Repeating a searched-for word with an agreement token in "challenged interaction"

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Orienting to interactional asymmetries in “challenged interaction”: Repetition in responses to other-completions of word searches

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Repetition in responses to word searches

Abstract

This article explores the conversational practice of responding to other-completions of word searches with a repeat followed by agreement token using ethnomethodological conversation analysis. Across three data sets involving “challenged interaction”, including second language interaction in Danish and English and Danish atypical interaction, participants’ orientations to interactional asymmetries in terms of competence and epistemic authority are explored. The article demonstrates that “challenged” search initiators responding with a repeat followed by agreement token to claim epistemic authority and demonstrate competence while using a repeat preceded by agreement token to align with others’ claims of epistemic authority and competence. Thus, the article contributes to conversation analytic studies of atypical interaction and deviance by describing how speakers in “challenged interaction” deal with competence as a practical problem. Data is in English, Arabic and Danish with English translations.
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When a speaker is at a loss for words, it is not uncommon for other participants to help by engaging in the search for the missing word and suggesting candidate solutions to the search. In response, the speaker assesses the solutions, orienting to them as either appropriate or inappropriate in relation to the object of the search, for instance by repeating the solution offered as part of the response. Such search sequences constitute a temporary asymmetry in the relationship between the participants, since one participant displays a lack of competence in being unable to retrieve the desired word and the others display superior competence by being able to suggest a candidate solution.

This study uses ethnomethodological conversation analysis as a method to explore participants’ orientation to interactional asymmetries in word search sequences, focusing on the conversational practice of using repetition in responses to other-completions of word searches. Relying on data consisting of “challenged interaction”, the study explores whether and how participants treat interactional asymmetries as relevant, including asymmetries involving epistemic authority as well as linguistic and cognitive competence. The term “challenged interaction” refers to interaction in which one or more participants do not use the seen-but-unnoticed sense-making methods by which members make themselves recognizable as and recognize others as competent members (Garfinkel, 1967) (see the discussion below). The study contributes to studies of challenged interaction by addressing how participants deal with their own and others’ linguistic and cognitive competence as a practical problem in the local particulars of the interaction.

Example 1 below illustrates the practice of searching for a word and for responding to an other-completion of the search. The participants are Stine and Annie, both native speakers of Danish.

Example 1: Oda road
In example 1, Stine is telling Annie a story. At one point she suspends the progress of the story, cutting off what is presumably the first part of a place name (line 1). Following the cut-off, Stine pauses and asks a question about the name of the location (line 2). Another pause follows, and then Stine states that she does not remember the name (line 3). Until this point in the search activity, Stine’s gaze has been withdrawn. But at this point, she turns her gaze to Annie who treats this as an invitation to join the search, offering a possible solution (line 6). Stine responds to Annie’s turn by repeating the solution offered (line 7). After the repetition, she adds a detail: ja, and then she continues the story.

Stine’s suspension of the story and her search for the place name is an example of the conversational practice of searching for a word, a practice which has been extensively discussed in conversation analytic literature (Goodwin 1987; Goodwin, 1983; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986; Lerner, 1996; Schegloff, 1979). Word searches constitute interruptions of the progressivity of the turn in sequential positions in which a turn constructional unit “is interrupted after it has begun but before it has reached a point of possible completion” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986, p. 55). As demonstrated in example 1 above, searching for a word
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is a co-constructed activity in which speaker and recipient cooperate to complete the search (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986; Lerner, 1996). Often, the search activity is displayed through a range of search markers, including nonlexical speech perturbations, gestures, facial expressions and also verbal search markers such as e.g. questions (cf. example 1, line 2) (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986). In multilingual settings, language alternation is often used as an additional resource for doing searching for a word (Brouwer, 2003; Chiarenza, 2010).

Speakers often withdraw their gaze from the recipient and assume a so-called “thinking face” during a word search (Goodwin, 1987; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986). This is treated by co-participants as a sign that the speaker is doing searching and that interruption is not a relevant action at that moment. On the other hand, speakers may gaze at one or more co-participants during a word search, thus inviting them to participate as in example 1 above.

In accordance with the general preference for self-repair (Schegloff, Jefferson, & Sacks, 1977), speakers are often allowed to finish the search themselves unless they invite others to participate. This article, however, focuses on word searches in which the recipients join the search by suggesting a possible solution to the search. Following Oelschlaeger and Damico (2000), we refer to this phenomenon as “participatory word search”. “Participatory word searches” involve at least three turns at talk: a) the word search initiation; b) the offering of a solution by the recipient; and c) the response to the solution offered by the search initiator in which the search initiator provides their feedback to the solution offered (Oelschlaeger & Damico, 2000). In example 1 above, Stine’s cut-off and her subsequent displays of doing searching (lines 1-4) constitute the word search initiation; Annie’s turn in line 6 constitutes the offering of the solution; and Stine’s repeat of the offered solution followed by *ja* (line 7) constitutes the response. This article focuses on the response to the solution and how the searcher uses that particular sequential position to treat interactional asymmetries as relevant. The analyses aim to demonstrate how participants’ orientations to interactional asymmetries contribute to negotiations of e.g. cognitive and linguistic competence in the local interactions and consequently to show that competence is not (only) an abstract or cognitive phenomenon.
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but is claimed, demonstrated, and contested by participants and for participants in the situated
details of the ongoing interaction.

