Repairs and old-age categorisations: interactional and categorisation analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of self-repairs in ascribing old-age categorisations to self and others in casual interactions among friends. Membership categorisation analysis and conversation analysis are employed to analyse self-recorded, everyday conversations of a group of older Greek Cypriot women with a long interactional history. The interactional organisation of old-age labels, and specifically instances of self-repair of age categorisations, reveal that members orient to old-age categories as hierarchically positioned and inference-rich. Members make relevant a very intricate set of expectations of who can be categorised by whom, with what specific age category term and at which context, partly because other-categorisations can also implicate one's self-categorisation as old. Sequential and categorisation analyses provide a powerful analytical toolkit for the investigation of participants' local system of self- and other-ascription of explicit -but also implicit- age identities. It is shown that the combination of membership categorisation analysis and conversation analysis can be extended beyond the analysis of turn-generating categories and can be instrumental in analysing flexible, context-shaped and agentively managed category identifications that also have currency beyond the local interactional occasion.

Keywords

1 Introduction

Peer-group interactions are a facilitator of socialisation into different old-age identities (Rosow 1974) and are thus crucial for the investigation of discourse constructions of age and ageing. Members' categories are at the core of identity work, not least because each identity entails an explicit or implicit categorical reference (Nikander 2000). Research on old-age categorisations in peer-group settings has shown the multiplicity and heterogeneity of older people's communication practices, and age identities, even within the same site (community centre). For example, Degnen's (2007) research, which focused on a community centre in a British village, showed the process through which older women monitor and ascribe different varieties of oldness to their peers through certain communicative practices. Informants would be under-accommodative and not attend to the subject proposed by their interlocutor, if the decline categorisation of "real old age" and "not like us" was attributed to that interlocutor. A variety of different, locally managed old-age categories has been shown to be ascribed, ratified, but also contested in the context of same-age interactions. Similarly, Hurd's (1999) research on a seniors' centre in Canada showed that the female members of the centre employed for themselves age categories that distanced them from those they categorised as "old". Paoletti (1998) has also found that older women in peer-group interactions in committee meetings in Italy constructed the category "old" as a homogenising, decline category which was attributed to others rather than to the self. In these studies about older women, in particular, as well as other studies focusing on older adults in general (Biggs 1997; Jolanki 2009; Gubrium 2011), participants constructed a positive self-image by claiming the category "not old". However, as Hurd points out (1999: 431) this places members in the precarious position where health problems, changes in body image and loss of spouse continually endanger their membership to the category "not old".

Despite this body of research, peer-elderly communication, especially in non-institutional settings, remains a desideratum of language and ageing research (Georgakopoulou and Charalambidou 2011). This paper contributes to this line of enquiry by focusing on casual conversations of a group of older Greek Cypriot friends, and in particular on repairs in the old-age categorisation process. Repairs can show dis-preference and orientation to the action at hand as impolite, uncomfortable, unpleasant, difficult, or risky (Pomerantz 1984: 77). Therefore, instances of self-repair provide "telling cases" (Mitchell 1984) for examining the interlocutors' local understanding of the various old-age categorisations and the rules for applying them.

2   Analytical Framework

2.1   Membership categorisation and conversation analysis

This study draws on the toolkits of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Membership Categorisation Analysis (MCA). Both CA and MCA emerged from ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967) and were pioneered in the work of Harvey Sacks and his colleagues (Sacks and Jefferson 1995). CA focuses on the examination of the sequential order, or in Sacks et al.'s term the "technology" of talk (1974: 718); whereas MCA focuses on the situated and reflexive use of the different categories of people, places, things that members (interlocutors) employ in interaction.

Sacks' theorisation on members' categories has been developed and expanded into a field of identity analysis by sociologists such as Hester, Eglin, Watson and Jayyusi (see e.g. Watson 1978; Jayyusi 1984; Hester and Eglin 1997a; Eglin and Hester 2003; Housley and Fitzgerald 2009). MCA is employed to locate the categories members use in carrying out their activities in and through talk, in organising knowledge and in assigning social identities.

