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Utkast artikel: *Discursive functions of 'hypothetical active-voicing' in adoption assessment interviews.*

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### Läshänvisningar

Detta utkast är i ett tidigt skede och är tänkt att skickas till *Journal of Pragmatics*. Huvudfokus är på ett kommunikativt fenomen (Hypothetical active-voicing) i utredningsintervjuer inför adoption.

Jag tar tacksamt emot alla kommentarer men framför allt kring hur exemplen fungerar; hur de skiljer sig och/eller kompletterar varandra.

## Discursive functions of ‘hypothetical active-voicing’ in adoption assessment interviews.

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### **Abstract (max 200 ord)**

Before becoming adoptive parents in Sweden, adoption applicants need to undergo a comprehensive assessment before receiving approval for adoption. This assessment involves multiple interviews conducted by an assigned social worker. The interviews cover various aspects, including the applicants’ personal backgrounds, their knowledge of adoption and adoptive children, and their visions for future family life. For first-time adoption applicants without prior parenting experience, the assessment concerns potential parenthood, as there is no existing parental practice to evaluate. Consequently, the interviews contain discussions of hypothetical situations and a hypothetical child. This study examines a specific interactional resource, ‘hypothetical active-voicing’, within the accomplishment of the institutional task of assessing suitability for parenthood. The study applies conversation analytical methods with a specific focus on the conversational details characterizing the delivery of ‘hypothetical active-voicing’ and its function in demonstration of suitability for adoptive parenthood. The study shows that ‘hypothetical active-voicing’ serves several functions in assessment interviews, as it allows the speaker take the position of absent parties, such as the hypothetical child, and thereby bringing forth the child’s perspective.

**Keywords:** (max 6) assessment interviews, hypothetical active-voicing, adoption, social work, conversation analysis

## Introduction

Being assessed for future parenthood is about determining a hypothetical future scenario. The potential child is still unknown, and the parenting practices stipulated are imaginations. Hence, assessment of prospective adoptive parents is a highly specific communicative activity. Adoption applicants are eager to demonstrate their suitability for future parenthood, while the assigned social worker is obligated to scrutinize the applicants’ ideas about the future (Wirzén, 2024). The assessment process in Sweden includes applicants’ participation in a mandatory parenting course and several interviews with an assigned social worker (MOFOF<sup>1</sup>, 2022). The dialogue between the social worker and the adoption applicants is the site where suitability is scrutinized and performed. It is high-stake

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish organization for family law and parental support is responsible for adoption assessment guidelines, parental course material, and other relevant resources.

encounters in which the potential for parenthood is assessed (MFOF, 2022; Lind & Lindgren, 2017). Because of the uncertainty surrounding the child that will eventually be adopted, and due to the lack of previous parenting practices to assess (in case of first-time adoption), many of the social worker's questions are hypothetical, inviting the applicants to discuss what they might do or think in a future situation (Noordegraaf et al., 2008a, 2008b; Wirzén & Cekaite, 2022). In response to such questions, the applicants present descriptions of future actions, outlining what kind of parental figure they expect to become (Wirzén, *forthcoming*). However, they might also enact future hypothetical conversations, in which they animate their future parental role (Wirzén, 2024). 'Voicing' absent or hypothetical parties might serve different discursive functions. This paper examines the discursive functions of what is referred to here as 'hypothetical active-voicing' (after Simmons & LeCouteur, 2011) in adoption assessment interviews.

Previous studies have examined how hypothetical questions are used to examine individuals' preparedness and dedication in a decision-making (Noordegraaf et al., 2008a; Speers & Parson, 2006). Other studies have focused on hypothetical discourse, examining how individuals enact hypothetical voices. This means that the voice being enacted belongs to a hypothetical person in a hypothetical situation. This phenomenon has been referred to in research as "hypothetical reported speech" (Holt, 2009) and "hypothetical active-voicing" (Simmons & LeCouteur, 2011). It has shown to be used as an argumentative tool (Fotiou, 2024) and a way to explore future situations as part of planning, preparation and rehearsal (Ferreira, 2021; Koester & Handford, 2018; Leyland, 2016). Up to now, no study has focused on the use of HAV in the course of action to assess and demonstrate suitability for parenthood.

The data for this study consists of recorded assessment interviews between social workers and prospective adoptive parents in Sweden. The analysis focuses on the form (the discursive organization) and the discursive functions of 'hypothetical active-voicing' (hereafter HAV) within the assessment context. The analysis is guided by the question: What kind of work does hypothetical active voicing in the dialogue between social workers and prospective adoptive parents? In the next section, the reader will be presented with an overview of research on hypothetical discourse in interaction and hypothetical reported speech/active voicing.

