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Sá er svinnr er sik kann

Persuasion and Image in *Hrafnkels saga*

Introduction

Given the unusually broad focus of scholarly attention on *Hrafnkels saga*, one might assume that this work had been investigated, read, and explicated from every conceivable angle, that there was nothing new under the sun to be said about it, no new territory to be explored. One might indeed ask the question why it should be necessary to write yet another article on *Hrafnkels saga*¹ in general and, in particular, to venture once more into the saga's dialogic center, the episode at the Althing, that has intrigued so many previous scholars, who because of its length and complexity of interaction have chosen to label it the "heart of Hrafnkatla". Beginning with Anne Saxon Slater's article on rhetoric and its role in revealing the psychology of the characters (1968), subsequent studies by W. F. Bolton (1971), Fredrik J. Heinemann (1975), Peter Hallberg (1975), Kathleen E. Dubs (1977), and Jan Geir Johansen (1995) have all used the rich dialogue material in this episode as evidence for their examinations of the saga's rhetoric, character portrayal, and moral viewpoint. Despite this considerable body of scholarship, however, we feel that certain critical holes in the interpretation remain and that some important questions have yet to be asked.

The dialogue referred to as the "heart of Hrafnkatla" constitutes the final and successful interaction in a series of dialogues requesting support from kinsmen and others in which social issues like power, image,² and prestige are at stake. The fact that the negotiation of such issues in request dialogues discloses important social values might help us to

¹ We have used Jón Helgason's edition of *Hrafnkels saga* (1950). References indicate page and line number.

² We use the term "image" here in the sense of "face", as described in Erving Goffman (1982: 5): "Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes", something that is adjusted according to the needs of situation, communication partners, and personal agenda.

understand why dialogues of this type are such a recurrent feature, not only in this saga, but in many other Icelandic sagas as well. This fact may also explain the degree of detail and elaborate staging in the famous toe-pulling scene and the subsequent interaction between Porkell and Þorgeirr, or why Þorbjörn cries, two “problems” for which we believe there is still no satisfactory explanation.

In our previous article (Bonner and Grimstad 1996) we used dialogue analysis as a tool which allowed us to focus on the characters’ intentions and strategies for negotiating power and getting their way.³ In a sense the present study is a continuation of this research, but this time we will focus on sequences dealing with requesting support. The requester had to invent a persuasive strategy, and the potential granter, faced with a decision of whether to aid or not to aid, had to weigh factors essential to the social dynamic of the medieval Icelandic society. We therefore want to examine the issues dealt with in the request sequences and describe how these requests are structured. Who puts forward the request and in what way; which means are used in the interaction to promote the cause; what reactions does the request strategy elicit from the potential granter of the request? By analyzing the conversational dynamics of the request dialogues culminating in Þorgeirr’s participation in the case against Hrafnkell, we aim to show which social and conversational context the participants signal and define through their verbal interaction in those situations, i.e., how they construct their own and their partners’ social identity, how they explore and establish boundaries of kinship and honor in order to persuade the other party that the cause is worthwhile.

Request dialogues

The requests for support in this text are a type of dialogue in which Party A must endeavor to persuade Party B to agree to provide support in some legal action, more specifically, in mounting a case against the hitherto invincible chieftain Hrafnkell. Whereas in other sagas those seeking support tend to be wealthy and important farmers and chieftains, an unusual feature of *Hrafnkels saga* is that the case originates with the impoverished farmer Þorbjörn against his own chieftain Hrafnkell over the latter’s slaying of Þorbjörn’s socially unimportant son Einarr. For the case to move forward, support must be garnered in order to serve

³ For a more general discussion of the analysis of literary dialogues, see Anne Betten (1994: 538), whose article contains a brief section on “Dialoge früherer Sprachstufen”.

the summons and take the matter to the Althing, where a chieftain might commit himself to back the cause.

There are several dialogues to consider, beginning with Þorbjörn's attempt to persuade his brother Bjarni to become involved. At subsequent stages in the process he next turns to his nephew Sámr, who in his turn must try to raise support from a chieftain at the Althing. All of these dialogues share some structural features.

The term "structural features" refers to the basic structural elements of the request sequence, in which each individual verbal act in the interaction has to be regarded as a specific, meaningful choice out of a range of possibilities. At a bare minimum, a request sequence is comprised of a request and unaccounted-for granting or refusal. A more elaborate request sequence allows us to observe how image is negotiated and how face needs are taken care of, what arguments are used to appeal to solidarity or to allude to power differences. It reveals important factors that play a role in the decision-making process, factors that may present obstacles to the success of the individual making the request. If we can judge by their frequency and prominence in the sagas, the detailed sequences requesting support with their various obstacles and strategies were of critical interest to the medieval Icelandic audience and can therefore provide the modern reader with important information about the cultural norms and values of that society. In our particular case the obstacles in securing the necessary allies in a case against Hrafnkell and the strategies employed to overcome them are a focus of the saga. As obstacles, we consider the reactions to the request from the parties to whom Þorbjörn turns for help; these range from dismissing the request altogether to complicated negotiations over the factors that play a role in deciding, including among other things obligation to Þorbjörn, general concepts of appropriate social behavior, and personal judgment of loss/gain of honor to be expected from an involvement in the case. Among the general strategies employed we encounter cajoling and verbal aggression.

A wise man knows his limitations (Dialogue 1)

After having refused Hrafnkell's offer of a gift in compensation for killing his son, Þorbjörn first approaches his brother Bjarni with the news (1a) and asks for his support to bring legal action against Hrafnkell (1b). As his only brother, Bjarni might be assumed to feel obligated to help. As we come to see, however, close kinship in this case does not over-

ride other critical factors in Bjarni's decision to refuse his brother's request.

Bjarni prepares his refusal (2g) by pointing out his own inadequacy with respect to Hrafnkell (2a–c). He evokes the authority of universal truth in a proverb (2d) and thus evaluates Þorbjörn's plan as ill-advised. Then he states that the desired outcome will be impossible because of Hrafnkell's proven skill in winning lawsuits (2e). The message communicated to Þorbjörn in this sequence is that he has completely misjudged the situation, an implicit and face-threatening dismissal. The dismissal then becomes explicit when Bjarni blames him for his stupidity (2f). This judgment carries a particularly humiliating sting through the use of the word *vitlitill*, which contrasts with the proverb's use of *svinnr* and distances Bjarni, who clearly sees himself as *svinnr*, from his foolish brother.