Members' categories usually come in sets. Categories that go together (e.g. infant, adolescent, adult, old person) are organised into *collections* (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 65). A *membership categorisation device* (MCD) is a collection of categories plus the relevant rules of application (Schegloff 2007b: 3). For example, for the collection mentioned above the MCD would be "age". Sacks developed two basic principles that members may employ when they use membership categories: the economy and the consistency rule. The *economy rule* dictates that a single category is adequate to describe a person. According to the *consistency rule,* if a category term from an MCD is used to categorise a member of a population, a term from the same MCD should be used to categorise other members of the same population (Hester and Eglin 1997b: 4). These "rules" of application (just like CA turn-taking rules) are expectations that participants have about each other's conduct; participants themselves draw attention in some way or other to deviation from these rules (Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998: 50). Hence, they are neither psycholinguistic rules for assembling well-formed utterances nor a set of regularities that one can observe in behaviour. Consequently, they can be deduced by looking at "telling" cases rather than a corpus of typical cases (Andrews 2017), as is done in this paper.

Although both CA and MCA have emerged from ethnomethodology, their co-existence has not been uncontentious. Schegloff's objection to the independent field of MCA includes a problematisation of the complementarity of CA and MCA (Schegloff 2007b; cf. Carlin 2010). Schegloff argues that,

whereas CA follows well-thought out standards of rigour in analysing what is demonstrably relevant in interaction, MCA can rely on analysts' unelaborated assumptions that certain categories are bound to certain attributions; without showing that participants make such categorisation devices relevant (issue of relevance) or that such devices affect the workings of the ordinary talk (issue of procedural consequentiality) (see Schegloff's "Introduction" in Sacks and Jefferson 1995: Axliii).

This, however, does not appear to be a position other CA analysts of the first generation take (e.g. Jefferson 2004a). In addition, Sacks showed that certain categories, in fact, emerge from the distribution of turns in the beginning of talk; e.g. in a telephone conversation the first speaker is the "caller" and the second speaker the "called". These are what Watson calls turn-generating categories, which bridge the divide between membership categorisation and sequential, turn-by-turn organisation (Watson 1997: 59). Watson, but also Hester, Eglin and Silverman, argue that the sequential and categorial aspects inform each other, are "reflexively tied" and "mutually constitutive" (Watson 1978, 1997: 54; Hester and Eglin 1997b: 2; Silverman 1998: 152). In practice, the combination of MCA with CA has been widely employed to research categorisations in interaction (see e.g. Watson 1997; Antaki and Widdicombe 1998; Psathas 1999; Tainio 2002; Johnson 2006; Stokoe and Edwards 2007; Marquez-Reiter et al. 2018).

Despite the growing influence of MCA, opposing views still exist as to whether MCA is inextricably linked with – or even part of – CA (e.g. Stokoe 2012) or whether it can be a viable approach in its own right (Fitzgerald 2012). This research adopts the viewpoint that the sequential organisation of talk (*sequential order*) is closely related with the negotiation, ascription and rejection of categories (*categorial order*). Both the MCA and the CA apparatus are employed concurrently, here, as the aim is to explore the interrelation of a sequential phenomenon (repairs) with old-age categorisation. This, however, in my view, does not preclude the possibility of applying MCA – uncoupled from CA – as an apparatus for studying social-knowledge-in-action as convincingly done, for example, by Eglin and Hester (2003) and Paulsen (2018).

2.2   Repair mechanisms

In interactions there is a variety of trouble-sources that need to be repaired, including mishearing, misunderstandings, mistakes, turn-taking errors and violations, including simultaneous talk etc. (Sacks et al. 1974: 723). Any utterance may be repaired and thus be treated as repairable (Silverman 1998: 133). Early conceptualisations of the repair mechanism by Sacks, Jefferson and Schegloff show how repairs are primarily employed to address turn-taking errors and violations (e.g. to resolve

overlaps, see Schegloff 2000). In fact the turn-taking system both engenders and facilitates repairs (Sacks et al. 1974:723).