## Literature review

This study brings together research on the role of hypothetical discourse in institutional communication and the use of (hypothetical) quotation within ongoing dialogues. The

theoretical framework approaches language use as a communicative action, emphasizing its use within specific contexts to achieve communicative goals (Linell, 1998).

### *Hypothetical discourse*

Hypothetical discourse serves diverse functions across various contexts, often involving the exploration of hypothetical scenarios or situations, such as through hypothetical questions or by speaking as if situated in a hypothetical scenario. In assessment practices, hypothetical questions and scenarios are frequently employed to evaluate individuals' qualifications for a position or their suitability for treatment. Research indicates that in psychiatric assessments of transgender individuals, hypothetical questions primarily function as evaluative tools (Speers & Parson, 2006), while in adoption assessments, they serve both as a test and as a means of preparing individuals for parenthood (Noordegraaf et al., 2008b).

Furthermore, hypothetical discourse is employed to stimulate discussions about absent individuals' perspectives in various contexts. For instance, in their study on supervision in social work, Symonds et al. (2022) illustrate how questions addressing the future prompt a shift in discussions from reporting events to exploring clients' perspectives. Modal verbs like 'would' play a crucial role in transitioning the conversation into hypothetical futures, inviting the social worker to envision the client's responses.

### *The function of quotations and hypothetical talk in dialogue*

Quotations are ubiquitous and appears to be present in all almost all kinds of communicative activities. They often function as argumentative tools, providing evidence within ongoing conversations (Fetzer & Weiss, 2020). Quotations can occur in direct reported speech, where speakers present claims or arguments by citing others' or their own previous statements (Holt, 1996, 2009). Reported speech, which integrates prior talk or events into ongoing conversations, serves as evidential support as narrators demonstrate rather than merely tell (Buttny, 1997; Holt, 2009). According to Clark and Gerrig (1990), the act of describing something and demonstrating it constitutes fundamentally different modes of communication. They propose that quotations, as in reported speech, should be considered a form of demonstration because the teller or narrator selectively portrays an event, dialogue, or person in a specific manner.

Although reported speech and quotations primarily pertain to past talk in ongoing conversation, Holt (2009) highlights the possibility of enacting future, imaginary talk as a form of reported speech. Holt (2009) suggests that people employ reported speech as a communicative strategy to present hypothetical scenarios and assume different roles. This hypothetical reported speech involves imaginings and predictions of future events, serving various purposes such as accessing and displaying relevant knowledge in interactions

(Koester & Handford, 2018). In therapeutic settings, Simmons and LeCouteur (2011), discuss this form of reported speech as 'hypothetical active voicing' (p. 3177), which refers to the therapist enacting future conversations as part of the therapy session. The technique works as part of the treatment strategy aiming to facilitate behavioral change and encourage patients to practice acquired skills. Similarly, in a study on child counselling, Emmison et al. (2011) demonstrate how 'voicing' absent parties functions as a 'script proposal' rather than direct advice. Hence, hypothetical reported speech, hypothetical quotation, or hypothetical active-voicing afford speakers the opportunity to adopt alternate positions in dialogue and explore the perspectives of absent individuals. Fotius (2024) explores this phenomenon in everyday conversations, finding that hypothetical quotation serves as an argumentative tool, allowing speakers to present arguments from someone else's perspective, which in turn makes the argument more difficult to question.

Research on reported speech, or constructed dialogues (Tannen, 1989), has identified various interactional resources, such as shift in prosody, use of reporting verbs, and change in pronoun usage that mark the transition into sequences of reported speech (Bolden, 2004; Holt, 2009; Klewitz & Couper-Kuhlen, 1999). These cues help listeners distinguish reported speech (or quotations) from surrounding talk. While reporting verbs like 'he said' are commonly recognized as markers of reported speech, Bolden (2004) illustrates that interjections (e.g., 'ah', 'oh') and changes in voice quality also serve as framing devices. Similarly, in their study on hypothetical active-voicing in therapy sessions, Simmons and LeCouteur (2011) show that pauses, pitch rises, and increased loudness in the therapist's speech serve as cues indicating that the utterance should be understood as hypothetical talk about the future. Hence, prosody seems to play a vital role in the framing of talk. However, prosody is linked to the situated activity, meaning that it needs to be understood in context as part of accomplishing interactional goals (Couper-Kuhlen & Selting, 1996).

Clearly, hypothetical talk in its various forms serves a multitude of functions, particularly in enacting future or hypothetical scenarios and voices in ongoing conversations. The literature on hypothetical discourse, particularly hypothetical active-voicing, has yet to focus on its use in presenting suitability for specific positions, such as the role of adoptive parent. To examine how adoption applicants' suitability for parenthood is assessed, this study concentrates on the discursive functions of hypothetical active voicing within the assessment context.

