

# Giving and receiving advice in higher education. Comparing Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish supervision meetings



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## Abstract

In this article we compare advice-giving in academic supervision meetings at Swedish-speaking university departments in Sweden and Finland. Working within the field of variational pragmatics and analyzing interaction in detail we show how Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish supervisors and students, as experts and non-experts in an institutional setting, initiate and respond to advice. The data consist of video and/or audio recordings of eight naturally occurring supervision meetings. All meetings show a similar pattern regarding the frequency and sequential structure of advice initiation and reception. The main differences between the two data sets occur in how advice is formulated and acknowledged. In the Sweden-Swedish data, advice is often given with strong mitigation and responded to by upgraded acknowledgements. In the Finland-Swedish data, advice delivery is more succinct and acknowledgements are often neutral. © 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

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## 1. Introduction

Advice-giving is a crucial part of all kinds of counseling. In academic supervision meetings, it is the core activity for the participants. The interactional organization of advice has been examined in several studies ([Heritage and Sefi, 1992](#); [Jefferson and Lee, 1992](#); [Hutchby, 1995](#); [Kinnell and Maynard, 1996](#); [Silverman, 1997](#)), including academic contexts ([He, 1993](#); [Guthrie, 1997](#); [Vehviläinen, 2001, 2009](#); [Waring, 2005, 2007, 2012](#)). However, none of these focus specifically on cross-linguistic or cross-cultural differences. Studies in the field of variational pragmatics ([Schneider and Barron, 2008](#)) have shown that pragmatic differences can be found even between varieties of the same language (e.g. [Tottie, 1991](#); [Tryggvason and De Geer, 2002](#); [Tryggvason, 2004](#); [O’Keeffe and Adolphs, 2008](#); [Henricson et al., 2015](#); [Nelson et al., 2015](#); [Norrby et al., 2015a](#); [Vismans, 2015](#); [Wide, 2016](#)). In this article, we explore advice-giving in higher education in Sweden and Finland from a variational perspective by addressing the following question: what differences and similarities can be found in giving and receiving advice in supervision meetings in Swedish-speaking university settings in Sweden and Finland?

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In accordance with previous research, we conceptualize *advice-giving* as an interactional activity, where information is offered rather than requested and where the information is given as a means to forward a certain course of action (Heritage and Sefi, 1992:367–368; Silverman, 1997:111; Waring, 2007:109–110; Vehviläinen, 2009:163–164). Example 1 shows a case of giving and receiving advice in higher education from our Finland-Swedish data set.<sup>1</sup>

Example 1. Writing dates in academic texts (Finland-Swedish)

- 01 (4.6)  
 02 SUP: datum får du skriva så här  
*a date you need to write like this*  
 03 (1.0)  
 04 STU: mm  
*mm*  
 05 (0.7)  
 06 SUP: konsekvent  
*consistently*  
 07 (0.3)  
 08 STU: okej mm just de  
*okay mm right*  
 09 (1.4)  
 10 STU: °nollan bort där°  
*no zero there*  
 11 SUP: så att å de här e ju direkt från engelskan  
*so that and this is PART directly from English*

After a longer pause, the sequence starts with a piece of advice, in line 2, launched by the supervisor in a straight-forward way, i.e. without any preparatory work such as asking a question or opening up a topic. The advice sequence concerns conventions for how to write dates in academic texts. In line 4, after a pause, the student responds with the back-channeling token *mm*. The supervisor then, in line 6, specifies that the writing conventions referred to in line 2 should be used *konsekvent* 'consistently' throughout the paper. The student acknowledges this in line 8: *okej mm just de* 'okay mm right'. After a pause, the student, in line 10, explicitly states how she will adjust the text: *nollan bort där* 'no zero there'. Finally, in line 11, the supervisor explains why the formulation is problematic: *de här e ju direkt från engelskan* 'this is directly from English'.

In example 1 and throughout our data, advice is often given by the supervisor without introductory interactional work, and responded to by the student with tokens of acknowledgment and acceptance. Advice sequences initiated by the supervisor in a straight-forward way, i.e. in *medias res*, are common in both the Sweden-Swedish and the Finland-Swedish data. However, in similarly structured advice sequences there are notable differences between the two data sets when it comes to how advice is formulated by the supervisor and received by the student. These differences, e.g. as regards mitigating advice and the choice of acknowledgment tokens, will be studied further in this article.

The aim with the article is to demonstrate how students and supervisors in the Sweden-Swedish and the Finland-Swedish data handle advice-giving. The study is based on a parallel analysis of naturally occurring interactions in comparable situations in the two national varieties of the pluricentric language Swedish: Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish.<sup>2</sup> Through a detailed sequential analysis of how advice is launched and responded to in Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish supervision meetings, we discuss differences as well as similarities in the two data sets.

In section 2, relevant previous research is presented. This is followed by a description of the methods and the data in section 3. Section 4 presents the findings on how advice is given and received through a qualitative analysis as well as through some quantitative observations. The paper concludes with a closing discussion in section 5.

## 2. Background

The following section starts with a presentation of the concept of Swedish as a pluricentric language (2.1). This is followed by a discussion on previous findings on the pragmatic variation between the two national varieties of Swedish, and between communicative patterns in Sweden and Finland (2.2). Thereafter, the specifics of advice-giving in academic contexts are highlighted and the general sequential patterns are clarified (2.3).

<sup>1</sup> For transcription symbols see the appendix at the end of the article.

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## 2.1. Swedish as a pluricentric language

The current study explores pragmatic variation in two geographical areas where Swedish is spoken as an official language, that is, in Sweden and Finland. In other words, Swedish is a pluricentric language with one national center in Sweden and one in Finland. Sweden-Swedish is the dominant variety and Finland-Swedish the non-dominant variety (Clyne, 1992; Reuter, 1992). In Sweden, Swedish is the main language of communication, spoken as first language by approximately 85% of the total population (Parkvall, 2015). Finland is officially a bilingual country, with Finnish and Swedish as its two national languages. The majority of the population is Finnish-speaking (89%), and the Swedish-speaking population is a numerical minority, adding up to roughly 5% of the entire population (Official Statistics of Finland, 2015).

