When gaze-selected next speakers do not take the turn

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A B S T R A C T

This paper discusses two phenomena of gaze-based micro-interaction in turn-taking. The two patterns illustrate the relevance of gaze for turn-taking in triadic interactions, as they show how speakers can allocate turns by their gaze. Based on the finding that a speaker can select the next speaker by gazing at her at the end of a turn (cf. Auer, 2017), the study shows how these *gaze-selected next speakers* can avoid taking the offered turn. I argue that the two different gaze patterns presented here have different interactional functions: a speaker who is gaze-selected by the previous speaker can either pass on the turn to a third participant by gazing at her, or she can reject the offered turn by 'gazing away' and dissolving the mutual gaze, and thus opening up the conversational floor for the other participant to self-select. The results show that all three participants orient themselves towards gaze in the organization of turn-taking, and that gaze as a turn-allocation technique serves to achieve a turn-transition between speakers.

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1. Introduction: gaze and turn-taking

In this paper, I will demonstrate how gaze-selected next speakers show that they have been selected and how participants in triadic conversations orient towards each other's gaze-behaviour in turn-taking. I will do so by presenting two interactional gaze-patterns that show how turns can be allocated in gaze-based micro-interactions and how gaze-selected next speakers can avoid their selection.

Early studies by Kendon (1967) and Goodwin (e.g. 1980, 1981) already show the relevance of gaze for turn-taking. During the last years, more and more conversation analytic research on the topic has become interested in the visual aspects of turn-taking (cf. e. g. Novick et al., 1996; Lerner, 2003; Stivers and Rossano, 2010; Rossano, 2012; Streeck, 2014; Holler and Kendrick, 2015; Auer, 2017; Zima, 2018).[1]

From current research it becomes increasingly obvious that speaker-gaze can elicit response from a recipient in other sequential contexts than questions (cf. e.g. Stivers and Rossano, 2010; also Kendon, 1967; Bavelas et al., 2002). Kendon (1967) has already established the power of speaker-gaze to elicit response in his seminal work:

In looking up, which we have seen that [the speaker] does briefly at phrase endings, and for a longer time at the ends of his utterances, he can at once check on how his interlocutor is responding to what he is saying, and signal to him that he is looking for some response from him. And for his interlocutor, these intermittent glances serve as signals to him, as to when [the current speaker] wants a response from him (Kendon, 1967: 42).

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[1] For an overview of previous research on gaze in interaction see Rossano (2012).

However, Kendon "only deals with the general dynamics of turn-taking" (Rossano, 2012: 129), while Rossano (2012) states that gaze is organized primarily in relation to sequences rather than turns. When analysing dialogues he found that mutual gaze-withdrawal at the end of sequences can lead to closure, while maintaining eye contact elicits sequence expansion (cf. Rossano, 2012: Chapter 4). Furthermore, by analysing Italian Question-and-Answer sequences, Rossano illustrates the importance of speaker-gaze for a response and, additionally, the importance of recipient-gaze: "if the speaker is looking at the recipient, the recipient is more likely to respond to a FPP, but if the recipient is looking at the speaker, the recipient is more likely to respond promptly, without delays." (Rossano, 2012: 153). Rossano also observes that "by looking at the recipient [the speakers] can exert additional pressure and display that a response would be expected by the end of the turn." (Rossano, 2012: 156).

Stivers and Rossano (2010) investigate the resources used by the speaker during assessments to prompt a response by a recipient. In line with Rossano's findings in Question-and-Answer sequences, they find that speaker-gaze directed at the recipient is one of four *turn design features* that elicit a follow-up assessment or another form of reply. Assessments that are not responded to by the recipient are usually produced without the speaker gazing at the recipient. Lerner (2003) explains how directing one's gaze to a specific participant during multi-party conversations can be a method of addressing a particular recipient: "Speakers can look to a recipient to indicate whom they are addressing and thereupon discern whether or not that participant recognizes that she is being addressed" (2003: 180−81). Furthermore, the work of Auer (2017) lays the foundation for treating speaker-gaze as a *next speaker selection*-cue in triadic conversations. He proposes a terminally ordered difference between addressing recipients through gaze throughout the turn and selecting a next speaker through gaze at the end of the turn. During turns, speakers alternatingly gaze at the two co-participants, addressing them simultaneously (although only looking at one of them, cf. Auer, 2017: 12), while at the close of the speaker's turn, "participants interpret last speaker's gaze as an offer or proposal, and sometimes even as an appeal to take the turn" (Auer, 2017: 19).