Theoretical position (den här delen ska in i övrig text på ett lämpligt sätt )

Assessment interviews, whether it concerns adoption or other high-stake encounters wherein someone's suitability is under examination, can be perceived as a performance. It is during the interview, the person being examined can demonstrate their qualifications for the desired position (e.g. adoptive parent). It is in Goffman's (1959) terminology about impression management. In his seminal work "Footings" Goffman (1979) discusses how individuals show alignment with their talk in interaction. Goffman suggests that individuals navigate various "footings" or stances, which dictate how they position themselves in relation to others and the situation at hand. Individuals can assume the role of the animator (the speaker), the author (the constructor) and principal (the focal point of the performance). These footings can shift dynamically throughout the interaction, influenced by factors such as social norms, power dynamics, and the participants' goals. In relation to reported speech and hypothetical active voicing, the speaker's enactment of voices can be interpreted from the concept of footing. ((NOTE: lägga till det komplexa med hypotetiskt tal och footing))

Furthermore, Goffman's discussion on brackets adds depth to the analysis by highlighting the conscious or unconscious act of temporarily setting aside certain beliefs or frames of reference in order to engage with a situation differently. Brackets serve as mechanisms for facilitating footing shifts, allowing individuals to temporarily suspend their usual interpretation of events and adopt different perspectives. This process of bracketing is particularly relevant in complex social interactions, such as adoption assessment interviews, where individuals may need to navigate multiple frames of reference and interpret ambiguous cues. Prosody can be part of such bracketing, signaling shifts in footing (Skidmore & Murakami, 2010).

## Method and data

The data for this study derives from a larger project that were focused on the assessment of prospective adoptive parents in Sweden. The data were collected between 2016-2018 and comprises 36 hours of 24 audio-recorded assessment interviews between six social workers and 11 prospective adoptive parents. The interviews took place in Sweden and all applicants in the study applied for international adoption for the first time. The data includes 4 couples and 3 single applicants, all of whom had no children on their own. The study was approved by the Ethical Board Committee (Dnr 2015/111-31) before collecting the data. All participants have given their informed consent to participate. The social workers in the study were responsible for the recordings, no researcher attended the interviews. Names and identifying details are removed in the presentation of data.

The analysis adopts the methodology from conversation analysis and interaction analytical methods that place specific focus on how social actions and communicative projects unfold

through talk-in-interaction (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). The analysis is focused on the organization of talk, the communicative resources employed in accomplishments of communicative projects specific to the institutional context. Assessment interviews are analyzed as part of the institutional activity, given consideration to what is at stake and what aims that guide the interaction (Arminen, 2005; Linell, 1998). The dialogue between social workers and applicants is hence examined as part of the larger project to assess and demonstrate suitability parenthood.

### Analytical Procedure:

Initially, all audio-recorded assessment interviews were transcribed verbatim, applying the Jeffersonian transcription system (Jefferson, 2004). The analysis then progressed by re-listening to the recordings and reviewing the transcripts, in search of noteworthy communicative instances within the data (“unmotivated looking” Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008:26). All instances that concerned hypothetical scenarios were compiled into a collection. Hypothetical conversations were not consistently present in all interviews however, they frequently emerged during interviews that centered on parenthood, the prospective child, and the applicants’ plans for future family life. Consequently, interviews primarily focused on background details did not consistently incorporate hypothetical elements. It is important to note, however, that in practice, interviews were not rigidly defined, and the subjects of discussion could vary within the course of an interview.

Within the collection of hypothetical talk, instances categorized as ‘hypothetical active-voicing’ were identified and subjected to further analysis. These interactional phenomena were then analyzed in detail, with a specific focus on sequential organization and discursive functions. (Develop analytical process)

The analysis is exclusively based on the Swedish transcripts and on the entire dataset. All transcripts have been translated from Swedish to English<sup>2</sup> for this presentation, given specific attention to capture both content and organization of talk in the translations. In the presentation of findings, extracts from different applicants are presented. The transcripts have two lines; the first line in Swedish and the second is the translation to English. Transcripts may feature either two social workers or a single social worker. Throughout the analysis, the term ‘social worker’ is replaced with the abbreviation SW, ‘prospective mother’ with PM and ‘prospective father’ with PF.

## Result

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<sup>2</sup> Not all excerpts have been translated yet

Hypothetical active-voicing was employed by both social workers and prospective adoptive parents but highly more frequently by prospective adoptive parents. On the other hand, social worker initiated hypothetical talk to a greater extent. The analysis contains five examples hypothetical active-voicing were used during the interviews. We will start with examples of the social worker constructing hypothetical dialogues as part of the accomplishment of their communicative project (assessment of suitability for parenthood). Hypothetical active-voicing (HAV) is marked with → in the transcript.