## 2.2. Pragmatic variation in Sweden and Finland

Cross-linguistic and cross-variational studies have shown that the way we interact with each other varies between different languages and language varieties (Schneider and Barron, 2008), an example being differences in back-channeling behavior in different varieties of English (Tottie, 1991; O’Keeffe and Adolphs, 2008). Communicative differences between Sweden and Finland have been investigated to some extent, with a focus on workplace interaction and everyday talk.

Research on communicative patterns in Swedish and Finnish business life has reported different perceptions of informality and asymmetry in Sweden and Finland (Charles and Louhiala-Salminen, 2007; Kangasharju, 2007). Based on questionnaires, interviews and video recorded meetings from a Swedish-Finnish company, Kangasharju (2007:348–349, 355–356) as well as Charles and Louhiala-Salminen (2007:431–432, 439–441), conclude that Finns are more result-oriented and prefer efficient decision making, whereas Swedes prefer to be given enough time for discussion before making the final decision. Another picture that arises throughout Kangasharju’s data (2007:348–356) is that Swedes make conscious efforts in order to diminish hierarchies and create a relaxed atmosphere, e.g. by a democratic approach to seating order during meetings and by starting meetings with an amusing comment and thereafter encouraging the participants to report on their activities since the last meeting. For Finns, on the other hand, the question of authority and hierarchies is considered a non-topic (Kangasharju, 2007:345–346).

Charles and Louhiala-Salminen (2007) have also looked closer at the realization of listenership in meetings where both Finns and Swedes participated. They conclude that Swedes tend to be active listeners, who do not wait in silence when listening, but ask for more information, add comments or make conclusions while listening (Charles and Louhiala-Salminen, 2007:435–436). The Finns in Charles and Louhiala-Salminen’s (2007:436) data more often choose to listen in silence, and afterwards give longer, fact-oriented responses to what they have heard. The findings about the actively listening Swedes and the more silent Finns (see also Sajavaara and Lehtonen, 1997) concur with findings from comparative interactional studies of family dinners, where Swedish family interactions include fewer pauses and more back-channeling than the equivalent Finnish ones (Tryggvason and De Geer, 2002; Tryggvason, 2004, 2006).

Moreover, previous research on Swedish-speaking interaction in Sweden and Finland has reported similar differences in communicative behavior regarding e.g. politeness, address practices and back-channeling (Saari, 1994, 1995; Henricson et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2015; Norrby et al., 2015a, 2015b; Wide, 2016). As regards politeness, Saari (1995) describes a stronger tendency toward solidarity strategies in Sweden, and toward respect strategies in Finland. This is observable in e.g. address patterns, where studies on medical consultations (Norrby et al., 2015a) and service encounters (Norrby et al., 2015b) have shown a stronger tendency to use informal and direct address patterns in Sweden-Swedish settings, and more indirect and formal address patterns in Finland-Swedish settings. In our own studies of interaction in academic supervision meetings (Nelson et al., 2015; Henricson and Nelson, 2016), we have observed fewer and shorter pauses, as well as more frequent and upgraded back-channeling in Sweden-Swedish than in Finland-Swedish supervision meetings.

Taken together, these comparative studies indicate a stronger tendency for solidarity strategies, informality and avoidance of hierarchies among Sweden-Swedish speakers than among Finland-Swedish or Finnish speakers.

## 2.3. Advice in an institutional context

A clear division of labor between an expert and a non-expert is a typical feature of institutional talk (see discussion in Benwell and Stokoe, 2006:88–89). In academic supervision meetings, knowledge asymmetry is a basic point of departure and the supervisor’s position as expert is taken for granted. The supervisor, as a representative of the academic institution that assesses the student’s academic performance, is expected to have considerably more knowledge and experience in academic research and writing than the student seeking advice. During the meetings, advice-giving is the main expected activity by all participants.

Studies in different cultural and institutional contexts have shown that the sequential structure of advice appears to be quite similar across contexts. The expert is usually the one who initiates the advice sequences (e.g. Heritage and Sefi, 1992:377; Silverman, 1997:126; Waring, 2012:100). The expert often delivers advice in a straight-forward way, but might also initiate advice in a stepwise manner, thus laying the ground for advice acceptance and reducing the risk of advice rejection (Heritage and Sefi, 1992). Advice sequences can also be launched by the non-expert (Heritage and Sefi, 1992), e.g. when the student asks a question, reports on the work-in-progress or complains about something (Vehviläinen, 2009:166).

In contexts such as supervision meetings, asymmetry and advice can be expected to be unproblematic, and often this is also the case (Vehviläinen, 2001:382). Nonetheless, advice, and more precisely the asymmetry it assumes and emphasizes, may be problematic also in contexts where advice-giving is the main purpose of the entire meeting (Heritage and Sefi, 1992; Waring, 2005, 2007; Vehviläinen, 2009). Whether or not advice is treated as problematic, and perhaps overtly resisted, can be anticipated by the context in which advice is given. In a context where advice is offered without being requested, as in Heritage and Sefi's study on health-visitors giving advice to first-time mothers in their homes (1992), advice might very well be resisted. In contexts where the advice receiver actively seeks out the advice giver for counseling (e.g. Silverman, 1997; Waring, 2007), advice is usually accepted.

Problematic or not, giving advice raises expectations of some sort of acknowledgment (Waring, 2007:111). How advice is acknowledged is connected to the way in which it is initiated and formulated (e.g. Heritage and Sefi, 1992; Silverman, 1997). Heritage and Sefi (1992:395) have observed that marked acknowledgements, e.g. news markers such as *oh right* or repetitions of advice, are found mostly as a response to advice launched by a request for advice, while Silverman (1997:127) has shown that advice given as information delivery does not oblige the advice receiver to respond with marked acknowledgements.

As shown by Silverman (1997:134), there is a preference for acceptance of advice. How clearly articulated this acceptance needs to be is highly dependent on the context and the sequential design of advice. In Heritage and Sefi (1992: e.g. 402), mere acknowledgment tokens, e.g. continuers such as *mm* and *yeah* were mainly interpreted as a sign of passive resistance. However, as Silverman (1997:168–177) argues, in other cases acknowledgment tokens might be sufficient signals of advice reception. Advice responses that are unproblematic and preferred<sup>3</sup> have been called *simple advice acceptances* (Waring, 2007:114). In particular, simple acknowledgements seem to be enough when advice is offered as a kind of general information and delivered as coming from an institutional source (Silverman, 1997:158–160, 168). Advice delivered in this manner also lay the ground for efficient chains of advice (Silverman, 1997:168).

