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What is in a greeting? The social meaning of greetings in Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish service encounters

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the use of greetings in Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish service encounters and the social meaning of different greeting forms. Situated within the framework of variational pragmatics, the study explores Swedish as a pluricentric language and investigates with interactional and statistical analyses to what extent the variable nation affect variation in greeting forms. While nation indeed is an important factor, the study also illustrates how social variables such as age, gender and participant roles as well as situational variables such as medium, region and venue impact the greeting choices participants make. Further, by applying an interactional analytical perspective the study contributes to the methodological development of variational pragmatics. This analysis shows how the sequential position of a greeting plays a part in the choice of greetings, and demonstrates that pragmatic variation emerges in interaction. The article suggests that greetings can be a resource for indexing the degree of social distance between interlocutors, and thereby manifest recurring cultural patterns.

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1. Introduction

Conversational openings are often performed through a verbal greeting. Greetings exist in all cultures (see e.g. [Duranti, 1997](#)), and regardless of age, gender, nation or region, most of us exchange greetings with others every day.¹ However, there is typically a range of lexical realizations to choose from. How do speakers manage to navigate between these choices? What in a given situation makes a speaker use a certain greeting over another, i.e., does that specific greeting carry social meaning relevant to the participants? A systematic examination of the use of greetings by different speakers of different varieties of a language may shed new light on the relationship between individuals, on the one hand, and the culture they are part of, on the other hand. In this study, we investigate and compare the use of *verbal greetings* between mostly unacquainted

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staff and customers in a corpus of 1097 audio- and video recorded service encounters with Swedish-speakers in Sweden and Finland, using both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Swedish is a pluricentric language, i.e., a language with more than one national centre (Clyne, 1992), which exists in two national varieties: Finland Swedish and Sweden Swedish. In the last decade, a growing number of studies has investigated pragmatic routines in pluricentric languages, especially within the framework of variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron, 2008a, b). This body of research has shown the importance of investigating pragmatic variation across geographical space in order to uncover the relationship between macro-social factors and language use (e.g. Schneider, 2010; Barron, 2017; Schneider, 2019). To date, most research within variational pragmatics has focussed on national and regional variation in the use of pragmatic routines such as address patterns, requests, expressions of gratitude and apologies. In the present study, the aim is to contribute to variational pragmatics by investigating not only the role of national and regional variation, but also how age, gender, participant roles, medium and venue affect speakers' choice of greeting form. Any linguistic choice, greetings included, is sensitive to several factors simultaneously, and this is why we approach greeting behaviour from a holistic perspective. By including all the above-mentioned variables, we can shed new light on how important nation is for variation in pluricentric languages vis-à-vis other variables. In other words, is the choice of greeting influenced by place, or is it predominantly governed by who we are and who we talk to? In addition, we investigate the sequential context in which the greetings are produced, and suggest that sequentiality also plays a crucial part in the choice of greeting forms. These perspectives contribute to the theoretical and methodological development of research on pluricentric languages as well as variational pragmatics.

The article is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a background on greetings, Section 3 outlines the theoretical approach followed by an account of the data and analytic approach in Section 4. The results are presented in Section 5. First we go through the above-mentioned variables in turn, in order to investigate to what extent greeting choices are affected by single variables. Then we present how the sequential context affects the use of greetings, and we summarise the findings. Finally, in Section 6, we discuss the social meaning of greetings in Finland-Swedish and Sweden-Swedish service encounters and how the investigated variables affect greeting behaviour. We also discuss the indexical potential of the various greeting forms, and whether variation in greeting behaviour is used to perform identities and social relationships in interaction.

2. Greetings

To speakers belonging to the same community, the greeting ritual is often performed easily as part of our cultural competence (see e.g. Duranti, 1997). One of the earliest in-depth studies of greeting behaviour is Kendon and Ferber's study from 1973, based on video data from American everyday interactions. Based on their findings, they defined greetings as a "unit of social interaction often observed when people come into another's presence, which includes a distinctive exchange of gestures or utterances in which each person appears to signal to the other, directly and explicitly, that he has been seen" (Kendon, 1990: 153). As they, and researchers following them have shown, lexical items conventionally signalling 'greeting' are often accompanied or replaced by head nods and waves, as well as other embodied actions (Kendon, 1990; Duranti, 1997; Pillet-Shore, 2008). In our data, the vast majority of the interactions are opened with a verbal greeting, often accompanied by eye contact and smiles. In the present study, we focus on the social meaning of verbal greetings. The synchronization of verbal and non-verbal behaviour was investigated in Nilsson et al., (2018) (see below).

Greetings are a means for soon-to-be interlocutors to move from *physical co-presence* into *social co-presence* (Pillet-Shore, 2008). In other words, the verbal exchange of greetings enables participants of a conversation to signal that they have crossed the border between not being in interaction and being in interaction. At the same time, the form of the greeting may reveal information about the speaker, and how that speaker perceives the interlocutor (Duranti, 1997). According to Hudson (1996), greetings display the power and solidarity relation between speakers, and Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (2006) stress that greeting behaviour (in America) varies depending on regional, ethnical, gender and status factors. In addition, greetings can also signal level of familiarity as well as the participant roles of the speakers in the soon-to-be interaction (Kendon, 1990; Pillet-Shore, 2008).

As the greeting ritual is an essential communicative skill in all cultures (see e.g. Duranti, 1997), it lends itself to a systematic examination of which pragmatic patterns are universal and which are culture specific (Kendon, 1990; Duranti, 1997). Early studies of regional variation in greetings in Germany (Schlieben-Lange and Weydt, 1978; see translation in Schneider and Barron, 2008b: 8–11) as well as Wierzbicka's (1985) study of greetings in Polish and Australian English suggested that greetings indeed are language- and culture specific. This is attested also in more recent studies. Pinto (2008) contrasted the use of greetings in peninsular Spanish with US English and found several differences in terms of politeness strategies, as did Schüpbach (2014) who compared Swiss German with German German. Moradi (2017) compared how age and gender affect the greeting behaviour in Persian and English, and found that the age of the interlocutors affects greeting behaviour in similar ways in both languages, but that gender influences the greeting choices more in Persian.