### Social workers use of HAV

The social workers in this study have the task of scrutinizing and assess adoption applicants' suitability as future parents. What makes the assessment interview especially complex is its dual aim; being the arena for both assessment of suitability and simultaneously provide the applicants with preparation for a future family life. As such it is a hybrid communicative activity (Wirzén & Cekaite, 2022). This means that the conversation recurrently transgresses into advisory and teaching sequences.

### Launching advice through HAV

In the first example, a social worker and a single prospective adoptive father have been discussing the initial period with the child and how the applicant believes he will organize his life. As part of providing advice to the applicant regarding limiting the involvement of others in the child's life, the social worker enacts the voice of a hypothetical child:

#### Ex 1 (singel applicant) SKA ÖVERSÄTTAS

01 sw: jag tänker såhär lite att e:h m  
02 som vi brukar <säga> å jag tror att  
03 man säger det på f:öräldrautbildningen  
04 också då nä- .hh när väl barnet <kommer>  
05 [så] ska man liksom för att barnet  
06 pf: [mm]  
07 sw: → ska förstå att .hh (.) nua-n- du ska  
08 → landa i det är hemmet det är du och  
09 → ja nu eller det är vi om det e  
10 ett- ett föräldrapar då [att vi]  
11 pf: [mm ]  
12 sw: liksom att man (.)lite isolera sig  
13 först↑ för att [inte]  
14 pf: [mm ]  
15 sw: å att man inte gör massa olika  
16 å gör massa olik- är ute bland  
17 massa olika människor fö- att inte  
18 → .h barnet blir vilken vem hör jag  
19 ihop med [utan att] man liksom försöker  
20 pf: [ja ]  
21 va där och landa å då tänker jag flera



22 månader  
 23 pf: ja ja absolut

The social worker initiates the conversation by referencing the mandatory parenting course, indicating that the subject matter is likely familiar to the prospective parent. She introduces a hypothetical scenario, framing it as “eventually when the child arrives”, with particular emphasis placed on the concept of arrival (line 5). The use of the second-person plural pronoun “you should” conveys a sense of strong suggestion (swe “ska”, line 5). Upon constructing this scenario, the social worker pauses, marked by an inhalation, a brief pause, and evident difficulty in articulating her thoughts (line 7). She proceeds to create a hypothetical dialogue, expressing, “you will make a home in this place it’s you and me now” (lines 7-9), thereby suggesting a script (Emmison et al 2011) or approach for the prospective parent to adopt in his interactions with the child. The applicant supports the social worker’s talk by repeatedly responding with affirmations such as “mm”. Subsequently, the social worker once again presents a future scenario, this time assuming the voice of the hypothetical child. She advises the prospective parent to refrain from engaging in numerous activities or meeting multiple individuals, as exemplified by the social worker’s statement in the voice of the child, “who do I belong with” (line 19). Through this utterance, she illustrates the potential consequences from the child’s perspective, suggesting that the child may feel disoriented and uncertain about their primary caregiver.

In both examples of HAV in this excerpt, the most notable linguistic change is the use of pronoun. The social worker uses “I” (in the role of a child, line 18) and she approaches the child with “you” (line 7-8) from the perspective of a parent (using “me” line 9). Hence, she applies the perspective of both the child and the prospective parent in a hypothetical future situation.

### *Challenging applicants’ perspective and encourage elaboration through HAV*

In line with patterns observed in other institutional interactions, social workers may challenge adoption applicants’ descriptions and conceptualizations of their potential family life. Given the high stakes inherent in such interviews, where the wish of adoption applicants to become parents are in jeopardy, challenging questions possess the potential to pose a threat to the applicants’ self-presentations. The social workers employ various strategies to contest applicants in their narratives (Wirzén, 2024). Hypothetical active voicing (HAV) emerges as one such communicative strategy evident in the data, serving as a means to challenge the applicants’ conceptions of a hypothetical future.