Advice reception including more than mere acknowledgment have been discussed by Waring (2007) as ways to reshape the inherent asymmetry between the participants. These advice receptions, characterized by Waring (2007:108) as *complex advice acceptances*, appear to turn the relation between the participants into a more symmetrical one. Waring (2007:108) further divides these complex advice acceptances into two types: *accept with claims of comparable thinking* and *accept with accounts*.

The analytical categories above will be used in the empirical analysis in this article. Advice initiations are discussed according to how advice is initiated structurally, either straight-forwardly, without previous related turns, or more gradually, where advice is preceded e.g. by a question on the topic of the upcoming piece of advice. Advice acknowledgements are divided into simple and complex advice acceptances, in accordance with Waring (2007).

### 3. Method and data

The framework of our study is variational pragmatics, which, as Schneider (2010:244) points out, encompasses a range of different research traditions and focus points. Importantly, all these traditions compare empirical data and contrast the pragmatics of different regional or social varieties (Schneider, 2010:252–253). In the current paper, we highlight the pragmatic variation of giving and receiving advice in the two national varieties of the pluricentric language Swedish.

We approach the data with a CA-inspired method, one of the possibilities within the field of variational pragmatics (Schneider, 2010:241). In the following, we address the specifics of how we combine variational pragmatics and CA in our study, explain our understanding of advice-giving, and assess the comparability between the data sets (see Schegloff, 2009:378 for a critical review of comparative approaches to CA).

Variational pragmatics frames the overall focus of our study, i.e. the comparison of communicative patterns in Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish advice-giving in supervision meetings. Our inspiration from CA is evident in the selection,

<sup>3</sup> Preference refers to the observation that certain actions are treated as preferred or dispreferred, and that this has structural consequences for the interaction. Preferred actions, such as accepting an invitation, are delivered in a direct way. Dispreferred actions, such as rejecting a request for help, are more likely formulated with delay or hedges. For the current state of CA-research on preference, see Pomerantz and Heritage (2013).

collection and analysis of the data. The data consist of recorded naturally occurring interactions in comparable settings in Sweden and Finland. Through a case-by-case analysis we have identified the advising sequences and compiled parallel collections from the Sweden-Swedish and the Finland-Swedish data sets. Each advising sequence has been analyzed in detail in its sequential context. We pay special attention to the verbal communication, but nonverbal communication has sometimes helped us interpret the interaction. In the analysis we do not a priori assume that the two varieties differ from each other; instead we seek to identify both potential differences and similarities between the Sweden-Swedish and the Finland-Swedish interactions.

One of the researchers is a native speaker of the Sweden-Swedish variety, and the other is a native speaker of the Finland-Swedish variety. In analyzing the data, the two researchers have collaborated closely. Judging by our data, and the fact that we are studying interactions in settings and cultures that are very similar, there is no inherent discrepancy in the conception of advice in the two varieties (cf. Sidnell, 2009:15–16).

More specifically, the data consist of supervision meetings at three universities in Finland and three in Sweden. The universities are situated in three different cities in each country. In all meetings, which were audio and/or video recorded in 2011, 2014 and 2015, the language of instruction is Swedish. The Finland-Swedish data contain four academic supervision meetings: two meetings with one student and one supervisor at an academic department (37 + 27, totally 64 min), and two meetings with one supervisor and one student at two writing centers affiliated with two different universities (39 + 64, totally 103 min). The total duration of the Finland-Swedish interactions is 167 min. The Sweden-Swedish data amount to 134 min and also consist of four academic supervision meetings: one meeting with one supervisor and two students at an academic department (41 min), and three meetings with one supervisor and one student at writing centers affiliated with two different universities (20 + 25 + 48, totally 93 min). In the supervision meetings different students and supervisors participate, except from in two Sweden-Swedish and two Finland-Swedish meetings, where the same supervisors meet different students. Hence, in all, six different supervisors and nine different students participate in the meetings. For a variational pragmatic approach, the scope of the data might seem limited. However, the chosen in-depth analytic method restricts our possibility to analyze large quantities of material. In this case, we have opted for the benefits of in-depth analyses of a smaller data set.

When collecting the data, we have tried to minimize differences in the settings, e.g., when it comes to academic discipline and the overall agenda for the meeting. All supervision meetings concern some kind of written work produced by the students. All supervisors, in both countries, have had access to the written texts in advance and have also prepared comments beforehand. A main thread during all meetings is to go through the supervisor's prepared as well as spontaneous comments on the text. In both data sets, we find similarities when it comes to topics and content, such as reference details, spelling conventions or discussions on when to use the indefinite pronoun *man* 'you'. These overall similarities imply that the studied supervision meetings are comparable. However, as with all naturally occurring data, we cannot control all factors and have tried to avoid affecting the interaction more than the situation demands.

#### 4. Analysis

In the supervision meetings studied, advice-giving is the dominating activity. There are 154 advice sequences in the Finland-Swedish data and 159 in the Sweden-Swedish data. About two thirds of all advice sequences in both data sets concern linguistic issues, such as spelling, grammar or vocabulary (101 in the Finland-Swedish data and 104 in the Sweden-Swedish data). The remaining third (53 Finland-Swedish/55 Sweden-Swedish) consists of advice regarding subject content. In the following analysis, we discuss how advice sequences are initiated, either by the supervisor or by the student (4.1), and how advice is received by the student (4.2).

##### 4.1. How advice is initiated

A vast majority of all advice sequences in the data are initiated by the supervisors. There are three ways in which the supervisors initiate advice sequences: (1) giving advice in a straight-forward way, (2) initiating advice by asking a question, or (3) opening up a new topic and thus gradually moving toward a piece of advice. In the first case, the advice sequence starts with advice. In the second case, the advice sequence starts with a question followed by advice. In the third case, the advice sequence starts with the introduction of a new topic followed by advice. Hence, initiating advice in a straight-forward (1) or gradual (2, 3) way describes the sequential structure of advice initiation. These ways of initiating advice correspond with previous findings by Heritage and Sefi (1992), Silverman (1997), Vehviläinen (2001) and Waring (2012). In our data, advice is often given based on written documents, i.e. the students' texts, and the supervisors' comments on them. Advice-giving starts with the shared understanding that the supervisor has read the text and identified things to discuss. Hence, e.g. initiating advice in a straight-forward way or chaining advice sequences to each other may be facilitated by the text in front of the participants.

