP and CA to study advice in an online forum for carers of PLWD, contributing to more general understanding of social practices within online platforms. The analysis presented a single extract as evidence of how a troubles-telling format can be used to request advice in a way that does not impose upon potential commenters. By presenting a trouble as opposed to asking for others to solve your trouble, forum users can increase the likelihood that others will comment on their original post (Vayreda & Antaki, 2009). Additionally, troubles-telling formats reduce the asymmetrical aspects of advice: where directly asking for advice can threaten face and competence of the advice-seeker (Goldsmith, 2000). Subsequently, commenters used various discursive devices aligning to the asymmetrical and normative nature of advice such as taking a low epistemic gradient and deontic stance through use of advice-implicative interrogatives, hedging and modal verbs. Commenters' advice also featured strong epistemic gradients and deontic stances through use of imperative formats and factual presentations, displaying the normativity of advice.

The extract presented provides evidence that troubles-telling formats function as a type of indirect request in this interactional setting as found in other settings (for example: various 'ordinary' and 'institutional' settings (Jefferson & Lee, 1981) and an online forum for young people who self-harm (Smithson et al., 2011)). Across the five troubles-telling extracts in the dataset, advice was given in all cases. However, in two of the five extracts, the titles of the original posts featured a request for advice/help, but still followed a troubles-telling format in the main text of the post. This provides evidence to suggest that in doing a troubles-telling, forum users are soliciting advice, even when advice is not requested directly. Further evidence that troubles-tellings function as an indirect way to solicit advice is that when forum users responded to the comments left on their post, they conveyed thanks and supplied answers to interrogatives (three out of five original posters responded). If the advice had been

unsolicited, forum users may have rejected the advice given by commenters (Jefferson & Lee, 1981). The average number of posts by original posters (146) in comparison to commenters (614) demonstrates how original posters were generally newcomers to the forum. The number of posts each user has contributed is visible to all and consequently demonstrates how established an original poster is in the forum. In turn, this may influence the deontic and epistemic stance a commenter takes in their text.

Applicability of methodology

DP and CA allowed for an approach that explained the features of the text as well as what they function to achieve. As found by Lawless et al. (2018), using a DP approach developed understanding of systematic means in which people construct their advice, for example through use of advice-implicative interrogatives. DP also provided an established means for systematically analysing discursive devices (Wiggins, 2016). In DP and CA, the focus is on studying language in use in its own right (Meredith, 2016) allowing for study of how participants in the interaction make psychological matters relevant (Edwards & Stokoe, 2004). In the context of the online forum, this was possible without the reactivity (impact of the researcher upon participants) which can be brought about by using other methods such as interviews or experiments (Potter, 2012).

Concluding thoughts

This article provided an exemplar of advice-giving in situ of its specific interactional context. The presentation of a single case may be seen as a limitation in some research traditions; however, this approach is common within interactional research (Schegloff, 1993) and can be used to apply existing findings to new settings (Schegloff, 1987) as in the case of this article. To improve upon the rigour of my analytic findings, a data session could be held, involving collaborative review of the data, aiding the researcher by testing their observations (ten Have,

2007). This was not carried out due to time constraints, but my analytic process and findings were discussed with my supervisors throughout the project. It is nonetheless important to consider reflexivity, that as the researcher I selected the extract that best exemplified what I wanted to show, to build the best case for the analysis, and that the extract I chose represents something I believe to be interesting about the authority of comments in response to the apparent mismatch between the explicit request in the title and the troubles-telling in the main text of the original post.

I have demonstrated how the Carers UK online forum culture has a central focus on advice-giving: advice was given, even though it was not requested in the main text of the original post. A troubles-telling format functioning as a low-contingency request was sufficient for eliciting advice from commenters. Where some commenters align to the possibility their advice may be unwanted, others did not, or their advice featured both high and low deontic and epistemic authority. The analysis presents the sophistication of commenters' use of epistemic and deontic authority in balancing the possible unwantedness of advice, due to lack of request in the main text, against the request for advice in the title of the original post.