#2 (couple applying) SKA ÖVERSÄTTAS

07 sw: va tänker ni på vilket sätt kan man (1.3)  
 08 hjälpa barnet i de både i stunden å (.) å på  
 09 sikt  
 10 (0.8) ((slammer))  
 11 pf: där tänker jag att det är ganska eh (.) det var  
 12 ju väldigt bra konkreta tips som man fick från  
 13 utbildningen att att ta med sig saker från  
 14 barnhemmet >å ändå asså< köpa med sig byta ta  
 15 med kläder å:: me[d foton ]  
 16 pm: [å senare]=  
 17 pf: =ja precis till senare tänker jag me- med foton  
 18 å liksom [med] berättelser å sånt  
 19 pm: [ja ]  
 20 sw: .ja  
 21 pf: att de- de är en sån: (.) del i: processen  
 22 också att kunna falla tillbaka på det och låta  
 23 barnet va nyfiken å inte kanske inte forcera på  
 24 det men .hhh [a::]  
 25 sw: [men] om man inte [får] det då  
 26 pm: [ja ]  
 27 sw: → om dom säger det är fotoförbud å [nåra] kläder=  
 28 pm: [mm ]  
 29 sw: → =[kan] ni glömma att ni får ta med=  
 30 pf: [mm ]  
 31 sw: =det är barnhemmets .h  
 32 pf: då är nog vår berättelse eh viktigare att vi  
 33 verkligen lå- har skrivit ner å dokumenterat  
 34 våra tankar liksom .hh eh va vi visste på  
 35 förhand å vad våra känslor var när vi var där  
 36 och så vidare och så vidare att vi för vår  
 37 dagbok eller loggbok eller vad man ska säg  
 38 sw: för det tänker ni att ni ska göra?  
 39 pf: [ja]  
 40 pm: [mm]

In #2, the applicants are prompted to discuss how they might support an adoptive child experiencing potential feelings of loss (lines 7-9). The prospective father refers to recommendations received during the mandatory parenting course, suggesting bringing items and clothing from the orphanage and capturing photographs for future discussions regarding the child's history. In line 25, the social worker introduces a challenging perspective by initiating her turn with "but if", indicating a forthcoming contrasting viewpoint. The use of "if", similar to "would" (Symond et al., 2022), signals speculation and that it is a hypothetical scenario that is presented (Handford, 2010). Consistent with findings from prior research (Wirzén, 2024), the applicants are eager to acknowledge this objection (as shown by overlap in line 26). Subsequently, in line 27, the social worker invokes the perspective of orphanage staff, prefacing the hypothetical dialogue with "if they were to say", (*reporting verb* Holt, 1996; *speech verb*, Simmons & LeCouteur, 2011) and thereby setting the stage for a hypothetical scenario. Adopting the role of orphanage personnel, the social worker articulates potential reservations regarding the suggested actions. Rather than

directly instructing the applicants about potential restrictions on photography and item acquisition, the social worker employs the voices of others to challenge the applicants' assumptions. Consequently, this approach prompts the applicants to elaborate further and demonstrate their preparedness to adapt their actions based on varying circumstances.

The use of HAV by social workers serves to address asymmetries in interactions; the social worker, positioned as a gatekeeper (Noordegraaf et al., 2008a), sidesteps the potential role of examiner (and avoids giving advice) by constructing hypothetical dialogues that applicants may encounter (c.f. Simmons & LeCouteur, 2011). By incorporating the perspectives of others, the social worker presents criticism without being the sole source. This strategy also aligns with the concept of self-directiveness (Vehviläinen, 2003; Wirzén & Cekaite, 2022), as it guides and encourages applicants to develop their thoughts in situ. Asking questions is a common method to avoid imposing responses on applicants and instead allows them to articulate their own perspectives. The use of hypothetical voices operates similarly, serving as a facilitator for further elaboration. ((NOTE: Develop HAV as argumentative device Fotiou, 2024, and the applicants' responses to that))

### Prospective adoptive parents use of HAV

Adoption applicants employ HAV in the ongoing dialogue as a means of portraying themselves as well-prepared and suitable for parenthood. The interviews between social workers and adoption applicants typically adhere to a question-answer format, wherein applicants are asked about various aspects of adoption. Through their responses, applicants demonstrate their understanding and outline the anticipated actions they intend to undertake in the future. The subsequent examples will present three distinct instances, all of which revolve around parental ideals and the envisioned roles of future parents.

#### *HAV to exemplify parental actions*

The interaction between social workers and applicants constitutes a communicative activity wherein applicants articulate their ideas about parenthood, specific knowledge related to adoption, and anticipated actions as prospective parents. Frequently, applicants demonstrate their intended future actions by assuming the role of a parent and speaking from that perspective. In #3, an applicant outlines a future scenario and exemplify her planned actions as an adoptive parent.