Between *self-selection* and *current speaker selects next*, speaker-gaze as a turn-allocation-technique can hardly be categorized into the traditional definition of the concept originally proposed by Sacks et al. (1974). The 'Turn-Taking-Machinery' as described in their classical paper still remains the fundamental concept for analysing the success or failure of turn-taking. However, non-verbal aspects of turn-taking are only mentioned marginally in this paper, whereas verbal cues and routine ethno-methods are understood as the central components of turn-taking. Two dichotomous categories for the organization of turn-taking are established: *self-selection* and *current speaker selects next*. The obligatory components of *current speaker selects next* comprise a first pair part as well as some form of addressing.

That class of units also includes such sequences as "greeting−greeting", "invitation-acceptance/decline" etc. […] an important general technique whereby current speaker selects next − perhaps the central one − involves the affiliation of an address term (or some other device for achieving "addressing", e.g. gaze direction) to a first pair-part. (1974: 716f.).

All actions lacking the use of a *current speaker selects next* technique are generally treated as *self-selection* by the following speaker when turn-taking occurs. In conversations with more than two speakers, "the basic technique for self-selection is 'starting first'" (Sacks et al., 1974: 32).

However, current speaker's gaze at the end of her turn establishes the need for a second sequential step, without the speaker producing − for example − address terms. Speaker-gaze as a turn-allocation-technique functions independently of the on-going action, as it can be used at all times (i.e. in all actions and formats, not only in adjacency pairs like Question-Answer Sequences as in the 'classical' sense of *current speaker selects next*). Based on these considerations on gaze and turn-taking, I will use the terms *gaze-selected turn-taking* and *not-gaze-selected turn-taking* as these concepts include fine-grained aspects of turn-taking in triadic face-to-face-interactions.

Speakers seem to avert their gazes from co-participants after finishing a turn, either in cases where they do not select a specific recipient as the next speaker or, more frequently, when their turn is not an initiating one and the sequence comes to a close. This is consistent with Rossano's (2012) findings from dyadic conversations. In triadic interactions speaker-gaze selects the next speaker throughout sequences, while gaze aversion by all speakers (or at least those involved in the current sequence) at the end of a non-projecting turn usually co-occurs with sequence closing. Therefore my analysis concentrates on turns that are sequence-initiating and make relevant a response by another speaker. This can be questions, assessments, jokes or humorous or witty remarks.

After describing the data and methods used for the analysis I will briefly illustrate a successful turn-transition with speaker-gaze as the main next speaker selection-cue (cf. Section 3). Sections 4 and 5 will analyse how gaze-selected speakers show that they are selected and how they deal with this selection when they do not want to take over. I will close with a discussion of the importance of speaker-gaze for turn-taking in Section 6.

2. Data and method

The basis for this study comprises eight *Eye-Tracking* recordings of German informal triadic conversations, between 45 and 60 min in length. In these the speakers mainly converse freely, on no particular topic. The participants sat at a round table, arranged in a triangle (cf. Fig. 1). The surrounding environment was designed to be relatively stimulus-free (except for drinks/coffee). Therefore the speakers' gaze-behaviour was 'free' for interactional functions.

All three participants wore mobile SMI *Eye-Tracking* glasses, enabling precise tracking of their gaze behaviour. Compared to the analysis of video recordings from external perspectives only, *Eye-Tracking* has the advantage of measuring the focus of attention (not only the approximate head and gaze direction) systematically and with a high