As support services for carers of PLWD are under pressure from overwhelmed local authority budgets (House of Commons, 2019) and the number of carers is estimated to need to increase to 1.7 million by 2050 (Lewis et al., 2014), online forums, such as Carers UK are providing much-needed access to social and practical support. This article prompts further exploration into the design of online forums that support advice-giving and advice-solicitation in a way that incorporates interactional evidence about epistemics and deontics.

Acknowledgements

I thank Professor Charles Antaki for supervision of this project for my master's dissertation. I also thank my current supervisors: Professor Elizabeth Peel, Professor Alison Pilnick and Dr Saul Albert, for their encouragement in publication of this article and for helping to shape it into its current form.

References

- Alzheimer's Society. (2019). *Facts for the media*. <https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-us/news-and-media/facts-media>
- Andersen, E. M. (2017). Typing yourself accountable: Objectifying subjective experiences in an online health forum. *Linguistik Online*, 87(8), 43-68.
- Buckner, L., & Yeandle, S. (2015). *Unpaid carers save the UK £132 billion a year – the cost of a second NHS*. <https://www.carersuk.org/news-and-campaigns/news/unpaid-carers-save-the-uk-132-billion-a-year-the-cost-of-a-second-nhs>
- Butler, C. W., Potter, J., Danby, S., Emmison, M., & Hepburn, A. (2010). Advice-implicative interrogatives: Building “client-centered” support in a children's helpline. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 73(3), 265-287.
- Curl, T. S., & Drew, P. (2008). Contingency and action: A comparison of two forms of requesting. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 41(2), 129-153.
- Edwards, D., & Potter, J. (1992). *Discursive psychology*. Sage.
- Edwards, D., & Stokoe, E. H. (2004). Discursive psychology, focus group interviews and participants' categories. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 22(4), 499-508.
- Goffman, E. (1979). Footing. *Semiotica*, 25(1-2), 1-30.

Goldsmith, D. J. (2000). Soliciting advice: The role of sequential placement in mitigating face threat. *Communications Monographs*, 67(1), 1-19.

Hepburn, A., & Potter, J. (2011). Designing the recipient: Managing advice resistance in institutional settings. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 74(2), 216-241.

Heritage, J. (2013a). Action formation and its epistemic (and other) backgrounds. *Discourse Studies*, 15(5), 551-578.

Heritage, J. (2013b). Epistemics in conversation. In T. Stivers, & J. Sidnell (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 370-394). Wiley-Blackwell.

Heritage, J., & Sefi, S. (1992). Dilemmas of advice: Aspects of the delivery and reception of advice in interactions between health visitors and first-time mothers. In P. Drew, & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Talk at work: Interaction in institutional settings* (pp. 359-417). Cambridge University Press.

House of Commons. (2019). *Local government spending, seventy-sixth report of session 2017–19 report (HC 1775)*.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmpublic/1775/1775.pdf>

Hutchby, I., & Wooffitt, R. (1998). *Conversation analysis: Principles, practices and applications*. Polity Press.

Jefferson, G. (1986, March). *Colligation as a device for minimizing repair or disagreement* [Conference paper]. Talk and Social Structure conference, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, United States.

Jefferson, G., & Lee, J. R. (1981). The rejection of advice: Managing the problematic convergence of a 'troubles-telling' and a 'service encounter'. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 5(5), 399-422.

- Johnson, J., Black, R. W., & Hayes, G. R. (2020). Roles in the discussion: An analysis of social support in an online forum for people with dementia. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 4, 1-30.
- Landmark, A. M. D., Gulbrandsen, P., & Svennevig, J. (2015). Whose decision? Negotiating epistemic and deontic rights in medical treatment decisions. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 78, 54-69.
- Lawless, M., Augoustinos, M., & LeCouteur, A. (2018). Dementia on Facebook: Requesting information and advice about dementia risk-prevention on social media. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 25(1), 44-51.
- Lester, J. N., & O'Reilly, M. (2018). *Applied conversation analysis: Social interaction in institutional settings*. Sage.
- Lethin, C., Hanson, E., Margioti, E., Chiatti, C., Gagliardi, C., Vaz de Carvalho, C., & Malmgren Fänge, A. (2019). Support needs and expectations of people living with dementia and their informal carers in everyday life: A European study. *Social Sciences*, 8(7), 1-14.
- Locher, M. A. (2006). Polite behavior within relational work: The discursive approach to politeness. *Multilingua - Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 25(3), 249-267.
- Madill, A., Widdicombe, S., & Barkham, M. (2001). The potential of conversation analysis for psychotherapy research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 29(3), 413-434.
- Meredith, J. (2016). Using conversation analysis and discursive psychology to analyse online data. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research* (pp. 261-276). Sage.

