
ARBEITSGRUPPE 4 | WORKSHOP 4

Raum | *Room*: S 01, Seminargebäude

Creativity and routine in linguistic feedback

**Jana Hosemann, Anastasia Bauer, Sonja Gipper &
Tobias-Alexander Herrmann**

Universität zu Köln

jhoseman@uni-koeln.de, anastasia.bauer@uni-koeln.de, sonja.gipper@uni-koeln.de, t.herrmannSpamProtectionuni-koeln.de

Feedback is central to interaction. It is omnipresent in interpersonal communication and reflects interlocutors' perception and monitoring of the success (or potential failure) of communication. Any given interaction is rife with feedback mechanisms, from interjections like *huh?* and exclamations like *really?* to verbal repetitions as well as smiles, frowns, nods, directed eye gaze and gestures. Feedback signals serve to coordinate interaction, direct the advancement of narrative, manage attention and establish common ground.

Looking at communicative interaction, the two fundamental forces creativity and routinization make language a highly flexible and adaptable communication system, offering routines for repair and managing trouble, as well as opening up avenues for innovative language use. Feedback signals play a central regulatory role within this interplay between individual skills and shared structures and norms, in line with creativity and routinization.

In this workshop, we want to gain an understanding and discuss topics that address feedback signals in the following contexts: (a) language- and individual-specific use of feedback cues in multimodal conversation interaction (e.g., head nods, eye gaze, gestures, interjections); (b) feedback signals in language acquisition contexts; (c) the potential impact of feedback mechanisms on linguistic structures; (d) feedback as a phenomenon beyond linguistics in “macroscopic” discourses on the level of institutions, societies and cultures.

We invite participants to present their research related to one of these or other relevant contexts and aim to gain new insights into the function of feedback signals in the interplay of linguistic creativity and routine.

The effect of conversational setting on backchannel feedback

Alicia Janz, Simona Sbranna, Simon Wehrle & Martine Grice

IfL-Phonetik, Universität zu Köln

alicia.janz@uni-koeln.de

The importance of backchannels (BCs)—short utterances produced by the listener—is widely recognised [1]. BCs play a major role in constructing and maintaining shared knowledge in conversation. They have been investigated in a number of studies in task-oriented speech, usually without visual contact between speakers. Owing to the design of these tasks, establishing *common ground* (shared knowledge between interlocutors) [2] is crucial. In spontaneous conversations, on the other hand, there is no specified task, making the establishment of common ground less important from a strictly functional perspective, allowing BCs to serve a wider range of functions [3].

Previous studies on German task-based dialogues report a predominance of the BCs *ja*, *okay*, *mmhm* (mostly with rising intonation) and *genau* (mostly with falling intonation) [4,5]. The current study investigates lexical choice and prosodic realisation of BCs in spontaneous face-to-face conversations and audio-only Maptasks. We recorded 14 speakers in dyads. In both types of conversation, speakers used mostly standard BC types such as *ja* and *mmhm*. However, in spontaneous conversation, the proportion of *other* (non-standard) BCs was much higher, with speakers using words such as *mega* or *voll* (‘totally’). Speakers used mostly rising intonation contours in task-based conversation and mostly level or falling contours in spontaneous conversation. The rate of backchannels per minute was higher in the Maptask (5.5) compared to the spontaneous setting (3.8).

In sum, our findings suggest considerable differences in BC production between task-oriented and spontaneous conversations. The more creative use of feedback at the lexical level in spontaneous conversations might reflect its use as a social signal in this setting. Similarly, the predominance of rising BCs, found only for Maptask conversations, might reflect a specific function of indicating that the interlocutor may proceed with the task at hand. Our findings emphasise the importance of taking into account conversational settings, especially when investigating quintessentially interactional aspects of speech communication.