**Repetition in responses to other-completions of word searches**

The response of the search initiator to the solution offered displays his or her understanding of the offering of the solution as well as assessment of the solution offered. One method that speakers use for accepting the solution offered is a repeat of the solution as illustrated in example 1. This method is similar to the practice which Schegloff (1996) terms “confirming allusions”. This practice involves speakers doing confirmation rather than agreement by repeating the previous utterance. In such cases, the repeat is produced with a level or falling intonation which displays receipt and claims understanding of the previous turn (Heritage, 1984; Svennevig, 2004). In Danish, however, the situation is more complex, since sentence-final intonation contours do not unambiguously indicate sentence function (Grønnum, 1992). Hence, the linguistic function of a turn may remain ambiguous if it is not signaled by other means, e.g. syntax. The practice described by Schegloff (1996) is used when the previous utterance offers a candidate observation, interpretation or understanding of the repeating speaker’s circumstances. Further, what is confirmed by the repetition is understood to have been implied in the first turn but not explicitly formulated.

In example 1 above, Annie’s suggested solution (line 6) offers a candidate interpretation of Stine’s circumstances in the sense that offering the solution to a problem, i.e. the word search, displays a specific understanding of that problem. It also constitutes an explicit formulation of the missing item implied in Stine’s search activity. Stine’s response to the candidate understanding consists of a repeat of the offered solution plus *ja* and accomplishes confirming allusions in Schegloff’s sense (Schegloff, 1996): The repeat of the solution offered becomes not only a confirmation of the understanding proposed but also a confirmation that that understanding was indeed implicitly conveyed in the search activity.
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Repeats in responses to other-completions of word searches thus treat the other-completion as a claim to superior epistemic authority which the repeat addresses by claiming primary epistemic rights (Heritage & Raymond, 2005) to the search activity and the outcome of the search despite the search initiator’s failure to complete the search on their own. The asymmetry which is thus addressed is related to the local activity of searching for a word and therefore does not usually characterize other parts of the interaction.

Some types of interaction, however, are characterized by asymmetry on a more general level as a result of a perceived lack of competence in at least one of the participants in the interaction. Competence, in this study, is approached from an ethnomethodological perspective. According to Garfinkel, competence is members’ “enforceable rights to manage and communicate decisions of meaning, fact, method, and causal texture without interference” (Garfinkel, 1967, p. 77). Hence, competence is understood as the sense-making methods by which members make themselves accountable as and recognizable to others as doing being competent members. Competence is thus a core part of being a member of society, that is, being able “to speak, to know, to understand, to act in ways that are sensible in [that] society and in the situations in which they [members] find themselves” (ten Have, 2005, p. 36). Further, though competence and membership are used and recognized by every member of society in and as every action, they are normally taken for granted and remain unnoticed.

In some situations, however, normative expectations of competence cannot be taken for granted. One or more participants in an interaction may not recognizably use the sense-making methods that are otherwise taken for granted. In such situations, participants do extra sense-making work to reach common understanding and, if possible, reestablish normative social orderliness. Participants who “breach” the normative social and interactional orderliness are often regarded by other participants as less competent, and their status as full participating members is endangered.

There are many reasons why participants fail to live up to normative expectations regarding social interaction. Second language learners or non-native speakers of a language may
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not (yet) have mastered the language sufficiently to interact in recognizably competent ways. Persons with speech impairments may not be able to participate in interaction in typical ways. And persons with cognitive disabilities may not have the cognitive ability to use the normatively expected methods for social interaction. The term “challenged interaction” refers to interaction in which one or more participants do not use the seen-but-unnoticed sense-making methods by which members make themselves recognizable as and recognize others as competent members (Garfinkel, 1967).

“Challenged interactions” constitute perspicuous settings (Garfinkel & Wieder, 1992) for investigating participants’ orientations to asymmetries in competence because in “challenged interaction”, participants’ sense-making methods are rendered noticeable by one or more participants’ deviant contributions which can be said to constitute naturally occurring breaching experiments (Garfinkel, 1967) in which “sharp discrepancies, between on the one hand existing expectations and/or competencies, and on the other practical behavioural and/or interpretive tasks, necessitate extraordinary sense-making efforts by members” (ten Have, 2005, p. 37).

As a consequence, “challenged interaction” forces participants and analysts to notice the otherwise taken-for-granted practices by which we establish and maintain social orderliness. In that way, research on “challenged interaction” may provide important insight into sense-making practices that tend to remain unnoticed by researchers working with typical interaction.

Orientation to Asymmetries in Offering a Solution

In “participatory word searches”, the fellow participants’ orientation to and treatment of the searcher are observable in their suggestions of possible solutions to the search. Oelschlaeger and Damico (2000), in a study of conversations with people with aphasia, describe two strategies that recipients who offer a solution to a word search may use: the “guess strategy” with which the possible solution is produced as a question, thus selecting the search initiator as the next speaker; and the “completion strategy” which produces the solution as a declarative, in effect completing the search initiator’s turn and allowing the recipient to assume speakership.
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Using the “guess strategy” treats the search initiator as a linguistically and cognitively competent conversation partner by allowing them to determine when the word search is over. With the “completion strategy”, on the other hand, the linguistic and cognitive competence of the search initiator is left open to question because they are not allowed to finish their turn or to assess the solution offered.