Meredith, J. (2019). Conversation analysis and online interaction. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 52(3), 241-256.

Morrow, P. R. (2006). Telling about problems and giving advice in an Internet discussion forum: Some discourse features. *Discourse Studies*, 8(4), 531-548.

Pomerantz, A. (1984). Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: Some features of preferred/dispreferred turn shapes. In J. M. Atkinson & J. Heritage (Eds.), *Structures of social action: Studies in conversation analysis* (pp. 57-101). Cambridge University Press.

Pomerantz, A. (1986). Extreme case formulations: A way of legitimizing claims. *Human Studies*, 9(2-3), 219-229.

Pomerantz, A., & Heritage, J. (2012). Preference. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 210–228). Wiley-Blackwell.

Potter, J. (2012). Re-reading ‘Discourse and social psychology’: Transforming social psychology. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 51(3), 436-455.

Potter, J., & Edwards, D. (2012). Conversation analysis and psychology. In J. Sidnell & T. Stivers (Eds.), *The handbook of conversation analysis* (pp. 701-725) Wiley-Blackwell.

Potter, J., & Hepburn, A. (2005). Qualitative interviews in psychology: Problems and possibilities. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 2(4), 281–307.

Schegloff, E. A. (1987). Analyzing single episodes of interaction: An exercise in conversation analysis. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 50(2), 101– 114.

Schegloff, E. A. (1993). Reflections on quantification in the study of conversation. *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, 26(1), 99–128.

- Seale, C., Charteris-Black, J., MacFarlane, A., & McPherson, A. (2010). Interviews and Internet forums: A comparison of two sources of qualitative data. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(5), 595-606.
- Shaw, C., Potter, J., & Hepburn, A. (2015). Advice-implicative actions: Using interrogatives and assessments to deliver advice in mundane conversation. *Discourse Studies*, 17(3), 317-342.
- Sillence, E. (2013). Giving and receiving peer advice in an online breast cancer support group. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 16(6), 480-485.
- Smithson, J., Sharkey, S., Hewis, E., Jones, R., Emmens, T., Ford, T., & Owens, C. (2011). Problem presentation and responses on an online forum for young people who self-harm. *Discourse Studies*, 13(4), 487-501.
- Stevanovic, M. (2013). *Deontic rights in interaction: A conversation analytic study on authority and cooperation* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Helsinki.
- Stevanovic, M., & Peräkylä, A. (2012). Deontic authority in interaction: The right to announce, propose, and decide. *Research on Language & Social Interaction*, 45(3), 297-321.
- ten Have, P. (2007). *Doing conversation analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
- Vayreda, A., & Antaki, C. (2009). Social support and unsolicited advice in a bipolar disorder online forum. *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(7), 931-942.
- Wiggins, S. (2016). *Discursive psychology: Theory, methods and applications*. Sage.
- Wittenberg, R., Hu, B., Barraza-Araiza, L., & Rehill, A. (2019). *Projections of older people living with dementia and costs of dementia care in the United Kingdom, 2019-2040*. <https://www.lse.ac.uk/cpec/assets/documents/cpec-working-paper-5.pdf>

This is a pre-publication version of the following article: [Slocombe, F. (2021). Online forum advice for carers of people living with dementia: A discursive and conversation analytic exploration. *Qualitative Methods in Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 13-23.]

This is a pre-publication version of the following article: [Slocombe, F. (2021). Online forum advice for carers of people living with dementia: A discursive and conversation analytic exploration. *Qualitative Methods in Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 13-23.]