

Dementia and Epistemic Authority: A Conversation Analytic Case Study

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Introduction

Imagine you have spent nearly all of the seventy years of your adult life being an organized and authoritative woman, raising three daughters, working as a clinical psychologist, maintaining many relationships and friendships. Now you've noticed more and more trouble remembering things, confusion about how to implement a plan or even what the right plan should be, even about things you know you used to do easily like shopping or making reservations. Imagine that, on top of all of this, one of those daughters you raised so competently is now sitting in front of you telling you that you're so incompetent now that you don't even *know* whether you're capable of writing a letter to a friend. Recently, there has been much research applying the tools of discourse analysis to the talk of individuals with cognitive impairments (Cherney, Shadden, & Coelho, 1998). Many studies have examined the coherence, informational content, and topic management ability of older adults with various forms of dementia. In this case study I examine the interactions between a woman diagnosed with dementia of the Alzheimer's type (DAT) and her daughter from a slightly different angle. Specifically, I demonstrate that the mother, Sophia,² is sensitive to her daughter's explicit challenges to her epistemic authority over domains of knowledge traditionally assumed to be her own, such as her abilities, experiences, and knowledge. Through skillful application of a range of

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techniques, Sophia is able to successfully reframe the talk to establish herself as the authority on these matters, working to minimize loss of face (Goffman, 1967). The observation that Sophia is sensitive to this implied asymmetry and works to minimize it has implications for caretakers and families of dementia patients in terms of minimizing tension and avoiding a cycle of learned helplessness (Lubinski, 1991).

Background

Dementia and Conversation Analysis

The subject of this case study, Sophia, has been diagnosed with dementia of the Alzheimer's type (DAT), a type of dementia characterized by cognitive impairments including losses in short term and procedural memory and executive and planning functions (Hales, Yudofsky, & Gabbard, 2008). Discourse analysis of various types has been used to investigate the speech of dementia patients in a range of specific areas, including, but not limited to, coherence and cohesion (Dijkstra, Bourgeois, & Allen, 2004; DiSanti, Koenig, Obler, & Goldberger, 1994; Laine, Laakso, Vuorinen, & Rinne, 1998), topic management (Garcia & Joannette, 1994; Mentis, Briggs-Whitaker, & Gramigna, 1995), repair (McNamara, Obler, Au, Durso, & Albert, 1992; Orange, Van Gennep, Miller, & Johnson, 1998), turn-taking (Ripich, Vertes, Whitehouse, Fulton, & Ekelman, 1991), and informational content (Chenery & Murdoch, 1994; Cherney & Canter, 1993; Ehrlich, Obler, & Clark, 1997).

Many of these studies, however, rely on picture description tasks, interviews, or other experimental means of eliciting the discourse sample (Perkins, Whitworth, & Lesser, 1998). Perkins *et al.* point out that these methods might “result in a discourse sample that is unlikely to reflect what happens between people with dementia and their caregivers on a daily basis” (p. 35). Because of this, they propose conversation analysis (CA) as the best method to really uncover

the everyday use of language between dementia patients and their caregivers, families, and friends. They also point out that CA lends itself to analysis not only of the practices and (dis)abilities of the patients, but also those of their conversation partners, uncovering specific ways in which caretakers can encourage communication as much as possible. To that end, they outline the *Conversation Analysis Profile for People with Cognitive Impairment (CAPPCI)* (originally proposed in Perkins, Whitworth, & Lesser, 1997), a method that combines a close conversation analysis of around ten minutes of interaction between the patient and the caretaker with a detailed interview with the caretaker. Through comparing the interview and the analysis, light can be shed on any discrepancies between the caretaker's perceptions and the practices, abilities, impairments, and strategies uncovered by the analysis, which in turn can help the caretaker discover new strategies, and avoid either overestimating the patient's abilities (leading to communication breakdowns) or underestimating them (leading to a cycle of learned helplessness (Lubinski, 1991).

Though not exemplifying the CAPPCI as such, Mikesell (2009) provides an excellent example of the application of CA to uncover both interactional patterns in the speech of one dementia patient, and strategies used by caretakers to accommodate these patterns. Specifically, she examines the interactions of SD, a man with frontotemporal dementia, and observes that SD's turns generally display local coherence with the previous turn, but often fail to demonstrate understanding of the broader aims of the sequence. For example, to open-ended *wh*-questions, SD will often respond "I don't know," a response that is locally type-conforming but often ignores the implications for the longer sequence of talk of failing to offer a specific answer. In response to this, Mikesell finds, SD's interlocutors shape their talk to encourage meaningful responses from SD by constraining the types of their turns to, for example, yes/no questions

rather than *wh*-questions. Interestingly, Mikesell points out that this accommodation simultaneously allows SD to demonstrate the competencies that he does possess, by helping him participate effectively in the conversation, and highlights his *in*competency by creating unnatural sequences and strings of test questions that would be very unlikely to occur in conversation between fully competent adults.