Repairs can be categorised, based on the party who initiates ("self-initiated" or "other-initiated") and the party who realises the repair ("self-repair" or "other-repair"). Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) found that there is a preference for self-initiated, as opposed to other-initiated, and for self-repairs, as opposed to other-repairs (see also Hutchby and Wooffitt 1998: 61; Jefferson 2007). This has been evidenced in a number of studies across contexts and age ranges, perhaps with the exception of teacher-student and adult-children interactions (Forrester 2008). In addition, a growing body of research shows the central role of self-repair skills in language acquisition, including the development of young speakers' interactional skills and understanding of social roles and positioning (e.g. Salonen and Laakso 2009; Forrester 2008).

The functions that self-repairs perform in interaction can range from expanding the turn and indexing hesitation to acting as a device to change the topic (e.g. Al-Harahsheh 2015). Levelt (1983) distinguished between two main sub-types; "error repairs", in which a speaker corrects a lexical, phonetic or other error, and "appropriateness repairs", in which a speaker provides further specification, expansion or clarification of a prior formulation. Importantly, later research drawing on Levelt's classification, has emphasised the continuum among various types of self-repairs, their functions and realisations (Plug 2011).

This paper shows that repairs in old-age categorisation can reveal not only errors in speech production and turn-taking considerations, such as claims to the floor, but also members' work in ascribing to self and others age identities. This is because the organisation of self-repairs in old-age categorisations makes apparent the rules that participants orient to in applying these categories and assembling their social world.

3   Description of the data

The data used for this study are eighteen hours of self-recorded, every-day conversation of an all-female group of older Greek Cypriot friends, aged 63–80, with most of them in their seventies at the time of the recordings. The participants have primary-school education, have been residing in close vicinity for decades and have a long interactional history (since childhood). They live in the government-controlled area of Cyprus, in the suburb of Nicosia. Five years before the recordings started they all began socialising together as a group on a regular basis, meeting for morning or

afternoon coffee at each other's houses. The participants of this research mainly talk in the Cypriot version of Greek, typically classified as a "dialect" of Greek (see e.g. Goutsos and Karyolemou 2004).

The data collection was carried out in three phases between January 2008 and August 2009. The participants recorded themselves with a digital audio-recorder whenever they met and the frequency of the recorded meetings ranged from several times a week to once every fortnight. The method of self-recordings minimised the observer's intrusion and effect on the situated activity, and therefore offers a partial solution to the observer's paradox (Labov 1997: 395).

3.1   Culture-specific age labels and their distribution in the data

There were many instances where members ascribe old-age categorisations explicitly or implicitly. Discussions involving age categorisations could be quite heated, humorous or serious and can last anything up to several minutes on each occasion. In all but one of the eighteen self-recorded conversations, in some way or another, the categorisation device of *age* and, more specifically, categories of *old age* were made relevant. Here I present the findings from the analysis of *explicit* old-age categorisations, and by that I mean instances where old-age categorial terms in noun form were used, such as 'old woman'. These are in addition to references to chronological age, which form a distinct, but related, class of categorisations (Charalambidou 2015) and more implicit references to old age (Charalambidou 2011).

The various generic age-membership category labels which participants use have different ideological loading and are not easily translatable to English; hence, they are used in their transliterated form.

- *Μεγάλη/megali*, pronounced /mɛˈɣeli/, in Greek (both Standard Modern Greeg and Cypriot Greek) means big or grown-up and can therefore be employed to categorise members of the full range of ages. A possible English equivalent would be age categorisations such as 'grown up' or 'mature' woman which, as Katz (2001) argues, blur the boundaries between middle and old age. In the self-recordings this term is used exclusively for women above 65 year olds.