Once again, the situation is less clear in Danish, however. Since intonation contours do not unambiguously signal sentence function (Grønnum, 1992), it may sometimes remain ambiguous whether a suggested solution is in fact a guess or a completion. Nevertheless, in the next turn the search initiator will demonstrate how they understood the solution suggested, thus resolving the ambiguity for all practical purposes.

Similarly, second language (L2) speakers may orient to asymmetries in linguistic competence during word searches. Brouwer (2003) and Kurhila (2007) note that L2 speakers inviting others to join their word search orient to the other participants’ linguistic expertise as relevant for a successful outcome of their search. The participants’ orientation to these categories can be inferred from the lack of hedges or downgrades in the turn offering the solution and the response in the next turn. In the first turn, L2 speakers display hesitancy, portraying themselves as “not sufficiently competent” speakers, and the other participant provides the solution from a knowledgeable position, asserting it rather than offering it as negotiable. Thus, asymmetries in speakers’ expertise in the language used can be made relevant in L2 word search activities. Note, however, that the categories of “expert” and “not sufficiently competent” are established and negotiated in the situation – the “expert” need thus not be a native speaker or even better at the language in general, and these categories need not be relevant for other parts of the interaction (cf. also Jacoby & Gonzales, 1991; Lin, 2014).

While the categories “expert” and “not sufficiently competent” that are relevant for speakers of second languages are viewed as temporary and locally negotiated, the category “person with dementia” and the lack of linguistic and cognitive competence associated with that category are often regarded as more permanent. The persons with dementia in our data live in a
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dementia ward, hence their diagnosis is known to all their conversation partners. The question is, however, if co-participants’ knowledge of the category necessarily means that they make that category relevant in the interaction. Schegloff (1992) argues that contextual factors, such as e.g. participants’ social status, cannot be assumed a priori to be relevant to the participants in the interaction. Rather, it must be demonstrated through analysis of the local interactional details that participants do in fact make such contextual factors relevant. In line with this, the analyses presented below do not take it for granted that categories such as “persons with dementia” or “second language speakers” are relevant to the interaction. Rather, the analyses demonstrate whether and how such categories are treated as relevant by the participants in the local details of the interaction.

Data and Method

Using an ethnomethodological conversation analytic approach (e.g. Antaki & Wilkinson, 2012; Garfinkel & Sacks, 1986; Mondada, 2014), this study investigates participants’ orientations to asymmetries with regard to the participants’ linguistic and/or cognitive competences in “participatory word search” sequences through detailed sequential analysis of naturally occurring interaction.

The video recorded data used in the study were obtained from three different sources: a) classroom interactions involving children with Danish as a second language (22 hours); b) university students using English as a second language (35 hours); and c) everyday interactions involving Danish persons with dementia (14 hours). All of the data was collected with the informed consent of those involved, and all participants are anonymized. The study explores an interactional phenomenon across several data types which can all be characterized as “challenged interaction”. Hence, the study constitutes an attempt to describe “deviance” or “breaching” behavior as a member’s concern: How do participants in interaction orient to “deviance”, i.e. to interactional contributions that do not seem to conform to normative expectations? The focus of the study is thus not primarily interaction involving with persons
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with dementia or speakers of Danish or English as a second language. Rather, the study focuses on how participants make sense in and of “challenged interaction”. In that way, the study contributes to a significant strain of research within ethnomethodology and conversation analysis which focuses on “deviance” as a means for highlighting the sense-making practices that are taken for granted and remain largely invisible in the seamless co-construction of mutual understanding that overwhelmingly characterizes “typical” interaction.

From these several data sources, a collection of 13 instances of word searches with repetition in the response was compiled. The collection is fairly small, and therefore the results of this study can be no more than limited claims. However, the study has validity in the sense that it describes possible practices which are demonstrably used, albeit by a limited number of participants, and which are hence possible resources for other participants in similar situations (Peräkylä, 2011).

Results

In Schegloff’s (1996) collection of instances of “confirming allusions”, the repeats either constituted the entire response, or they were the first element of the response. In the collection at hand, all repeats are either followed by or preceded by an agreement token or nodding. The position of the agreement token makes a difference for the action accomplished in and through the turn containing the repeat, as will be demonstrated in the analyses below.

Repeat followed by agreement: Claiming independence

Example 1, reprinted below, features a repeat followed by an agreement token. The participants are Stine, a person with dementia living at a dementia ward, and Annie, a visiting researcher, both native speakers of Danish. The analysis will focus on Annie’s suggested solution (line 6) and Stine’s response (line 7) which consists of a repeat and an agreement token *ja*. 
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Example 1 (reprinted): Oda road

1  Stine:  og det var oppe (.) på Oda- (.)  
   and it was up on Oda
   ((looks at Annie))
2  nej hvad hedder det lige heroppe→
   no what is its name right up here
   ((gazes down, knocks her hand on sofa once))
3  (0.8)
4  kan ikke huske hvad det hedder→
   can’t remember what it is called
   (0.3)
   ((gaze returns to Annie, knocks on sofa three times))
6  Annie:  Odavej
   Oda road
7  Stine:  Odavej ja
   Oda road yeah
   ((knocks on sofa once))
8  (0.2)
9  Annie:  °ja°
   yeah
10 (0.4)
11 Stine:  det var derinde jeg var
   it was in there that I was