#### 4.1.1. Advice given in a straight-forward way

Giving advice in a straight-forward way is the far most dominating pattern throughout the data. Straight-forwardly initiated advice refers to cases where advice is given without introductory work, i.e. in medias res. Straight-forwardly initiated advice can be given in a more or less direct way and may also contain mitigating devices.

Example 2 illustrates advice initiated in a straight-forward way. In this Finland-Swedish example, there are no signs of gradual introduction of advice, e.g. by asking a question. In line 1, the student acknowledges a previous turn uttered by the supervisor. In the following line, the supervisor proceeds straight into giving advice.

Example 2. Stimuli is the plural form (Finland-Swedish)

- 01 STU: jä  
yeah
- 02 SUP: stimuli e de pluralis å då heter de ÅMNESORD stimuli  
stimuli is it plural and then it is SUBJECT TERM stimuli
- 03 STU: just de  
right
- 04 SUP: annars e de ju då stimulus  
otherwise it is PART stimulus
- 05 (0.4)
- 06 ST1: okej (0.5) nå sidu  
okay (0.5) PART that's right
- 07 (1.1)
- 08 SUP: mm  
mm
- 09 (2.3)
- 10 SUP: å dehär (0.4) hemsida hellre då we[bbplats hem-] hemsida e  
and this (0.4) home page then rather website home- home page is
- 11 STU: [webbplats mm]  
website mm
- 12 SUP: mera så där liksom att me [kommersiella sammanhang så att]  
more well like in commercial contexts so that
- 13 STU: [dagligt tal ja mm ]  
colloquial speech yes mm
- 14 SUP: å webbplats funkar [kanske] bäst där  
and website might work the best there
- 15 STU: [mm ]  
mm
- 16 STU: mm  
mm

Example 2 includes two advice sequences, with one following directly after the other. The first advice sequence, in lines 2–6, concerns the noun *stimulus*. In line 2, the supervisor states that *stimuli* is the plural form and the correct choice in this context (both participants orient to this as a declarative turn even if the abridged utterance appears in interrogative syntax). This piece of advice, in addition to being structurally initiated in a straight-forward way, i.e. in medias res, is also formulated in very direct words, without any signs of hedging or mitigation. In line 4, the supervisor further clarifies the singular form, here adding the particle *ju*, which implies that the student might already be aware of the mentioned form. After this advice sequence followed by a couple of pauses and a *mm* in lines 7–9, the supervisor proceeds directly to the next piece of advice, from line 10 onwards. Here, the supervisor argues for the term *webbplats* 'website' rather than *hemsida* 'home page'. Also in this case, advice is given in a straight-forward way and in fairly direct words, although some mitigation is included when the supervisor, in line 10, advises the student to *hellre då* 'then rather' choose another formulation in the text. In lines 10, 12 and 14, the supervisor adds an explanation for why the alternative *webbplats* 'website' is to be preferred over *hemsida* 'home page'; the latter is used in more *kommersiella sammanhang* 'commercial contexts'. In example 2 the supervisor delivers advice after advice in a straight-forward way, resulting in a chain of advice, a phenomenon also noted by Silverman (1997:168). This way of chaining advice sequences to each other and only moderately mitigating advice is mostly used by the Finland-Swedish supervisors.

Example 3 illustrates straight-forward advice initiation in the Sweden-Swedish data. Without any gradual transition between topics the supervisor in line 1 proceeds from one topic to another, initiating advice on whether to write compound words as a single word or as two words.

## Example 3. Writing compound words (Sweden-Swedish)

- 01 SUP: a .hh å här har vi ett ord igen  
*yeah .hh and here we have one word again*
- 02 alltså flera av dom här sakerna e att du sår skriver o:rd  
*like many of these things is that you write in two words*
- 03 STU: mm  
*mm*
- 04 (0.6)
- 05 SUP: å: (1.3) ja så de e ju många som gör de  
*and (1.3) yeah so there are PART many who do that*
- 06 STU: mm  
*mm*

In the first line in example 3, the supervisor immediately explains that *här har vi ett ord igen* 'here we have one word again'. Using an inclusive *vi* 'we' is characteristic for the Sweden-Swedish data (Henricson et al., 2015), and in this case it may also be a way to mitigate advice. After a simple acknowledgment by the student in line 3 and a short pause, the supervisor in line 5 further mitigates the advice-giving, *så de e ju många som gör de* 'so there are PART many who do that'. She thereby normalizes the problem by claiming that many students write compound words as two words (for research on normalizing in institutional interaction, see e.g. Svinhufvud et al., 2017).

As a final example of a straight-forwardly initiated advice, we return to example 1, which is here partly reproduced as example 4. After the previous topic has ended (not shown in the transcription) and a notable pause in line 1, the supervisor gives the student directly formulated advice on how to accurately write dates.

## Example 4. Writing dates in academic texts (Finland-Swedish)

- 01 (4.6)
- 02 SUP: datum får du skriva så här  
*a date you need to write like this*
- 03 (1.0)
- 04 STU: mm  
*mm*
- 05 (0.7)
- 06 SUP: konsekvent  
*consistently*

This strikingly succinct way of giving advice, without transition markers or other sequential clues, nor mitigation of any kind, is a feature found only in the Finland-Swedish data.

## 4.1.2. Gradually launched advice

In those cases where the supervisor launches advice-giving gradually, two different patterns are found in the data. The most common way to enter advice-giving gradually is that the supervisor initiates the advice sequence by asking the student(s) a question. Example 5 from the Finland-Swedish data illustrates this pattern.

## Example 5. Formatting of the reference list (Finland-Swedish)

- 01 SUP: om de här e då e de här en (0.2) tid[skrift]  
*if this is then is this a journal*
- 02 STU: [de e] en tidskrifft ja ]  
*it's a journal yes*
- 03 SUP: [ja så] så  
*yes well well*
- 04 [den ] hör ju ti litteraturförteck[ningen] å då ska kursi<sup>o</sup>vera<sup>o</sup>  
*it is then PART part of the reference list and then must italicize*
- 05 STU: [.mm] [mm ]  
*.mm mm*
- 06 STU: ja  
*yes*

In line 1, the supervisor asks *e de här en tidskrift* 'is this a journal'. After receiving an answer to this question (line 2), she provides direct advice regarding the reference list (lines 3–4). Except for the particle *ju* in line 4, implying some form of shared knowledge, advice is given without any mitigating devices. In this case, the supervisor's question in line 1 and the student's response in line 2 offer a step-wise entry into the advice sequence.