- *Κοτζάκαρη/kojakari,* pronounced /kɔˈtʃekeri/ is a basilectal term of Cypriot Greek, derived from Turkish. It is not just a descriptive term, as it has a marked low register and can function as a derogatory person reference; a male equivalent of the term does not exist. This

category is generally used in Cypriot Greek to refer to traditional Cypriot women, wearing headscarves and black mourning dress and holding a cane, of rural origin and low educational level. The diminutives *kojakarou* or *kojakaroua* have similar connotations in Cypriot Greek, but could also be seen as emphasising age-related loss of body mass. An English "near-miss" could be 'crone'.

- ***Ηλικιωμένη/Ilikiomeni***, pronounced /iliciˈmɛni/, is a term that is not exclusively found in Cypriot Greek, but is also used in Standard Modern Greek to refer to older adults. This term is also employed on formal occasions, e.g. in news reports about pensions and in policy documents. An English term with similar ideological loading would be 'senior' or 'elderly'.

- Finally, ***γριά/gria,*** pronounced /ɣriˈɐ/, is also part of both the Cypriot Greek and Standard Modern Greek inventory, but is a more colloquial and less euphemistic term than *ilikiomeni.* An English near-miss would be 'old woman'.

In the 18 hours of self-recorded conversations 71 explicit old-age categorisations were used. Most old-age categorisations refer to others non-present (53 out of the 71 categories) and to women (58 out of 71). This is predictable, since all the participants are women and hence all categories directed at self and interlocutors would be in the feminine form. Also, the participants socialise primarily with women and in their conversations they also talk mostly about other women and not men, hence the large majority of categories directed at third parties are female. For women*,* the most frequently used old-age categorisations were *megali* and *kojakari* and (19 and 17 times each), followed by *ilikiomeni* (12 instances) and *gria* (9 times).

4   Self-repairs and rules of application

The close examination of two telling case of self-repairs of old-age categorisations reveals members' orientation to a set of rules of application. The following interactional sequence takes place during an afternoon meeting of the main five participants, at Gregoria's house. Gregoria is 79, Charoulla and Loulla are 73, Myria is 72, and Tasoulla 62. Tasoulla mentions that in their next meeting at her house she will also invite Limbourina, her *koumera,*[1] with whom the other participants are not well acquainted. Thus in this excerpt Tasoulla tries to identify Limbourina.[2]

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[1] *Koumera* is an untranslatable category reference, also used as a term of address, to denote one's maid of honour or one's child's godmother. It is regarded as a kinship tie maintained throughout one's lifetime.

[2] In the transcripts Jefferson's transcription system is used (Jefferson 2004b). The original is given followed by an English translation. The original is represented in standard spelling, and the Cypriot Greek phonemes that do not constitute part of the phonological inventory of Standard Modern Greek are represented with a letter of the

Excerpt 4-1 (participants: Myria, 72; Tasoulla, 62; Gregoria, 79; Loulla, 72; Charoulla, 73)

1. M   θωρούμεν την τζειαμαί πό'ρκεται κοντά σου?   **1.33.11**

2. T   νναι εν τζείνη η κοτζα:-

3. M   =κο:τζακαρού?

4. T   νναι:, ε °νι νναι°, νναι:. (.)

5.   ↑ ε: εν να της πω τζαι τζείνης   [πάω τακτικά: τζαι-]

6. M   [κοτζακαρού:] πέρκι να'μαστεν

7. *πκιο μεγάλες* εμείς ((smile voice)) χαχαχα

1. M   have we seen her when she comes to your house?

2. T   yes it is that *koja*:-

3. M   =*ko:jakaru*?

4. T   yeah:, em °yeah yeah°, yeah:. (.)

5.   ↑ we:ll I will tell her as well   [I go often: and-]