Annie’s suggested solution (line 6) is produced with a globally falling intonation which indicates that it is a declarative statement rather than a question (Grønnum & Tøndering, 2007). She thus treats the solution as something that she has independent epistemic access to rather than something that only Stine has epistemic access to (cf. Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Raymond & Heritage, 2006; Stivers, Mondada, & Steensig, 2011). This is in fact the case, since Stine has mentioned that particular place name at an earlier point in the conversation. By claiming independent epistemic access to the object of Stine’s search activity, Annie treats it as common knowledge – as something that she thinks Stine knows. In that way, Annie orients to the moral accountability involved in remembering previously established common ground and treats Stine’s failure to retrieve the desired lexical item as an indication of incompetence, i.e. as something that calls into question Stine’s status as a full, competent participant.

Stine responds to Annie’s turn by repeating the solution offered (line 7). Stine’s repeat amounts to a claim that the solution offered by Annie was in fact what she had in mind during
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the word search and thus to a claim to primary epistemic access to that information (for discussions of claiming and demonstrating, see Sacks (1992) and Mondada (2011)). After the repetition, Stine adds a detail: *ja*, and then she returns to the story. Heritage and Raymond (2005; 2006) demonstrate how, by placing the agreement token after the repeat, speakers separate the action of agreeing from that of confirming to resist the constraints set up in a yes-no question or to upgrade a second assessment. By adding *ja* after the repeat, Stine is pushing back on Annie’s claim to epistemic authority in her suggested solution by strengthening the claim to primary epistemic rights accomplished by doing confirmation by repetition.

In example 1, Stine initiates a word search, invites participation and evaluates the feedback received by repeating the solution suggested. By means of these interactional methods, she asserts her epistemic authority despite asking for help. She further manages to suspend the activity of storytelling and resume it once the search is finished, thus controlling the progression of the interaction. Stine thus demonstrates local interactional competence, making herself recognizable as a competent participant in the interaction. Nevertheless, Annie’s suggested solution orients to the fact that in other respects, i.e. the moral accountability of previously established common ground – a characteristic symptom of dementia (Jones et al., 2016) – Stine does not live up to normative expectations for participation in interaction and thus may not be considered a competent participant.

Example 2 presents another instance of the same phenomenon. Edith is a person with dementia, and Alice is her daughter. Both are native speakers of Danish.

**Example 2: To Clara**

1 Edith: ja den er kommet ud til
yes it has been given to
((lowers gaze slightly))
2 ((0.2))
3 (0.2)
((turns gaze to Alice))
4 Alice: til Clara ja /
to Clara yeah
((nods once))
4 Edith: til Clara
((nods once))
5 til Clara
→ 6 to Clara
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5 Alice: ((nodding))
   ja
   yeah
   ((leans back in her chair))

6 (1.4)

7 Alice: der star den også rigtig flot
   there it is placed very nicely

8 Edith: jamen det gør den da
   yes it is indeed

Edith and Alice are talking about a trunk that has been in the family for generations. In
the first line of the example, Edith initiates a turn stating where the trunk is now. However, she
breaks off at the point where the relevant next item would be the name of the present owners of
the trunk, or some other means of identification. The vowel of ti:l (line 1) is slightly prolonged,
and this, along with the ensuing pause, signals that Edith is doing a word search. During the
search, Edith turns her gaze to Alice (line 2) who treats this as an invitation to join the search.
She offers a candidate completion which repeats the preposition til and suggests a complement,
i.e. Clara (line 3). The candidate solution is offered with a globally falling intonation (cf.
Grønnum & Tøndering, 2007) which suggests a declarative statement, and it ends with ja
which, when placed after repeat, does confirmation rather than agreement. In that way, ja
retrospectively marks til Clara as repetition of information that has already been presented, i.e.
is mutually accessible and hence already established as common knowledge. Thus, like Annie in
example 1, Alice treats the word searched for as information that Edith is morally accountable
for remembering and consequently Edith’s word search as displaying lack of competence.

The relevant next action for Edith, after Alice’s completion of the search, is a token of
agreement rather than an evaluation of the search activity (cf. Oelschlaeger & Damico, 2000).
Nevertheless, Edith repeats the suggested solution (line 4), thus confirming that the suggested
solution is in fact the one she was searching for and pushing back on Alice’s categorization of
Edith as unable to remember information that is considered common knowledge.

After the repeat Edith nods, producing a token of agreement after the repeat (line 4).
This further strengthens her claim to primary epistemic rights and contests Alice’s claim to
primary epistemic access and the categorization implied in her suggestion of a solution. Alice
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responds to Edith’s repeat with /a line 5/), a minimal token of acknowledgment and agreement. Thus, Alice acknowledges Edith’s contribution and at the same time yields the floor, allowing Edith to continue if she wants to and treating the search activity as finished.

In the analyses above, persons with dementia use repeats of other-completions of word searches for reasserting their epistemic rights despite co-participants’ treatment of them as lacking competence. Their responses treat their loss of words and common items of knowledge as temporary and hence as unrelated to their overall cognitive competence. Further, they demonstrate interactional competence by being able to use confirmation by repetition as a method for claiming cognitive competence.