On that note, a final consideration about the discourse of cognitively impaired adults relevant to this study concerns learned helplessness, mentioned above (Lubinski, 1991). Lubinski describes learned helplessness in this context as a destructive cycle in which a diagnosis of dementia and some amount of innate loss of ability are reinforced by lowered expectations by family and caretakers and reduced opportunities to engage in normal life, leading to further deterioration of abilities. This cycle can function in subtle ways in the realm of communication, as the conversation partners of dementia patients shape their talk differently because of assumptions about the patient's impairment, leading potentially to the further deterioration of communication skills as the patient internalizes these assumptions. It is assumptions like these (among other factors) that Lubinski argues can lead to dementia patients lowering their expectations of themselves, triggering a cycle of learned helplessness.

Epistemic Authority and Disagreement

Conversation analysis is concerned with understanding the underlying systems to which participants in talk-in-interaction orient and through which practices such as turn-taking and sequence structure are organized (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974; Schegloff, 2007). In this section I discuss the notion of preference, and specifically how it relates to the acts of agreeing and disagreeing, as well as some findings on the role of epistemic authority in assessment sequences.

Conversation can be thought of as being built around *adjacency pairs*, or more colloquially, statements and responses that go naturally together (Schegloff, 2007). For example, when one party proffers an invitation, this makes *conditionally relevant* either an acceptance or rejection of the invitation: if an appropriate *second pair part* (SPP) to the *first pair part* (FPP) of an invitation fails to occur reasonably soon in the interaction, participants will likely orient to this as deviant or in need of explanation (Schegloff, 2007). The notion of preference concerns cases in which more than one type of relevant SPP exists – for example, acceptance or rejection of an invitation, agreement or disagreement with an assessment, and so on. In these cases researchers have often found that a certain preference structure operates, causing an asymmetry between the different relevant types of response. Sacks (1987), for instance, demonstrates a preference for agreement over disagreement when responding to yes/no interrogatives. This preference can be seen in the shaping of the talk by the recipient of the question; agreeing responses are generally delivered quickly and without mitigation, while disagreements often follow pauses, hedging, or partial initial agreements. When a pause or hesitation marker foreshadows subsequent disagreement, the first speaker may preemptively reframe the question so that what was originally a negative response becomes a positive, agreeing one, showing that the preference structure is oriented to by both parties.

Pomerantz (1984) examined preference structure in the case of assessments, and found, not surprisingly, a general preference for agreement with assessment FPPs. In other words, SPPs that express agreement are generally delivered in a preferred format, quickly and without mitigation, while disagreement is generally expressed with some bundle of features in the turn design indicating a dispreferred response (hesitation, hedging, partial agreement prefacing, accounts, etc.). However, Pomerantz makes the important observation that preference structure is

sensitive to the specific type of assessment sequence, and that other broad preference structures can, in a sense, trump the preference for agreement. In sequences in which the FPP assessment is a self-deprecation, she demonstrates a reversal of the normal preference order, such that disagreements with self-deprecating assessments are delivered in a preferred format, and agreements carry the features of dispreference. Kotthoff (1993) further complicates the picture of the agreement/disagreement preference structure by examining disputes. She observes that in extended dispute sequences, once both parties orient to the talk as being a dispute, preference order can again flip, so that disagreement, or standing up for one's original position, seems to be preferred. In this context, agreement is seen as a loss of face and must be managed carefully; in fact, Kotthoff finds that "concession," (eventual agreement by one party to the main point of the other) is often delivered hesitantly and with much initial mitigation. The general preference for agreement, therefore, is highly context-sensitive and can be overridden by other factors, such as social concerns (don't agree if it means putting down your conversation partner) or concerns of face and defending one's own original claims.

An additional factor at play in sequences involving agreement or disagreement with claims is negotiation of epistemic authority; in other words, which speaker has primary authority and rights to assess the domain in question. Heritage and Raymond (2005) show that the speaker making an initial assessment (the FPP) has a sort of de facto claim to superior authority, and both participants in the interaction can work to downplay, challenge, or reverse that claim. For example, a first speaker can downplay his or her superior authority by asking for confirmation from the second speaker, or a second speaker can assert independent and equal access to the knowledge in question through "oh"-prefaced or upgraded responses. Heritage and Raymond discuss these techniques in the context of face (Goffman, 1967), claiming that even in the case of

agreement in a context where agreement is preferred, there are delicate issues of claims to superior epistemic authority which are oriented to by the participants.

Overall, then, the structures and forces at play in the course of a sequence involving assessments of some form are varied and potentially contradictory. The general preference for agreement may be subverted by desire not to threaten the face of the first speaker (in the case of self-deprecating assessments) or not to lose face oneself; turn design, in addition, may be influenced not only by the preference structure in operation, but by concerns of maintaining the proper hierarchy of epistemic rights to knowledge.

Data Analysis

The data examined for this study consist of six hours of video recordings taken, with Sophia's knowledge and consent, on three separate occasions on which she was visiting with her eldest daughter, Lucy, and other members of Lucy's family. However, all of the excerpts that will be analyzed in detail in this study come from the third occasion, a visit by Lucy to Sophia at her nursing home in the fall of 2010.

