

“I DON’T KNOW HOW TO SAY IT”: THE ROLE OF MULTIMODAL RESOURCES IN MEANING NEGOTIATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that studying the use of spoken language, gaze, and hand gestures as multimodal resources among speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds can shed light on how multilingual interlocutors jointly work together in meaning negotiation when they are having difficulty progressing a conversation. Using a multimodal conversation analytic approach, this study examines video-recorded interactions of university students from different first language backgrounds at a dinner table communicating in English as it is the most common language that multilingual students resort to when speaking with someone who has a different language background. This study provides a unique insight into the stages where interlocutors encounter difficulty producing a word in English, and then moves on to how interlocutors use multimodal resources (spoken language, gaze and hand gestures) to construct a joint solution in the process of meaning negotiation. More specifically, this study demonstrates how multimodal analysis of interactional difficulties among multilingual interlocutors can broaden our understanding of the roles of multimodal resources as a multilingual interactional strategy in which interlocutors collaboratively use the resources to describe, represent, and negotiate the meaning of the word searched-for and jointly attempt for a solution to reach an understanding.

KEYWORDS:

Multimodal conversation analysis; multimodal resources; meaning negotiation; joint solution; interactional difficulties

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing accessibility of multimedia technology in recent years, there has been a growing interest in using multimodal approaches in conversation analysis studies (henceforth CA), which allows researchers to closely examine how spoken language, gestures, gaze, and body movement as interactional resources in face-to-face interaction (Streeck et al., 2011; Mortensen, 2012; Mondada, 2019). The use of video technology has allowed researchers to investigate how various multimodal resources (spoken language, gaze, and gestures) are synchronised, coordinated, and mutually inform one another (Mondada, 2019).

The significance of multimodality in the CA has also begun to emerge in studies investigating interactional practises among multilingual speakers (Kimura 2020; Matsumoto, 2018). Multimodal CA has allowed researchers to closely examine how multimodal resources are intertwined in multilingual interaction and in the meaning-making process (see e.g. Matsumoto & Canagarajah, 2020; Abdullah & Sahar, 2020).

The current study aims to investigate the role of multimodal resources in interactional difficulties (e.g., word searches) among international university students from various linguacultural backgrounds communicating in English at a dinner table. Word searches are instances in interaction when a speaker's turn is temporarily paused due to difficulty in searching for suitable linguistics items in formulating the talk (Schegloff et al., 1977). Although several empirical CA studies have examined multimodal resources in second language face-to-face interaction (e.g., Greer, 2013; Markee & Kunitz, 2013) there have been few studies that investigate the role of multimodal resources in meaning negotiation in word searches between interlocutors with different first languages and cultural backgrounds.

OBJECTIVE

The study focuses on the analysis of multimodal resources in situations where interactional difficulties occur, such as word-searching (Matsumoto & Canagarajah, 2020), and this paper attempts to explain how this social ordered structure is achieved in interaction through micro-analyses of naturally occurring conversation. Furthermore, the study seeks to comprehend the complex ways in which multilingual speakers use spoken language, gaze, and hand gestures as interactional resources for a joint construction in meaning negotiation to reach an understanding, and, in particular, how multilingual speakers achieve communicative success when interacting with someone from a different first language and cultural background (Firth 1996; Kaur, 2020). Thus, the study's objective is to investigate how multilingual speakers use multimodal resources to negotiate meaning when encounter with interactional difficulties.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

Using a multimodal CA approach (Mortensen, 2012; Mondada, 2019), this study is aimed at investigating how multilingual interlocutors collaborate in negotiating meaning in word searches using multimodal resources (spoken language, gaze, and hand gestures). The setting for this study is a mundane conversation between international university students in a non-educational setting.

The data collection consists of approximately eight hours of video recorded data sets of dinner conversations between groups of friends, with different first language and cultural backgrounds, who use English as a medium of communication. There are 44 occurrences of interactional difficulties involving searching for words activity identified in the data. This paper examines a subset of a larger data set that depicts casual conversation among a group of female students who were having dinner together; Ann (from Vietnam), Mus (from Malaysia), and Lea (from Kazakhstan) - the names used in this paper are pseudonyms, and participation in this study was voluntary. The data was transcribed using CA transcription conventions (Jefferson, 2004) and annotated multimodally (see Sert, 2017).

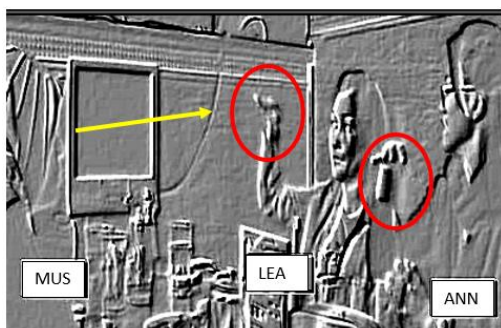
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher attempts to demonstrate how meaning negotiation in interactional difficulty is collaboratively accomplished multimodally among interlocutors from different linguistic backgrounds. The extract below depicts a stage when Ann is having difficulty forming a word in English and expresses her difficulty in word-searching as 'how-to-say-it?'. The discussion then shifts to how interlocutors use spoken language, gaze, and hand gestures to construct a joint solution during the meaning negotiation process.