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Multimodal resources for coordination and adaptation in conversational interaction

Judith Holler^{1, 2}

¹*Donders Institute for Brain, Cognition & Behaviour, Radboud University,*

²*Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics*

judith.holler@donders.ru.nl

Traditionally, in much of the language sciences, the focus has been on the individual speaker (Clark, 1996). Addressees are typically seen as passive recipients, and frequently do not feature in experimental paradigms at all. In this talk, I will illustrate that addressees are active collaborators (Bavelas et al, 2000; Schegloff, 1982) which becomes particularly evident if we consider their contributions multimodally. To do so, I will draw on evidence from co-speech manual gestures and their role in achieving mutual understanding, especially by facilitating grounding and repair. I will also present findings from recent studies that have investigated the role of other visual signals in these processes, including facial signals and head gestures. Further, I will consider feedback functions of visual signals from a perspective that goes beyond signalling during typical feedback ‘slots’, taking into account the temporal organisation of multimodal conversational turns. Together, the findings I present show that, next to idiosyncrasy, feedback in face-to-face conversation is characterized by considerable regularity in multimodal signalling, suggesting that Gestalt-based processing plays an important role (Trujillo & Holler, in press). Moreover, they underline the relevance of considering human language not only as inherently multimodal (Holler & Levinson, 2019, Kendon, 2004), but also as a fundamentally bilateral, reciprocal activity (Bavelas, 2022; Clark, 1996). While this has been the *modus operandi* for many decades in some fields of enquiry (such as conversation analysis), it still needs to find proper recognition in many other branches of the language sciences. The findings I present are a call for pushing to move more strongly into this direction.

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**Speaker turns and listener feedbacks: exploring lexical, phonetic,
and social variation of backchannels and fluncemes in conversation**

Marlene Böttcher & Martina Rossi

ISFAS, Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel
mboettcher@isfas.uni-kiel.de, mrossi@isfas.uni-kiel.de

Speakers' turn-taking items (fluncemes, FLs) and listeners' feedback expressions (backchannels, BCs) are both produced to ensure a smooth exchange of turns in spontaneous conversations. Despite their functional difference (FLs are used for turn initiation or continuation [1]; BCs signal active listenership [2]), both share a short constituent size and lexical candidates in German (e.g., *mh, ja, genau* [3, 4]).

This study explores the relationship between the two types of turn-management devices looking at their frequency, lexical and prosodic form in 6 German dyadic conversations, from [5], with respect to familiarity and gender of the interlocutors.

The results in this study illustrate the predominant use of short lexical items of both forms of feedback, as well as functional specific pitch movements in German: non-lexical items are mostly rising as BCs and mostly falling as FLs [cf. 6].

The analyzed data also contributes to a better understanding of interlocutor dynamics: both male and female subjects produce more BCs when in conversation with a female interlocutor and produce more FLs with an interlocutor of the same gender. Additionally, FLs and BCs appear to be more frequent in dyads sharing no previous familiarity. This may be related to social conventions of signaling active listenership in these contexts [cf. 7].

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Negotiation of mutual understanding in signed conversations: the case of backchanneling in LSFb

Alysson Lepout

LSFB-Lab, NaLTT, University of Namur

alysson.lepout@unamur.be

The roots of language lie in face-to-face conversation. While the question of how people successfully build mutual understanding has been widely examined in spoken languages (Bavelas et al., 2002), some issues are still uncharted territory, especially in relation to signed languages (SLs). For instance, how deaf signers build and maintain mutual understanding in SLs or the extent to which grounding mechanisms are contingent upon the contextual contingencies of talk-in-interaction (Dideriksen et al., 2019) in signed discourse are poorly understood. The current study aims to fill these gaps by examining how deaf signers from LSFb (French Belgian SL) coordinate their interaction with success through backchannels (BCs), a key conversational grounding mechanism. In total, about 1 hour of conversation involving 5 dyads from the LSFb Corpus (Meurant, 2015) were analyzed in ELAN. BCs were first identified capitalizing on previous protocols (Allwood et al., 2007; Mesch, 2016) for their forms (e.g., manual/non-manual), types (generic/specific), and functions (e.g., continuers). Simultaneity and clustering of BCs are also examined for potential interrelations. In particular, the following research questions are addressed: (i) What kinds of BCs do LSFb signers produce in free vs. task oriented conversation? (ii) Are generic BCs significantly more frequent in free conversation than specific ones? (iii) Do certain clusters of BCs combine with each other? Preliminary findings suggest that (1) manual and non-manual BCs are most often combined rather than used in isolation, (2) different types of BCs (generic/specific) carry distinctive functions, and (3) inter-individual variation plays a substantial part in the production of BCs in the sampled LSFb data. Ultimately, this study provides key insights into the ways signers build and maintain mutual understanding, thereby contributing to a more dynamic and semiotically diverse view of language (Ferrara and Hodge, 2018).