In a related discussion, Mikesell (2010) notes that confirmation can only be done when the speaker has the rights or authority to confirm the previous speaker’s turn, and she shows that people living with frontotemporal dementia make use of this in conversation, either to assert primary access to something other speakers have claimed access to, or to push back against assumptions about their knowledge state inherent in other speakers’ questions. Examples 1 and 2 demonstrate how the practice of confirmation by repeat in responses to other-completions of word searches similarly displays speakers’ claims to epistemic rights and authority, and thus to a status as a full member of the conversation.

Example 3 presents another repeat as response to other-completion of a word search. In the example, three university students are working on a project report. Andy is a native speaker of Danish, Bonnie is a native speaker of Brazilian and Carl a native speaker of Spanish. The interaction takes place in English, their common language and also the official language of the BA program they are enrolled in. At this point in the meeting, Andy interrupts the interaction to ask about a smell.

Example 3: Cinnamon

1 Andy: \[c n c a n y o u\] smell kanel\(\cdot\) kane:k cinnamon cinnamon ((gaze at Bonnie and Carl))
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In the example, Andy asks a question (line 1), and the last word of the question *kanel* – which introduces the topic of the turn – is repeated several times. This is treated by the other participants as a search activity as evident in Carl’s turn (line 5) in which he utters *cinnamon*, the English word for *kanel* (cf. Brouwer, 2003), thus offering a solution to Andy’s search.

With the repeated *kanel* (line 1) and the following searching activities, Andy performs a language alternation as part of the search activity. By introducing a gloss from his native language into an otherwise English-language conversation, he accomplishes several things. First, he completes the turn by adding a word that can function as the projected object of the verb *smell* (line 1). Second, by using multilingual resources, he offers his co-participants a clue about the nature of the object of his search. The project meeting takes place at a Danish university, so it is not unreasonable to think that one of the other participants may be familiar with the Danish word. Third, the repeat and prolonging of *kanel* (line 1) and the subsequent repetitions and cut-offs display Andy’s orientation to the search activity as not being successfully completed despite the production of *kanel* in line 1.

Andy is looking at the other students while asking the initial question and during the first part of the search activity (line 1), but when he offers the third candidate solution (line 4), he briefly looks away. When he looks back at the other participants, they treat that as an invitation to join the search. Carl utters *cinnamon* with a questioning intonation (line 5), thus
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producing a suggested solution. Carl’s suggestion treats Andy’s word search as language specific, offering a translation of Andy’s *kanel* in the preferred language of the conversation (cf. Taquechel-Chaigneau, 2014).

Andy responds not by repeating *cinnamon*, which would amount to confirmation of the suggestion, but by repeating the Danish *kanel* (line 6), which was previously used as a resource for doing searching. Thus, Andy’s response does not display alignment or confirmation of Carl’s suggested solution. In fact, it does not seem to respond to Carl’s turn in any obvious way. However, Carl’s turn poses a question, thus constituting a first pair part in an adjacency pair and making an answer conditionally relevant as the next turn (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Hence, Andy’s turn occupies the sequential position of an answer to Carl’s question. Since Andy’s repeat of *kanel* is not doing confirmation of the suggested solution but rather continuing the search activity, Bonnie treats Andy’s turn (line 6) as a continuation of the word search. She repeats Carl’s suggested solution *cinnamon* (line 7), thus supporting Carl’s solution. Andy responds with a repeat *cinnamon* (line 8), thus doing confirmation of the suggested solution as well as of the fact that that was actually the word he was looking for. He adds the agreement token *yeah*, thus separating agreement from confirmation and strengthening the claim to epistemic rights which is achieved by the confirmation by repetition practice.

In the search activity, Andy uses his native language, Danish, as a resource for doing searching and for describing the word he is looking for to the other participants. The other participants are not native speakers of Danish, but they are nonetheless able to make use of the Danish gloss (and perhaps also the smell in the room) to offer an acceptable solution. By using the Danish gloss in his word search, Andy orients to his lack of the corresponding English gloss as the trouble source which triggered the search. He thus makes himself recognizable as a “not sufficiently proficient speaker”. However, the other speakers offer their suggested solutions as guesses rather than completions, thus downplaying the “expert role” which is made relevant as a category for the recipients by Andy’s orientation to his own lack of expertise (cf. Chiarenza, 2010).
Nevertheless, Andy still claims primary epistemic access to the search activity by using
the repeat followed by agreement token in his response to the other-completion of the word
search. In that way, like the searchers in the examples above, he treats the lack of competence as
temporary, that is, as a category that is not necessarily relevant for him in other parts of the
interaction. The co-participants’ downgrading of the expert category similarly displays an
orientation to Andy’s loss for words as unrelated to his status as a full, competent member and
participant.

In fact Bonnie, immediately after Andy’s confirmation and agreement, treats the
multilingual word search activity as a language learning opportunity for herself. She says
kanel(.) kane:l (line 9) in a try-marked intonation (Sacks & Schegloff, 1979), thereby making
relevant for herself the category of “not sufficiently competent” – this time not in English, but in
Danish. Andy responds by accepting the expert role that is made relevant by Bonnie’s
orientation to her own lack of expertise; he offers a clarification by mentioning a Danish cookie
in which kanel is an important ingredient (lines 10-11). Bonnie claims understanding with mm
(line12), and after that they return to the activity of locating the source of the smell.