6. M   [*kojakaru*:   ] we might be

7. *older* ((smile voice)) hahaha   **1.33.20**

Myria asks Tasoulla whether she and the other interlocutors have ever seen Limbourina at Tasoulla's house, trying to identify Limbourina. Tasoulla answers the question, at line 2, employing a categorisation about Limbourina, thus she does categorising to do identifying (Schegloff 2007a: 437). Since the MCD age has already been made relevant in the immediately prior talk to categorise another acquaintance of Tasoulla (not included in this excerpt), and in accordance with the consistency rule of application of membership categories, Tasoulla chooses to mention a category from the same device. However she offers the categorisation with a perturbation (i.e. a "deflection in the production of the talk from the trajectory which it has been projected to follow", Schegloff 2000: 11). The end of turn in line 2 is marked with a prolonged *a:* and a sudden cut off. This self-initiated other-repair indicates hesitation which can signal a disturbance in the categorisation process (Paoletti 1998: 32). Tasoulla's hesitation to categorise a person older than her as *kojakarou* can be interpreted by a rule of application specific to the MCD age.

Greek alphabet, modified with a down arrowhead on top of it, following commonly used, although far from standardised, orthographic conventions (Pavlou 2004).

1. If A categorises B as a member of age category X, and B shares with interlocutor C the category-bound feature of similar chronological age (and other attributions), then by implication A may also be categorising or be taken to categorise C as a member of age category X.

This would explain the difficult situation that Tasoulla found herself in after initiating the categorisation of *kojakarou* (with all its negative category-bound attributions, see Charalambidou 2015) for a woman almost the same age as one of her interlocutors (Gregoria) and to whom the categorisation *kojakarou* might by implication apply.

In line 3 Myria does not align with Tasoulla's self-censorship and responds by choosing between the two possible completions – *kojakarou* and *kojakari* – the diminutive type *kojakarou* (emphasising the category-bound features of frailty). This receives Tasoulla's hesitant ratification in line 4 (the hesitation is indexed with elongations of vowels, lower voice, repetitions and other perturbations). Hence with a strategic manoeuvre, rather than a subverted production, Tasoulla seeks her interlocutors' contribution in the categorisation, in order to redress the dispreferredness of implying a derogatory old-age categorisation for her interlocutors. In line 5, Tasoulla tries to resume the main storyline, which is her invitation for coffee next week. This could get her out of the spot she got herself in, in line 2. However, in line 6 there is friction, as Myria interrupts the flow. Her remark in line 6 presents categorising a person of similar or younger age as *kojakarou* to be comical/ironic, and she frames her utterance with laughter. The reason why it is comical/ironic to ascribe derogatory old-age categorisations to peers could be explained by the **second** rule of application:

2. If A categorises B as a member of the age category X, and they share the category-bound feature of similar chronological age (and other attributions), then by implication A is also categorising themselves as a member of the age category X.

Thus, according to this principle, Myria's use of the derogatory category *kojakarou* is also by implication ascribed to herself, hence the irony. Finally, Myria categorises not only herself but also the three other interlocutors, Loulla, Charoulla and Gregoria, who are older than her, as potentially older than a person categorised as *kojakarou* (l.6/7: 'We might be older'). Therefore, she points out, in a humorous way, that Tasoulla's negatively loaded categorisation (l. 2) could be extended to all her interlocutors (**first rule** of application). And of course, this explains Tasoulla's self-censorship at line 2.

Self-initiated self-repairs of the old-age category term used could also be interpreted with these rules of application. The example below occurred about 25 minutes after the beginning of an almost

two hour long meeting at Charoulla's house. At this point Charoulla is in a different room and does not participate in the conversation, and the interlocutors are Loulla, Myria, Gregoria and Tasoulla. Myria and Loulla refer to Mr Kypros and his wife, a woman named Christina, and Gregoria tries to identify her.

Excerpt 4-2 (participants: Gregoria, 79; Myria, 72; Loulla, 73; Tasoulla, 62)

[associated audio-2-charalambidou.wav]

1. Γ   χμ. τούτη πο'ρκεται στην εκκλη**ŏ**άν κάποτε?   **25.10**
2. Μ   ε: νομίζω.
3. Γ   =εν ηλικιωμέ- εν[μεγάλη::]?
4. Μ   [ό::ι   όι]τούτη.
5. Γ   α.