The subject, Sophia, is an eighty-eight year old woman living in the health center wing of a continuum of care retirement home, diagnosed with early-to-intermediate DAT. While Sophia's executive functions and short-term memory are impaired enough that she cannot live independently even within the retirement home, her long-term memory and many other cognitive functions are still mostly intact, including the ability to participate in conversation. Having spent her entire adult life as an extremely competent and organized woman, Sophia now finds herself in a position where her short-term memory often fails her and she feels overwhelmed by tasks that used to come easily. Sophia is keenly aware of her declining ability to both remember things and perform routine tasks on her own, as evidenced by many comments to her daughter declaring

things too hard or complicated for her. Despite this level of awareness of her own limits, Sophia still appears to respond to what I refer to as *other-initiated challenges* to her claims about her own situation or memory of events by attempting to refute or minimize the challenge. In other words, while she does not hesitate, around her daughter, to make negative assessments of *her own* abilities, she is still sensitive to implications that her own assessments are inaccurate or lacking. I focus my analysis on sequences in which Lucy initiates an explicit challenge to a claim or assessment made by Sophia about something reasonably assumed to be more in Sophia's domain of authority than Lucy's. I will examine three extracts that exhibit such challenges. Close analysis demonstrates that Sophia is sensitive to these challenges and employs a variety of techniques in order to reestablish herself as the authority on her own abilities, situation, and knowledge.

The first example occurs while Lucy is looking through cards that have been sent to Sophia. We join the talk as Lucy is reading the text of a card sent to Sophia by her friend Roz. In this and the examples that follow, Sophia's assertions are indicated with an arrow marked A, Lucy's challenge to Sophia's authority with an arrow marked C, and Sophia's response with an arrow marked R.³

(1a)

42 Luc: ((reading)) I: want to wish you a shana tova and make
 43 a promise to visit your room. tsk ↑Oh my ↑goodness.
 44 (0.2) My husband Eli was just [diag]nosed=
 45 Sop: [°Yeah.°]
 46 Luc: =with cancer of the tongue.
 47 Sop: Yeah.
 48 Luc: tsk Needs to have some chemo and radiation.
 49 (1.0)
 50 Luc: ((continues reading)) .hh We are in for a rough few
 51 months but the prognosis is a good one and we must
 52 be hopeful and positive. Please keep us in your
 53 thoughts. tsk Bo:y. (.) This would be a good one to
 54 answer.

³ See Appendix 1 for a transcription key.

55 Sop: →_A Uh now- (.) he:re's a- (.) I don' know whether I did
 56 already.
 57 (0.2)
 58 Luc: →_C Unless- (0.2) i- i- it's too hard for you. H- how
 59 would you have done [that.]
 60 Sop: →_R [I] could have done it.
 61 Luc: Really?
 62 Sop: { ((nods)) - (0.6) } Mhm,

Despite appearing to remember some of the content of the card, after Lucy's assertion in lines 53-54 that this card would be a good one to answer, Sophia makes a statement about her own lack of *memory* about whether or not she answered the card. Lucy's response does not address the issue of Sophia's memory; rather, she directly challenges Sophia's *ability* to have answered the letter. Importantly, not only does Lucy's turn make a negative assessment of Sophia's ability to perform a task that would be routine to a fully competent adult, but by declaring Sophia unable to have answered the letter, she contradicts Sophia's own description of the situation. Implicit in Sophia's statement of her lack of memory as a problem is an assumption that she is capable of having answered the letter, making the question of whether or not she did a concern. Lucy is not only saying *you can't have done this*, but is also implying *your own understanding of your abilities is inaccurate*. Note that while Lucy's turns shows some features of dispreferred turn design, such as hesitation and cut-offs, the first actual statement in her turn, "it's too hard for you," is not mitigated in strength or authority.

Sophia's response in line 60 is a clear and straightforward example of her ability to respond effectively to challenges to her epistemic authority. What is notable about her response is its blunt delivery; despite being a direct contradiction of her daughter's assertion, it is delivered without mitigation, hesitation, or any other markers of a dispreferred action. It also stands out as one of the only instances in the entirety of the data examined for this study in which Sophia overlaps her talk with that of her conversation partner. By disagreeing with Lucy without

any of the normal features of doing (dispreferred) disagreement, Sophia subtly emphasizes that this is an area about which she has the right to make a blunt, unmitigated declaration, and that it is her assessment, and not Lucy's, that is relevant. In a way her turn can better be seen as *correcting* Lucy than as *disagreeing* with her, and implicit in the right to correct is the right to be considered the ultimate authority on the matter. It could also be seen as a mini-example of a dispute sequence as in Kotthoff (1993), where Sophia's defense of her original (implicit) claim is delivered as a preferred response. Lucy's reply of "really?", while still displaying some doubt or disbelief, does go along with the switch to deferring, at least on the surface, to Sophia's role as primary assessor of her own abilities.