In example 3, the participants thus orient to asymmetries in competence during the word
search activity. However, the competence that is oriented to during the word search is linguistic
rather than cognitive. Andy makes relevant for himself the category of “not sufficiently
proficient” during the word search, and Carl and Bonnie treat the word search as language
specific. Further, despite knowing the right term for the object of the search, Bonnie and Carl do
not align with the asymmetry that Andy makes relevant by means of the word search. Rather,
they also treat themselves as belonging to the category of “not sufficiently proficient” by using
the “guess strategy” in their turns suggesting a solution. However, cognitive competence is not
oriented to as relevant in this example. All participants are oriented to as full, participating
members, and differences in linguistic competence are treated as temporary and as opportunities
for language learning rather than as related to or indicative of cognitive deficiencies.
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Repetition preceded by agreement: doing not claiming independence

The analyses above concern repeats followed by tokens of agreement. However, the collection also includes a few examples of repeats that are preceded by agreement tokens. Two of these are analyzed below in order to demonstrate in what ways the sequential position of the agreement token influences the action performed by the repeat. Both examples are fragments of second-language interaction, because no instances of this practice were found in interactions involving persons with dementia.

Example 4 is a fragment of a supervisor meeting between a group of international students and their two supervisors, Laura and Carol. The meeting takes place in English, and all participants are non-native speakers of English. Laura is a native speaker of Danish and Carol is a native speaker of Spanish. In the fragment presented below, Laura is engaged in explaining the importance of proofreading your paper before it is handed in.

Example 4: Last minute-ish

1 Laura: it it’s not so good if i- i-
2 I mean if it (.)
3 it if it actually perhaps takes you gr-
4 e:h grade down
5 that that it it seems that
6 that the appearance of the report is a bit eh
7 eh
8 ((turns gaze to Carol))
9 what do you say?

→ 10 Carol: [last minute]

11 Laura: yeah last minute (.). ish
12 ehh heh

In example 4, Laura’s account displays hesitation several times by e.g. repeating words, cutting off words and restarting them, etc. (lines 1-6). However, this is not oriented to as cause for action by the other participants. But at the end of her turn, Laura makes a hesitation that is longer than her previous hesitations (line 7) and orients explicitly to the word search with the question *eh what do you say* (line 8). At the same time she invites Carol to participate in the word search by looking at her. In response to this, Carol offers a solution to the word search in a
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declarative intonation and in overlap with Laura’s question (line 9), and Laura aligns with it with the agreement token yeah before repeating Carol’s suggestion last minute (line 10). Laura’s response to the other-completion is thus not in the first instance a confirmation which asserts Laura’s primary epistemic access to the word search but an agreement to Carol’s completion of the search. However, Laura continues the turn by adding ish after a micropause (line 10) and subsequently treating this as a laughable (line 11). By expanding Carol’s suggestion in her own turn, Laura performs an operation on the suggested solution in order to appropriate it to her interactional project (cf. Mondada, 2011). In that way, Laura demonstrates that the solution offered was acceptable but not quite what she had in mind: Her addition of ish constitutes a claim to epistemic authority by reappropriating the object of the word search.

Laura’s response thus manages to treat Carol as more competent with regard to the specific outcome of the word search while still retaining Laura’s status as the initiator of the search and thus the one who has the primary rights to assess the appropriateness of the solution suggested. In the first part of the response, Laura focuses on the linguistic part of the search activity, i.e. the search for the correct English gloss, thereby treating Carol as being more competent with regard to English than Laura is, while the second part of the response focuses on the content of the turn, assessing the appropriateness of the retrieved gloss for the conversational project at hand.

Example 5 provides another, more complex, example of a response to a word search in which the token of agreement precedes rather than follows the repeat. In example 5, three boys are discussing what dish to cook in the school kitchen. The setting is a Danish school and all three participants speak Danish as a second language. Yasin is a native speaker of Somali, and Musa and Abbas are native speakers of Arabic. Immediately before the extract begins, Yasin suggests that they make pizza. In the opening line of the example, he recategorizes the dish as ikke pizza and subsequently initiates a word search to retrieve the correct name of the dish (lines 1-4).
Example 5: Manaeshe

