**Nå in Swedish conversation**

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In the Swedish etymological dictionary Hellquist describes the Swedish *nå* as an interjection. Historically, *nå* is documented in the 1541 edition of the bible and in written dialogues dating from the late 17th century. Citing Noréen, Hellquist states that *nå* is associated with the Icelandic *ná* as in *hérna* and *nú*; the southern Norwegian *naa*, *nu*, *nå*; the old German *nu*, the German *nun*, and the Greek *ny*.

Prior research on *nå* in Sweden-Swedish conversation has focussed on texts. Aijmer and Simon-Vandenbergen (2003) analyzed texts translated from English to Swedish. They found that the English *well* often is translated as *nå* in Swedish. Keinonen (1998) compared two editions of the fiction book *Anderssonskans Kalle* by Emil Nordlander; the first published in 1901 and the second published in 1989. She found that *nå* was four times more prevalent in the first edition. *Nå* was not only less prevalent in the 1989 edition, it also exhibited a more narrow functional profile. Keinonen's finding that *nå* is on the decline resonates with my exploration of *nå* in modern corpora of audio- and video recordings of naturally occurring Swedish interaction. Given that I had no instances of *nå* in my corpora of modern spoken Swedish, this paper is based on analysis of historical materials drawn from one film and radio- and television broadcasts from the 1950's.

The data is taken from one of Sweden’s very first cooking shows entitled *The Novice at the Stove*. The host was the professional chef Tore Wretman who might be described as Sweden’s Julia Childs. The show was sponsored by the Swedish dairy industry and it was first included in the so called housewives films from the early 1950’s that were shown during afternoon matinees at cinemas across Sweden. Berner (2002) reports that these films were very popular drawing an audience of more than half a million. *The Novice at the Stove* was also broadcast on the radio and with the emergence of television it became a popular television program. Each episode involves Wretman teaching the novice, the Swedish journalist Folke Olhagen, to prepare a typical Swedish dish. A recurrent but informally accomplished dramaturgy is that the chef walks the novice through the different steps of preparing a dish, the novice proposes that the dish is complete whereupon the chef chastises the novice for his impatience and introduces a dairy product (typically heavy cream) that provides the final culinary touch.

There are several reasons why these data lend themselves to a conversation analytic study of *nå*. The video- and audio recordings are of high quality and the interactions have an informal and unscripted feel that may inhere in the fact that the participants are not professional actors and that they are engaged in a real activity – cooking – that requires not only the use of spoken language but also the manipulation of artefacts (cooking utensils and food). Drawbacks of the data are that insights into the conditions of production are limited, parts of the talk feel somewhat scripted and contrived and that there are a few editorial cuts. These limitations notwithstanding these data provide a unique insight into Swedish as it was spoken over half a century ago. Furthermore, and in light of the low prevalence of *nå* in modern spoken Swedish, these recordings offer a rare opportunity to analyse *nå* within the details of talk-in-interaction.

The presentation is based on an analysis of all instances of *nå* in *The Novice at the Stove*. *Nå* is used as a freestanding token as well as in clusters with the affirmative response token *ja* (yes) and the
modal particle väl. Preliminary analysis suggests that nå is typically produced prosodically unstressed in turn-initial position. Within a sequence or activity, nå can be used as a probe to promote progressivity (Stivers & Robinson, 2006) by advocating the production of a (so far) missing second pair part. In responses, nå can be used to mark an otherwise affiliative second pair part as a concession or mitigated consent. Multimodal analysis of environments of use suggests that nå is a resource for focussing the interaction around a new center of attention such as a new dish that is brought out of the oven. Finally, situating the use of nå within the broader ethnographic context of the instructional setting of a cooking show, nå appears to be a strategic resource for invoking and highlighting the asymmetrical relationship between expert and novice.

References