While the exchange analyzed above is my focus, it is interesting to examine the development of Sophia's position over the next couple of minutes. After a four-second pause Sophia strengthens her contention that she could have written back by stating that she thinks she did:

(1b)

63 (4.0)

64 Sop: →_A I think I did do it.

65 (2.0)

66 Sop: heh hh Not a good [()]

67 Luc: [You] fou:nd a notecard and

68 a stamp, a:nd her address,=

69 Sop: ((nod))

70 Luc: =and you figured out what to sa:y?

71 (0.4)

72 Sop: I [think so.]

73 Luc: [About] her husband who has cancer?

74 (1.8)

75 Sop: U:::h, (1.6) not the- maybe that directly but (.)

76 that a:ll- a:ll of the (.) problems would ea:se up

77 or=

78 Luc: Mmm. [↑ Okay,]

79 Sop: =[(something.)]

80 (5.0)

81 Luc: We::ll- (0.4) Okay, so that's possible,

82 Sop: Yeah.

83 Luc: But if you're not su:re,=

84 Sop: ((shaking head)) I'm not [sure.]

85 Luc: =[then]there's no ha:rm in

86 writing her another note,=

87

88

89

90

91 Sop: [((nod))]

In line 78 Sophia is not swayed from her position by Lucy's elaboration of the tasks involved, and although Lucy's final question in line 79 is greeted with hesitation and disfluency, Sophia's ability to produce a vague description of what she said in her supposed return letter seems to block Lucy from expressing further doubt. After an extended silence, Lucy appears to cut off the beginning of her turn in line 85 to explicitly concede the possibility that Sophia answered, reversing her claim back in line 58 that it's too hard for Sophia to do. Lucy then moves to reestablish alignment by focusing on the fact that Sophia isn't certain she did write the note, which appears effective as the next several turns of talk are occupied with agreement that it's important to make sure she answered this letter, and suggestions by Lucy of how she could word the new note. After a short pause, however, Sophia jumps back in with a revised claim about the state of her certainty about previous events:

(1c)
 109 (0.6)
 110 Sop: →_A I did write a note (to it), and I think I mailed it.
 111 Luc: But before or after you got this.
 112 Sop: After.
 113 Luc: After. ↑Okay, ↑well,
 114 (3.0)
 115 Luc: That's good then.
 116 (2.0)

In line 110, Sophia shifts the epistemic strength of her claims to assert her having written the letter as fact, and shifting the "I think" to apply only to whether she mailed it. That Lucy is still not entirely convinced is hinted in the extended gap in line 114, but finally in line 115 Lucy seems to concede the truth of Sophia's claim (and therefore also her right to make it, despite Lucy's doubts). It is after this concession, and another extended pause, that this sequence culminates in Sophia's repeating Lucy's suggestion (from lines 89-90), delivered as a first pair

part with no indications of awareness that Lucy has been suggesting this for the past twenty-six lines of talk:

(1d)
 117 Sop: → I could write her another no:te.
 118 Luc: Right. You could. And just sa::y (0.4) hope things are
 119 going we:ll, [°whatever,°]
 120 Sop: [((nods))]

The most interesting features of Sophia’s turn in line 117 are the word “another” and the emphasis on “no:te.” The latter feature seems to mark “note” as new information in some sense, in this case projecting the implication that she is introducing this suggestion on her own, rather than agreeing with Lucy’s suggestion. Whether this is in any sense a purposeful manipulation of the talk or whether Sophia simply lost track of the previous thirty seconds of interaction enough to honestly believe she was introducing this idea herself is impossible to determine. In either case, however, the effect is to recast Sophia as at least a co-author of the suggested course of action, and to put Lucy in the position of providing the second pair part replying to Sophia’s suggestion; in a subtle way this emphasizes Sophia’s role as the one responsible for dealing with her own correspondence with friends. In addition, Sophia’s use of the word “another,” coming right after Lucy finally seems to concede the existence of a first reply, serves to further establish the original reply as given, cementing her own position.

Sophia’s position, then, evolves through the interaction from an implicit *I could have written a letter*, to *I think I did write it*, to *I did write a letter and probably mailed it*. It is not possible to know whether this progressive strengthening is in any way a conscious or subconscious attempt to increase her perceived competence and authority in the conversation as part of a reaction against Lucy’s initial challenge to her ability, or whether she honestly is searching her memory and finding more and more certain evidence in her mind that she actually

wrote the reply. However, given everything she knows about her mother's situations, and her subsequent experience helping her mother write "another" note to Roz, Lucy still believes strongly that Sophia could not have written back on her own, and therefore was not basing her increased certainty on accurate memories (informal interview, January 2011). This leaves wide open the possibility that the development of Sophia's position is at least at some level a continued reaction against Lucy's challenge to her assessment of her own ability. In any case, she skillfully manipulates the talk from Lucy challenging her memory and suggesting a course of action, into Lucy accepting her version of events (thereby conceding that she *could* have done it), and Sophia herself suggesting a further action.