1. G   hm. the one who comes to the church sometimes?
2. M   erm: I think so.
3. G   =is *ilikiome*- is   [*megali::*]?
4. M   [no:: not] her. .
5. G   ah.   **25.16**

In line 1 Gregoria offers a locational formulation[3] to identify the person referred to. However, since Myria does not assertively confirm the identification, a further categorisation is needed to do identifying. In line 3 Gregoria refers to Christina's membership in age categories. Here the incomplete old-age categorisation *ilikiome*- is first employed. Since it is not as generic as *megali* and it explicitly denotes third age it is more effective for doing identifying. The categorial term *ilikiome(ni)*, however, is self-repaired within the same turn construction unit to *megali:*. The hesitation indexed by the cut-off of *ilikiome*- suggests a problem in the process of categorising. This can be justified by employing the first two rules of application of the MCD age. Gregoria hesitates to categorise a woman of a similar age to her as *ilikiomeni,* probably because it would simultaneously categorise herself as a member of this age category (**second rule** of application). On the contrary, she opts for the term *megali:* rather than *ilikiomeni.* This could be accounted for with an additional rule of application for the collection of categories for "old women" (**third rule** of application).

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[3] This is Schegloff's term for geographical locations, such as street addresses, "the café", "my school" etc. (Silverman 1998: 133).

3. Old age categories appear to be "positioned" in a hierarchical order where A is higher than B, B higher than C etc. (Sacks and Jefferson 1995: A585)**. In most local contexts of the self-recordings the hierarchy seems to be the following:**

    A. 'μεγάλη γυναίκα'/*megali gineka*

    B. 'ηλικιωμένη'/*ilikiomeni*

    C. 'γριά'/*gria*

    D. 'κοτζάκαρη'/*kojakari*

The lower the position of a category the more it is associated with decline attributions, poor health, immobility, loneliness, dependence, advanced old age and death. Therefore, participants are more likely to identify with categories of higher status, and to meticulously try to disassociate themselves from activities bound to lower status categories.

Going back to the example, in line 3, the second term, *megali*, is hierarchically higher than *ilikiomeni* and thus a more preferred category to be implicitly extended to the speaker. With this strategic shift Gregoria both does identifying effectively (with the more specific term *ilikiome-*) and also repairs it to the more preferred category *megali*. Myria's assertive dis-identification in line 4 shows that Gregoria's first age categorisation has successfully done identifying.

The distribution of the use of the different old-age categories among the participants also indicates the applicability of these three rules. Gregoria is the participant who is least likely to employ more negative categorisations such as *kojakari* and *gria*; she only uses these once each, as opposed to the category *megali,* which she employs eight times (as an old age category), and *ilikiomeni,* which she uses four times*.* Being the oldest participant (79-80 during the recordings), she would very likely share the same attribution of chronological age as the person to whom she would ascribe the old-age category. Therefore, by avoiding ascription of lower positioned categories (third rule), she also avoided being ascribed these decline old-age categories herself (second rule). On the other hand, Tasoulla, the youngest participant (62-63 years), is the only one to use more decline old-age categories, than counter-decline. In fact the category she employs most frequently is the one positioned lowest in the hierarchy, i.e. *kojakari*, because, according to the second rule, as long as the person she categorises is not of the same age-in-years as herself, the decline category will not be extended to her as well.

The fact that the younger members of old-age groups refer more frequently to the category old is also documented in the literature (Paoletti 1998: 19). The difference with these data is that older

participants do not avoid mentioning old-age categories altogether (as previous research on peer-elderly interactions has shown, see Section 1: Introduction). Instead, participants in this study avoid old-age categorisations with negative attributions, while still ratifying incumbency to the more positive old-age categories.