Another step-wise way for the supervisor to launch advice is to open up a new topic and thereafter provide advice related to this. In both data sets, this is the least common way for the supervisor to initiate advice. This advice initiation practice is used by the Sweden-Swedish supervisor in example 6, where she explains that headlines are not required in the reference list.

Example 6. It's my job to be fussy (Sweden-Swedish)

- 01 SUP: å sen förstår ja att de här e er egna eh e- ÄMNESORD har ni skrivit  
*and then I understand that this is your own eh SUBJECT TERM you have written*
- 02 ÄMNESORD å ÄMNESORD i i källförteckningen  
*SUBJECT TERM and SUBJECT TERM in in the reference list*
- 03 ST1: mm  
*mm*
- 04 SUP: asså ni behöver ju inte ha dom rubrikerna i referenslistan  
*well you don't need PART those headlines in the reference list*
- 05 men de tror ja ni redan vet  
*but I believe you already know that*
- 06 ST2: jo  
*yes*
- 07 SUP: eller hur de e väl ba att ni har delat upp [men]  
*don't you it's just that you have divided but*
- 08 ST1: [a: ]  
*yeah*
- 09 SUP: har vi fått med så här många artiklar å så  
*did we manage to include this many articles and so on*
- 10 ST1: a:  
*yeah*
- 11 ST2: a [precis]  
*yeah exactly*
- 12 SUP: [att det] e som arbets[material] de: förstod ja nästan  
*that it is like working material that I almost understood*
- 13 ST1: [a ]  
*yeah*
- 14 ST1: mm  
*mm*
- 15 SUP: men de de e ju mitt jobb å peta  
*but it is PART my job to be fussy*
- 16 ST2: mm  
*mm*
- 17 ST1: [\*mm\* ]  
*mm*
- 18 SUP: [\*mm\* \*mm\*] .h eh å så  
*mm mm .h eh and so on*

Example 6 shows how the Sweden-Swedish supervisor opens up a new topic in lines 1 and 2 by introducing the reference list. She then, in line 4, quickly moves on to giving advice about deleting headlines in the list. Immediately after that, in line 5, the supervisor starts providing an account on behalf of the students, *men de tror ja ni redan vet* 'but I believe you already know that'. The immediate student response is a simple advice acceptance in line 6, *jo* 'yes'. This minimal response is not oriented to as sufficient by the supervisor, as she then, in line 7, seeks a stronger response from the students through the increment *eller hur* 'don't you' followed by another account on behalf of the students as she suggests that they have probably just divided the reference list into thematic parts. This assumption is confirmed, in overlap, by one of the students in line 8. After that, in line 9, the supervisor talks with the voice of the students, *har vi fått med så här många artiklar* 'did we manage to include this many articles', hence quoting their thoughts during the writing process. The students agree with



this interpretation, one of them with the neutral acknowledgment token *a*: 'yeah', in line 10, and the other with a more upgraded expression *a precis* 'yeah exactly', in line 11. Before the advice sequence is closed, the supervisor in line 12 mitigates her advice further by clarifying that she is aware of the fact that the text *e som arbetsmaterial* 'is like working material'. This is briefly acknowledged by one of the students, in lines 13 and 14. In line 15, the supervisor concludes with a mitigating comment about it being her job *å peta* 'to be fussy' about details, which is responded to by short acknowledgements from the students in lines 16 and 17. The intensive mitigation process illustrated in example 6 is characteristic of the Sweden-Swedish data. Hence, although the advice initiations in example 5 and 6 are structured in a similar way, there are notable differences in how advice is formulated.

#### 4.1.3. Student-initiated advice

All supervision meetings we have studied include a few cases where the advice sequences are initiated by the students. The students' advice-seeking turns are either direct questions or turns that open up a new topic. Similar cases of student-initiated advice sequences are discussed in Vehviläinen (2009:166). It is not uncommon that turns where students seek advice follow directly after supervisor-initiated advice or is somehow connected to earlier advice given by the supervisor. In Vehviläinen (2009:169), there are similar examples where the student's advice initiation is linked to previous advice initiated by the supervisor (see also Heritage and Sefi, 1992:374).

In example 7, from the Finland-Swedish data, and example 8, from the Sweden-Swedish data, the students initiate advice by asking a question directed at the supervisor. In example 7, the question concerns spelling and choosing between two versions of the verb 'shall' (*ska* or *skall* in Swedish).

Example 7. Choosing between two spelling forms of the same verb (Finland-Swedish)

- 01 (3.2)  
 02 STU: va e de för skillnad där på skall å ska (0.2)  
*what is the difference there between shall and shall*  
 03 eller e- an[vänder man bara] ska  
*or uh- do you just use shall*  
 04 SUP: [eh s- ]  
*uhm s-*  
 05 SUP: ska ha- (0.3) e de här vanligare nu så att  
*shall ha- is like more common now so that*  
 06 STU: jä  
*yeah*  
 07 SUP: skall va tidigare de norma[la i formell text ] men  
*shall was before the normal form in formal writing but*  
 08 STU: [ja e så gammal ja så att de e mm]  
*me I am so old so that it is mm*  
 09 SUP: ska e de som rekommenderas till å me i lagtext  
*shall is the one recommended even in legal writing*  
 10 så nu kör du me ska  
*so now you go with shall*  
 11 (0.2)  
 12 STU mm okej  
*mm okay .mh*  
 13 (0.3)  
 14 .mh  
*.mh*  
 15 SUP: så du kan ju ta en sökning på de .så  
*so you can PART take a search on that so*  
 16 STU: mm  
*mm*

After a pause, in line 2, the student asks the supervisor about the difference between the two Swedish spelling forms of shall, *ska* and *skall*. She then reformulates the question by raising the possibility that one of the two spelling forms is preferred, *ska* 'shall' (line 3). The supervisor affirms this assumption in line 5, by stating that *ska* 'shall' is more common nowadays, and then explains the usage of *ska* and *skall* in lines 7 and 9. Finally, in line 15, she gives the student practical advice on how to find all the instances of the two forms in the text, using the 'search'-command in

the document. This piece of advice is oriented to as sufficient by the student and no further questions on the topic arise.