#### #3 (couple applying)

09 pm: jag tänker att det är viktigt att vi finns (0.3)  
***I think that it is important that we are there (0.3)***  
10 >att vi- dom vet om< att vi finns där  
***>that we- they know< that we are there***  
11 pf: m[m]  
***m[m]***

12 sw1: [m]m  
[m]m

13 pm: vi kommer stå här i vårt och torrt  
**we will be standing here through thick and thin**

14 sw1: [mm]  
[mm]

15 pm: [å ] det är meningen att du ska va med oss=  
**[an'] you are meant to be with us=**

16 sw1: =mm↑  
=mm↑

17 pm: ä:: å °ehm° lite såhär exempel om barnet skulle gå  
**a:: an' °ehm° just an example if the child will move**

18 iväg å sen >gå fram till nån annan å sådär< å att  
**away an' then >approaches someone else like that<**

19 → man liksom amen det är hos mig du ska va  
**that you kind of it's with me you're supposed to be**

20 sw1: m[m]  
m[m]

21 pm: [a]tt hela tiden ta tillbaka barnet å [sådär]  
**[t]o always bring the child back like [that ]**

22 sw1: [° .mm°]  
[° .mm°]

The applicants (in this example two applicants are present and two social workers) have prior to this example been invited to articulate their ideas on how to facilitate the child's attachment to them. The applicants outline their plan of being present and available for the child "through thick and thin" (swe "i vårt och torrt", line 13). In line 15, the prospective mother shifts her focus to the hypothetical child affirming that "you are meant to be with us", assuming the voice of a future parent. She then transitions back to addressing the social workers and presents a hypothetical scenario to demonstrate her intended actions and how to put their ideas into practice. She clarifies that she provides an example (line 17 "just an example") which serves as a transition into HAV. In this narrated scenario, the child moves away from their parents, and the prospective mother's response is to guide the child back, stating "its with me you're supposed to be" (line 19). Thereby she transitions from the general "they" (e.g. children, swe "dom", line 10) to addressing a hypothetical child with the term "you" (swe "du", line 15 and 19).

((NOTE: "liksom amen" line 19 – signaling the change in footing, similar to "look" Simmons & LeCouteur, 2011, p. 3181, or "be like" Fotiou, 2024, p. 8)).

#### *HAV to enact a future parental figure*

HAV also serves for applicants to embody the parental figure they intend to portray. In the following excerpt, a female applicant elaborates on her perspective regarding the child's upbringing, emphasizing the significance of rules and boundaries. After stating that certain

behaviors, such as criminal acts, are prohibited and unacceptable, the applicant transitions into a more nuanced description of child rearing.

## #4 (singel applicant)

15 pm: men samtidigt så vet jag också att det som mina  
**but at the same time I also know that what my**  
 16 föräldrar gav mig att jag visste att .h om jag  
**parents gave me that I knew that .h if I**  
 17 tokar till livet (.)  
**slip up in life (.)**  
 18 sw: [((coughs))]  
 19 pm: [så står ] dom där  
**[then they ] stand there**  
 20 sw: ↑mm  
 ↑mm  
 21 pm: det är ganska viktigt å känna det (0.6) för att  
**it's quite important to know that (0.6) because if**  
 22 tokar man till livet så mycket så att man tror att  
**you mess up so bad that you think that no one is**  
 23 ingen står där då vågar man ju inte säga nånting vad  
**standing there then you want dare to tell what**  
 24 man har hållit på med  
**you have been up to**  
 25 sw: näe  
**nah**  
 26 pm: så det gäller ju också samtidigt att i det här att  
**so at the same time it's also about this that they**  
 27 dom känner att det finns en (0.6) .hh hh (0.9) ja  
**know that there is a (0.6) .hh hh (0.9)**  
 28 → (0.3) att vi löser det (.) om det skulle strular  
**yes (0.3) that we will work it out (.) if things**  
 29 → till sig å (0.2) så (.)kom till mig å de vi vi  
**get messy an' (0.2) like (.) come to me an we we**  
 30 [vi] löser det ihop  
**[we] work it out together**  
 31 sw: [mm]  
**[mm]**

After her statement that some behaviors are strictly forbidden (not shown in this excerpt) and drawing her line there, the applicant presents a contrasting and nuanced perspective (beginning in line 15). The phrase “but at the same time” frames her subsequent elaboration as a reflection and an acknowledgment of the necessity for a more nuanced approach to child rearing. Drawing from her own personal experiences, the applicant asserts the significance of always feeling welcomed and supported at home. Similar to the prospective parent in example #3, she shifts her focus toward the imagined child. This transition is marked by an inhalation, exhalation, and pauses, which serve as brackets signaling a shift in framing (Goffman 1981). Subsequently, the applicant engages in a hypothetical dialogue with the child, assuming the voice of her future role as a parent as she states, “we will work it out” (line 28). This represents an upgraded demonstration of suitability, almost serving as

the culmination of her narrative. Through her portrayal of imagined dialogues with the child, expressed in future tens, she displays her preparedness and capability to be a loving and caring parent in the future. Additionally, there is a slight change in the tone of voice when the applicant addresses the future child. These interactional resources (prosody of speech) signify the delivery of hypothetical talk (cf. Simmons & LeCouteur, 2011).

