Embodied participation: What multimodal analysis can tell us about interpreter-mediated encounters in pedagogical settings

Elena Davitti [a,*], Sergio Pasquandrea [b]

[a] Centre for Translation Studies, School of English and Languages, University of Surrey, United Kingdom
[b] Independent Researcher, Italy

Available online 9 August 2016

Abstract

In the last two decades, Dialogue Interpreting (DI) has been studied extensively through the lenses of discourse analysis and conversation analysis. As a result, DI has been recognised as an interactional communicative event, in which all the participants jointly and actively collaborate. Nevertheless, most of these studies focused merely on the verbal level of interaction, whereas its multimodal dimension has not received much attention so far, and the literature on this subject is still scarce and dispersed. By analysing and comparing two sequences, taken from a corpus of face-to-face interpreter-mediated encounters in pedagogical settings, this study aims at showing how multimodal analysis can contribute to a deeper understanding of the interactional dynamics of DI. In particular, the paper sheds light on how participants employ multimodal resources (gaze, gesture, body position, proxemics, object manipulation) to co-construct different participation frameworks throughout the encounters, and how the "ecology of action" (i.e., the relationships between the participants and the surrounding environment) influences the development of interaction.
© 2016 Published by Elsevier B.V.

1. Introduction and focus of the paper

Over the last few decades, the role of embodiment in human communication has been increasingly scrutinised, within a wide range of settings (see, among many others, Deppermann, 2013; Goodwin, 2000a,b; Hazel et al., 2014a; Kendon, 2004; Mondada, 2014; Mondada, 2014; Scollon and Scollon, 2004; Stivers and Sidnell, 2005; Streeck et al., 2011; Nevile et al., 2014a). Despite the different conceptual and methodological tools adopted (see section 3), it has become clear that the production of socially shared meaning needs to be situated within a multi-layered context, including not only human interactants and their verbal exchanges, but also the physical environment in which they operate and the wide range of bodily resources they use in order to communicate. In other words, "human interaction *is* fundamentally embodied, and as such any research into human social interaction is research into embodied interaction" (Hazel et al., 2014b:3, italics in the original). As a consequence, the verbal side of interaction has been increasingly integrated with "concurrently relevant

semiotic fields'' (Goodwin, 2000a:1499) such as gaze, gesture, posture, body and space orientation, and object manipulation, in an attempt to achieve a holistic model, capable of accounting for the complexity of naturally-occurring communicative events.

Building on these premises, the present paper explores the impact of embodied semiotic resources (especially gaze, object manipulation and body posture/orientation) on participation during interpreter-mediated interaction (IMI). In particular, the paper contributes to this line of enquiry through a detailed single-case analysis (Schegloff, 1987; Mondada, 2012a) consisting of two sequences from a corpus of video-recorded face-to-face encounters in Italian and English pedagogical settings (parent–teacher meeting, henceforth PTMs). These have been selected on the basis of the fact that the same specific activity (i.e. reading and signing teachers' reports) is performed in both sequences. This activity is prototypical of the type of communicative event analysed, and it involves the manipulation of an artefact (i.e. the school report). The paper describes how the different 'multimodal formatting' of the activity, i.e. the multimodal resources mobilised throughout its development in each sequence, generate different participation frameworks (Goffman, 1981), and entail changes of the interactional space (Mondada, 2009) as well as reconfigurations of participants' engagement that would escape a purely verbal analysis.

Our aim is to investigate participation as a situated, temporally unfolding process, embedded in its physical environment, actively negotiated and reconfigured by participants through embodied actions. Building on a micro-analytical approach largely based on Multimodal Conversation Analysis (Deppermann, 2013; Hazel et al., 2014a), we will show how participation is the result of the concerted efforts of *all* parties-at-talk to articulate objects, gestures, gaze, body posture and talk within collaborative activities in context. The main research questions are: (a) How is participation negotiated and displayed multimodally in IMI?; (b) What interactional practices do participants (both interpreters and primary parties) implement in order to manage and coordinate participation?; (c) How do participants display, make recognisable and communicate to others their engagement/disengagement through their talk and embodied conduct?; (d) In particular, what is the role of objects (namely, written artefacts) in the negotiation of participation during the interaction?

2. Embodied actions and participation

Participation and embodiment have been treated extensively in the existing literature on monolingual interaction, both separately and in connection with each other. In order to set the background for the analysis, the following sections will provide an overview of how participation has been described as a situated achievement (section 2.1), how it has been conceptualised and analysed within IMI, particularly in relation to multimodal semiotic resources (section 2.2), and finally, how the *ecology of objects* (i.e. the peculiar positioning of objects and other physical resources within the environment, in relation to the interactants; see Gibson, 1979; Hindmarsh and Heath, 2003; Nevile et al., 2014b) exerts an influence on the organisation of social interaction, which is the specific focus of this article (section 2.3).

2.1. Participation as a situated achievement

Participating in a conversation is one of the most common experiences in everyday social life. Yet, research has shown that it requires subtle, but complex, coordination among the participants, who need to adjust to and actively negotiate constantly shifting participation frameworks (Goffman, 1981). Such a dynamic conceptualisation of participation opens up the possibility for different encounters to entail different participation frameworks, depending on their goals, participants and settings. Similarly, a single encounter can switch through different participation formats, depending on its local contingencies. Participation is therefore a locally negotiated and co-constructed achievement, which can be shaped in a variety of ways (cf. Goodwin and Goodwin, 2004), employing a wide range of multimodal resources. These resources play a crucial role in defining the different participation frameworks which can take place in a conversation, and in negotiating the shifts from one framework to another. For example, displays of engagement and recipiency can be conveyed through gaze (see Goodwin, 1980; Heath, 1982; Rossano, 2012) and body position (Schegloff, 1998); mutual orientation can be achieved through gesture (Goodwin, 1986; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1986) or through an interplay of gaze, gesture and posture (Mondada, 2009, 2012a); turn-taking mechanisms are influenced by the multimodal behaviour of the interactants (Mondada, 2007). More broadly, participating in a social interaction requires the interplay of different semiotic modalities (see Goodwin, 2007; Kendon, 1967, 1990; Heath, 1986; Kidwell and Zimmerman, 2007).

These interactional phenomena have received little consideration in the literature on IMI, where priority has been given to the vocal-aural modality over the visuospatial one (Enfield, 2005) for the creation of interactional meaning. Yet, the inherently multiparty, multilingual and socio-culturally situated nature of IMI requires the mobilisation of multimodal resources on the part of all participants, interpreter included, to manage and negotiate complex participation dynamics.