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What you give is what you get

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What you give is what you get: advice-giving and uptake in conversation

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There is much research on advice-giving in both institutional (e.g. Butler et al., 2009; Heritage & Sefi, 1992) and everyday conversation (e.g. Adolphs, 2008; Shaw et al., 2015). Responses to advice—or advice uptake—however, have been studied to a lesser extent. Consider (1).

- (1) A: why don't you just put an uplifting message on it
B: maybe I should

In (1), A uses an interrogative construction to advise B, who is her employee, to put an uplifting message on a birthday present. In this case, B appears to accept the advice, but advice can also be resisted, rejected, or ignored altogether (Shaw & Hepburn, 2013). According to Jefferson & Lee (1981), advice uptake is largely an interactional matter, which raises the question: what are the interactional factors that determine advice uptake? We explore the effect of two factors on the way advice is taken up in conversation: the constructional properties of the advice-giving sequence and interlocutor relationship. By drawing on corpora previously not available to researchers, we are able to empirically test the validity of their predictions, and suggest further developments of their original theories.

The data comes from two corpora of spoken British English, the London-Lund Corpus and the London-Lund Corpus 2, where the conversations have been divided into those among equals (e.g. family) and disparates (e.g. employer–employee). We extracted 417 instances of advice and annotated them for the constructional properties of the advice-giving sequence (e.g. interrogatives, imperatives) and interlocutor relationship. We then determined whether the advice is accepted, resisted, rejected, or ignored, and how.

The preliminary results suggest that almost half of all advice (46.5%) is met with some kind of resistance, particularly in cases of strong advice, such as deontic modals (*you should ask him*) and imperatives (*go check the guidelines*), and where the adviser is of higher status. More indirect, but still canonical, forms such as interrogatives (*why don't you get hold of Peter*) result in the highest levels of acceptance, while for less explicit forms (*it's better to have a controlled environment*) a lack of response is more common. Rejection is least common in advice exchanged between equals. We are exploring possible reasons for these results.

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