- Þ (1a) *segir honum þessi tíðendi, (1b) *biðr at hann muni nokkurn hlut í eiga um þessi mál.⁴
- B (2a) *Biarni kvað eigi sitt iafnmenni við at eiga þar er Hrafnkell er, (2b) en þó at vér stýrim penningum miklum, (2c) þá megum vér ekki deila af kappi við Hrafnkel, (2d) ok er þat satt at sá er svinnr er sik kann; (2e) hefir hann þá marga málaferlum vafit er meira bein hafa í hendi haft en vér; (2f) synisk mér þú vitlitill við hafa orðit er þú hefir svá góðum kostum neitat; (2g) vil ek mér hér øngu af skipta.

At this point Þorbjörn has suffered severe loss of face since both Hrafnkell and Bjarni have dismissed him, and because Bjarni has already anticipated all of his possible counterarguments, he is left with no further valid negotiating options. His only recourse is to retaliate by resorting to abusive language (3a) and by calling into question his brother's courage (3b).

- Þ (3a) *Þorbjörn mælti þá mǫrg herfilig orð til bróður síns (3b) *ok segir því siðr dáð í honum sem meira lægi við.

In this interaction the verbal aggression falls flat as a strategy for getting support since Bjarni plays no further role in the saga. In other instances, however, verbal aggression can open the door to further negotiation, as we will see in the second dialogue. Nevertheless, Þorbjörn's *herfilig orð* are not wasted; the narrator reports that the brothers parted

⁴ * marks passages in indirect speech; numbering is added for reference.

on unfriendly terms, and therefore we might conclude that Þorbjörn was at least successful in paying Bjarni back for his humiliation and thereby reestablishing a kind of balance between them.

Weighing the pros and cons (Dialogue 11a) and
You can't have your cake and eat it too (Dialogue 11b)

Having failed to win the support of his brother Bjarni, Þorbjörn goes to see his nephew Sámur, who is described as *uppivopðslumaðr mikill* (3:11), but also *logkænn* (3:12), to recruit support for legal action against Hrafnkell. With a formulaic opening gambit (1) he cues that he has important matters to discuss. The greeting scene ends with a formal inquiry about news (2–4), whereupon Þorbjörn states that Hrafnkell has killed his son (5). However, Sámur doesn't acknowledge this as news since it's nothing unusual (6), thereby disputing Þorbjörn's entitlement to reckon with his support before the request has even been uttered.

- Þ (1) * Þorbjörn biðr Sám út ganga.
S (2) *Sámur heilsaði vel frænda sínum ok bauð honum þar at vera.
Þ (3) * Þorbjörn tók því öllu seint.
S (4) *[Sámur sér ógleði á Þorbirni] ok spyrr tíðenda,
Þ (5) *en hann sagði víg Einars sonar síns.
S (6) Þat eru eigi mikil tíðendi þótt Hrafnkell drepi menn.

Þorbjörn requests support from Sámur nevertheless (7a). He tries to establish his license to make this request by focusing on Sámur's close kinship to the dead man (7b) with the implication that, after all, there is news and news. When Hrafnkell kills a member of your own family, it can't be dismissed as no news. As someone who is *logkænn* and understands the risks in getting involved in such a case, Sámur has to make sure that Þorbjörn has exhausted all other possibilities for compensation (8), information which Þorbjörn readily provides (9).

- Þ (7a) * Þorbjörn spyrr ef Sámur vildi nokkura liðveizlu veita sér; (7b) er þetta mál þann veg, þótt mér sé nánastr maðrinn, at þó er yðr eigi fiarri hoggvit.
S (8) Hefir þú nokkut eptir sömdum leitast við Hrafnkel?
Þ (9) *Þorbjörn sagði alt hit sanna, hversu farit hafði með þeim Hrafnkatli.

Sámur evaluates Hrafnkell's offer of compensation as extraordinary (10a) in contrast to his earlier dismissal of Einarr's killing as "news" (4).

He suggests instead returning to Hrafnkell to recover the original offer and volunteers to help (10b–e). Þorbjörn declines the suggestion. He states that Hrafnkell is no longer willing to renew his offer (11a) — an assumption on his part — and claims that his own rejection of Hrafnkell's terms hasn't changed (11b). Now Sámur replies to Þorbjörn's original request for support (7a) by expressing his reluctance (12). This counts as an indirect refusal; however, the door to further negotiations is left open a crack.

- S (10a) Eigi hefi ek varr orðit fyrr at Hrafnkell hafi svá boðit nokkurum sem þér. (10b) Nú vil ek riða með þér upp á Aðalból, (10c) ok fõrum vit lítillátliga at við Hrafnkel, (10d) ok vita ef hann vill halda hin sõmu boð. (10e) Mun honum nokkurn veg vel fara.
- Þ (11a) Þat er bæði at Hrafnkell mun nú eigi vilia, (11b) enda er mér þat nú eigi heldr í hug en þá er ek reið þaðan.
- S (12) Pungt get ek at deila kappi við Hrafnkel um málaferli.

Þorbjörn clearly sees the opening in his nephew's ambiguous refusal and, as a final strategy, lets fly once again with *herflig orð*. The entire speech is a provocation in which specific reproaches are uttered as a form of shaming: Sámur lacks ambition (13a), he is a useless relative (13b), he is contemptible because he's all show and no substance (13c–f). In his next attack he warns Sámur that inaction will result in public condemnation (13g) and allies himself with the critics of Sámur's boastful behavior (13h). Understood: If you don't do something for me, you will prove the accuracy of my reproaches. Finally, he expresses resignation with a hint of contempt (13i). The effect of the provocation is to put his partner in a bind: either to do nothing and prove to be the unreliable relative he has described, or to help him and demonstrate that the description is invalid.

- Þ (13a) Því verðr engi uppreist yður ungra manna at yðr vex alt í augu; (13b) hygg ek at engi maðr muni eiga iafnmikil auvirði at frændum sem ek; (13c) sýnisk mér slíkum mõnnum illa farit sem þér, (13d) er þykkisk lögkõenn vera (13e) ok ert giarn á smásakir (13f) en vill eigi taka við þessu máli er svá er brýnt; (13g) mun þér verða ámællissamt, sem makligt er, (13h) fyrir því at þú ert hávaðamestr ór ætt varri; (13i) sé ek nú hvat sþk horfir.