The second sequence I examine is prompted by a remark by Sophia that people she goes to dinner with never ask her a second time. This remark prompts Lucy to suggest that Sophia take the initiative to make the invitation, to which Sophia replies that the system for inviting people to eat with you "is in the process of being radically changed." When Lucy asks for elaboration of this, through an extended series of questions she is able to determine that Sophia feels that the lack of smaller tables in the new location of the dining hall makes it harder to converse with people. After Lucy seems to accept this account of the problem, Sophia continues with a second account:

(2a)

52 Sop: It's a change.

53 Luc: Different. Right.

54 (2.0)

55 Sop: [And,]

56 Luc: [Hmm,] int'resting.

57 Sop: →_A U:h, it's more awkward to get there.

58 (1.4)

59 Sop: [To the dining room.]

60 Luc: [That I don't understand.] Why:. .

61 Sop: It's in a different space.

62 Luc: ↑Yeah so? It's next to the space it ↑was in.

63 Sop: Yeah but people have to you know figure out how you

64 do this thing no:w. Where- where do you go to get i:n

65 →_A and u:h (.) check with the nurses, and stuff,

66 Luc: I have a hard time believing that. ['Cuz I've]=
 67 Sop: [°()°]
 68 Luc: =been in that dining room. It's right ↑there. There's
 69 →_c not- there's nothing new about checking with the
 70 →_c nurses to find out where the dining room is.
 71 [That d-]=
 72 Sop: [But ()]
 73 Luc: →_c =that doesn't make sense.
 74 Sop: →_R Well (.) it feels awkward and people say that.
 75 Luc: Do they?
 76 Sop: [Yeah.]
 77 Luc: [Mhm.]

The line I wish to focus on is line 74, but to get there we must understand the sequence leading up to this line. Sophia's assertion (as part of her account) in line 57 is greeted first with silence and then with a statement by Lucy that she doesn't understand (in contrast to the first part of the account, which she subtly repeats her acceptance of with the emphasis on "that"). Sophia's further attempts at elaboration are rejected, culminating in Lucy's assessment in line 73 that it "doesn't make sense." In this case, instead of using a series of questions to draw out details of the explanation, after her first question ("Why:", line 60), Lucy simply rejects Sophia's description of the situation, with increasingly less mitigation or hedging, eventually stating bluntly that there is nothing new about checking with the nurses and that Sophia's account is illogical.

The strategies that Sophia uses in this case to reestablish her authority are slightly more complex than in the previous example. Specifically, she emphasizes in two different ways that it is her own domain of authority that she is describing: the words "feels" and "say" both receive heavy stress in her response, and these are the key elements that allow her to counter Lucy's criticism in a way that preempts further similar criticisms. By emphasizing "feels," she reframes the assessment of the situation as awkward into a statement of her own subjective experience of it, which is something Lucy has much less authority to challenge than a more objective statement about the procedures involved. The second part of the turn preemptively blocks Lucy from

responding in any way that minimizes Sophia's subjective experience as unfounded or unrepresentative of the views of the other (mostly less impaired) residents of the home, by explicitly presenting her own feelings as shared by "people" in general. By shifting the focus to her own experience of the new set-up and backing up that subjective assessment with reported consensus among "people," Sophia effectively reestablishes herself as the expert on this issue and blocks Lucy's channels for dismissing her claims. Indeed, Lucy does not immediately repeat her challenge, but rather responds, as in the previous example, with a confirmation question, before acknowledging Sophia's revised claim in line 77.

It is again interesting to examine the subsequent development of the talk. While Sophia, perhaps desiring to leave the topic that caused trouble now that she has reestablished her position, moves back to the issue of larger tables, Lucy is apparently not quite ready to let the question of the new location go without resolving her doubts about why it is an issue. Her restatement, however, is sensitive to Sophia's previous reaction in that she reshapes it as a failure of her own understanding (lines 81-82):

(2b)

75 Luc: Do they?
 76 Sop: [Yeah.]
 77 Luc: [Mmhm.]
 78 (1.0)
 79 Sop: And if you have tables of six and eight people,
 80 Luc: Well, the size of the tables I can understand that but
 81 the location of the dining room, it's hard for me to
 82 understand that as a problem since it's right the:re,
 83 it's actually closer (.) [than it used to be.]
 84 Sop: [It i:s but it-] but
 85 it- it's new and people have to learn how to get
 86 there, an' it=
 87 Luc: Mmhm,
 88 Sop: =takes longer and they (0.4) go out mo:re, I don'
 89 →_A know why. Something.
 90 Luc: Mmhmm:.
 91 (1.2)
 92 Luc: But it sounds like wh- the tables are the biggest
 93 (.) prob[↑]le:m, would you say? That it's not as
 94 private?

In line 84, Sophia jumps in after Lucy's slight pause with emphasized agreement with her observation that the new location is closer, and then goes on to offer a string of further assertions about the dynamics of the new arrangement and how "people" are reacting to them, culminating in an admission that she doesn't know exactly why, but "something." While in a way this seems like a weakening of her position, the effect is actually to reinforce the marking of this topic as being in her domain to assess: by increasing the vagueness of her claim (and you cannot get much more vague than "something"), and shifting the focus further onto how other people are reacting, she constructs her claim as increasingly difficult for Lucy to refute. In fact, by admitting some failure to understand the exact problem on her own part, she brings herself closer to alignment with Lucy's position without actually changing or renouncing her position that the new location *is* a problem. Indeed, Lucy appears to be left with no option other than a token of agreement (line 90), and after a short silence, she now moves to minimize the importance of the second part of Sophia's account and return to the issue of the tables, seeking agreement from Sophia that this is the main problem.