In the Sweden-Swedish example 8, advice-seeking is initiated by the student in a similar way as in example 7. During the meeting and in the student's text, the different interpretations of the term *familj* 'family' is discussed. In the text, the student talks about *analysera* 'analyzing' the term in question, and now wants to know whether this choice of verb is correct or not.

Example 8. Deciding on the most appropriate verb (Sweden-Swedish)

- 01 STU: mt kan man skriva asså e de dumt å skriva analyse- asså  
*mt can one write I mean is it stupid to write analyz- like*  
 02 (0.5)  
 03 SUP: def:ini[era ] eller diskutera  
*define or discuss*  
 04 STU: [definiera]  
*define*  
 05 STU: a  
*yeah*  
 06 (1.4)  
 07 SUP: vi kan säga diskutera e bättre  
*we can say discuss is better*  
 08 STU: a:  
*yeah*  
 09 (0.5)  
 10 SUP: diskutera (2.1) ehm (0.4) begreppet fa[milj]  
*discuss (2.1) uhm (0.4) the term family*  
 11 STU: [a: ]  
*yeah*

The advice sequence is launched by the student's question in line 1, *kan man skriva asså e de dumt å skriva analyse-asså* 'can one write I mean is it stupid to write analyz-like'. After a short pause, the supervisor suggests to rather use one of the two verbs *definiera* 'define' or *diskutera* 'discuss' (line 3). In overlap with the supervisor, the student in line 4 repeats the verb *definiera* 'define', and after having heard both suggestions she utters the acknowledgment token a 'yeah' in line 5. After another pause in line 6, the supervisor concludes, in line 7, that *diskutera* 'discuss' is a better alternative, and in line 10 she formulates a suggestion for the student's writing, *diskutera begreppet familj* 'discuss the term family'. The student accepts the suggestions with acknowledgment tokens in lines 8 and 11, and the problem appears to be solved.

Another way for students to initiate advice is to open up a new topic. In our data, only a few instances of this kind of student-initiated advice can be found. These openings lead to longer advice sequences on topics such as plagiarism or references. Due to space limitations examples of this rarely found advice initiation pattern are not included here.

In all, the structural patterns for initiating advice are strikingly similar in the Sweden-Swedish and the Finland-Swedish data, mostly with supervisor-initiated advice, delivered in a straight-forward way. In both data sets, student-initiated advice is relatively rare. Mitigating devices are used by both Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish supervisors, but the extent of the mitigation process varies considerably. In the Sweden-Swedish data, mitigating advice is clearly more common and often stronger than in the Finland-Swedish data. In the Finland-Swedish data, mitigating advice is often done in a less accentuated manner, and there are many succinct examples without mitigation of any kind.

#### 4.2. How advice is acknowledged

Responsive turns and back-channels play a crucial role in constructing a collaborative interaction. How the institutional roles as student and supervisor as well as the social distance and relation between the participants are recreated, negotiated, and adjusted during the meeting, is mirrored in the way participants respond upon each other's utterances (Nelson et al., 2015). In our data, each instance of advice is acknowledged in one way or the other, and the students never resist advice overtly. In accordance with Waring's (2007) distinction, in this section we discuss advice acknowledgements in terms of simple (4.2.1) and complex (4.2.2) advice acceptances.

##### 4.2.1. Simple advice acceptance

The most prominent pattern in both data sets is that the students respond to advice with simple acknowledgments. They include neutral expressions, such as *okej* 'okay', *mm* 'mm' or *a*: 'yeah', as well as more upgraded formulations, such

as *absolut* ‘absolutely’ or *exakt* ‘exactly’. The neutral acknowledgements are found throughout the data, as illustrated by all the examples given so far. However, the upgraded acknowledgements are more frequent in the Sweden-Swedish data, and example 9 shows an example of this. Here, the supervisor suggests that the students should focus on three core issues and thus make the text more concise and the writing process more manageable.

#### Example 9. Simplifying the process (Sweden-Swedish)

- 01 SUP: asså ja leker själv me tanken ni kanske bara ska hålla er till  
*I mean I play with the thought myself maybe you should only stick to*
- 02 ÄMNESORD ÄMNESORD å ÄMNESORD  
 SUBJECT TERM SUBJECT TERM and SUBJECT TERM
- 03 (0.8)
- 04 ST2: mm  
*mm*
- 05 ST1: ja  
*yeah*
- 06 SUP: asså eh eh de e också ett sätt att dra [ihop de litegrann] för  
*I mean eh eh it is also a way to make it a bit more concise because*
- 07 ST1: [a: mm ]  
*yeah mm*
- 08 SUP: att ni måste eh eh eh föra skutan framåt  
*you have to eh eh eh move the ship forward*
- 09 ST1: \*a: precis\*  
*yeah exactly*
- 10 SUP: (skrattar) så att ni inte liksom tar er vatten över huvet  
*(laughs) so that you don't like bite off more than you can chew*
- 11 ST1: a: a: precis  
*yeah yeah exactly*
- 12 SUP: hänger ni med  
*are you with me*
- 13 ST1: a: absolut  
*yeah absolutely*

Throughout the sequence in example 9, the Sweden-Swedish students respond to advice with simple advice acknowledgements. Most of the acknowledgements are neutral, *mm*, *yeah*, *yeah mm* (lines 4, 5 and 7), but there are also examples of more upgraded acknowledgements, i.e. *a: precis* ‘yeah exactly’, *a: a: precis* ‘yeah yeah exactly’ and *a: absolut* ‘yeah absolutely’ (lines 9, 11 and 13). Despite the acknowledgements already delivered, the supervisor, in line 12, asks *hänger ni med* ‘are you with me’, turning her gaze down. This leads to an upgraded response *a: absolut* ‘yeah absolutely’ in line 13, which also brings the sequence to an end. Asking for further response is almost exclusively done by the Sweden-Swedish supervisors (also noted in example 6, *eller hur* ‘don’t you’ in line 7), and this sometimes leads to more upgraded acknowledgements. In the Finland-Swedish data, the students’ neutrally formulated simple acknowledgements such as *ja* ‘yeah’, *mm* ‘mm’ and *okej* ‘okay’ are in most cases oriented to as sufficient by the supervisors.