Sámur's response to the provocation shows ambivalence. On the one hand, he appears willing to consider taking the case (14b). There are several factors that may make this a tempting option: the general social

expectation that a young man⁵ who wants to amount to something needs to prove himself by accepting challenges; his own skill in legal matters and, as *uppivözlumadr*, an inclination to be contentious; the supposition that Hrafnkell's defenses may be weakened because he has actually made an offer of compensation to Þorbjörn; and the lure of taking on and possibly winning a big case. On the other hand, he doubts that his involvement will make a difference in Þorbjörn's situation (14a) and reproaches him for his bad judgment in bringing inevitable shame and humiliation to both of them (14c), i.e., to Sámur, since Þorbjörn has nothing to lose. Here the negative factors under consideration might include the assumption that he can't hope to get anything better for Þorbjörn (and thus nothing for himself) than the offer the latter already has rejected and the unlikelihood, based on Hrafnkell's record, that they will get support at the Althing and win the case. He takes for granted the status quo in the balance of power and that Hrafnkell cannot be defeated. Should he accept responsibility for the case, he alone will be in charge of its prosecution and for better or for worse bear the consequences of the outcome, as he makes very clear in the next interaction when Þorbjörn wants to abandon the case. The critical question is whether the payoff outweighs the potential risks to his reputation and social standing.

- S (14a) Hveriu góðu ert þú þá nær en áðr, (14b) þótt ek taka við þessu máli
(14c) ok sém vit þá báðir hrakðir?

Þorbjörn's answer reveals his complete lack of understanding of power politics and long-range planning. The benefit he derives from Sámur's aid is expressed as *hugarbót*, by which he may mean both repair of loss of face from the two previous rejections as well as relieving himself of the responsibility of pursuing the case (15a). The subsequent developments, which clearly concern Sámur, don't burden him for the moment (15b).

Although he has reservations, Sámur now accepts the case and agrees to the request for support (16a). He states kinship as his primary reason for granting the request (16b), but like Bjarni he also reproaches Þorbjörn for his shortsightedness and stupidity (16c). This may be the payback for Þorbjörn's provocative speech (13a–h), but the reproach con-

⁵ That is, young and ambitious. On this topic see Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's comments about the different strategies employed by older or younger men in their pursuit of honor (Meulengracht Sørensen 1993: 194, 220–224 et passim).

tains a hook since a prudent man would probably not help a foolish one. At the same time the insult serves as a hedge in reference to the presumed failure of their action against Hrafnkell.

- P (15a) Þó er mér þat mikil hugarbót at þú takir við málinu; (15b) verðr at þvi sem má.
 S (16a) Ófúss geng ek at þessu; (16b) meir geri ek þat fyrir frændsemis sakir við þik; (16c) en vita skaltu at mér þykkir þar heimskum manni at duga sem þú ert.

At the conclusion of the dialogue Sámur formally takes over the case from Þorbjörn by shaking hands and sealing the deal (12: 4–5): “Þá rétti Sámur fram höndina ok tók við málinu af Þorbirni”. This action confirms his verbal agreement (16a–b).

The dialogue between Sámur and Þorbjörn at the Althing can be viewed as a coda to their negotiations over Þorbjörn’s original request. All the chieftains they have approached for support have refused because Hrafnkell always wins all his court cases and none of them wants to risk defeat. Þorbjörn initiates a conversation with Sámur, expresses his agitation (1a–b), and they both go outside to talk. Þorbjörn wants to revoke the entitlement he transferred to Sámur (2a) because he finally feels the burden and realizes the consequences of his self-willed behavior for himself and Sámur, namely public shame and humiliation (2b).

- P (1a) *ok það hann upp standa, (1b) má ek ekki sofa. (2a) Þat er ráð mitt at þú látir reka at hesta vára, ok búumsk heim; (2b) er nú sét at oss vill ekki annat en svívirðing.

To judge from Sámur’s reaction, for a client to try to give orders to his advocate is an offensive act and therefore leads to a violent response not unlike Þorbjörn’s tirade in dialogue 11a. He scolds his uncle for foolishly going after the birds in the bush instead of seizing the bird in the hand (3a–c). This is a parallel to Bjarni’s dismissal (1, 2f) with its explicit reference to Þorbjörn’s stubbornness and inability to know a good thing when he sees it. Furthermore he judges as irresponsible Þorbjörn’s questioning the courage of Sámur and others who wisely recognized their limitations (3d–e). Sámur’s aggressive scolding might also serve to pay Þorbjörn back for the latter’s earlier provocative challenge (11a, 13a–h). His strategy effectively puts Þorbjörn in his place, i.e., as a client with no further claims on the decision-making process. He spells out the consequences,

only hinted at in dialogue IIa, of taking over a case (3f). As the advocate in charge, he asserts his right to the case, which implies that at a minimum he is determined to get some advantage for himself, a factor that played an important role in his final decision in dialogue IIa. We may also assume from the wording that he sees some remaining options.

- S (3a) Þat er vel, (3b) af því at þú vildir ekki annat en deila við Hrafnkel (3c) ok vildir eigi þá kosti þiggja er margr mundi giarna þegit hafa, sá er eptir sinn náunga átti at síá; (3d) frýðir þú oss miðk hugar (3e) ok öllum þeim er í þetta mál vildu eigi ganga með þér. (3f) Skal ek ok nú aldri fyrr af láta en mér þykkir fyrir ván komit at ek geta nokkut at gort.

Whereas in their previous encounter and likewise in the encounter with Bjarni, Þorbjörn reacted aggressively to the face-threatening dismissal with *herfilig orð*, in this instance he bursts into tears (14:16): “Þá fær Þorbirni svá miðk at hann grætr”. What does this response signify, as Þorbjörn’s final utterance in his quest for support? In the scholarship on this episode, his crying is commonly seen as an expression of an inner emotion, but with the exception of Johansen’s reading, there is no interpretation of its nature. Johansen sees Þorbjörn as a character flawed by his lack of judgment, who cries “when reminded as to who wanted to get involved in the first place, when he is confronted with his own responsibility” (1995: 276). According to our reading, the crying is a response to his having received yet another scolding for his stupidity and bad judgment. It does not express gratitude over Sámur’s persistence, a new awareness of his obligation to his dead son, or a realization that he alone is to blame for the humiliation he now fears. Viewed in the context of his two earlier provocative outbursts when confronted with a dismissal (I, 3a–b; IIa, 13a–i), his crying must rather be seen as an expression of suppressed aggression triggered by disappointment and the collapse of the face he has been trying to maintain. In his shamefaced state all other possible avenues of reaction are closed.⁶

Why does Þorbjörn, who wanted nothing more than to secure an ally and bring his case to the Althing, now want to give up and go home? In this environment where all the powerful chieftains are hobnobbing with each other, gossiping and playing power politics, Þorbjörn is made to

⁶ This reading of Þorbjörn’s reaction is supported remarkably well by Goffman’s (1982: 8) description of what being “out of face” or “in wrong face” means for a participant in a contemporary American social interaction. According to Goffman, “[h]is manner and bearing may falter, collapse, and crumble. He may become embarrassed and chagrined; he may become shamefaced”.

realize that he and Sámr are on the verge of becoming objects of public ridicule. In effect, by taking his case to the Althing and seeking support in vain, he has created a situation in which even he is forced to see the folly of the case, something which both Bjarni and Sámr told him in the very beginning. And, although he may earlier have fancied himself as the “driving power” behind this enterprise, he is now forced to recognize that in fact he really has been the “stupid man” that others have told him he was. His understanding of legal matters is naïve and simplistic — if X has killed Y, then Y’s family should get compensation (cf. IIa, 7b) — and he lacks understanding of other facets of the dynamic concept of compensation which includes all the factors that both Bjarni and Sámr weighed before reaching a decision.