Others have focussed on organisational aspects of the greeting sequence. For example, Félix-Brasdefer (2015) compared service interactions at supermarket delicatessens in Mexico and the USA and found reciprocal conventional greetings to be quite rare in both settings. Instead, other summons-answer-sequences were used. A study on the sequential organization of Finland-Swedish and Sweden-Swedish service encounter openings revealed that interlocutors manage gaze in relation to verbal greetings in similar ways in the two varieties, but that the duration and timing of mutual gaze differed slightly, with longer mutual gaze in the Finland-Swedish service encounters (Nilsson et al., 2018). In a small-scale study, Saari (1995)

noticed a difference in greeting behaviour in the two varieties: while Sweden-Swedish speakers tended to use reciprocal greetings, Finland-Swedish speakers often opened interactions without any verbal greetings (this result was however not replicated in Nilsson et al., 2018). Clyne et al. (2009: 143–144) discuss the degree of formality of different verbal forms of Swedish greetings and suggest that Finland Swedish is more formal than Sweden Swedish. The difference in degree of formality between the two varieties has also been attested in other contrasting studies (Clyne and Norrby, 2011; Lindström, 2000; Nilsson et al., 2017; Norrby et al., 2015a, b). We discuss the greetings' degree of formality further in Sections 5 and 6.

3. Theoretical approach

The study is situated within the framework of variational pragmatics, introduced by Schneider and Barron (2008a, b). Variational pragmatics is concerned with exploring “pragmatic variation across geographical and social varieties of a language” (2008b: 1). It combines pragmatics and sociolinguistics, especially socio-dialectology, in order to determine what impact macro-social factors such as region, social class, age, gender and ethnicity might have on language use (Schneider and Barron, 2008b; Barron, 2017; Schneider, 2010, 2019).

So far, variational pragmatics has mainly been concerned with exploring how factors such as region and nation affect pragmatic routines,² but has also highlighted the importance of investigating a range of social variables (see e.g. Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Barron, 2017; Schneider, 2019). However, Schneider and Barron (2008b: 1) call attention to the difficulty of investigating several variables at the same time. In the present study, we aim at addressing several social variables concurrently, and use both quantitative and qualitative analyses in order to accomplish this. We investigate the variables nation, region, venue, age, gender, participant roles and medium, as well as how the sequential context affects the choice of greeting in order to determine how important nation is for variation in pluricentric languages. We also explore the greetings' potential indexical role (see e.g. Silverstein, 2003; Johnstone and Kiesling, 2008; Eckert, 2008) when performing social identities in interaction. In interaction with others, speakers at the same time construct, perform and reproduce their own identity as well as the identity of the group they belong to (see e.g. Rampton, 2006). Identities are constructions that receive temporal stability and meaning in concrete situations (Törrönen, 2013; Nylund Skog, 2018) and in relation to others. In the present study, we investigate how identities and relationships between participants are displayed through greetings in service interactions between (mostly) unacquainted interlocutors in the sociocultural context of Sweden and Finland.

As Johnstone and Kiesling (2008: 6) point out, semiotic relationships often exist between linguistic variants and social meanings, but not all speakers of a language are likely to interpret these relationships in the same way. Instead, what we can capture are repeated patterns of greetings often used by speakers belonging to certain categories such as ‘male’, ‘young’, ‘staff’ etc. Whether these speakers themselves, at a given moment of an interaction, interpret these greeting forms as resources to perform such parts of their identities, or to establish certain relationships, is difficult to determine. In our case, the repeated use of specific greeting forms by for example females, or older people, does however give us insights into possible shared norms of Swedish-speakers in Sweden and Finland respectively. We also use focus group data to determine whether Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish speakers assign the same degree of formality to different greeting forms. Focus group data facilitate access to laypeople's interpretations of the semiotic value of greeting forms and what a linguistic form indexes to speakers in a certain community. However, this is not to say that each individual always assigns these meanings at the moment they speak.

So far, variational pragmatics has not adopted an interactional perspective to any great extent, but there are some exceptions (e.g. Félix-Brasdefer, 2015; Haugh and Carbaugh, 2015; Norrby et al., 2015a, b; Nilsson et al., 2017, 2018). There is also a growing body of research on interactional similarities and differences in pluricentric languages. Interactional differences between American English and British English are demonstrated in Bergen et al. (2017) in a study of British and American doctor-patient encounters, as well as in progress Reber's (2020) investigation of elliptical constructions in English and American televised post-match sports interviews. An interactional analysis has the potential to explain how pragmatic routines, such as greetings organisation, emerge and evolve in real-life encounters between speakers of a variety.

4. Data and analytic approach

We have investigated the use of greetings in 1097 service encounters where customers buy tickets, or request information, at theatre box offices (three in Sweden and four in Finland), event booking venues (sports and cultural events, four in Sweden and five in Finland) and library information desks (two in each nation). These venues were situated in seven regions in Finland and six regions in Sweden representing the capitals (Helsinki and Stockholm), larger regional centres (Turku and Vasa in Finland and Gothenburg, Karlstad, Luleå and Umeå in Sweden) as well as smaller towns (Jakobstad, Karleby and Raseborg in Finland and Osby in Sweden). The amount of data from each venue varies and 475 of the service encounters were recorded

² Within variational pragmatics, the notions of region and nation are not always separated. Since research within pluricentric languages often takes nation as starting point, we have chosen to separate the concepts here in order to problematize to what extent nation (and other factors) plays a role in differences between national varieties of a pluricentric language.

in Sweden, and 622 in Finland. Except for 94 Sweden-Swedish audio-recorded telephone conversations, all data consist of video-recorded face-to-face interactions. All video recorded customers were asked as they entered the venue if they were willing to participate in a research study. They received more information and signed a participation agreement form after the recording, and we have anonymised all personal information.³ In the telephone data, the customers were informed about the project in a pre-recorded voice message prior to the staff member answering the phone. They were then able to decline participation as the staff member answered the phone. The telephone data were included in order to investigate whether patterns for service encounters were influenced by medium – we were however not able to collect any such data in Finland due to recording technicalities.

The regulation of the flow of customers follows slightly different institutional practices. At most venues in Sweden, customers take a queue number as they enter the premises, and staff summon the customers in turn by pressing a button that emits a beeping sound and the ticket number is displayed on a monitor. At other venues (both in Finland and Sweden), customers immediately walk up to the counter, or wait in line for their turn. These differences do not affect the greeting behaviour, nor the ensuing interaction. The telephone data is of course different, and the variable medium does affect the greeting behaviour (see Section 5.6).

The service encounters are brief interactions that follow the same task-oriented agenda: 1. exchange of greetings, 2. the customer presents the reason for the visit, 3. the staff member handles the requested service, and 4. an exchange of farewells as a closing. The settings are in many ways very similar, but it should be pointed out that some of the venues attract certain groups of customers. For example, we have recorded more young men at an event booking venue selling tickets to a hockey game and more older females at theatre box offices. Swedish was spoken in all the recordings. The vast majority involve one member of staff and one customer, but in 118 encounters there are two customers. In these cases both customers usually produce a greeting, but in the quantitative analysis we have only included the first customer's greeting. In total, 1215 customers participated in the study (65.6% were female (312 in Sweden and 485 in Finland) and 34.4% male (211 in Sweden and 207 in Finland)).