1  Yasin:   det er ikke pizza
      it’s not pizza
2  det va::r (.) det va::r
      it was
3    (1.5)
4  det der med m
      that thing with m
5  Musa:  se hans lillesøster
      look his little sister
6  Yasin:  de der runde pizzer
      those round pizzas
7    (1.0)
8  de med mimimim
      those with mimimim
9  Musa:  lese Hameds lillesøster
      look Hamed’s little sister
10 Yasin:  de: arabisk (     )
       they’re Arabic
11 Musa:  kom og se Hameds lillesøster
      come and look at Hamed’s little sister
12    (3.0)
13 Musa:  sj det med YouTube
      oh it’s with YouTube
14    (2.0)
15 Yasin:  Musa hvad hedder de der mans eh:
      Musa what is the name of those mans eh
16 Musa:  hvad er det for noget
      what is that
17 Yasin:  de der pizza runde pizza
      those there pizza round pizza
18 Musa:  hvad mener du
      what do you mean
19 Yasin:  de der runde pizza (.) det er sådan små der
      those there round pizza they’re like small ones
20 Musa:  man kan købe det i Egelunden
       you can buy it in Egelunden
21 Musa:  hvad mener du
      what do you mean
22    (14.0)
23 Yasin:  det hedder noget med men et eller andet eller m
      it’s called something with men something or m
24      sådan noget pizza
      like a pizza
25      candy and sweets hun sælger det
      candy and sweets she sells it
26 Musa:  nå:: ja: hvad er der galt med det
      oh   right what’s wrong with that
27  Abbas:  manaeesh
28 Musa:  manaeesh
29  Yasin:  ja: manaeesh
      yeah
30 Musa:  manaeesh
31 Yasin:  jeg tror det er det vi skal lave
      I think that’s what we have to cook
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Yasin’s turn and his search activity (lines 1-4) are ignored by the other participants who are focusing their attention on something happening on the computer screen (line 5). Yasin, however, pursues his search by producing a description of the object of the search (line 6), restating the initial sound (line 8) and subsequently adding another descriptive element, namely the cultural and/or linguistic category *arabisk* (line 10). In response, Musa once again orients to the activity on the computer (lines 11-13). Yasin, however, continues his search activity despite Musa’s resistance, and he initiates his next turn by addressing Musa directly and asking him about the name of the dish (line 15).

Addressing Musa is a relevant strategy for Yasin, since he has categorized the dish he is trying to name as Arabic, and Musa is a native speaker of Arabic. Yasin produces what is heard as the first syllable of the name of the dish followed by *eh::* (line 15) which constitutes another attempt at retrieving the word. Musa responds by asking for clarification in a very general manner (line 16), treating Yasin’s search activity as new to him. In that way, he displays to his co-participants that he has not paid attention to Yasin’s talk until this point. Yasin treats Musa’s turn as an information seeking question and responds by repeating his first description of the dish, *de der pizza runde pizza* (line 17). Musa responds with a second question, asking for clarification (line 18). Yasin then elaborates his description by adding information about the size of the dish (line 19) and a place where they are sold (line 20). Once again, Musa responds with a general request for clarification (line 21), still treating Yasin’s search activity as unintelligible.

A 14 second pause ensues (line 22). After the pause, Yasin resumes his search activity by restating the first syllable of the dish, *men*, (line 23) and describing it as similar to pizza (line 24). To this he adds a new detail – the name of the shop which sells it (line 25). In response to the last element of the search, Musa displays recognition with the change of state token *nå:: ja:* (line 26) (Emmertsen & Heinemann, 2010) to indicate that he remembers the food item that Yasin is searching for. However, he does not name the dish, so the turn remains a claim rather than a demonstration of knowledge (Mondada, 2011; Sacks, 1992). After the change of state
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token, Musa once again requests clarification, asking why Yasin is interested in this particular dish (line 26).

At this point, however, Abbas, who has not, until now, participated in the search activity, offers a possible solution to the search (line 27): *manaesh*. Abbas produces the word as a guess, which invites Yasin to assess the contribution as correct or incorrect. In the next turn, however, Musa repeats the word suggested in a declarative intonation (line 28). In that way, Musa produces the confirmation by repeat which constitutes an evaluation of the solution suggested. Overwhelmingly, the confirmation by repeat is done by the search initiator who in that way claims primary epistemic rights by having the authority to evaluate the contributions of others. In example 5, Musa thus retrospectively claims primary epistemic rights to the search activity by evaluating Abbas’ contribution.

In the next turn, Yasin produces another repeat of *manaesh* (line 29). His repeat is preceded by the agreement token *ja*: Agreement tokens that initiate a turn conform to the constraints set up by the previous turn, displaying acceptance of the claims to epistemic authority made in and by the previous turn (Heritage & Raymond, 2005; Raymond, 2003). Yasin thus aligns with Musa’s claim to primary epistemic rights despite being the original search initiator and despite Musa’s previous lack of contributions to the search activity.

Yasin’s turn is followed by a third repeat of *manaesh* (line 30). It is produced by Musa in a globally falling, declarative intonation and constitutes a second confirmation by repeat. The repeat treats Yasin’s turn as a challenge to Musa’s claim to epistemic authority in the previous turn (line 28) despite the alignment that Yasin displays with *ja*: (line 29). Musa’s repeat thus orients to the epistemic authority inherent in Yasin’s role as search initiator and claims superior epistemic authority by categorizing Musa as the participant who is entitled to evaluate the contributions of other participants, even those who otherwise have primary epistemic rights to the activity at hand.

In the next turn, Yasin states that *manaesh* is the dish they will have to cook (line 31), treating the word search as completed by continuing the interaction from the point when he
Repetition in responses to word searches initiated the word search. Yasin’s turn orients to and reasserts Yasin’s status as the search initiator by performing the next relevant action, i.e., the continuation of the topic which is expected upon the successful completion of a word search. In that way, Yasin makes use of another sequential feature of word searches to push back against the epistemic authority claimed by Musa. However, Yasin does not challenge Musa’s epistemic authority in relation to the word *manaeshe* which constitutes the object of the search.