Sámr, on the other hand, is under extreme pressure. After lengthy deliberation he took a gamble and accepted a dubious case; unless he succeeds, his reputation and social standing will suffer. But giving up at this point, so we might reasonably assume, will result in immediate loss of face, and thus exploring even the slightest chance to find an ally is still the better option.

Ǫlkofra þáttur (1950: 86) provides us with an example of a similar situation, in which a man cries after receiving a disappointing refusal. *Ǫlkofri* has accidentally burned down a forest belonging to a collection of chieftains, who plan to outlaw him at the Althing. He expects his influential friends to come to his aid, but neither they nor anyone else offers support. Þorsteinn Síðu-Hallsson represents his last chance, and when he too refuses his request for aid, the disappointment and humiliation bring *Ǫlkofri* to tears outside the booth. The common factor here is that in both cases the requester receives an answer that is unwelcome and exactly the opposite from the one he would have preferred. This suggests that the crying is a reaction to being denied that which is most important in order to preserve the image of a man who is competent and knows what he’s doing.

Take it or leave it (Dialogue III)

Sámr and Þorbjörn see a group of men leaving a booth led by a distinguished-looking man in colored clothes. Sámr decides that they will approach the men. After a greeting and presentation (1–4), Sámr questions Þorkell about his background to find out whether he could be a candidate to provide support (5–22c).

- Þk (1) *heilsar þeim fyrri ok spyr hverir þeir væri.
S/Þb (2) *Þeir sögðu til sín.
S (3) *Sámr spurði þenna mann at nafni,
Þk (4a) *en hann nefndisk Þorkell (4b) *ok kvazk vera Þióstars son.
S (5) *Sámr spurði hvar hann væri ættaðr eða hvar hann ætti heima.
Þk (6) *Hann kvazk vera vestfirzkr at kyni ok uppruna, en eiga heima í Þorskafirði.
S (7) Hvárt ertu goðorðsmaðr?
Þk (8) *Hann kvað þat fiarri fara.
S (9) Ertu þá bóndi?
Þk (10) *Hann kvazk eigi þat vera.
S (11) Hvat manna ertu þá?
Þk (12a) Ek em einn einhleypingr; (12b) kom ek út í fyrra vetr; (12c) hefi ek verit utan siau vetr ok farit út í Miklagarð (12d) en em handgenginn Garðskonunginum, (12e) en nú em ek á vist með bróður mínum, þeim er Þorgeirr heitir.
S (13) Er hann goðorðsmaðr?
Þk (14) Goðorðsmaðr er hann vist um Þorskafiðrð ok viðara um Vestfiðrðu.
S (15) Er hann hér á þinginu?
Þk (16) Hér er hann vist.
S (17) Hversu margmennr er hann?
Þk (18) Hann er við .lxx. manna.
S (19) Eru þér fleiri bræðrnir?
Þk (20) Er hinn þriði.
S (21) Hverr er sá?
Þk (22a) Hann heitir Þormóðr (22b) ok býr í Gørðum á Álptanesi; (22c) hann á Þórdísi, dóttur Þórólfs Skalla-Grímssonar frá Borg.

Based on the answers to his questions, Sámr concludes that Þorkell has suitable credentials and requests support (23), in answer to which Þorkell asks for more information (24). Sámr tells him what kind of support they need (25a), the nature of the case and who the adversary is (25b), and what role he plans to play in the legal proceedings (25c). Þorkell refuses the request on the grounds that he is ineligible (26a–b).

- S (23) Viltu nokkut liðsinni okkr veita?
Þk (24) Hvers þurfu þit við?
S (25a) Liðsinnis ok afla höfðingia, (25b) því at vit eigum málum at skipta við Hrafinkel goða um víg Einars Þorbiarnarsonar, (25c) en vit megum vel hlíta okkrum flutningi með þínu fulltingi.
Þk (26a) Svá er sem ek sagða, (26b) at ek em engi goðorðsmaðr.

Sámr responds to the refusal with aggressive behavior, insinuating that Þorkell must have done something bad in order to lose his inherited right to a chieftainship (27a–b). By protesting against the insinuation, Þorkell tries to restore his diminished image. He corrects the record (27a), explains his situation fully (27b–d), and countersuggests that they seek aid from his brother (28e), whom he describes as noble-minded, accomplished, young, and ambitious — just the sort of person to be inclined to help Sámr in his quest for support (28f–g). Sámr assumes that this will not lead to the desired outcome (29a). His flattering comments are an attempt to cajole Þorkell into mediating with his brother on their behalf (29b).

- S (27a) Hví ertu svá afskipta gørr, (27b) þar sem þú ert hofðingia son sem aðrir bræðr þínir?
- Þk (28a) Eigi sagða ek þér þat at ek ætta þat eigi, (28b) en ek selda í hendr Þorgeiri bróður mínum mannaforráð mitt áðr en ek fór útan; (28c) síðan hefi ek eigi við tekit, (28d) fyrir því at mér þykkir vel komit meðan hann varðveitir. (28e) Gangi þit á fund hans, biðið hann ásiá; (28f) hann er skörungr í skapi ok drengr góðr ok í alla staði vel mentr, ungr maðr ok metnaðargiarn; (28g) eru slíkir menn vænstir til at veita ykkr liðsinni.
- S (29a) Af honum munum vit ekki fá, (29b) nema þú sér í flutningi með okkr.

Þorkell consents (30a) on the grounds that it is appropriate for relatives of a slain man to take legal action against the slayer (30b). He then proceeds to outline a plan for Sámr and Þorbjörn to approach his brother Þorgeirr (30c–n).