In total, 60 staff between the age of 18 and 64 equally distributed across Sweden and Finland took part in the recordings. Of these, 23 in Finland were female and seven male, and in Sweden 18 were female and 12 male. Of the 1121 video-recorded customers, nearly half were below the age of 50 (529 or 47%, with equal gender distribution).⁴ The interactions vary in length, with an average of 2.76 min in Sweden and 1.84 min in Finland.

In the Swedish dataset all customers but nine were L1 speakers of Swedish, and in Finland 20 customers had Finnish or another language than Swedish as their first language. These were included in the study as we were interested in empirically investigating all greeting behaviour that took place in the studied settings. It should be noted, however, that the greeting behaviour of the L2 speakers does not deviate from that of the L1 speakers.

The focus group data consist of six focus group discussions (with university students) on greetings in Sweden (16 participants, of which 11 females, 1 non-binary and 4 males, most between the ages 20 and 30) and Finland (10 participants, of which 6 females and 4 males aged 23–27) (see also Nilsson et al., 2017). By drawing on the focus group discussions, we can describe the formality of the greetings and their possible indexical potential.

Our interactional analyses are based on the assumptions made within Interactional Linguistics and Conversation Analysis (CA) that conversation is a social activity (see e.g. Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Sacks, 1992; Couper-Kuhlen and Selting, 2001). In addition, conversations are sequentially organized and a turn is always produced in relation to previous turns and makes a next turn relevant (Sacks et al., 1974). Each turn is a social action shaped to display an orientation to the conversational context and the co-participants, and the analysis seeks to demonstrate why a certain utterance is used at a given point in interaction. In the analysis in Section 5.6, the main objective is to establish why a specific greeting form is used at a given moment and how the participants manage greeting variation.

When investigating pluricentric languages, it is desirable to both describe an interactional practice (e.g. the action of producing a 'greeting') and the methods the participants use to produce such actions, as well as identifying the macro-social meanings reflected by recurring forms of actions among the speakers of a variety. In this study, we combine the interactional perspective with statistical analyses. For the statistical analyses, we used a multilevel logistic regression analysis as well as anova-tests and t-tests. In a logistic regression analysis the odds that something is done by a certain group is calculated. The results are presented as odds ratios, showing e.g. the odds for women divided by the odds of men. This modelling allows for testing several variables at the same time and it is possible to determine the propensity that a greeting type is used by and to certain groups, controlling for the effect of other variables. For example, suppose that the female customers on average are older than the male customers, and that the female customers use a certain greeting more frequently than male customers do. With our analyses, we can separate the effects and see if the use of a certain greeting is associated with age or gender. Furthermore, our statistical analyses tell us if a perceived connection between a specific greeting and a characteristic (such as age, gender or nation) is statistically significant. Statistical significance means that we are at least 95% sure that a difference spotted in the data reflects a true difference in the population (hence, we use a 95% threshold to claim statistical significance). As there is a limited number of tokens of the different greetings, we generally do not discuss the numbers presented in the results section. Instead, we focus on whether the differences

³ The research conducted in this project follows the Swedish Research Council's guidelines for ethical research.

⁴ We do not know the age of the customers partaking in the 94 telephone recordings.

found in the data reflect differences in the population. This is shown as p-values, and we discuss our statistical analysis in terms of statistical significance.

Due to the unbalanced nature of the data (each staff member produces several greetings, but every customer greets only once), the quantitative analysis considers the customers' greetings only (the staff members' greetings are analysed qualitatively). We employ a random effects multilevel approach since the data are structured in a hierarchical way: the two nations consist of regions, which in turn consist of venues, which in turn consist of different staff members, and each staff member serves several customers. A main concern is that each staff member participates in several interactions, and that the staff can affect the respondent's greeting. To counteract such unwanted effects, *staff* is used as a level in the multilevel analysis. In other words, this is a way of cleaning the data of the effect that each individual staff member's personal traits may have. Just like we suspect certain greetings to be affected by staff member's personal traits, we assume that certain greetings may be used more in some regions. Hence, we use region as a level in the model as well. This means that we, for each type of greeting, employ a logistic analysis with so-called random intercepts for each staff member and for each region. As we only investigate two nations, we can measure the effect of nation directly (instead of employing random intercepts for each nation).⁵

Since there are only telephone recordings in two regions in Sweden, we cannot include telephone interactions (contrary to face-to-face interactions) in the model. Hence, the telephone data are excluded from the regression model and analysed separately with a t-test.

For greeting forms present in only one of the varieties, the variable *nation* could not be included in the analysis. However, ignoring the hierarchical structure of the data, we have, for reference, conducted t-tests (for difference between nations) and anova-tests (for difference between regions and venues, and difference between nations with control for other independent variables).⁶ In the anova-test and t-test the variables are tested one at the time and can reveal statistically significant relations, but not in the same robust way as the multilevel analysis.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses makes it possible to investigate how and why greetings are exchanged in conversation.

5. Results

In the majority of the interactions (840/1097, 76.5%), the staff and the customer greet each other with a conventional verbal greeting. The greeting sequences are orderly, and customer and staff exchange reciprocal greetings one at a time in 66% of the cases. Overlapping greeting turns constitute a small minority (10%). Cases of non-reciprocal verbal greetings are relatively uncommon (23.5%) and are generally of two types. In the first case, the staff greets in the first turn and the customer presents the reason for the visit in the next turn (i.e. Staff: *hi* Customer: *I would like some tickets to...*). In the other case, the interaction opens with a summons-answer sequence without typical verbal greetings (i.e. Staff: *number sixty-four?* Customer: *it's here yes*) as this exchange occupies the sequential slot for greetings.

In a study of the sequential organization of gaze and verbal greetings in a subset of 297 interactions from the corpus, Nilsson et al. (2018) found that overlapping greetings typically occurred when one of the (soon-to-be) interlocutors was occupied with something else as the customer approached the counter (e.g. talking to someone else or solving another task). Consequently, customer and staff did not exchange mutual gaze, and the overlapping greetings were a result of mutual gaze not being established before the greeting exchange.

In our data, most interactions are opened with reciprocal use of the form *hej* ('hi', 65%), or the reduplicated form *hej hej* ('hi hi', 8%). In Extract 1, a staff member (S) and a customer (C) exchange reciprocal *hej* (transcription conventions are found in Appendix 1).