Like categories, collections and devices, rules of application cannot be decontextualised (cf. Hester and Eglin 1997c: 26). For instance, elsewhere in the self-recordings Myria, does not hesitate to categorise a woman with the pejorative *kojakari*, even though she shares the feature of similar chronological age with her and some of her interlocutors (Charoulla and Loulla) and might even be younger than the other interlocutor, Gregoria. This happens presumably because the person categorised as old is a complete stranger and is also associated with category-bound attributions that do not apply to the members present. This is an indication that the first two rules apply to a greater extent when the person categorised as old is an acquaintance of the group rather than a complete stranger, and when she is associated with category bound features that could be extended to the interlocutors/speaker. Hence the parenthetical clause in the two rules saying "(*and other attributions*)" represents the condition which affects the degree of applicability of the first two rules.

The degree of applicability of the three rules is also evident in the distribution of old-age categories among the three phases of data collection. Certain structural confines, afforded by the deterioration of some of the members' health and the group's sociability, made members more susceptible to being categorised as old, by implication, according to the first and second rule of application. In particular, after the first phase of recordings Myria underwent two serious operations, and Gregoria also had eye surgery and her hearing deteriorated significantly. As a result, the group's pre-arranged meetings became less frequent and were substituted by impromptu meetings, mostly at the house of the participant who was recovering from a surgery. During the third phase of the recordings the explicit reference to decline-related old-age categories drops significantly. For instance, *kojakari* is used three times more frequently in the first than in the third phase although both phases produced the same length of self-recordings (seven hours each). Only the number of old-age categorisations ascribed to strangers does not drop. As suggested above, categorisations directed at strangers (as opposed to close friends or even acquaintances) are the ones least likely to be ascribed, by implication, to the speaker or her interlocutors.

On the whole, categories positioned lower in the hierarchical order, such as *kojakari* and *gria*, are primarily directed at strangers or people that the participants are not close to. On the contrary, when old-age categories are ascribed to members the participants are close to, more positive categorial references are preferred, such as *megali* or *ilikiomeni*. This could also be attributed to the varied level of applicability of the first two rules and more specifically to the fact that self-categorisation, by implication, is more prominent when the person categorised as old is a close acquaintance.

5   Conclusion

The interactional analysis of repair sequences, where old age categories were employed, has shown that the participants demonstrably oriented to a set of rules for applying old-age categories. It has been shown that old-age categories are hierarchically positioned and that certain restrictions and implications affect the categorisation process. What these rules of application exhibit is that members orient to a very intricate set of expectations of who can be categorised by whom, with what specific age category term and in which context. In addition, the rules of application suggest that old-age categories are inference-rich, as different members, including the self and interlocutors, could be categorised by implication, even when the categorisation is directed at third parties.

On the whole, old age identities were not only *relevant* in interaction, as they are explicitly claimed, ascribed and contested, but they also meet Schegloff's (1992) 'golden rule' of being *procedurally consequential* to the talk. In particular, speaker's and interlocutors' age identities have been demonstrated to affect the turn-by-turn organisation of repair sequences where these categories are employed. Also, it has been shown that these extra-situational factors also affected the frequency and type of categories employed. For example, in the third phase of the recordings when the physical health of some of the members deteriorated and they could therefore attract attributions that imply membership in decline old-age categories, more negative old-age categories were not used, even to categorise others non-present. This appears to shows members' strategic manipulation of the explicit old-age categorisation apparatus, to avoid ascription of decline old-age categories to themselves and their interlocutors. This nuanced machinery that members oriented to in applying the different age-categories could not have been fully understood, without the employment of both categorial and sequential analysis.

The combination of members' stated categorisations, as well as repairs, silences, perturbations and other sequential aspects provides a very robust framework in the analysis of explicit and implicit identity work. To conclude, the combination of MCA and CA can be extended beyond the analysis of turn-generating categories and can be instrumental in analysing flexible, context-shaped and agentively managed category identifications that also have currency beyond the local interactional occasion.

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