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Testing perceptions of multimodal cues in overlapping speech

Matthew Hunt¹ & Pamela Perniss²

¹University of Southampton, ²University of Cologne
m.c.hunt@soton.ac.uk, ppermiss@uni-koeln.de

Overlapping speech is a common occurrence in spoken conversation, serving several communicative functions for speakers including the signalling of turn-competitiveness, collaborative completion, and requests for more information (Tannen, 1983). Recent experimental work by Hilton (2016) suggests that the social perception of overlapping speech depends on a range of factors, including the duration and prosodic intensity of the overlap, and the pragmatic relations between speaking turns. Such factors affect how speakers are perceived with respect to competitiveness, cooperativeness, and overall likeability; this is further modulated by the listener's own conversational style.

Building on this work, we look to analyse the role of multimodal cues in the perception of overlapping speech. We examine the role of timing and synchronisation of overlapping speech with two multimodal cues, namely eye-gaze (Kendrick & Holler, 2017) and co-speech gestures held across turn units (Sikveland & Ogden, 2012). It is predicted that both averted eye-gaze and the holding of a representational gesture across turns will give a speaker greater license to overlap with their interlocutor due to the additional pragmatic information conveyed.

To test this prediction, participants will see a series of video clips depicting a short 12-second dialogue. For each cue type, there are 8 different conditions varied by the presence of overlap in the speech, the use of a multimodal cue (eye gaze vs no eye gaze; gesture held vs gesture dropped), and the stance taken during the overlap (agreeing vs disagreeing). Using a between-subjects design, each participant will watch exactly one dialogue before answering a series of questions about the speakers and their relationship. Additionally, background information on participations pertaining to their conversational style and tendency towards traits associated with autism spectrum disorder will be taken, in addition to basic demographic information. This will allow us to measure how the effects of overlapping speech on perception of speakers is modulated by multimodal cues and varies across different populations of listeners.

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A first cross-linguistic foray into children's feedback signals

Alice Mitchell, Anastasia Bauer & Birgit Hellwig

Universität zu Köln

alice.mitchell@uni-koeln.de, anastasia.bauer@uni-koeln.de,

bhellwig@uni-koeln.de

Feedback occupies a central position in the field of language acquisition, where it is understood to facilitate language learning. One strand of literature has focused on how adult language users, particularly mothers, orient to and “correct” problems in the speech of children (Clark 2020). But feedback signals have many other functions. Adult listeners are understood to be active participants in conversation who co-construct talk through their response tokens (Gardner 2001). How children learn to engage in feedback-giving practices, thereby signalling their active participation, is an open question for developmental pragmatics.

As an inroad into this topic, this paper investigates children's use of multimodal feedback signals in video corpora representing three very different languages and lingua-cultures: Datooga (Tanzania); Qaqet (Papua New Guinea); and English (UK, CHILDES talkbank). We know from studies of adult language that feedback signalling comprehension might come in the form of verbal continuers (‘mm’), agreement tokens (‘yes’), nods, gestures, eye gaze, body posture, facial expression, laughter, or even blinks (Hömke et al 2017), while feedback that signals trouble can include frowns, head movements, gaze shifts, as well as verbal repair initiators (see Kendrick 2015 for English). Which of these formats do children make use of, and for what purposes? And how do they compare to nonspeaking adult addressees in interaction?

Across our sample, we observe that young children have a relatively high tolerance for non-progressivity and break-downs in communication. Young children may make fewer explicit attempts to achieve shared understanding or to indicate that they are monitoring their interlocutor's speech. Nevertheless, children in all the corpora do provide feedback: they help with word searches, use minimal repair initiators as well as longer repair formats, they employ continuers, and they sometimes orient to other children's non-target-like forms, thus providing metalinguistic feedback. Based on our preliminary survey, we identify aspects of children's feedback signals to focus on in future work.