⁵ The model used is defined as:

$$L_i = \alpha + \beta X_{ijk} + \beta X_{jk} + \beta X_k + e_{ijk} + u_{jk} + v_k$$

where X_{ijk} are the individual values of an individual i served by staff j in region k . The term X_{jk} represent staff characteristics (and since a staff person can serve several customers these characteristics do not vary randomly across customers), and the term X_k signifies that the model holds variables that varies on the regional level, this specific variable is nation. e_{ijk} is the individual (served by staff j at region k) random error term, u_{jk} is the additional error term for each staff member j , and v_k are the error terms for each region. This is basically the definition of a random intercept model with three levels. L shows that the model as such is a logistic model, which uses the logit link function defined as:

$$\ln\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right)$$

where P is the probability for the analysed greeting.

⁶ Note however that *region* is also used as a random intercept variable in the regression model.

Extract 1. Reciprocal *hej*, box office Helsinki. S = 53 y.o. female, C = 49 y.o. female

C: **hej**

S: **hej**

(0.9)

C: kan ja reservera ti (.) Djungelboken på f: de e den där fredagen tjugu- (1.5)
 can I reserve to (.) the Djungle book on f: it is PRT Friday twenty- (1.5)
 e de tjuifemte (0.9) april
 is it the twentyfifth (0.9) of April

Hej is used regardless of nation, region, age, gender and participant role, and in telephone calls as well as face-to-face encounters and at all types of venues. This finding concurs with prior research suggesting that *hej* is the neutral, or default, greeting in Swedish (Clyne et al., 2009). Only in 237 cases customers and staff use other greetings in the data. These are distributed over 25 types of greetings. For ease of exposition we grouped these together in five greeting types (according to etymological and lexical similarities) (see Table 1).⁷

Table 1

Tokens of greeting forms in the data in descending order.

Greeting type	Total tokens customers	Total tokens staff	Variations (total number of tokens, both customers and staff)
<i>Hejsan</i>	73	24	<i>hejsan</i> (91), <i>hejsan hejsan</i> (4), <i>hej hejsan</i> (1), <i>hejsan svejsan</i> (1)
<i>Tjena</i>	26	39	<i>tjena</i> (44), <i>tjenare</i> (11), <i>tja</i> (5), <i>tjena tjena</i> (3), <i>tjabba</i> (2)
<i>God dag</i>	16	16	<i>god dag</i> (16), <i>god dag god dag</i> (6), <i>påivää god dag</i> (5), <i>hej god dag</i> (2), <i>men god dag på dig</i> (1), <i>god morgon</i> (1), <i>morgon</i> (1)
<i>Hallå</i>	10	12	<i>hallå</i> (14), <i>hallå hallå</i> (7), <i>hello</i> (1)
<i>Moi</i> ⁸	13	8	<i>moi</i> (17), <i>morjens</i> (2) <i>mojn</i> (1), <i>moi moi</i> (1)
TOTAL	138	99	

In the following, we will focus on these 237 non-*hej* greeting cases as these greetings potentially have more specific social meaning than the default greeting *hej*. We present results from the statistical analysis regarding the customers, i.e. the propensity that a customer (depending on social and situational variables) use a certain non-*hej* greeting. We also discuss patterns noted in our interactional analyses in both the customers' and the staff members' use of greetings.

Previous research, as well as Swedish dictionaries, suggest that the greeting forms *tjena*, *hejsan*, *hallå* and *moi* (with variations) are less formal, while the *god dag* forms are more formal (see e.g. Lindström, 2000, Nilsson et al., 2017 and Svenska.se). In the focus groups, participants described some of these greeting forms in terms of their level of formality. For example, the focus group participants in both countries suggested that *god dag* is a formal greeting used to and by older people, and that it is appropriate in interactions between strangers or between a job applicant and a potential employer, i.e. between interlocutors whose relationship is characterised by greater social distance. It seems to have the same value, or degree of formality, in both varieties of Swedish, at least among young people. *Hejsan* was considered 'dorky' (Swe. *töntigt*). *Moi* was only reported from the Finland-Swedish focus groups and is also used in Finnish. *Tjena* (and variations) was said to be used by and to men, and predominantly in Sweden. The participants also pointed out that *tjena* was not suitable in job interviews or when addressing a grandparent, suggesting that it is a peer-oriented informal greeting. *Hallå*, on the other hand, was mostly discussed in the Sweden-Swedish focus groups. *Tjena* and *hallå* were reported to be used to those perceived as belonging to a similar group, i.e. more suitable in interactions with speakers of the same age and gender, or between friends. We return to the focus group data in the discussion (Section 6).

In the following, we account for the use of greetings in our audio- and video data in relation to the investigated variables: 5.1 Nation, region and venue, 5.2 Age, 5.3 Gender, 5.4 Participant roles and 5.5 Medium. In 5.6, we describe how the sequential context also affects the use of greetings, and in Section 5.7, we summarize the results.

5.1. Nation, region and venue

The use of different greeting forms among customers and staff is accounted for in Table 2.

⁷ We do not translate the greetings into English as such translations have different stylistic value in different parts of the English-speaking world.

⁸ The etymology of these greeting forms is probably Low German and has evolved in separate ways due to contact with Finnish.

Table 2
Greetings used by customers and staff in Sweden and Finland, number of tokens.

Greeting type	Sweden-Swedish data customers	Sweden-Swedish data staff	Finland-Swedish data customers	Finland-Swedish data staff	TOTAL
<i>Hejsan</i>	42	13 (5 staff) ^a	31	11 (8 staff)	97
<i>Tjena</i>	25	39 (6 staff)	1	0	66
<i>God dag</i>	0	0	16	16 (5 staff)	32
<i>Hallå</i>	9	12 (7 staff)	0	0	21
<i>Moi</i>	0	0	13	8 (3 staff)	21
TOTAL	76	64	62	35	237

^a Information in brackets state the number of staff members who use the greeting form in question.

Non-*hej* greetings are used more in the Sweden-Swedish data (17% of customers) than in the Finland-Swedish data (10% of the customers). We have used a multilevel logistic regression analysis to calculate the customers' odds of using each greeting in Sweden compared to Finland (Table 3). Only two of the five analysed greetings were used in both nations, so analyses have only been carried out for these two greetings.

Table 3
Multilevel logistic regression on customers' greetings in relation to nation, odds ratios (controlled for age and gender of speaker as well as age and gender of interlocutor).