- Þk (30a) Því mun ek heita at vera heldr með ykkr en móti, (30b) með því at mér þykkir óerin nauðsyn til at mæla eptir náskyldan mann. (30c) Fari þit nú fyrir til búðarinnar ok gangið inn í búðina. (30d) Er mannfólk í svefni. (30e) Þit munuð síá hvar standa innar um þvera búðina tvau húðföt, (30f) ok reis ek upp ór þöru en í þöru hvilir Þorgeirr bróðir minn. (30g) Hann hefir haft kveisu mikla í föetinum síðan hann kom á þingit, (30h) ok því hefir hann lítit sofit um nætr; (30i) en nú sprakk fötrinn í nótt ok er ór kveisunaglinn, (30j) en nú hefir hann sofnat síðan ok hefir réttan fötinn út undan fötunum fram á fótafiqlina sakir ofrhita er á er föetinum. (30k) Gangi sá hinn gamli maðr fyrir ok svá innar eptir búðinni; (30l) mér sýnisk hann miðk hrymðr bæði at sýn ok elli. (30m) Þá er þú, maðr, kemr at húðfatinu, skaltu rasa miðk ok fall á fótafiqlina ok tak í tána þá er um er bundit, ok hnykk at þér, (30n) ok vit hversu hann verðr við.

Because Þorkell is his last hope, Sámr carefully hedges his face-threatening rejection; he affirms his belief in Þorkell's good intentions (31a), but nevertheless dismisses the plan as bad advice (31b). Þorkell clearly understands the dismissal and confronts Sámr with an ultimatum (32a). With all the power on his side, he puts an end to the negotiations (32b). Left with no other options, Sámr accedes to the plan (33).

- S (31a) Heilráðr muntu okkr vera, (31b) en eigi sýnisk mér þetta ráðligt.
 Þk (32a) Annathvært verði þit at gera, (32b) at hafa þat sem ek legg til, eða leita ekki ráða til mín.
 S (33) Svá skal gera sem hann gefr ráð til.

The “heart of Hrafnkatla” revisited (Dialogue IV)

Playing the roles Þorkell has given them in his drama, Sámr and Þorbjörn enter the tent of the sleeping chieftain. When Þorbjörn, whom Þorkell has cast as a stumbling old man, pulls on the sore toe and awakens Þorgeirr suddenly out of a sound sleep, the latter jumps up and asks what is going on (1). Judging by Þorkell's subsequent reassurances (3b), Þorgeirr understands the message as a signal that something important needs immediate attention.⁷ Because Þorkell's script did not extend beyond pulling the toe, Sámr and Þorbjörn are left hanging without their lines (2).

- Þg (1) *[En Þorgeirr vaknar við ok hlióp upp í húðfatinu] ok spurði hvern þar fœri svá hrapalliga, at hlypi á fœtr mǫnnum er áðr váru vanmáttu.
 S/Þb (2) *En þeim Sámi varð ekki at orði.

Þorkell, who obviously has been waiting in the wings, now makes his grand entrance onto the scene and reassures his brother that there is no imminent danger to his person (3a–b). He has reason to address this specific concern since in this and other sagas characters who lie abed in the early morning, instead of being up and alert, often come to grief. He then embarks on an elaborate apology for the clumsy behavior of an old man who is a character of his own creation. He begins by reminding his brother of something everyone knows, expressed in the form of two commonplaces that relate specifically to unsatisfactory performance under duress (3c–d). The commonplaces serve two purposes: on the one

⁷ For another example of awakening someone by seizing his feet or legs, see *Finnboga saga* (1959: 275).

hand, to provide Þorkell with the authority to say that his interpretation of Þorbjörn's behavior is the correct one; on the other hand, to allude subtly to his brother's inadequate performance at the Althing. What follows is a comparison designed to demonstrate what Þorgeirr and Þorbjörn have in common and thus to appeal to Þorgeirr's sense of solidarity. Þorkell acknowledges that Þorgeirr has an excuse, leaving a blank for Þorgeirr and the audience to fill regarding what he needs to be excused for (3e). Here the context indicates that in fact Þorkell is again alluding to his brother's absence from the business of the Althing, something which we can assume other chieftains would be talking about and excusing. With the use of *frændi* he appeals to kinship ties, letting his brother know that he too excuses his absence, which has not yet affected the honor of the family. He closes the first part of the comparison with a statement that conveys a twofold message: on the concrete level about the relief of the pain; on the figurative level about being conscious of his lack of performance at the Althing (3f). The second part of the comparison makes the analogy with Þorbjörn's grief over the killing of his son and need for compensation to heal the wound to his family honor (3g–i). The explicit comparison of the chieftain's pain from a sore foot with the old man's emotional and social pain caused by his son's death seems on the surface to be preposterous and absurd, a kind of strange comedy improvised by Þorkell for some inexplicable reason. The subtext, however, conveys the message that both men share the problem of flawed performance, which Þorkell wants his brother to understand is turning into an issue of concern. By repeating the commonplace saying about limited foresight, he evaluates Þorbjörn's behavior as perfectly understandable and cues the end of his apology (3j).⁸

Þorgeirr rejects the apology: he is not the cause of Þorbjörn's grief. Hurting him will therefore neither alleviate Þorbjörn's pain nor accomplish revenge (4a–c). This response indicates that he either has not understood the subtext in Þorkell's message or has chosen to ignore the provocation.

By reframing Þorbjörn's action as an attempt to win support for his lawsuit rather than as an act of revenge, Þorkell contradicts his brother's reading (5a, 5d). He presents Þorbjörn's act of grabbing the toe as merely a consequence of an old man's tottering balance and poor eyesight (5b–c). Here the staged drama and Þorkell's previous excuse of Þorbjörn's clumsiness have worked together to create the character of a needy old

⁸ On the concept of contextualization cues, see, e.g., John J. Gumperz (1982: 130–152).

man he requires in order to appeal to Þorgeirr's sense of duty and honor as a chieftain (5e). He also assures his brother that this is a good cause because Þorbjörn's motives in seeking compensation are socially sanctioned (5f), a view he already expressed in the dialogue with Sámur (III, 30b). The depiction of the other chieftains' behavior as lack of *drengskapr* is a strategy to put pressure on his brother. If Þorgeirr misses out on this unique opportunity to perform at the Althing by helping an old man against Hrafnkell, he implies that his brother will fall into the same category as the other chieftains. This is a clear challenge, not unlike the strategy Þorbjörn earlier used in his attempt to persuade Sámur (IIA, 13a–i). If Þorgeirr wants to maintain his image as *drengur góður* and a chieftain worthy of the name, he has no real choice (5g–h).