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**Participants' multimodal engagement and backchanneling
in multiparty interaction during dinners in French speaking and sign-
ing families**

Claire Danet¹, Loulou Kosmala² Stéphanie Caët³ & Aliyah Morgenstern⁴

¹CNRS-LISN, ²Université Paris Nanterre, ³Université de Lille,

⁴Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

claire.danet@gmail.com, l.kosmala@parisnanterre.fr,

stephanie.caet@univ-lille.fr, aliyah.morgenstern@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr

The present work focuses on how signers and speakers demonstrate forms of engagement through visible cues (gaze, body orientation, postures, suspension of actions) with or without providing visual or vocal feedback in multi-party conversations. The dinners involve complex participation frameworks (Goffman, 1981, Goodwin, 1981) and coordination of activities (Haddington et al., 2014). Analyses are carried out on the DinLang Corpus (Morgenstern et al., 2021) which includes video recordings of French middle-class speaking and signing families during dinner at home.

The specificity of family dinners is that participants are constantly alternating between *linguaging* (Linell, 2009) and eating, which requires a finely tuned orchestration of their bodies. How do participants thus manage to signal their *engagement* while managing these different activities simultaneously? We present multimodal analyses of both signers and speakers from 4 signing families and 4 speaking families (two dinners per family) with children between 3 and 12 years old. Three major trends emerge: participants may display signs of active participation without providing backchanneling while suspending their current activity, or they may do both simultaneously; in other cases, however, participants may withdraw from the current participation arrangement by focusing on a single activity. By observing the subtle coordination of bodies in those complex multiparty interactions, this study illustrates the subtle impact that addresses' and overhearers' engagement and backchanneling have on complex participation frameworks and on interactive dynamics, as participants constantly navigate between different activities and modalities.

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**Adult's feedback to children's multimodal productions:
scaffolding the primacy of spoken language**

Pauline Beaupoil-Hourdel¹ & Aliyah Morgenstern²

¹Sorbonne University, ²Sorbonne Nouvelle University

pauline.beaupoil-hourdel@sorbonne-universite.fr,

aliyah.morgenstern@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr

As children under two years old are not yet fluent users of spoken language, other more iconic, embodied and situated semiotic means are likely to be meaningful to adults when interacting with them. Adults often reformulate multimodal cues (like gaze, facial expressions, gestures and mundane actions) into spoken forms and thus shape them into patterns that are compatible with the adult language system. Adult feedback to children's multimodal productions thus has a regulatory function and socializes children to the specific features of their cultural community's language. As children progressively master language, priority is given to verbal resources as adults provide spoken feedback that function as repairs (Forrester, 2008).

Drawing on an ethnographic study of longitudinal adult-child interactions filmed at home, we analyze how adults *highlight* (Goodwin 2018) their transmission of the spoken code in their interpretations and reformulations of their children's actions and gestures. Through detailed analyses of excerpts of our data, this study illustrates how adults foreground speech as the primary vehicle to *language* their experience. In the process, children learn to inhibit their capacity for rich syncretic embodied communication but they also learn to adapt to adults and appropriate the forms of expression specific to their surrounding cultural community.

Our analyses illustrate the role of the adult feedback and of child addressed speech. The adults are "doing being ordinary" scaffolding adults (Sacks 1992, Ochs & Kremer-Sadlik, 2021) by providing spoken recasts of the children's behaviors. By actively responding to their children, by co-constructing meaning with them, the adults are empowering and positioning them as a co-speaker. However, the adults continually resort to sedimented practices in which speech is the primary symbolic interactive modality and thus scaffold their children as apprentice-speakers into becoming thriving members of their socio-cultural and linguistic community.