In this example, in contrast to the first example, Sophia somewhat paradoxically increases her authority on the issue by successively weakening the epistemic strength of her claim: from *it is awkward* to *it feels awkward and other people agree to people go out more and I don't know why*. This progression is not as different from the progression in the previous example as it appears on the surface, however. In this case, the claim that Lucy challenges is not about Sophia's own ability, but rather it is about Sophia's evaluation of the situation at her retirement home. By shifting the emphasis to her subjective experience of the new set-up and to her observations of how other residents are reacting, Sophia strengthens the extent to which her claims are located in a domain Lucy cannot easily challenge (her actual feelings and experience),

rather than a domain Lucy may feel more able to question (the specific logistics of the new set-up). In the previous example, Sophia strengthens her initial claim that she has the ability to write a card to her friend by citing an increasingly strong memory of having actually done so. Again, falling back on her own memories and experience, something Lucy has no easy avenue to challenge directly. In this second example as well, Sophia manages over the course of this talk not only to defend her position, but to effectively block Lucy from challenging her further by emphasizing the domain under discussion as her own area of authority.

The final sequence that I examine is shorter, and different from the first two examples in that the challenge, in a sense, comes not from Lucy but from Sophia herself. I include this example to demonstrate the subtlety that Sophia is capable of utilizing in pursuit of saving face and maintaining the appearance of being able to accurately evaluate her own situation and state of knowledge. In extract (3), Lucy and Sophia have been talking about ways to make it easier for Sophia to listen to music during the day.

(3)

01 Sop: →_{A1} And I don't know where the records a::re, and (.)
 02 which things go whe:re.
 03 Luc: Right. But that's- you're living in a place where you
 04 have lots of help. That's the whole point. You: don't
 05 have to know all that. There are only three or four
 06 places in the room where records could be:, and in
 07 fa:ct,
 08 ((lines omitted; Lucy looks in drawers for records))
 09 Luc: They're in that bottom drawer. ((points to top of
 10 dresser)) So: let's make a little si:gn that goes
 11 right he:re that says records in bottom drawer.
 12 (3.0)
 13 Luc: Right?
 14 Sop: Well I don't really think I need it because if you ask
 15 me where they are I'll tell you.
 16 (1.2)
 17 Luc: Did you know they were in the bottom drawer?
 18 (0.6)
 19 Sop: →_{A2} I think so.
 20 Luc: →_C But you just- No::, you just told me that part of what
 21 makes it difficult to play records is that you don't
 22 know where they are.
 23 (0.4)

24 Sop: →_R That's sort of true too.
 25 Luc: ↑ Right.

This sequence starts in line 01 with Sophia's assertion that she doesn't know where the records are, offered in the context of reasons that it's hard for her to play music. Lucy moves to address Sophia's worry by locating the collection of CDs and proposing a specific action designed to make it easier for Sophia to determine the location of the records in the future. Sophia fails to respond to this suggestion; the extended silence in line 12 indicates trouble, possibly in comprehension, prompting Lucy to seek agreement with her suggestion more explicitly in line 13. Sophia's response is not to agree, but to dissent and give a reason that a sign on the dresser is unnecessary: "if you ask me where they are I'll tell you." Since Lucy has just found the CDs in the bottom drawer, it is reasonable to assume that Sophia's assertion in lines 14-15 is locally true; at that moment she knows where the CDs are, and therefore does not see the need for a sign reminding her. Lucy, remembering the previous talk (which it is not clear Sophia does), hesitates before responding to Sophia's self-contradictory assertion. Lucy's question in line 17 cleverly reframes the issue into the past tense, perhaps with the intent of subtly reminding Sophia that while she may know where the CDs are *now*, she did not know a moment ago. This technique fails to work – in fact, although Sophia's claim in line 19 is mitigated in strength by "I think," the fact that she extends her claim into the past means that the contradiction with her claim in line 01 is now more intractable (which is why it is this line that I identify as the second contradictory assertion). Lucy, therefore, resorts to explicitly confronting Sophia with her contradiction, cutting off the original design of her turn as a simple statement of Sophia's previous claim ("But you just-") in order to add an emphatic "No::," thereby not only reminding Sophia of her previous claim, but explicitly negating Sophia's own stance on her state of knowledge (line 19).

The ingenious construction of Sophia's line "that's sort of true too" in line 24, however, allows her to get through her turn without admitting to any self-contradiction or failure in short-term memory, and simultaneously allows the conversation to proceed and even prompts Lucy to agree with her in line 25, establishing the two as being back in alignment. This feat is accomplished through two key elements: the mitigating "sort of," and the cohesive device "too." Had she said simply "that's true too," the blatant contradiction would remain, and Lucy may still have felt the need to clarify or challenge. By adding "sort of," Sophia introduces enough ambiguity into her claim that she can avoid blatant logical contradiction without renouncing the entire truth of either of her stances. The inclusion of "too" on the end of her sentence assumes (and therefore reasserts in the face of Lucy's "No:::") the truth of her more recent statements (lines 14-15, 19). While it is not heavily emphasized, reasserting the truth of her previous turn in this subtle manner marks it as assumed in her turn and therefore not as easily up for further debate than it might have been had she restated her knowledge of where the CDs were more directly. In this way Sophia is able to simultaneously increase the ambiguity of her claim in order to smooth over the apparent contradiction, and reassert her previous claim (that she knew where the CDs were) in the face of stark rejection of it by her daughter, thereby avoiding an overt loss of face or authority by simultaneously claiming both of her (opposing) positions as at least partial truth.