#### 4.2.2. Complex advice acceptance

In some cases the students respond to advice with more than a simple acknowledgment token. These more complex advice acceptances are, as described by Waring (2007:115), a way for the student to position him- or herself as a ‘competent, thoughtful, and participating peer in the advising process’, and hence diminish the inherent asymmetry. One kind of complex advice acceptance includes accounts (4.2.2.1), another claims of comparable thinking (4.2.2.2).

4.2.2.1. *Accepting with accounts.* In both the Sweden-Swedish and the Finland-Swedish data the students at times accept advice with some kind of accounting. This is illustrated in example 10, where the supervisor gives advice on spacing conventions.

#### Example 10. Spacing conventions (Sweden-Swedish)

- 01 SUP: mt eh om ni tittar på kommentar ett (0.4) en sån här petgrej bara  
*mt eh if you look at commentary one (0.4) a petty detail only*
- 02 ja har skrivi mellanslag .h mt efter ordet innan referensen inom

- 03 *I have written a spacing .h mt after the word before the reference in  
parentes .h [å se vidare i texten ]  
brackets .h and see further in the text*
- 04 STU2: [mm ]  
*mm*
- 05 STU1: [.h ja okej av misstag] [ja]  
*.h yeah okay by mistake yeah*
- 06 SUP: [ja] (0.6) precis eh  
*yeah (0.6) exactly*
- 07 så att ni ni kan väl kolla på de mt de är en sån här m-  
*so that you you can then check that mt it is such a m-*
- 08 formaliagrej så att de ska #[se eh ]# rätt å å riktigt ut  
*formalities thing so that it looks correct and right*
- 09 ST1: [mm mm ]  
*mm mm*

In lines 2–3 the supervisor remarks on a missing spacing in the text: *ja har skrivit mellanslag mt efter ordet innan referensen inom parentes* 'I have written a spacing mt after the word before the reference in brackets'. In line 5, one of the students accounts for the missing spacing by clarifying that it was a mistake, *ja okej av misstag ja* 'yeah okay by mistake yeah'. The supervisor acknowledges the account in line 6, *ja precis* 'yeah exactly', and then in lines 7–8 continues by stating the piece of advice as a question of mere formalities and thereby mitigating the action of advice-giving. Already when launching advice in line 1, the supervisor diminishes the upcoming suggestion by referring to it as a *petgrej* 'petty detail'. Hence, she both enters and exits the advice sequence in what appears to be a typically Sweden-Swedish manner, by continuously using mitigating devices.

Also in the Finland-Swedish data the students sometimes account for shortcomings by explaining them as mistakes or lapses. In addition, the Finland-Swedish students give longer accounts explaining the process behind the shortcomings that the supervisor remarks upon. Example 11 illustrates this kind of accounting. Here, the supervisor suggests that the student should include the page numbers in the references already in an early stage of the writing process.

#### Example 11. Details in references (Finland-Swedish)

- 01 (19.4)
- 02 SUP: å sen (0.3) vissa (0.4) referenser den här EFTERNAMN  
*and then (0.3) some (0.4) references this SURNAME*
- 03 å EFTER[NAMN saknar ]  
*and SURNAME doesn't have*
- 04 STU: [jå så siffror ] jå ja ha  
*yeah so numbers yeah I have*
- 05 SUP: sidnummer (0.3) å de (0.7) de e lite \*farligt\* att .h  
*page numbers (0.3) and it (0.7) it is a bit dangerous to .h*
- 06 STU: jå [ja ha-]  
*yeah I have*
- 07 SUP: [att ] #eh# glömma bort å skriva in de för sen blir de jobbigt  
*to eh forget to write it because then it gets hard*
- 08 att hitta dom där  
*to find them there*
- 09 STU: jå ja [måst k]olla de  
*yeah I need to check it*
- 10 SUP: [sidorna]  
*the pages*
- 11 (0.7)
- 12 STU: kolla: dom där sidorna  
*will check those pages*
- 13 (0.5)
- 14 SUP: jå  
*yeah*
- 15 (7.2)

- 16 STU: de va fö- ja hadd (0.3) ja ha anteckna från den där  
*it was be- I had (0.3) I have taken notes from that*
- 17 boken å sen ha ja från mina anteckningar (0.2) satt ja de in hit  
*book and then I have from my notes (0.2) I put it in here*
- 18 (0.5)
- 19 SUP: [#mh#]  
*mm*
- 20 STU: [å ] sen så därför ha de .h ja har int sidorna där i  
*and then so that's why I have .h I haven't got the pages there in*
- 21 anteckningarna så därför ja må[st] kolla  
*the notes so that's why I need to check*
- 22 SUP: [jå]  
*yeah*
- 23 STU: men ja ska göra de så att int ja sen glömmet helt bo[rt ]  
*but I will do it so that I won't forget it all together*
- 24 SUP: [mm]  
*mm*

In line 2, the Finland-Swedish supervisor directly initiates advice-giving by pointing out that some references lack page numbers. She further emphasizes, in lines 5, 7, 8 and 10, the urgency of the piece of advice by explaining that the page numbers may be difficult to find afterwards and that it therefore is a bit dangerous to postpone this kind of work. Already before the supervisor has finished her advice or mentioned the page numbers, the student responds by confirming the topic of the piece of advice, *ja så siffror* 'yeah so numbers' in line 4, in partial overlap with the supervisor. The participants have the student's text in front of them and once the supervisor introduces the topic, the student quickly notices the missing numbers in the text. Already at this point, the student also starts off with what might project an account, *ja ja ha* 'yeah I have' (line 6), but abandons her turn and instead acknowledges the piece of advice by confirming that she will check the numbers, *ja ja måst kolla de* 'yeah I need to check it' (line 9), and *kolla: dom där sidorna* 'will check those pages' (line 12). The supervisor acknowledges this with a short *ja* 'yeah' in line 14. After a lengthy pause in line 15, the student extends the same topic by providing an account for the missing page numbers and reassuring the supervisor that she will attend to the problem (lines 16–17, 20–21, 23). The supervisor acknowledges the account with the neutral back-channeling tokens *mm*, *yeah* and *mm*, in lines 19, 22 and 24. Extensive accounts of the on-going writing process (line 16–17, 20–21) and how the problem will be solved (line 9, 12, 23), as in example 11, are only found in the Finland-Swedish data.

