

Matching gestures – Teachers’ repetitions of students’ gestures in second language learning classrooms



Ali Reza Majlesi*

Department of Culture and Communication, Linköping University, Sweden

Received 7 August 2014; received in revised form 4 November 2014; accepted 20 November 2014

Abstract

This study is about teachers’ responsive matching gestures in Swedish as a second language classrooms. Matching gestures are those gestures that are similar, if not identical, to those in the prior turns-at-talk. An ethnomethodological/conversation analytic framework is adopted for examining the phenomenon in different sequence types such as correction, reformulation and explanation sequences. The multimodal analysis of the excerpts that are extracted from the video recordings of teacher–student conversations shows that matching gestures in language learning situations have a double function. First, they are used as tying devices to connect teachers’ actions to students’ prior actions, and are resources for the display of interactive co-engagements and thus maintaining and sustaining intersubjectivity. Second, matching gestures are used as teaching devices creating teachable moments and learning opportunities. Teachers employ matching gestures along with some verbal affiliates, when matching gestures are the crucial parts of the teachers’ contributions foregrounding the verbal forms as substitutes or remedial proposal for (enhancing) the students’ prior actions. That is, matching gestures are used in second language learning situations for proffering learnables through highlighting an alternative way of telling and exhibiting something in that language.

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Keywords: Conversation analysis; Ethnomethodology; Multimodal interaction analysis; Matching gestures; Second language learning

1. Introduction

This study is about the use of matching gestures in teachers’ responses to the students’ embodied actions both for communicative and pedagogical purposes. In second language learning classes, the students may use gestures in the replacement of missing linguistic expressions, or for the display of what is being said in the second language (an-exhibition-for-clarification). The teachers in their timely responses, through matching gestures, may tune their students’ prior gestures into pedagogical opportunities while they proffer an enhancement of, or a substitution for, the student’s verbal productions. From an interactional perspective, this is not much discussed in research on second language teaching and learning.

Research on instruction has taken an interest in the use of gestures and other bodily actions in instructors’ turns that are followed by their students’ bodily actions (see e.g. Nishizaka, 2006; Arnold, 2012; Lindwall and Ekström, 2012; cf. Keevallik, 2010). Studies have also investigated how teachers may repeat the students’ prior gestures when correcting them (e.g. in Keevallik; and in Lindwall and Ekström). These studies are primarily concerned with manual skills (e.g. how to repair a bike in Arnold; how to stitch a crochet in Lindwall and Ekström) or the exchange of other embodied skills (e.g. dance in Keevallik; playing music in Nishizaka, 2006; Szczepek Reed et al., 2013) as to the leading-following nature of instructional

* Tel.: +46 13 281000.

E-mail address: ali.reza.majlesi@liu.se.

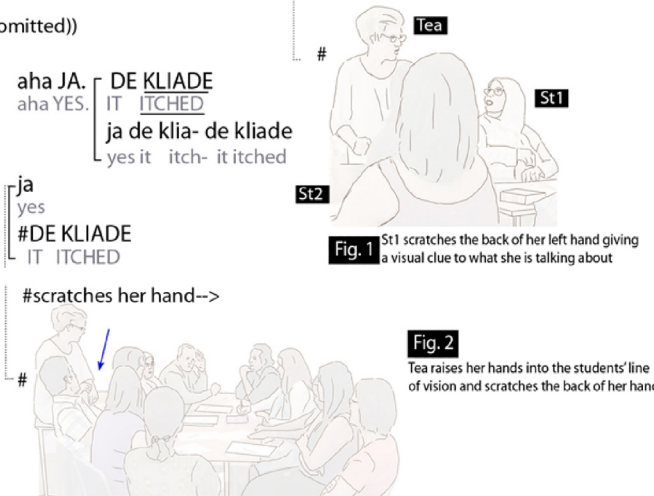
sequences (cf. Weeks, 1996). This study, however, focuses on second language learning situations in regard to the emergence of opportunities for learning, and ‘teachable moments’ (Alibali et al., 1997). Unlike previous studies, the gestures studied here are not just disambiguated by talk (cf. Weeks, 1996; Arnold, 2012:278; Lindwall and Ekström, 2012). Rather, they are part of disambiguating actions in the ongoing talk that results in offering alternative ways of telling in the second language. From a data corpus of Swedish as a second language classes, I will present some examples to demonstrate the use of teachers’ responsive matching gestures in different interactional sequence types as part of intertwined resources (e.g. prosody, body orientations, etc.) to foreground and highlight learnables (Majlesi and Broth, 2012; Szczepek Reed et al., 2013).

The phenomenon of interest can be illustrated by the following example. A student (St1) tries to tell a group of her peers, in Swedish, that she had a skin irritation in the past. When she cannot express herself in words, she uses a gesture (G1, Fig. 1), which is picked up by the teacher (MG, Fig. 2) in the subsequent turns as a resource for teaching. The interrelatedness of successive actions is not only made through the talk but also through the production of similar gestures that are made recognizable and accountable in the responsive turns. Such similarities are recognizable both in the temporal and sequential organization of responsive turns and in the details of the formation of gestures (see McNeill, 2000) i.e. in their orientations, the hand-shapes, and the directions of the hands, etc. all in relation to the ongoing talk-in-interaction.

In the transcripts, I show the first gesture with G1 and the matching gesture with MG, and if they are repeated, I will add an apostrophe for each repetition. The depiction of gestures is also visible in the drawings. The pictures are aligned with the turns at talk with dotted brackets showing where in talk-in-interaction the gestures take place (more information about the transcription conventions is given in the Appendix):

Excerpt 1. Itch: Tape Ma, D level (simplified)

Participants: Teacher (Tea), Student 1 (St1), and Student 2 (St2)

- 05 St1: a: (0.2) ja #klåade? (1.3) #klåade.
 yeah: (0.2) I scrash? (1.3) scrash.
 →G1#scratches her hand#scratches her hand
- ... ((9 lines omitted))
- 15 Tea: aha JA. DE KLIADE
 aha YES. IT ITCHED
- 16 St2: ja de kli- de kliade
 yes it itch- it itched
- 17 St1: ja
 yes
- 18 Tea: #DE KLIADE
 IT ITCHED
 →MG #scratches her hand-->
- 
- 19 St2: °kliade ja:° ((other students murmur the word *kliade*)
 °itched yes:°
- 20 Tea: de kliade JA HADe KLÅ:DA, (0.4)
 it itched I HAD [an] ITCH [irritation], (0.4)
- 21 St1: ja ha
 yes yeah

The excerpt shows how a student’s search for a word is cooperatively resolved (cf. Goodwin and Goodwin, 1986). Her display of search for a verbal form (‘itch’ in Swedish, line 5) through the talk and a gesture (G1, Fig. 1) is responded to also by the talk and a matching gesture by the teacher (MG, Fig. 2). The teacher’s action, however, includes a different orientation in the details of its production. The teacher first shows her understanding of the search in an aha-yes-prefaced turn (line 15, cf. Heritage, 1984), and offers a candidate suggestion (cf. Schegloff et al., 1977; Kurhila, 2006:154), which is produced loudly and emphatically ‘DE KLIADE’ (IT ITCHED, line 15). When the offer gets confirmed (line 17), she also exhibits a matching gesture (MG, Fig. 2) while resoundingly repeating the same linguistic expression and also looking

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