Unlike the previous two examples, the issue is not developed further in the subsequent talk. What this example underscores is the range and flexibility of Sophia's attention to not losing face. In the first two examples, her own claims were challenged by Lucy, and she responded skillfully to these challenges to emphasize the domains in question as hers and block Lucy from further challenges. In this case, while it is Lucy who articulates the challenge, the

conflict is not between Lucy's assertion and Sophia's; it is between Sophia's current assessment of her knowledge, and her assessment of a couple minutes previous, as reported to her by Lucy. Hence her task is more complicated than defending herself against her daughter. That she is able to construct a sentence that avoids admitting her own contradiction, renouncing either of her positions, or prompting further expansion of the sequence by Lucy is impressive and noteworthy.

Discussion

I have examined three extended sequences of talk in which Sophia's daughter, Lucy, initiates an explicit challenge to an assessment or assertion made by Sophia about a domain of knowledge reasonably assumed to be more Sophia's expertise than Lucy's. In this section I summarize and synthesize the main observations from this analysis, and discuss the importance and implications of the practices I have examined.

First of all, as pointed out during the analysis, each of the examples has the same basic sequence structure:

1. An assertion by Sophia about something within her traditional domain of expertise (her own abilities, the dynamics of her retirement home, her state of knowledge);
2. A challenge by Lucy, opposing or contradicting Sophia's assertion without acknowledgement of Sophia's greater claim to epistemic authority;
3. A response by Sophia successfully reestablishing herself as the authority on the domain in question and avoiding loss of face.

While my analysis focused on the features of Sophia's responses more than Lucy's challenges, it is very important that the challenges are delivered as assertions of fact, without explicit indication of sensitivity to the fact that the domains of knowledge in question would

normally be considered more Sophia's than Lucy's. It is not only the content of Lucy's turns that constitutes the problematic challenge; it is their construction as an unmitigated statement of fact that truly marks these turns as undermining Sophia's right to hold the superior epistemic authority on issues pertaining to her own situation. Lucy is not orienting, in these examples, to a desire to minimize loss of face for Sophia and maintain agreement and harmony.

Since Sophia does not hesitate to describe her own failings of memory and inability to do things she used to be able to do, I believe it is Lucy's presumption of equal or greater authority that Sophia is primarily responding to. Her responses seem designed to emphasize her epistemic authority and force Lucy at the very least to structure her talk to acknowledge this authority. To accomplish this, she makes use of a few different techniques:

1. *Turn design:* By (re)contradicting Lucy's assertions without any typical markers of dispreferred disagreement, Sophia can mark her claims as more authoritative than Lucy's and emphasize her right to be the one making the assessment. Features of turn delivery include overlap with Lucy's talk, heavy stress, and lack of hesitations, pauses, filler words, or mitigating accounts for her disagreement.
2. *Emphasis on subjectivity or personal experience:* By emphasizing the subjective nature of her claims, or framing her claims as grounded in actual experience, Sophia can effectively block Lucy's ability to challenge them directly. This includes appealing to the actions and opinions of other people with whom Sophia has daily contact and Lucy does not.
3. *Ambiguity:* By weakening the strength and specificity of her claims in the face of contradiction by Lucy, Sophia is able to avoid renouncing her positions while leaving her exact stance vague enough that Lucy cannot effectively undermine it by appealing to specific information or logic.

4. *Cohesive devices*: Sophia seems able to utilize cohesive devices, such as “another” and “too,” to subtly reassert or assume the truth of her previous claims in subsequent turns; since the reassertion is indirect and not the focus of her turn, it is less open to direct challenge from Lucy.

Through skillful application of these techniques, Sophia navigates her way through the three examples above without overt loss of face in the form of allowing herself to be corrected or contradicted about her own ability, experience, or knowledge. The obvious question, then, is “so what?” Surely these techniques, or similar, are employed routinely in the course of disagreements and arguments of all sorts of people in all sorts of contexts. To have uncovered them in just a few examples of the conversation of one woman, then, does not on the surface seem worthy of all this discussion. However, there are several reasons for proposing that these practices and abilities on the part of Sophia are worth noting and analyzing..

First of all, the specific flavor of the general category of “disagreement” that occurs in these conversations is not one likely to be commonly found in the conversations of fully competent adults. As discussed above, the *other-initiated challenges* to epistemic authority involve specifically an act of blatant and unmitigated negation or denial by Lucy of something that would normally be considered to be clearly more in Sophia’s domain to assess than in Lucy’s. Therefore, these are not mere instances of disagreement about the facts; they pose a threat to Sophia’s role in the conversation as an equal, an adult capable of assessing the facts of her own life accurately and logically. These challenges highlight and reinforce an underlying asymmetry in the talk: Sophia is impaired and Lucy knows it. While Sophia freely admits to being aware of certain new limits to her memory and ability to do routine things, even these admissions could be seen as underscoring her desire to appear competent to, at the very least, understand her own situation accurately. This exact type of asymmetry and challenge to

epistemic authority is likely to occur primarily in conversations involving an adult known to be cognitively impaired in some way; therefore, examining the techniques employed to respond to this type of challenge can bring an added dimension to both the study of various forms of disagreement, and the study of the interactions of cognitively impaired adults.