Musa and Yasin both display an orientation to Musa’s primary epistemic access to the word *manaeshe* despite Yasin’s role as search initiator. In that way, the interactional asymmetry arising from Musa’s superior linguistic competence, i.e., his status as a native speaker of Arabic, is made relevant in the interaction by the participants. Yasin, who is a native speaker of Somali rather than Arabic defers to Musa’s authority in the matter of the Arabic term *manaeshe* but uses other resources for asserting competence and authority in relation to the search activity.

**Discussion**

The above analyses explore how search initiators use repeat followed by an agreement token in responses to other-completions of word searches to orient to interactional asymmetries. They detail how speakers use such responses to claim epistemic authority and to push back against assumptions of lack of competence implied in the previous turn. The analyses are based on data involving persons living with dementia as well as second language speakers. The study indicates that the practice of responding by repeat and agreement token is used by participants who are interactionally “challenged” for a variety of reasons, including cognitive and communicative impairments as well as inadequate proficiency in a second language. In that way, the study contributes to the growing body of ethnomethodological and conversation analytic studies that address “deviance” by describing one practice used by participants in “challenged interaction” to deal with their own and others’ linguistic and cognitive competence as a practical problem.
The participants orient to various kinds of competence in the responses to the word search sequences. Nevertheless, the methods by which they orient to competence remain the same. In other words, while the specific kind of competence is a matter arising from the local contingencies of the interaction, the sense-making methods that speakers use as resources for orienting to it are used across different contexts.

On the one hand, the study demonstrates how persons with dementia orient to problems with remembering a word or phrase in and through the word search activity, and how they invite others to join the search, thus making relevant an asymmetry in knowledge. It also shows how, by using the response by repeat, they subsequently claim primary epistemic rights or access to the solution offered, which claims that the asymmetry in knowledge was only temporary. Such participants, despite difficulties with demonstrating some kinds of competence, thus demonstrate interactional competence by managing to use the practice of responding with repeat followed by agreement token. Moreover, other, “non-challenged”, participants in the interaction acknowledge such interactional competence by waiting for an invitation before they contribute to the word search activity, that is, they regard e.g. the person with dementia as able to assess and decide whether they need help.

Persons with dementia orient to local, sequential kinds of competence but are often unaware of how they breach normative expectations for displaying competence in more extended interactional contexts, such as e.g. recognizing and orienting to common ground. Participants’ lack not only of orientation to normative expectations but also of awareness of this contributes to creating an interactional asymmetry that is accessible to and may be oriented to by “non-challenged” participants but which is often inaccessible to and hence not oriented to by the participant with dementia.

The study is based on a small collection (13 examples): hence, any apparent systematicity with respect to e.g. the use of the completion strategy rather than the guess strategy in interactions with person with dementia must be treated with caution. More research is necessary before anything definite can be said about possible systematic practices in this or
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other respects. The present study presents a first, exploratory inquiry into competence and epistemic authority as members’ concerns in “challenged interaction”. Further studies are needed to investigate the possible practices that are indicated here.

On the other hand, the study also addresses how multilingual speakers orient to asymmetries in linguistic competence in and through word searches. By using multiple languages during the search activity, the searcher may make relevant the category of “not-yet-proficient”, thus reciprocally making relevant for other participants the category of “expert”. However, the analysis also demonstrates how, despite orientating to the category of “not-yet-proficient”, the searcher may still make a claim to primary epistemic rights or access to the object of the search activity by means of a response by repeat followed by agreement token. In such search activities, participants treat the lack of competence as a temporary and purely linguistic matter without implications for the search initiator’s overall communicative or cognitive competence (cf. also Lin, 2014; Taquechel-Chaigneau, 2014). In other words, the interactional asymmetry displayed in and through the search sequence is treated as a local matter that does not necessarily apply to the rest of the interaction.

Finally, the study explores how speakers may defer to other speakers’ claim to primary epistemic rights or access to the object of the search by agreement token followed by repeat. The practice is used by search initiators to treat other participants as more competent with regard to the object of the search. Search initiators using this practice do subsequent work to reestablish their position, work that is otherwise accomplished in and through the response by repeat followed by agreement token. In the two examples analyzed, both search initiators orient to linguistic competence, treating another participant as more competent than themselves. In example 5, the asymmetry oriented to arises from the fact that the search initiator, a native speaker of Somali, is searching for an Arabic term –and the other participants are native speakers of Arabic. The other participants orient to the asymmetry as well as evidenced in the repeats followed by agreement token which Musa does without being the search initiator. In
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example 4, both speakers are non-native speakers of English, but Laura nevertheless treats Carol as more linguistically competent in the local context of the interaction.

The results presented in this article add to the substantial body of research which details how participants in interaction orient to, negotiate and contest matters of competence and epistemic authority in interaction. Specifically, the study demonstrates that the methods used by participants to claim epistemic authority and competence are the same across various types of “challenged interaction”, whether the challenges arise from cognitive and/or communicative impairments or from lack of proficiency in a second language. However, the kinds of competence that participants orient to differ in systematic ways. More research is needed to shed light on the phenomenon of “challenged interaction”, specifically the systematicities that can be observed across different types of data. Such research will contribute further to our understanding of “challenged interaction” as a phenomenon and simultaneously, by illuminating the constituent details that make interaction recognizably and describably “challenged”, shed new light on interaction that is “non-challenged”.

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