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Strategies for targeting prior turns: A cross-linguistic corpus study

Sonja Gipper, Martin Becker, Tobias-Alexander Herrmann & Nikolaus P. Himmelmann

Universität zu Köln

sonja.gipper@uni-koeln.de, martin.becker1@uni-koeln.de,
t.herrmann@uni-koeln.de, n.himmelmann@uni-koeln.de

In conversation, interactants constantly refer back to their own and the interlocutors' utterances. Consequently, speakers of all languages must have available linguistic strategies to target (parts of) a preceding turn. In this paper, we explore how speakers of three syntactically diverse languages accomplish this task: Standard German, peninsular Spanish, and Yurakaré (isolate, Bolivia). As a test case, we investigate the interactional environment of verbal non-minimal feedback which offers a somewhat controlled conversational setting for such an endeavor, as by definition feedback engages with some prior talk by the interlocutor (e.g. Stubbe 1998). Moreover, it is frequently met by a response or continuation that potentially manifests how the feedback was understood (Tolins & Fox Tree 2014), which means that we have some measure of success of the feedback signal achieving the intended reference.

On the basis of conversational corpora (unpublished; Torreira & Ernestus 2012; van Gijn et al. 2011), we demonstrate that all three languages deploy a range of strategies for establishing reference to a preceding utterance in feedback position: anaphoric expressions, discourse markers (see also Portolés 2001), full and partial repetition, co-completions, fragmentary sentences, and (often elliptical) information questions. However, languages differ as to the syntactic manifestation of these formats and the extent to which they make use of them (see Clancy et al. 1996; Stubbe 1998, *inter alia*). Our interest in this paper pertains to the question whether there is a correlation between feedback practices and morphosyntactic properties of the expressions used to carry them out.

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BACK: A postural gesture of surprise

Naomi Francis

Leibniz-Zentrum Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft

francis@leibniz-zas.de

This talk describes the distribution of the BACK gesture, which consists of a movement of the head and optionally the upper body away from one's addressee, and argues that this gesture should be analyzed as a surprise marker. That BACK encodes surprise can be seen from its incompatibility with continuations conveying a lack of surprise, as shown in (1).

- (1) A: I'm a Capricorn.
B: ..._{BACK} #Of course./#I'm not surprised that you said that.

I show that BACK can target both at-issue and not-at-issue content of a preceding linguistic update to the context. BACK can also comment on the form of an utterance, on the fact that the utterance was made, or even a non-linguistic event in the discourse context as in (2).

- (2) A: *takes off shoes and puts them on hands*
B: ..._{BACK}

This behaviour can be captured by assigning this gesture a use-conditional meaning (cf. Gutzmann 2015) encoding that the author of a BACK utterance is surprised by a salient preceding update. This correctly predicts that BACK is infelicitous out-of-the-blue.

Most formal semantic work on gestures (e.g., Ebert & Ebert 2014, Schlenker 2018) has focused on manual and facial gestures; the present study expands this empirical landscape to include a postural gesture. Among mirative markers, BACK is special in that it does not comment on spoken material that it accompanies (cf., e.g., Rett 2021, Esipova 2019) in that it does not comment on spoken material that it accompanies, but instead always evaluates a preceding update. In this respect, BACK is a feedback gesture par excellence. Interestingly, BACK is felt to be most natural when it is produced with an emotive/evaluative facial expression (including but not limited to surprised, disgusted, skeptical, and impressed); it is odd when produced with a neutral facial expression. The interaction of BACK and co-occurring facial expressions thus provides a useful testing ground for exploring the integration of gestural meanings within the grammar.

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A comparative account for backchannels in two settings, dyad and multi-person conversations in Swedish Sign Language

Pia Simper-Allen & Johanna Mesch

Stockholm University

pia@ling.su.se, johanna.mesch@ling.su.se

The presentation addresses backchannel signals in two different conversation settings, dyads and multi-person conversation in Swedish Sign Language. Turn-taking patterns in signed conversations have been widely studied, mostly in dyads, e.g. Coates & Sutton-Spence (2001). Backchannel signals constitute both manual and non-manual signals, e.g. nodding, head-shaking, smiling, change of posture, use of facial expressions and full signs, e.g. JA ('yes') and PRECIS ('exactly') (Baker 1977, Mesch 2016, Ferrara 2020). The highlight of the presentation is the comparison of types of non-manual and manual backchannel signals in the two settings and a closer look at the quality of the types of backchannel signals, as some signals of one type occur in both of the settings analyzed in this study. Besides, in a multi-person conversation, the participants produced much fewer non-manual backchannel signals, and fewer different types of manual backchannel signals to the interlocutors than in a dyad. Other findings regarding manual backchannel signals are that in multi-person conversations are e.g. articulated larger and with a further distance from the signer's body in signing space than in a dyad conversation, e.g. JA ('yes'), RIGHT/AGREE ('agree'), and POINT. Also, the interlocutor's upper body leans more forward and/or has larger body movements in laughter. The non-manual backchannel signals in multi-person conversation are also fewer than in a dyad conversation; fewer head nods and mouth movements. When a dyad conversation occurs in a multi-person conversation, the backchannel signals remain more than those seen in a dyad conversation. The major issue in these differences is due to the restrictions of the field of vision when many participants are involved in a multi-person conversation.