Secondly, many previous studies of the interactions of DAT patients have focused primarily on the limitations of their talk, or differences from the conversations of normal adults (see Perkins et al. (1998) for discussion and some exceptions). This study focuses on uncovering conversational resources that Sophia is able to use skillfully to deal with a type of challenge that she is subject to due to her impairments. This underscores the obvious fact that while DAT does affect conversational abilities in some ways, it does not necessarily affect the desire to participate as an equal adult in conversations, nor the ability to detect when a conversation partner's turn is not respectful of that status as equals. It is important that research and analysis seek to discover the competencies and skills that people in Sophia's position bring to an interaction, and not solely the limitations.

Finally, the discovery of Sophia's sensitivity has important implications for family and caretakers of dementia patients. In the course of being interviewed for this study subsequent to the analysis of the data, Lucy admitted while she often "has to remind [her]self that [Sophia's] assessments of her own situation should really be taken seriously," she hadn't fully realized the extent to which she sometimes dismissed her mother's apparently false or contradictory assessments of her own situation (informal interview, January 2011). The analysis from this study helped her realize that she should be more conscious of framing her talk in ways that accord Sophia the proper authority over her own domains of experience. We can see in the talk analyzed here some techniques for doing this and maintaining alignment even in the face of

contradictory or confusing assertions by Sophia; such techniques include persistent questioning to get at the details of Sophia's claims (as was effective in understanding the first of her accounts in the second example, about the size of the tables), and framing challenges as failures in Lucy's own understanding of the situation. If family and caretakers of dementia patients are attuned to this issue and these techniques, tension and loss of face can better be avoided.

Conclusion and Further Research

The talk I have analyzed exhibits what might be confusingly called an asymmetric perception of asymmetry: the daughter seems occasionally to shape her responses in ways that betray orientation to a systematic difference between her mother's ability to assess the situation and her own, while the mother resists this implication of asymmetry, and shapes her own talk to reassert herself as an equal. Even when the differences between Lucy's cognitive capacities and Sophia's are made relatively explicit, as in the third example in which Sophia blatantly contradicts her own position of a couple minutes previous, Sophia still seems oriented toward shaping her talk locally to avoid loss of face and avoid explicit admission of her inconsistency. Her turn design seems oriented toward asserting her epistemic authority; the study of the techniques she uses, then, adds to the observations of Heritage and Raymond (2005) about negotiation of epistemic authority in agreement sequences, in this case within a particular type of *disagreement* sequence. These examples also illustrate another environment in which disagreement seems preferred. In Lucy's case, the unmitigated negations of Sophia's claims may have been motivated partially by frustration, and in Sophia's case, her responses seem primarily concerned with saving face and defending her authority. Sensitivity to these potentially threatening challenges by family and caretakers of cognitively impaired adults could help

maintain harmonious interactions and decrease frustration and sense of helplessness in the patients.

Obviously, this is a small-scale study, and is very small-scale and therefore limited in scope and generalizability. Given the relative infrequency of these challenge sequences within the data and the logistical constraints on gathering video data, only a handful of examples were available for analysis. A clear step for further research is simply gathering significantly more data from a variety of patients in situations like Sophia's, in the hope of collecting more and more examples. With a larger corpus of data, further details and patterns in this type of sequence may emerge. In particular, more work is needed to examine the specific techniques used by caretakers in order to deal with seemingly inaccurate or contradictory assessment without subjecting the patient to significant loss of face or the undermining of epistemic authority. I believe the threat to face that I have uncovered in this study is particularly insidious, since it involves a challenge not just to the patient's ability to do and remember things, but to her ability to accurately assess and represent her own situation. For early- or intermediate-stage dementia patients like Sophia who are aware of the increasing limits on their abilities, being able to, at the very least, be trusted to understand their world accurately may feel like a final foothold on an identity as a true adult participant in interaction. Therefore, I hope that further investigation of the issues I have begun to explore here can contribute to the growing understanding of the conversational interactions of cognitively impaired adults, and can help family and caretakers to be conscious of the design of disagreement or challenge turns.

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Appendix 1: CA Transcription Symbols

.	falling intonation
?	rising intonation
,	continuing intonation
-	cut-off
::	elongation of sound
<u>word</u>	emphasis (more underlining for greater stress)
↑ word	raised pitch on the following syllable
°word°	quiet speech
[word1] [word2]	overlapping speech.
=	continued utterances of the same speaker
(2.4)	length of a silence in seconds
(.)	micro-pause
()	non-transcribable talk.
((action))	nonverbal activity.
{{(action))- word}	simultaneous talk and nonverbal activity