	Hejsan	Tjena
Nation (Finland reference)	0.434	22.500**

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

The odds for saying *hejsan* is 56.6% less in Sweden than in Finland, but the difference is not significant. The odds for saying *tjena* is however much higher in Sweden than in Finland (significant at p < 0.01, only one customer uses it in the Finland-Swedish dataset). In order to get an indication whether the differences seen between nations are significant for greetings used in only one nation, we have made additional anova-tests (Table 4). In these anova-tests, we have ignored the hierarchical structure of the data and have controlled for age and gender of both speaker and interlocutor.⁹

Table 4
Significance of difference for nation, region and venue (anova-analyses, controlled for age and gender of speaker as well as age and gender of interlocutor).

	Hejsan	Tjena	God dag	Hallå	Moi
National level		***	*	***	**
Regional level		***	**		
Venue level		***	***		

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

As seen in Table 4, the difference in use in the two varieties is significant for all greetings but *hejsan*: *god dag* and *moi* are only used in the Finland-Swedish data¹⁰ and *hallå* is only used in the Sweden-Swedish data set. Our qualitative analysis suggests that this holds true for the staff members as well. The statistical analysis further reveals that there is also a significant regional difference in where customers use *tjena* (only used in Gothenburg and Umeå) and *god dag* (used in Helsinki, Turku and Vasa). It should be pointed out that the qualitative analysis shows that staff members use *god dag* also in other regions (Karleby and Jakobstad). The greeting forms *moi* and the variant *mojn* are only used in the southern parts of Finland, i.e. Helsinki, Turku and Raseborg, but not in Vasa, Karleby or Jakobstad (on the Finnish north-western coast). In Sweden, the qualitative analysis reveals that *hallå* is almost only used in Gothenburg. In our statistical analysis, *hallå* does not show any significant regional pattern, but it is close to significant (p = 0.087). A larger sample would yield a better understanding of this matter.

The quantitative analysis suggests that there is a venue effect for both *tjena* and *god dag*. These effects hold true even when we control for gender and age of both the speaker and interlocutor of the greeting. This means that the use of greeting forms differs between venues, and that this cannot only be explained by different venues attracting customers of a certain age or gender. Instead, it seems that the greeting used when someone e.g. buys a ticket to a sports event is different from the greeting used at a library or theatre box office. From our qualitative analysis, it seems that *tjena* is

⁹ Due to high level of multicollinearity we have not controlled for the other types of place-specific variables except the tested ones (when testing the difference between regions, we have not controlled for nation and venue).

¹⁰ Note that there is one token of *god middag*, which is similar to *god dag*, in one Sweden-Swedish encounter. This was not included in the statistical analysis.

used more often in the former case, and *god dag* in the latter. In other words, it is possible that the venues constitute linguistic micro-cosmoses where a certain greeting repertoire is used. Whether different venues attract customers with a certain language use (not only associated with age and gender) or if the customers use different parts of their greeting repertoire in different environments (here measured as venues) is an open question. There is also a possibility that the choice of greeting has to do with other variables, such as class, which we have not investigated in this study. Another explanation could be that the customers use the same greeting as the staff members (we return to this in Section 5.6).

5.2. Age

Table 5 shows the results from the quantitative analysis of greetings in relation to both the speaker (customer) and interlocutor (staff).

Table 5

Multilevel logistic regression on different types of greetings in relation to age, odds ratios (controlled for nation, gender of speaker and gender of interlocutor).

	Greeting				
	Hejsan	Tjena	God dag ^{a,c}	Hallå ^b	Moi ^a
Age	0.996	0.933***	1.057**	1.015	0.976
Age of interlocutor (staff)	0.989	0.931*	0.978	1.016	0.976

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

^a No occurrences of *god dag* or *moi* in Sweden, model only based on data from Finland.

^b No occurrences of *hallå* in Finland, model only based on data from Sweden.

^c This greeting is not said to any male staff, model only based on interactions with female staff.

As Table 5 shows, *Hejsan*, *hallå* and *moi* are used regardless of age of both speaker and interlocutor. The odds of using *tjena* is higher for younger customers, and the odds of using *tjena* is also higher when interacting with younger staff. *God dag* is used predominantly by older customers. The qualitative analysis reveals that staff members, even as young as 25, also use *god dag* when addressing visibly older customers, but never when addressing young customers. It seems that *god dag* has separate connotations for older customers and young staff members. As seen in Table 5, *tjena* is used more frequently by younger customers and to younger staff members. The qualitative analysis of the staff members' greeting behaviour shows the same pattern, and young staff greet young customers with *tjena*. According to the statistical analysis, the use of *tjena* decreases by 6.7% (0.933–1 = –0.067) for each additional year of age of the speaker (i.e., customer); in other words, the older the customers are, the less likely it is that they would use *tjena*. In addition, the odds that customers would use *tjena* to a staff member decreases by 6.9% for each additional year of age of the addressee (i.e., staff).

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analyses suggest that *tjena* might have the potential to index 'younger', while *god dag* possibly indexes 'older' (although we cannot be certain that this is what the participants actually wish to express; we return to this in the discussion in Section 6).

5.3. Gender

In the data, all greeting types are produced by both males and females, although *tjena* is only used by one female. Table 6 shows the results from the statistical analysis of the customers' use of greetings and how their own gender and the gender of their interlocutor affect the greeting behaviour.

Table 6

Multilevel logistic regression on different types of greetings in relation to gender, odds ratios (controlled for nation, age of speaker and age of interlocutor).

	Greeting				
	Hejsan	Tjena	God dag ^a	Hallå ^b	Moi ^a
Female (male reference)	1.091	0.031***	0.672	0.225	0.264*
Female staff member (male reference)	1.405	0.512	– ^c	3.604	0.884

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

^a No occurrences of *god dag* or *moi* in Sweden, model only based on data from Finland.

^b No occurrences of *hallå* in Finland, model only based on data from Sweden.

^c This greeting is not said to any male staff, model only based on interactions with female staff.

As seen in Table 6, the odds for using *tjena* and *moi* is much smaller for female than for male customers. There is no statistical significance regarding the choice of greeting in relation to the gender of the interlocutor. We have also tested if different combinations of the speaker and the interlocutor gender associate with the propensity of using certain greetings (if

males/females were more prone to using certain greetings when talking to other males/females). We found no such significant effects. However, the number of each greeting type is rather small, so the lack of significant effect could be due to the nature of the data. From our qualitative analysis, we note that *tjena* is most often used in cases where males greet other males. This suggests that the gender of both participants in an exchange of greetings may play a part in the choice of greeting form.

5.4. Participant roles

Due to the nature of the data, we have not included the variable participant role in the statistical analysis. From the qualitative analysis, it seems that the roles as customer and staff do not affect the use of greetings to any great extent. Overall, customers and staff use similar greeting forms, although customers use non-*hej* greetings slightly more than the staff members. It can however be noted that some staff have a personal style. For example, only one young male staff uses the very informal *tjena*-forms *tjabba* and *tja* (7 tokens), and another male staff repeatedly (5 tokens) greets with the bilingual form *päivää god dag* (*päivää* is Finnish for (*good*) *day*), traditionally used by service providers in bilingual parts of Finland when the customer's language is not known.