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“Whoa! Say that again!?”: a case study of multimodal feedback in two tandem learning dyads

Loulou Kosmala¹, Céline Horgues² & Sylwia Scheuer²

¹Université Paris Nanterre, ²Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

l.kosmala@parisnanterre.fr, celine.horgues@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr,

sylwia.scheuer-samson@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr

The present case study focuses on tandem conversations, i.e., non-formal exchanges between native speakers (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNS) to study corrective feedback (CF i.e. an indicative of what is not a correct form in the target language, Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Gass, 2003) and feedback signals. Tandem conversations are a context where authentic miscommunication issues (Varonis & Glass, 1985) may arise between tandem partners, and where feedback signals may be key in anticipating, signaling and resolving communication issues between them. Feedback signals are essential cues to signal active listening and understanding, marked by multimodal cues (Bertrand et al., 2007) both vocal and visual.

Our analyses are conducted on the SITAF corpus (Horgues & Scheuer, 2015) which contains video recordings of face-to-face interactions between undergraduate students (NSs of French and of English) who were recorded while performing collaborative reading and semi-spontaneous conversation tasks. The present work focuses on two pairs from this corpus in order to study the individual and collaborative multimodal strategies developed by the two tandem partners, with a focus on the role of feedback signals as a part of miscommunication management but also more didactic, corrective feedback.

Analyses reveal preliminary trends in the use of multimodal feedback within corrective feedback and miscommunication sequences involving frowns, shifts in body posture, as well as smiles and head nods. Our case study points to the constructive use of feedback cues by NSs for successfully signaling and collaboratively resolving miscommunication, but also for providing corrective feedback to their NNS partner, which are both essential elements in L2 acquisition.

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The resilient properties of interaction: evidence for the interaction engine from sign language and homesign

Connie de Vos

Tilburg University

c.l.g.devos@tilburguniversity.edu

Everyday conversation forms the core ecological niche for new languages to emerge. Levinson (2006) suggests that humans are born with a special interactive ability that precedes language and that makes language possible. In line with this “interaction engine” hypothesis, we observe similarities in the conversational infrastructure for everyday social interaction across languages and modalities (Stivers et al. 2009; de Vos et al. 2015; Dingemanse & Enfield 2015), but to what extent are these present from the early stages of language communities onwards?

Homesigners are deaf individuals who have grown up in the absence of conventional language input whether spoken or signed. The homesign systems they co-create with their hearing relatives and friends form a natural testcase to further understand the human endowment for linguistic communication. Prior work on homesign systems has identified several ways in which homesign may exhibit language-like characteristics, but the pragmatic competence that supports mutual understanding in these interactions has not been studied until recently.

I present data from the newly created Balinese homesign corpus, capturing spontaneous interactions between Balinese homesigners and their regular communication partners. Our conversation analyses identify several robust features of these interactions including the ability to produce timely and contingent responses, to signal mutual understanding, and to anticipate and resolve communicative trouble when it arises (Safar & de Vos 2022). An important question moving forward will be to determine to what extent pragmatic competence is shaped by social experience, and conversely, how the emergence of new sign languages is supported by the social interactions homesigners engage in.