- Pk (3a) Ver eigi svá bráðr né óðr, frændi, um þetta, (3b) því at þik mun ekki saka; (3c) en mörpum teksk verr en vill, (3d) ok verðr þat mörpum at þá fá eigi alls gætt iafnvel er honum er mikit í skapi. (3e) En þat er várkunn, frændi, at þér sé sárr fótr þinn, er mikit mein hefir í verit; (3f) muntu þess mest á þér kenna. (3g) Nú má ok þat vera at gömlum manni sé eigi ósárari sonardauði sinn, (3h) en fá öngvar boetr ok skorti hvevitna síalfr; (3i) mun hann þess gørst kenna á sér, (3j) ok er þat at vánum at sá maðr gæti eigi alls vel er mikit býr í skapi.
- Pg (4a) Ekki hugða ek at hann mætti mik þessa kunna, (4b) því at eigi drap ek son hans, (4c) ok má hann af því eigi á mér þessu hefna.
- Pk (5a) Eigi vildi hann á þér þessu hefna (5b) en fór hann at þér harðara en hann vildi, (5c) ok galt hann óskygnleika síns, (5d) en vænti sér af þér nokkurs trausts. (5e) Er þat nú drengskapr at veita gömlum manni ok þurftigum. (5f) Er honum þetta nauðsyn, en eigi seiling, þó at hann mæli eptir son sinn, (5g) en nú ganga allir höfðingiar undan liðveizlu við þessa menn (5h) ok sýna í því mikinn ódrengskap.

Þorgeirr clearly understands the implication of his brother's provocation since he asks for information about the identity of the adversary (6). In constructing his answer, Þorgeirr focuses on Hrafnkell's tyrannical behavior, not only in this case but in many others as well. By implying that Þorgeirr might be just the right person to show Hrafnkell his limitations, Þorgeirr redresses his brother's positive image (7a–c). As soon as Hrafnkell's name is mentioned, however, Þorgeirr loses interest (8a). Without any obligation whatsoever to Þorbjörn and Sámur, he sees no reason to test his strength against an adversary like Hrafnkell (8b–c). His reference to the ample evidence of people's previous failures indicates that his refusal has nothing to do with cowardice, but rather is a matter of political prudence (8d–g).

- Pg (6) Við hvern eigu þessir menn at kæra?
 Pk (7a) Hrafnkell goði hefir vegit son hans Þorbiarnar saklausan. (7b) Vinnr hann hvert óverkan at öðru (7c) en vill öngum manni sóma unna fyrir.
 Pg (8a) Svá mun mér fara sem öðrum, (8b) at ek veit eigi mik þessum mǫnnum svá gott eiga upp at inna at ek vilia ganga í deilur við Hrafnkel. (8c) Þykki mér hann einn veg fara hvert sumar við þá menn sem málum eigu at skipta við hann, (8d) at flestir menn fá litla virðing eða öngva áðr lúki, (8e) ok sé ek þar fara einn veg öllum; (8f) get ek af því flesta menn ófúsa til, (8g) þá sem engi nauðsyn dregr til.

In the following speech, Þorkell appeals to his brother's ambition by presenting himself as the positive model and his brother as the negative model. He first gives Þorgeirr credit for his prudence (9a–c), a hedge against his claim that he himself is made of different stuff (9d–e). In this way he disputes the validity of his brother's scruples; after all, a real chieftain shouldn't shy away from this extraordinary challenge (9f). He downplays the risk of losing honor (9g–h) and, with the proverb "Nothing ventured, nothing gained", goads his brother to action (9i).

Þorkell's goading fails to have the desired effect since once again Þorgeirr either ignores or doesn't understand its implied message. Instead what he hears is that Þorkell wants to support Sámur and Þorbjörn (10a). He therefore offers to turn over all his power and authority as chieftain to Þorkell, which will give him the control and freedom of choice to support anyone he wants (10b, e). Þorgeirr understands and alludes to the obligation that he has incurred by having his brother's share of the *goðorð* (10c) and suggests keeping their power and responsibilities separate in the future (10d). Knowing his brother's situation, Þorgeirr must be aware that Þorkell will not be inclined to accept the responsibility. His suggestion is therefore most likely a provocation.

- Pk (9a) Þat má vera at svá fœri mér at, (9b) ef ek væri höfðingi, (9c) at mér þœtti ilt at deila við Hrafnkel. (9d) En eigi sýnisk mér svá, (9e) fyrir því at mér þœtti við þann bezt at eiga er allir hrekiask fyrir áðr, (9f) ok þœtti mér mikit vaxa mín virðing eða þess höfðingia er á Hrafnkel gæti nokkura vik róit, (9g) en minkask ekki þó at mér fœri sem öðrum, (9h) fyrir því at má mér þat sem yfir margan gengr; (9i) hefir sá ok iafnan er hættir.
 Pg (10a) Sé ek hversu þér er gefit, at þú vill veita þessum mǫnnum. (10b) Nú mun ek selia þér í hendr goðorð mitt ok mannaforráð, (10c) ok haf þú þat, sem ek hefi haft áðr, (10d) en þaðan af höfum vit iöfnuð af báðir, (10e) ok veittu þá þeim er þú vill.

In his final attempt to get his brother to do what he wants, Þorkell pursues two strategies to deal with the obstacles raised by Þorgeirr and

stay in control: he rejects the offer of the chieftainship and threatens to sever the family ties. He frames his rejection as flattery in a series of statements designed to enhance Þorgeirr's image while diminishing his own: Þorgeirr is the better chieftain of the two, both with respect to experience and accomplishments (11a, c); he inspires Þorkell's generosity and confidence (11b); Þorkell, on the other hand, is still unsettled (11d); and he has had little opportunity to test his abilities on the home front (11e). He announces that he will no longer discuss the matter with his brother (11f) and puts an end to further negotiation of the topic (11g). Assuming that he will receive better treatment elsewhere, he threatens to turn away from Þorgeirr, which implies a reproach for his brother's lack of appreciation (11h).

Þorgeirr, aware of his brother's displeasure (12a), gives in to the threat against their relationship. This is an unacceptable state of affairs (12b), and therefore he finally agrees to the request (12c), even while questioning Þorkell's decision one final time (12d).

Þorkell insists on his evaluation of the necessity to give support, and at the same time he reassures his brother that he will not make any further demands (13). Þorgeirr seems to accept that assurance since he now asks for the specific details of the enterprise (14). Although he has not been personally addressed, Sámr fills in the information he has earlier (III, 25a–c) told Þorkell (15a–b). After this, Þorgeirr gives them his instructions and sends them on their way (16a–g).