The structure of the applicant's response is as follow: she starts with a personal reflection on her own intentions as future parent. She then transitions to a more general summarizing account of the needs of children in general (for instance using the generic "man", line 22). Subsequently, the applicant's then addresses the future child and presents herself as a future parent. In the hypothetical narrative of her future parenthood, the nonspecific term "them" (referring to children, line 27) is replaced with the specific pronoun "we" (line 28), representing the applicant and the hypothetical child.

#### *HAV to perform parental identity*

Applicants in assessment interviews must convincingly present themselves as suitable future parents. This entails meeting the institutional requirements stipulated by the Swedish authority (MFOF 2022). For couples applying for adoption together, their relationship is also scrutinized (Noordegraaf et al., 2010). Therefore, constructing future parental identities becomes a collaborative communicative project for couples. In example #5, a unified parental identity is presented by two applicants with the assistance of HAV.

#### Ex 5 (couple ) SKA ÖVERSÄTTAS

23 pm: å det e väldit viktigt å ha regler  
24 pf: mm  
25 (0.3)  
26 pm: för att allting funkar inte jämt man kan inte  
27 få som man vill hela tiden (0.4) å det är lite  
28 → där k- som kommer in att då får du va arg  
29 sw: a just [det]  
30 pf: [mm ]  
31 pm: → det är okej (0.5) men [ju]st nu så nej  
32 sw: [mm]  
33 (1.6)  
34 pm: hård kärlek \$hh\$  
35 sw: ja (.) precis mm  
36 pf: å för de de skapar ju också en trygghet å en  
37 → slags pålitlighet att även om (0.4) okej även  
38 → om jag blir förbannad över det här så kommer  
39 → inte dom (0.3) [å. ] ge sig [utan] (0.3) man=  
40 sw: [°mm°] [°mm°]  
41 pf: =får va där me- med \$värme\$ nånstans å ändå  
42. → ma[rkera] att de det är okej att vara arg men=

43 pm: [mm ]  
 44 pf: → =du kommer inte få det här ändå just nu utan .h  
 45 eh  
 46 pm: sen när man får ett sånt barn som hela tiden  
 47 har lärt sig att va till lags=  
 48 pf: =mm  
 49 pm: så det ju jätteviktigt att man lär dom att=  
 50 pf: → =det är okej-  
 51 pm: → det är okej att va arg=  
 52 pf: =precis=  
 53 pm: → =vi är ändå kvar  
 54 pf: mm  
 55 (0.5)  
 56 pm: → vi finns här (0.3) vi kommer inte å lämna dig  
 57 sw: °näe°  
 58 pm: → trots att du känner dina känslor du [behöver=]  
 59 pf: [mm ]  
 60 pm: → =inte (.) vara glad å vara oss till lags hela  
 61 → tiden .h för så funkar det inte  
 62 sw: °mm°

The couple in #5 have been reporting similar ideas about child upbringing as other participants in this study. They emphasize unconditional love and care and picture themselves as loving caregivers. They also underscore the importance of rules and clear boundaries in their approach to parenting. The prospective mother, in line 23, states, “it is very important to have rules”, and subsequently explains their significance: “You (plur ‘man’) can’t always get what you want” (lines 26-27). She then envisions her response if the child desires something against the rules, stating, “then you are allowed to be angry”. Consequently, displaying her ability to uphold rules and address potential upset feelings from the child (line 31).

The prospective father supports the prospective mother’s outlined description (“mm” in overlap line 30). In line 36, he takes over and elaborates on the importance of rules in providing a sense of security and reliability for the child. Similar to the prospective mother, he illustrates his viewpoint through a hypothetical dialogue, speaking from the perspective of the hypothetical child to highlight the implications of their parenting approach: “Even if I get upset, they won’t give in” (lines 37-39). Subsequently, the prospective father alternates between representing the voice of the child and his own voice as a parent, presenting and embodying a hypothetical future scenario.

The prospective father continues to echo the prospective mother’s earlier assertion that it is acceptable to experience anger and express feelings. The word “okey” appears to condense the applicants’ approach to child rearing, and it is repeated several times (lines 3, 50, 51).

The prospective mother suggests that an adoptive child may have learned to comply with others' wishes, which situates their child-rearing approach within the specific circumstances surrounding adoptive children. From line 46 onwards, the two applicants demonstrate a unified approach to future parenting. They complete each other's sentences and reinforce each other's perspectives (Noordegraaf et al., 2010). Additionally, they speak from a collective 'we' perspective, emphasizing their shared parental role rather than their individual roles.