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The Functions of Mirroring in Linguistic Feedback: a Case-study of Polish Sign Language

Anna Kuder¹ & Joanna Wójcicka²

¹Universität zu Köln, ²University of Warsaw

akuder@uni-koeln.de, j.filipczak@uw.edu.pl

The term ‘mirroring’ refers to the behavior in which one member of the face-to-face interaction imitates (matches) gestures, speech patterns, or attitude of another (eg. Bavelas et al., 1986). Based on the material coming from the Polish Sign Language (PJM) Corpus (Kuder et al., 2022) we want to answer the following research questions: (1) How is mirroring realized in PJM? (2) What is the role of mirroring in natural signed communication?

For the purposes of the study we choose a sample from the PJM Corpus that contains 12 texts (6 retellings and 6 dialogues) coming from 7 dyads. The sample lasts for 235 minutes and contains 12.296 sign tokens. In this dataset we distinguish all cases of mirroring, which we divide into those realised manually and non-manually. In the second annotation round, the functions of all identified cases are interpreted. Those functions include: sentiment matching; matching comments; content matching and prosody matching.

The obtained results suggest that the most common function of the non-manual mirroring in PJM is matching the emotional load of the utterance, not the topic of the conversation. Prosody (tempo and rhythm) of the signing can be mirrored by rhythmically nodding (or shaking) one’s head. The content of the utterance can be mirrored not only manually, but also non-manually (eg. puffing one’s cheeks can match an utterance about a large and round object). Mirroring used in sign language discourse has one unique feature that stems from its modality: mouthing can be used to mirror the manual sign used by the other signer.

All identified cases of copying manual lexical signs originally produced by the interlocutor serve two main aims. On the one hand they are used for the purpose of mirroring, but can also be used for making paraphrases of what was signed (a phenomenon known as reflecting).

We conclude that feedback in PJM is broader than mere backchannelling and that behavioral matching is a modality-independent phenomenon allowing the conversation participants to build rapport and togetherness.

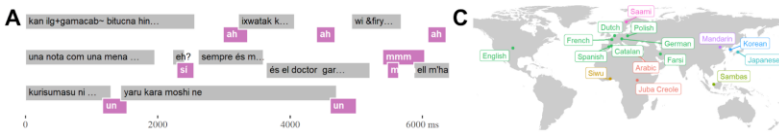
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**From sequence to form and function:
Acoustic and multimodal variation in feedback**

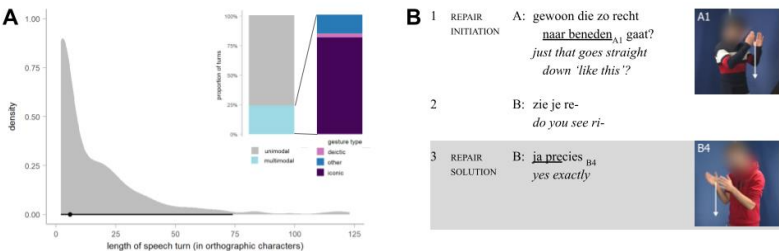
Andreas Liesenfeld¹, Marlou Rasenberg^{1,2} & Mark Dingemans¹
¹*Centre for Language Studies, Radboud University, Nijmegen,*
²*Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, Nijmegen*
 andreas.liesenfeld@ru.nl, Marlou.Rasenberg@mpi.nl,
 mark.dingemans@ru.nl

Studying response tokens both at scale and in depth sets the empirical foundations of investigating how people use these interactional tools to coordinate collaboration, accomplish joint action, and scaffold complex language. We discuss two complementary approaches to better understand form and function of these ubiquitous elements in interaction: 1) a maximally scalable method to investigate acoustic variation across a dataset of around 500 hours of social interaction across a diverse set of languages (Figure 1A), and 2) an in-depth analysis of multimodal variation, investigating how response tokens can be used with different gestures in repair solutions. Both approaches explore different dimensions of variation.

Acoustic variation: Across 16 languages (Figure 1C), we find that continuers make a minimal nasal as well as at least one other response token format available — but how do participants exploit such differences in acoustic form interactionally?



Multimodal variation: We zoom in on responses to so-called ‘restricted offers’ (i.e., repair initiations such as “You mean X?”), and find that iconic gestures can make the meanings of response tokens more precise.



Both case studies start out from a well-defined sequential environment (continuers and repair solutions) which enables a careful exploration of variation in form and function of response tokens, which helps to broaden and deepen what we know about feedback.