- Pk (11a) Svá sýnisk mér sem þá muni goðorð vart bezt komit er þú hafir sem lengst. (11b) Ann ek öngum svá vel sem þér at hafa, (11c) því at þú hefir marga hluti til mentar um fram alla oss bræðr, (11d) en ek óráðinn hvat er ek vil af mér gera at bragði. (11e) En þú veizt, frændi, at ek hefi til fás hlutazk síðan ek kom til Íslands. (11f) Má ek nú síá hvat mín ráð eru. (11g) Nú hefi ek flutt sem ek mun at sinni. (11h) Kann vera at Þorkell lepr komi þar at hans orð verði meiri metin.
- Pg (12a) Sé ek nú hversu horfir, frændi, at þér mislíkar, (12b) en ek má þat eigi vita, (12c) ok munum vit fylgia þessum mǫnnum hversu sem ferr, (12d) ef þú vill.
- Pk (13) Þessa eins bið ek, at mér þykkir betr at veitt sé.
- Pg (14) Til hvers þykkisk þessir menn foerir svá at framkvæmð verði at þeira máli?
- S (15a) Svá er sem ek sagða í dag, (15b) at styrk þurfum vit af höfðingium en málaflutning á ek undir mér.
- Pg (16a) *Þorgeirr kvað honum þá gott at duga (16b) ok er nú þat til, at búa mál til sem réttligast. (16c) En mér þykkir sem Þorkell vili at þit vitið hans áðr dómar fara út; (16d) munu þit þá hafa annathvart fyrir ykkart

þrá, nokkura huggan eða læging enn meiri en áðr ok hrelling ok skap-raun. (16e) Gangið nú heim ok verið kátir, (16f) af því at þess munu þit við þurfa ef þit skuluð deila við Hrafnkel, at þit berið ykkv vel upp um hrið, (16g) en segi þit öngum manni at vit höfum liðveizlu heitit ykkv.

Conclusion

We can now step back from our detailed discussion of each dialogue to summarize what using dialogue analysis has revealed to us about the structure of request sequences, about social issues critical to the negotiation process, about the significance of crying and pulling toes, and perhaps even about the broader message of the saga as a whole.

In the dialogues we observed how the interactants made moves in different directions, each pursuing a suitable strategy to achieve his own goal. If we look at the issues the potential granter brings up in response to a request, we find two main categories of countermoves represented: one concerns the appropriateness of the request, which can be ascertained or questioned; the other concerns its possible invalidating features, which can become matter for objections or doubts. Since they all have the potential to lead to a refusal, these countermoves represent obstacles, and therefore the requester must counter with strategies to overcome them. The following list surveys the types of obstacles encountered in the dialogues. When A asks for support, B may:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ascertain the appropriateness of the request | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by asking for details about the background of the case (Sámr, Þorgeirr) • by asking for details about the kind of support needed (Þorkell, Þorgeirr) |
| question the appropriateness of the request | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by disputing the benefit of the action for A (Sámr) • by blaming A for lack of wit or understanding (Bjarni, Sámr) |
| name objections against granting the request | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • by pointing out one's own ineligibility (Þorkell) • by pointing out one's own inadequacy (Bjarni) • by pointing out lack of obligation (Þorgeirr) |

raise doubts about granting the request

- by pointing out inadvisability (Bjarni)
- by pointing out impossibility of desired outcome (Bjarni, Þorgeirr)
- by expressing unspecified reluctance (Sámr)

Omitted from this survey is the option of making a countersuggestion, since countersuggestions can have different functions, depending on the context. When Sámr suggests returning to Hrafnkell to retrieve the offer, he is disputing the validity of the request; when Þorkell suggests presenting the case to his brother, he is confirming the validity of the request; and when Þorgeirr suggests that his brother take over the chieftainship instead of supplying the support himself, he is actually refusing the request. From this survey it becomes clear that the requester had to convince the granter that the request was appropriate, that the granter was the right person to ask, and that there was a fair chance of success. Using this frame of reference, we can return to the individual dialogues and reiterate the salient points of our analysis.

Of all the potential granters only Bjarni refuses Þorbjörn's request. His primary objection is his inadequacy to contend against an adversary of Hrafnkell's skill and status. He raises doubts about the general advisability of the lawsuit and about the possibility of the desired outcome. However, the overriding factor seems to be that he questions the appropriateness of the request because of Þorbjörn's demonstrated lack of wit, and this outweighs factors of close kinship to his brother and sufficient financial resources to undertake the case. The proverb sums up concisely Bjarni's evaluation of Þorbjörn's behavior and stresses the point that a man who takes his social responsibilities seriously must know the range of his possibilities and act accordingly. As an older, established man, Bjarni appears to be most interested in maintaining the status quo and therefore fits Meulengracht Sørensen's description (1993: 222): "Den voksne mand skal kende sig selv og sin begrænsning". Unable to invalidate any of Bjarni's objections, Þorbjörn can only respond to the refusal with verbal aggression and leave. In this dialogue we encounter an aggressive response to a refusal, a pattern that repeats itself in the other dialogues.⁹

The interaction with Sámr shows a similar, albeit more elaborate

⁹ For examples of how unaccounted-for refusals lead to physical violence, see Frederic Amory (1991: 64–68).

structure as the interaction with Bjarni. Although like Bjarni he is concerned about the appropriateness of the case, Sámur, who is young and aspiring, has a greater inclination to explore its potential merit; this leads to a more extensive sequence of negotiations before Sámur agrees to the request. Having failed in his quest for support from his closest relative, Þorbjörn immediately appeals to the kinship factor with Sámur, setting the tone for the negotiations. Against an adversary like Hrafnkell, Sámur understands that mounting a lawsuit is generally inappropriate; therefore he makes a countersuggestion to help Þorbjörn retrieve Hrafnkell's offer of compensation that would secure the family's economic future. Here we might suppose that the possibility of success in such a venture would appeal to his legal skills and be a feather in his cap. When Þorbjörn rejects the countersuggestion, Sámur raises doubts about the probability of the desired outcome of the lawsuit. In an attempt to ward off the refusal he sees coming, Þorbjörn resorts to an aggressive strategy to attack Sámur's image on two levels, both the personal as a family member and the professional as a lawyer. The aggression pays off; Sámur is provoked into defending his image and, as he states, takes the case for the sake of their kinship. Although kinship is his explicit motive, we might have reason to suspect that other factors relating to his image as lawyer and ambitious young man play an even more important role in this decision. In his parting shot Sámur emphasizes the considerable risks he is taking in helping such a shortsighted man.