((NOTE: Develop: adopting footing of future self))

## Discussion (preliminary draft!)

This study has focused on the use of 'hypothetical active-voicing' in assessment interviews preceding international adoption. It has examined how hypothetical active-voicing is utilized and what functions this interactional resource serves. The study reveals that hypothetical active voicing is employed in the dialogue between social workers and prospective adoptive parents to achieve various communicative objectives. For instance, social workers utilize hypothetical active-voicing as a means of providing advice or guidance for prospective parenthood. Instead of instructing prospective adoptive parents on what they should or ought to do, social workers incorporate voices from third parties. These voices may represent the hypothetical child or other relevant individuals in the adoption process. They serve to stimulate reflection and perspective-taking regarding adoption matters (cf. Symonds et al., 2022). Through analysis, instances have been observed where the voice of the hypothetical adopted child is utilized by social workers to highlight consequences for the child in the adoption process. This approach allows social workers to avoid assuming the role of experts or advice-givers (cf. Emmison et al., 2011), recognizing the complexities of various institutional contexts. Thus, it provides a means to circumvent such challenges and allows the hypothetical child to assume that role.

Another example illustrates how questioning prospective adoptive parents' future plans can be achieved by social workers adopting roles, such as orphanage staff. Consequently, these individuals become subject to questioning instead of the social worker directly. Essentially, the utilization of hypothetical active-voicing enables social workers to navigate the sometimes complex task of investigating and preparing prospective adoptive parents for adoption, thereby serving as a resource that facilitates and enables this task.

The dialogue that takes place between prospective parents and social workers is situated within the broader project of demonstrating suitability for adoptive parenthood. Adoptions



applicants' responses to social workers' questions can be seen as a performance in their project of gaining approval for adoption. In their portrayal of themselves as suitable future parents, adoption applicants employ various communicative resources to be persuasive. Overall, the structure of their responses and their demonstration of suitability entails a dynamic interplay between general knowledge and the practical application of concrete actions. Hypothetical active-voicing is used as part of their demonstration of suitability for parenthood. The analysis has revealed different ways in which hypothetical active-voicing operates in these demonstrations of suitability. For instance, it is used to exemplify how one should act in the role of a future parent. Prospective adoptive parents simply assume the position of a parent and speak from that perspective. They essentially employ their future voice, effectively quoting themselves. Additionally, prospective adoptive parents adopt the voices of others, such as the hypothetical child, demonstrating their understanding and awareness of what a potential adopted child might express or feel within their family. This enables prospective adoptive parents to demonstrate preparedness and an understanding of the child's perspective, thereby facilitating the adoption process. Hypothetical talk, referring to a hypothetical future or inviting discussion about it, can function as a means of incorporating absent individuals' perspectives into the conversation. This is precisely how hypothetical active-voicing operates within adoption investigation interviews.

An important function served by hypothetical active-voicing for prospective adoptive parents is the demonstration and concretization of parenting ideals and concepts related to parenthood (ref demonstration). It involves both expressing what one believes their child's upbringing should entail or look like and embodying these ideas through hypothetical active-voicing by demonstrating how to implement them. As shown in the analysis, adoption applicants seamlessly incorporate future voices into their narratives. They transition smoothly between reporting their knowledge to the social worker and demonstrating their future plans and actions. Hypothetical active voicing has been studied as a mean of proposing or advising future actions. However, this study focuses on the employment of hypothetical active voicing as a demonstration of anticipated future actions, serving as evidence of an individual's suitability for parenthood. With assistance of future voices, the applicants can access and display knowledge that they have not yet experienced in real life (Koester & Handford, 2018). Consequently, the description of future plans and the demonstration of those plans in action create a convincing image of suitability.

((NOTE: Quotations as demonstrations))

((NOTE: Här ska en diskussion om Goffmans begrepp och footing utvecklas i relation till resultaten))

((NOTE: tidigare studier identifierat tydliga resurser som markerar HAV – denna studie visar att det görs med mindre markeringar))

### Limitations

Prior studies have shown that use of objects and embodied actions contributes to the transition from present talk to hypothetical talk (e.g. Leyland, 2016). The absent of video in this study limit the possibility to capture these kinds of interactional resources.

### Transcription symbols

(.)	shorter break
(0.5)	silence in tenths of a second
Wo::rd	extension of a sound
<u>Word</u>	underlined word marks emphasis
WORD	capitals marks syllables or words louder than surrounding speech
°word°	quiet voice
\$word\$	said with smiley/laughing voice
word?	rising intonation
Word.	falling intonation
Wor-	cut-off word
Word=	no gap between two lines
((word))	transcriber's notes / clarifications
(----)	unclear to transcriber
.hh	inbreath
hh	outbreath
Wor[d	overlapping talk, bracket indicate beginnings
> word<	increased speaking rate

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