The staff members and customers are previously unacquainted in the vast majority of cases. In a handful service encounters, the staff and customer do however know each other, which results in a closer relationship than would otherwise be the case. This is reflected in the use of greetings. Most notably, in cases where the interlocutors are previously acquainted, first names are sometimes used together with a verbal greeting, as in Extract 2.

Extract 2. Box office Gothenburg, S = approx. 60 y.o. female, C = 75 y.o. female

- S: **hej Mia**
hej Mia
 C: **hallå Anne** (0.7) nu ska vi se va ja har
hallå Anne (0.7) now let's see what I have

In some cases where staff and customer are previously acquainted, the prosodic delivery of the greeting can be described as 'warm'; with a lowered pitch and smiley voice. This is sometimes accompanied by a vowel lengthening, as in Extract 3.

Extract 3. Box office Turku, S = approx. 60 y.o. female, C = approx. 35 y.o. female

- S: **hej eh he[ε::j]**
hej uh he::j
 C: [he::j]
he::j ((LAUGHS))
 S: hur mår ni¹¹
how are you.PL
 C: £bra tack£ (0.2) °ja:°
£good thanks£ (0.2) °ye:s°

The staff first opens the interaction with *hej*, but upon noticing that the customer is someone she knows she repairs (note the hitch *eh*) to a warm and very lengthened *he:::j*. The customer replies with a long *he:::j* as well. This is produced in slight overlap, which could be because the staff already produced a first greeting, but it could also be a case of the kind of preferred overlap noted by [Pillet-Shore \(2008\)](#) in greetings between friends.

5.5. Medium

We have investigated if there is a difference in the choice of greeting in telephone calls and face-to-face interactions both quantitatively and qualitatively. The data includes 94 Sweden-Swedish telephone recordings. It is common with non-reciprocal verbal greetings in this dataset (44.5%), and the qualitative analysis shows that this is because the staff opens the call by stating the name of the venue and herself¹² and the customer often presents the reason for calling immediately after the verbal greeting, as in Extract 4.

Extract 4. Telephone call to Sweden-Swedish box office. S = female, C = female

- S: biljettkassan de e Maria
box office this is Maria
 C: ja **hej** ja (0.3) vill beställa biljetter till den här (.) .h eh genrepet på ehm (.) Familjen Adams
yes hej I (0.3) want to order tickets to this (.) .h uh dress rehearsal of ehm (.) MUSICAL

¹¹ This is the plural pronoun *ni*, probably due to the fact that the customer is visibly pregnant.

¹² All staff in the telephone recordings are female.

Since we do not know the age of the customers in the telephone data, and since we have no such data from Finland (and only from two venues in Sweden), this variable was not included in the logistic regression analysis. Instead, we used t-tests in order to see if a certain greeting was more common in the telephone data or in face-to-face encounters. These t-tests ignore the hierarchical structure of the data, but they can nevertheless be seen as indications of if a real difference exists or not. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7

Percentage of each greeting in telephone and face-to-face interaction (data for two regions only). Difference tested with t-tests.

	Greeting		
	Hejsan	Tjena	Hallå
Face-to-face	1.53%	10.71%	3.57%
Phone	35.11%	0.00%	1.06%
Total	12.41%	7.24%	2.76%
Significance of difference:	***	***	

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001.

As seen in Table 7, the greeting *hejsan* is used much more in telephone encounters than in face-to-face encounters in the Sweden-Swedish data. The qualitative analysis shows that almost all of these tokens are produced by customers in the second turn in response to the staff member's opening. The greetings used only in Finland in our data (*moi* and *god dag*) are not used in the Sweden-Swedish phone calls. The qualitative analysis further reveals that all tokens of *hallå* in telephone encounters are channel openers (*Hallå, is anyone there?*) when transferring a call, but there are no tokens as an initial conventional greeting. *Tjena* is never used in the telephone data (but note that there are no telephone interactions between two males in the data, which could explain this absence).

5.6. The sequential context

In the previous sections, we have focused on how each of the social and situational variables affect the greeting form, but in the following we will consider how speakers influence each other in the here and now of an interaction.

The participants in our data often use the same greeting form as their interlocutor, i.e. the second greeting is a repetition, or reuse, of the first greeting. Of the non-*hej* greetings in the data (produced by both staff and customers), 21% (50/238 tokens) are cases of such reuse. Reuse is most common when the first greeter has used *god dag* (16/33, 48.5%) or *tjena* (24/66, 37%). The use of *moi* is limited in the data, but also tends to be reused by the interlocutor. The greeting forms *hejsan* and *hallå* are rarely reused in the data. Why certain greeting forms seem more prone to be reused than others could have to do with their potential to signal certain values or a certain level of social distance in a service encounter, as we illustrate in the following.

Here we exemplify reuse through one staff member's use of greetings. The staff is a 30-year-old male at an event booking office. He participates in seven interactions and in two of these he greets the customer first, in both cases with *hallå*. In the other five cases the customers greet first, and we focus on the staff response to his customers in Extracts 5–9 below.

Extract 5. Box office Gothenburg, S = 30 y.o. male, C = 21 y.o. male

C: **tjena**

S: **tjena**

C: e::h ja tänkte lösa ut två: Frölundabiljetter tills i morgon

u::h I wanted to pick up two: TEAM-tickets for tomorrow

Extract 6. Box office Gothenburg, S = 30 y.o. male, C = 51 y.o. male

C: **hej**

S: **tjena**

C: **tjena** ja har ett bokningsnummer som heter fjorton tjuogoett (.) nollfem nitton

tjena I have a booking reference that is fourteen twenty-one (.) zero five nineteen

S: °fjorton tjugiätt nollfem nitton°

°fourteen twenty-one zero five nineteen°

Extract 7. Box office Gothenburg, S = 30 y.o. male, C = 50 y.o. male

C: **tjena**

S: [**tjena**]

C: [du] biljetter ti Frölunda på:: i k- i morgon

PRT tickets to TEAM o::n ton- tomorrow

S: imorgon

tomorrow

Extract 8. Box office Gothenburg, S = 30 y.o. male, C = 68 y.o. female

C: **hej**
 S: **hej**
 C: du ja skulle ha två biljetter till är det IFK Gävle som spelar
PRT I wanted two tickets to is it TEAM that plays

Extract 9. Box office Gothenburg, S = 30 y.o. male, C = 47 y.o. male

C: **tjenare**
 S: **tjena**
 C: tionde i tionde
tenth of the tenth
 S: °tionde i tio[nde°]
 °tenth of the te[nth°]

In all these extracts, except 6, the staff reuses the customer's greeting, displaying sensitivity to which greeting form the customer uses and accommodating his own greetings accordingly. In Extract 6, which takes place immediately after Extract 5, the staff reuses the greeting used by the customer in Extract 5 (*tjena*). In this case, the customer also reuses the greeting *tjena*, even though he already opened the interaction with *hej*, thus accommodating to the staff. In these extracts, *tjena* is reused the most, and the customer's repetition of the staff's *tjena* in Extract 6 also suggests that *tjena* does something more than merely open up the conversation – in this case most likely lowering the social distance between the interlocutors.