The dialogue between Sámur and Þorbjörn at the Althing we would like to regard as the final act in their negotiations. Proving that he is exactly the *heimsker maðr* Sámur has called him, Þorbjörn acts as if he were still in charge of the case and tries to back out, a move completely unacceptable in a client/advocate relationship since it would mean a breach of contract. Þorbjörn's attempt to retreat is an admission that his image of himself as a man who could make demands has crumbled. In this vulnerable state he is confronted with Sámur's aggressive scolding and shaming, which makes clear that his behavior is offensive. By explicitly spelling out the total folly of his behavior from beginning to end, Sámur heaps insult on Þorbjörn's injured self image, putting him firmly in his place. The humiliation is overwhelming, leaving him with crying as the only outlet for his anger.

The interaction with Þorkell introduces a new configuration of interactants because the person being asked for support is not a relative or even known to the requesters. Although in this case kinship obligations play no role whatsoever in his deliberations, Þorkell states categori-

cally that he thinks the request is appropriate and solidly grounded in a moral imperative to get compensation for the killing of a relative. The only objection he raises is that he is ineligible to provide the kind of help they are seeking. Hearing this as a refusal, Sámr resorts to the same strategy as Þorbjörn on two previous occasions. He provokes Þorkell to defend his image by means of an aggressive question, containing an implication of weakness or character defects. In response Þorkell repairs his image, makes a countersuggestion designed to get the requested support, and agrees to mediate.

In the final dialogue we encounter yet another type of interaction. The original requester plays no role, but is instead replaced by a mediator who negotiates with the granter. As mediator, Þorkell stages the drama in which Þorbjörn stumbles and pulls Þorgeirr's sore toe for no other purpose than to establish the appropriateness of the request for support. In the ensuing comparison, Þorkell stresses factors that create a sense of solidarity between a needy old man and a powerful chieftain, two people who would otherwise be socially distant from each other. On the surface Þorkell seems to be comparing physical pain to emotional pain; his real agenda, however, is to point out that Þorgeirr's performance at the Althing is just as flawed as the old man's entrance into the tent. When Þorgeirr ignores this part of the message, Þorkell reframes the negotiations and introduces the relationship between the two brothers as a new topic. He continues his use of comparison as a rhetorical device, in the first instance by elaborating on how, if he were a chieftain, he would welcome the challenge of taking on Hrafnkell to help a man like Þorbjörn. In this way he presents himself as a positive role model and blames his brother once again for lack of performance, a distancing tactic which threatens the brotherly solidarity. In the second instance, after Þorgeirr again fails to react to his provocation and offers Þorkell a chieftainship he doesn't want, the latter is forced to turn the comparison around, now enhancing his brother's image as the more competent chieftain of the two while diminishing his own. Þorkell comes across as a master of face-work. He plays with aggression and cajoling when he tries to steer his recalcitrant brother towards agreeing to take on the case. The final aggressive move, the threat to leave, brings about a change of mind in Þorgeirr, for whom brotherly loyalty takes precedence.

What are the factors that we might assume are the driving force behind Þorkell's elaborate strategy to persuade his brother to accept this case? As Þorgeirr makes clear, obligation is not an issue. However, chal-

lenge is an important factor in the social power balance, and we might assume that Þorgeirr's injury has put him out of action at the Althing so that he has not been involved in the public business. That Þorgeirr can be excused for his inactivity, but at the same time criticized for not taking on a major case that conveniently drops into his lap, must be Þorkell's message. A collaboration between Sámur and Þorgeirr to defeat Hrafnkell represents the last chance for both men to distinguish themselves at this Althing.

In attempting to understand why Þorkell invests so much energy in convincing his brother to take on a risky case that no one else is willing to consider, we might look again at the implications in Bjarni's proverb "Sá er svinnr er sik kann". Because it expresses a judgment that can be interpreted in different ways depending on the referential context, a proverb is useful as part of an interaction strategy. Bjarni uses the proverb as a way of underscoring his refusal and conveys the message that he knows his own limitations with regard to resources and social status and intends to respect them. Like Bjarni, Sámur appears to be well aware of his limitations. His countersuggestion implies that, while he considers the project of mounting a case against Hrafnkell to be out of bounds, he is not averse to using his legal skills to help his uncle retrieve the original offer of compensation. However, unlike Bjarni, Sámur is tempted by the challenge, provoked by his uncle's abusive tirade, and decides to take the gamble, presumably because he is interested in testing his legal mettle and increasing his honor. According to our interpretation, the interaction between Þorkell and Þorgeirr is also about limitations, in the sense that Þorkell feels that Þorgeirr is being too cautious, is hesitating in a situation in which he ought to reach out and seize an opportunity to prove his worth as a chieftain. The social values at stake in this negotiation are well formulated by Meulengracht Sørensen (1993: 194): "En mand må vise, at han duer til noget, og hvor en konflikt truer, gælder det ikke kun for parterne om at vurdere, om de kan undgå den uden at miste ære. De må også hver for sig afgøre, om de kan vinde ære ved at tage konflikten". Accordingly, a man who knows himself does not always put his limitations first in considering a request for support. Especially at the higher levels of power he may have the social obligation to push himself and take risks to secure the social balance of power threatened by the ruthless actions of a man like Hrafnkell.

The social issues under consideration in the dialogues that constitute the "heart of Hrafnkatla" relate to the thematic message of the saga as a whole. One of these themes is the connection between physical pain and

social pain caused by humiliation and loss of honor. Just as Þorkell uses this comparison to try to make his brother's obligation clear to him, so Hrafnkell is taught a lesson about his social responsibilities through physical pain followed by defeat and humiliation. Another theme focuses on knowing yourself and acting accordingly. As we demonstrated in our previous study (Bonner and Grimstad 1996), Hrafnkell exceeded the socially acceptable bounds of his authority by ignoring rules about compensation and by swearing an irresponsible oath. The ideas about how chieftains should behave, about their duties and social responsibilities, under deliberation in the dialogue between Þorkell and Þorgeirr constitute the "heart" of the lesson that Hrafnkell has to learn. Each of the dialogues we have examined reveals perspectives on the importance of knowing yourself, using common sense, and making correct judgments. Thus, we would conclude that length and complexity of interaction alone do not constitute the real critical factors in awarding this episode pride of place in the saga. As our study has shown, an analysis of the so-called "heart of Hrafnkatla" contributes to an understanding of the entire saga, highlighting its importance in the larger structure. And so in the end we can agree that "heart" is not a bad name for this episode after all.

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