Prior to the extract below, Lea discusses her brother's college experience living in a room with six other students, and Ann joins the conversation to express her surprise for the number of occupants in the room. However, when Ann takes her turn to describe the type of beds in the room in line 1, she begins to struggle with her utterances by elongating words and speaking in a softer voice (e.g. line 1-5), silence, and hand gestures (e.g. raising her hand upwards and downwards, line 4) that indicate the onset of word-searching. Following that, Lea joins the search activity by making similar hand gestures and moving it in an upward and downward motion to visually describe the bed in an attempt to assist Ann, and Lea most likely does not know the correct word item as well (see figure 1). Ann then shifts her gaze to Mus and resumes her word search, expressing her difficulty by saying, "I don't know how to say it?" (line 7). In line 8, Lea performs a recurring hand movement (see figure 2), while Mus maintains her gaze on Lea's and Ann's hand movements that correspond synchronously with their utterances, "two level" (e.g. line13-14, figure 2). Following that, Mus proposed a possible solution to the word-searched for (e.g. double decker, line 18) Ann then shows her acceptance for Mus' candidate solution.

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1 ANN: I think semi- I think they give-
2 LEA: like-
3 (0.3)
+ANN raises her hands upwards
4 ANN: single:: the::(0.4)°>kind of known as<° semi:: †
+LEA moves hand upwards & downwards (Fig 1)
+MUS gazes at LEA's hand gestures (Fig 1)
+ANN moves hand gestures downwards & upwards. (Fig 1)
5 (0.4)
+ANN keeps hand gestures upwards
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FIGURE 1



6 MUS: mm::
 +MUS frowns while gazes at ANN

7 ANN: be:d? >I don't know< how to say it (.) like-
 +ANN shifts gazes towards MUS

8 LEA: be:ds
 +LEA moves her hands upwards & downwards
 (0.4)

9

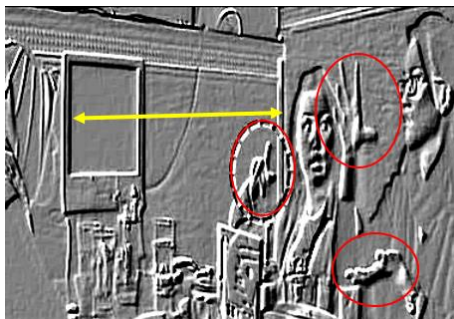
10 ANN: yah [like- like-

11 LEA: [ya:h ya:h

12 (0.2)

13 LEA: they have two like- (.) two levels
 +LEA makes finger gestures (Fig 2)
 +ANN makes hand gestures (Fig 2)
 +ANN and MUS gaze at each other (Fig 2)

FIGURE 2



14 ANN: like two levels
 +ANN and LEA continues with their hand gestures

15 : (0.5)
 +MUS nods head

16 MUS: mm:: (0.3) oka:y
 +MUS keeps nodding head

17 ANN: what is it ca:ll↑ (0.2) se- call semi:: ↑ °be:d°
 +Both ANN and MUS gaze at each other

18 MUS: er:: (.) [double decke:r?

19 ANN: [forgo:t

20 (0.2)

21 ANN: a double decke:r maybe

22 MUS: maybe

23 MUS: [°haha°]

24 ANN: [maybe] I think it's double decker

25 MUS: ↑mm ↓hm
 +MUS nods head

It is worth noting that the communication process is not limited to verbal language, as each interlocutors appears to observe their interlocutors' responses from how they describe and represent multimodal resources that are made relevant in the attempt to negotiate meaning for a possible word searched-for (e.g. double-decker bed). For instance, Ann and Lea synchronously demonstrate similar hand gestures to visually describe the bed (e.g., figure 1 & figure 2) possibly to align their understanding and the use of multimodal resources provide shared knowledge for Mus to collaborate in the meaning negotiation process.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

This study contributes to our understanding of how multilingual speakers who do not share the same first language achieve communicative success and are creative language users in multilingual interaction (Firth 1996; Kaur, 2020). Furthermore, understanding how language and communication work requires understanding the joint construction of meaning in interactions among multilingual participants (Canagarajah & Wurr, 2011). This study has shed light on how interlocutors use multimodal resources (spoken language, gaze, and hand gestures) to construct a joint solution during the meaning negotiation process (Matsumoto & Canagarajah, 2020). This study suggests that the process of meaning negotiation is fundamentally multimodal (Streeck et al., 2011), and limiting it to spoken language would limit investigation into the multifaceted reality of English as a lingua franca/ multilingual interaction and second language interaction (Firth, 1996; Matsumoto & Canagarajah, 2020, Kaur 2020; Kimura, 2020).

To summarise, the advancement of advanced video recording technology as a research tool has become an increasingly important tool in CA studies, allowing for detailed observations of complex multimodal resources running simultaneously (Streeck et al., 2011; Mortensen, 2012). The micro-analytic examination of multimodal resources among speakers with different linguacultural backgrounds can capture and reveal the complex coordination of interactional details, such as in the meaning negotiation process during interactional trouble (Matsumoto & Canagarajah, 2020). Therefore, multimodal CA appears to be one of the most effective approaches for analysing the interplay of language and multimodal resources in various interactional contexts, such as in multilingual settings (Kimura, 2020).

Transcript Conventions

(0.5)	pause
[]	overlap marker
::	lengthening sound
↑	high pitch
?	rising intonation
°word°	soft utterance
UPPER CASE	loud voice
()	unclear word
<u>word</u>	stressed syllable / word emphasis
+	notes on the start of gaze, gestures etc. movement

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