God dag is, as mentioned above, reused the most in our data, and this is exemplified in Extract 10.

Extract 10. Box office Helsinki, S = 25 y.o. female, C = 60 y.o. male

S: **hej**
 C: **hej god dag** (x)
 S: **god dag**
 C: .h ja hörde i radion om en eh sänhän stand up
.h I heard on the radio about a uh kind of stand up

In Extract 10, the 25-year-old female staff greets the 60-year-old male customer with *hej*. The customer replies with a reciprocal *hej* but continues directly without any pause with *god dag*. In this case the customer both aligns (with *hej*) and disaligns (through *god dag*) with the staff, signalling a preference for the more formal greeting form. The staff then accommodates to the customer and greets again with *god dag* in the third turn. Similarly to *tjena*, *god dag* seems to have the potential to mark social categories and relationships relevant to the participants. In this exchange of greetings, it is made visible through the staff's reuse of *god dag* even though she has already produced a greeting. It is possible that *god dag* is used as a resource to mark a greater level of formality and sensitivity to the interlocutors' age (as the focus groups suggest).

The phenomenon of reusing someone else's linguistic form (with or without slight variation) has been discussed in terms of *format tying* (Goodwin and Goodwin, 1987), *mirroring* (Coates, 1996), *repetition* (Tannen, 1989) and *reusing* (Nilsson, 2015). In Extracts 6, 7 and 9 the 30-year-old male staff also reuses parts of the customer's previous utterance. It has been suggested that reuse makes the conversation flow more easily, and that repetition shows that participants in interaction are partaking actively (Coates, 1996; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1987; Tannen, 1989). Such reuse can also be a resource for showing affiliation and solidarity with one's interlocutors (Schegloff, 1996; Nilsson, 2015). This was visible above, especially in Extracts 6 and 10 where the participants produced new greetings in alignment with the previous greeting, thus accommodating to the greeting behaviour of the interlocutor. Within Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), it is suggested that such accommodation is a resource in expressing a common social identity (Giles et al., 1991; Gasiorek and Giles, 2013).

5.7. Summary: variables influencing greetings

The choice of greeting depends on several factors. Extracts 11 and 12 illustrate this.

Extract 11. Box office Gothenburg, S = 26 y.o. male, C = 35 y.o. male

C: **tjena tjena**
 S: **tjena tjena**
 C: du (.) ja: har ju lite fri:plåtar här va
you (.) I have PRT some free tickets here PRT

Extract 12. Box office Helsinki, S = female, approx. 50 y.o., C = female, approx. 70 y.o.

S: **god dag god dag** h
 C: **god dag god dag** (0.6)
 C: nå(r) finns de (0.3) två biljetter till Mamma Mia
when are there (0.3) two tickets to MUSICAL

In Extract 11, the greetings *tjena tjena* are exchanged by two visibly younger Sweden-Swedish men at an event booking office. In Extract 12, both staff and customer use *god dag god dag*. The staff addresses a customer visibly older than herself, in a Finland-Swedish theatre box office in the Finnish capital. In both extracts, the second greeter reuses the same reduplicated greeting, illustrating how a certain greeting form may be used in accommodation to the interlocutor's greeting. The extracts are also illustrations of how both the gender and age of the participants can play a part in the greeting behaviour.

In summary, *hejsan* is affected by few variables, although the quantitative analysis shows that it is often used on the telephone. The qualitative analysis reveals that *hejsan* is mostly used by customers in these telephone interactions, in the second turn as a response to the call taker's opening.

According to our statistical analysis, *tjena* is used more by men and younger customers, and more often to men and younger staff persons. Our qualitative analysis further suggests that *tjena* is mostly used when a young male greets another young male at a Sweden-Swedish event booking office. For example, one young male staff member greets all women and most older men with *hej*, but uses *tjena* (13 tokens) when greeting other young males. Another young male staff member uses *hej* most of the time, but in six interactions he uses *tjena*, all to other young men (with one exception where he greets a 50-year-old man with *tjena*). *Tjena* is also often reused by the second speaker.

God dag is only used in Finland, and according to the qualitative analysis where both customers' and staff members' greeting behaviour is studied, it is used in all regions. The quantitative analysis reveals that age clearly affects *god dag*: it is almost only used by older customers. The qualitative analysis gives a more complex picture as staff members, also younger, use it when addressing older customers. *God dag* is also reused often.

Hallå is only used in Sweden, and most in Gothenburg (even though this is not statistically significant). It is used regardless of age and gender of the speaker and interlocutor, but it is only used in face-to-face encounters and not on the telephone in our data (except as a channel opener).

Moi is only used in southern Finland and mostly by men.¹³

In conclusion, the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses show that the choice of greeting is influenced by several variables, and that *tjena* and *god dag* have the greatest potential of the investigated greetings to reflect the participants' relations and perceptions of their interlocutors. In the following, we discuss what our results suggest for the relationship between individuals, nations and cultures.

6. Discussion

In modern Finland-Swedish and Sweden-Swedish service encounters, the greeting *hej* is the default greeting. It is neutral in that it does not signal anything in particular or, put differently, it does not index inclusion in, or exclusion from, any specific group. Accordingly, the use of *hej* is a "safe" way of opening an interaction with any interlocutor in any situation. Service encounters of the type under scrutiny in this article are typically brief, goal-oriented interactions taking place in a public space, usually between unacquainted participants who occupy different participant roles as customer and staff. Given the default value of *hej* today, its dominant position in such encounters is hardly surprising. However, what counts as a neutral, default type of greeting can change with time. Before the 1950s, *god dag* occupied a similar position as default greeting, but was gradually superseded by *hej* with the general trend towards more informal and relaxed ways of communicating in both national contexts, although the informalisation process is generally considered to have been more pervasive in Sweden (e.g. Clyne et al., 2009).