4.2.2.2. *Accepting with claims of comparable thinking.* Further exclusive to the Finland-Swedish data, in addition to the students' extensive accounts, the students sometimes accept advice with claims of comparable thinking. An example of this acceptance pattern is found in example 12.

Example 12. Missing colon (Finland-Swedish)

- 01 SUP: sen sk- har du:[#: kolon där# ]  
*then sh- you have colon there*
- 02 STU: [ja e de sådär att den]  
*yes is it like that that it*
- 03 SUP: #mm [ÄMNESORD# kolon S ]  
*mm SUBJECT TERM colon S*
- 04 STU: [mja de fundera ja också på]  
*well I also thought about that*

In line 1, the supervisor points out that a colon is missing in the text. In overlap with the supervisor, the student starts asking for further information with an incomplete question in line 2, after which the supervisor in line 3 clarifies exactly how to write the construction in question. In line 4 the student mentions that she has thought about the same herself, *de fundera ja också på* 'I also thought about that', and hence adds a claim of comparable thinking. As discussed by Waring (2007), claiming comparable thinking is a means to diminish the asymmetry between the expert and the non-expert. The impact of the student's independent agency is further emphasized as the student, in line 2, initiates a turn in overlap with the advice-giving turn. Stating comparable thinking and entering with overlapping talk into the on-going advice-giving is a way for the student to position herself as an engaged and independent participant in the supervision meeting. These features,

illustrated in example 12, only appear in the Finland-Swedish data. In the Sweden-Swedish data, there are neither claims of comparable thinking nor overlapping of this kind.

## 5. Concluding discussion

When compared on a general level, the Sweden-Swedish and the Finland-Swedish data show strikingly similar patterns as regards frequency and distribution of different structural types of advice initiation and reception. A common division of labor throughout the data is that the supervisor gives and motivates advice, and that the student responds to this, e.g. by showing acceptance, comprehension or verbalizing the aim to follow the piece of advice. However, in the sequential unfolding of the advice sequences many differences between the two data sets occur.

A typical feature of the Sweden-Swedish supervision meetings is that advice is seldom delivered without any markers of transition. Advice is mostly delivered with some, and often many, different mitigation devices. These mitigations include diminishing the necessity of the suggestion (*en sån här petgnej bara* 'a petty detail only'), explaining shortcomings on behalf of the students (*att det e som arbetsmaterial det förstod ja nästan* 'that it is like working material that I almost understood'), or indicating that the piece of advice is redundant (*men de tror ja ni redan vet* 'but I believe you already know that'). In addition, the supervisor may enter or exit the advising sequence by accounting for having the duty to deliver advice (*men de e ju mitt jobb å peta* 'but it is my job to be fuzzy'). These different ways of mitigating appear throughout the sequences; when initiating, giving, and rounding off advice. This pattern is in line with Kangasharju's (2007) observation about the tendency in Swedish business communication to diminish hierarchies and make a conscious effort to create an egalitarian and relaxed atmosphere.

Only in the Finland-Swedish supervision meetings advice is sometimes initiated without any markers of transition or other launching clues (e.g. *stimuli e de pluralis* 'stimuli is it plural' or *datum får du skriva så här* 'a date you need to write like this'). One way to deliver advice in an efficient way is to chain sequences on to each other. This feature is mostly found in the Finland-Swedish data. Mitigation appears also in the Finland-Swedish advice sequences, but this is by far not as salient as in the Sweden-Swedish data. This result concurs with Kangasharju's (2007) description of Finns' preference for a result-oriented and efficient approach to work-related interaction, as well as of their unproblematic relationship to hierarchy.

In the Sweden-Swedish interactions, neutral acknowledgements are not always oriented to as sufficient by the supervisors and the students may thus turn to upgraded expressions, such as *a: absolut* 'yeah absolutely'. These stronger responses are at times evoked by the supervisor, e.g. with the question *hänger ni me* 'are you with me'. Instances of complex advice acceptances are restricted to accounts related to lapses or mistakes (*ja okej av misstag* 'yeah okay by mistake'). Here, we see similarities with Charles and Louhiala-Salminen's (2007) description of the actively listening Swedes, as well as with the frequent back-channeling documented in the Swedish dinner conversations studied by Tryggvasson (2004, 2006) and with the results of our own studies of back-channeling behavior in Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish academic supervision meetings (Nelson et al., 2015; Henricson and Nelson, 2016).

In the Finland-Swedish data, the default case is that neutral acknowledgements from the students are sufficient responses to advice. Among the more complex acceptances, a broader repertoire is noted in the Finland-Swedish than in the Sweden-Swedish data. Besides accounting for shortcomings as mistakes, Finland-Swedish students sometimes give longer accounts leading to a discussion about the working processes behind the shortcomings. In addition, the students at times add a clarification of how the problem will be solved (*kolla: dom där sidorna* 'will check those pages') and may also claim comparable thinking (*mja de fundera ja också på* 'well I also thought about that'). This picture is in line with Charles and Louhiala-Salminen's (2007) portrayal of Finns as silent listeners, who after listening respond with long and fact-oriented utterances.

In all, in the Sweden-Swedish data, the supervisor puts a lot of interactional work into downplaying the directness of advice, e.g. by mitigating and accounting for advice. In the Finland-Swedish data, advice-giving appears to be an action that does not need to be continuously mitigated or accounted for in the first place. These patterns support the findings in previous studies, showing different perceptions of institutional roles, asymmetry and social distance in Sweden and Finland (e.g. Saari, 1995; Kangasharju, 2007; Henricson et al., 2015). Based on this empirical study, and on other findings within the field of variational pragmatics, we propose that the documented variation in advice sequences may be explained in terms of pragmatic differences between the two varieties of Swedish.

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## Appendix. Transcription symbols

(0.2)	Length of pause in seconds and tenths of seconds
[mm]	Overlap
#mm#	Creaky voice
°mm°	Soft voice
*mm*	Laughing voice
ja	Emphasis
ja:	Prolonged sound
.ja	Uttered with aspiration
.h	Audible inhalation
javi-	Interrupted word
NAME	Anonymized word
(laughs)	Comment
PART	Discourse particle with no obvious English equivalent

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