When other forms of greetings are used in the data they potentially index something that *hej* lacks today (but not historically), such as the level of social distance between the interlocutors. Other greeting forms are not particularly frequent in our data, but are nevertheless salient, as they reveal how interlocutors interpret and manage interpersonal relationships and levels of social distance between self and other. A high degree of social distance would typically exist between strangers whereas low social distance characterises family relations and close friendships. By employing a greeting associated with greater or less formality the interlocutors thus signal where on the social distance scale they position one another.

What counts as formal or informal is however a somewhat thorny issue as formality is only fully understood emically, i.e. from within the speech community/society in question and how its members view a particular form. In a previous study (Nilsson et al., 2017) we discussed formality from such a perspective and concluded that the national varieties of Swedish differ in that Finland Swedish operates with a broader formality scale (formal-neutral-informal) than Sweden Swedish where the options are, in reality, limited to greetings towards the neutral-informal end of the spectrum. In another study, based on the same service encounter data, we investigated address practices and found the same overall trend with a greater variety of lexical forms used in Finland Swedish (Norrby et al., 2015b).

Our empirical results demonstrate robust differences between the national varieties in greeting behaviour. Firstly, non-*hej* greetings are used more in the Sweden-Swedish dataset than in the Finland-Swedish dataset (see Table 1), even though the repertoire of greetings is slightly larger in the latter. Secondly, informal greetings, in particular *tjena*, are almost exclusively used in Sweden while the more formal *god dag* only appears in the Finland-Swedish dataset, albeit in modest

¹³ The form does not exist in Sweden Swedish.

numbers. By drawing also on focus group discussions, we are able to compare actual use with the observations offered by young focus group participants in Finland and Sweden respectively. The comments suggest that Finland-Swedish greeting behaviour is more sensitive to the perceived level of social distance between the interlocutors: for example, greeting a much older person may occasion the use of *god dag*. Focus group comments from Sweden do however also reveal a sensitivity to social distance and perceived otherness, but the base level is much more informal as demonstrated by comments that *tjena* would not be suitable for greeting a significantly older person. Of course, focus group data also from older Swedish speakers could give further clues to the social meaning of different greetings, and would be a useful avenue for future research.

That fact that non-*hej* greetings are used by different groups in different contexts does not necessarily entail that all greetings have apparent indexical meaning, or that every speaker assigns such meaning in every context and have the same intentions when using them. Instead, we suggest that the results of our study should be seen as recurring cultural patterns, the effect of a cultural conditioning, or a first-order indexicality (Johnstone and Kiesling, 2008, see also Silverstein, 2003), which *might* have social meaning to the participants that use them.

There are in particular two greeting forms which seem to index social meaning more explicitly to the participants. These two, *tjena* and *god dag*, are at opposite ends of the formality scale. *Tjena* is used by young males interacting with other young males, especially at an event booking office selling tickets to hockey games in Sweden. *God dag* is used by and to older customers, especially at a theatre box office in the Finnish capital. But does this mean that they index ‘young Swedish hockey male’ and ‘older Finnish theatre visitor’? And are these the identities the participants perform in the service encounters?

According to the focus group participants, *tjena* has connotations to young males, and this is corroborated by the service encounter data. It is apparently not a resource for women, nor for older men to any great extent. Nevertheless, it seems that *tjena* does not solely index ‘young male’, but is a resource to perform *belongingness* – the state or sense that an individual is an important part of something (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Such belongingness could be related to social class, family, ancestors or a place (Prins, 2006). In other words, *tjena* could be a resource for males to lower social distance with other males. At the same time, whether this is what these young males try to achieve in a given interaction is not possible to determine based on our data.

The focus group participants point out that *god dag* is used by and to older participants in formal settings. As such, it has the potential to maintain social distance. As mentioned above, the semiotic value and formality of greeting forms have, naturally, evolved over time, and to the older users of *god dag* it might be a neutral greeting. Nevertheless, the younger staff who greet older customers with *god dag* seem to orient to it as a marker of politeness, accommodating to the perceived image of older citizens’ pragmatic patterns. Coupland et al. (1988) reported that people below 55 often have stereotypical perceptions of the old and consider them incompetent, slow, old-fashioned and non-flexible. Accordingly, young people will accommodate more to this stereotype than to the actual speech of the elderly. In our data, older customers do in fact use *god dag*. It is possible that *god dag* has different connotations for younger and older speakers, as well as for different individuals. To some older participants it might be a neutral greeting, to others a marker of politeness and perhaps social distance, and to others again (older greeting older) a way to perform belongingness. To younger participants, it seems to index ‘older’, as well as politeness and social distance. In other words, *god dag* should be seen as an indexical field (Eckert, 2008) with several potential meanings.

7. Conclusion

Our aim with this study was to contribute to variational pragmatics by illustrating how a multi-variable analysis can broaden the scope of which factors determine variation in pragmatic routines. Such an analysis also reflects to what extent ‘nation’ should be considered when studying pluricentric languages, and what other factors play an equally important part.

As our study shows, a single variable can give plenty of information: nation is indeed a relevant variable to study, and can explain variation in greeting behaviour and offer new insights into the relationship between individuals, languages and culture(s). However, it does not provide us with the full picture. A person using for example *tjena* is not just somebody from Sweden, but also have a higher propensity of being a male, being young, interacting with another male and being at a particular venue.

Because our corpus is extensive, and comprises data from different types of venues, and because we have employed statistical analyses to our data, we have been able to map recurring patterns that do not just appear due to one variable (such as nation). A further strength of the study is that it is based on authentic interactions that would have taken place regardless of our presence. Another important aspect is that the face-to-face encounters were video-recorded and the telephone calls audio-recorded, thus making it possible for us to “participate” in the interaction and gain new insights into pragmatic patterns in situ, and the role of greetings as an interactional resource. An interactional perspective highlights how pragmatic variation emerges in conversation – how interlocutors actually use and orient towards the greeting forms used. Speakers often accommodate their greeting behaviour to their interlocutor, and greeting forms can be a part of showing affiliation, or for that matter disaffiliation, between interlocutors. This suggests that at least some greeting forms have the potential to do more than open a conversation; they can also be used to index the degree of social distance between interlocutors. In summary, greeting behaviour is constituted of socially recognizable actions, manifesting the culture that produces that behaviour.

Appendix. Transcription symbols

[point of overlap onset
]	point where overlapping talk stops
(.)	micropause, less than 0.2 seconds
(0.5)	silences timed in tenths of a second
he-	cut-off
he:j	lengthening of a sound
(hej)	uncertain transcription of talk
((LAUGHS))	meta comments
ɛhejɛ	smiley voice
°hej°	quiet voice
.h	inbreath

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