The local constitution of multimodal resources for social interaction

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This special issue brings together papers addressing topics within ''CA studies of social conduct''. By so doing, it aims to contribute to a more general trend observed in Conversation Analysis as well as in other approaches, developing various solutions to integrate within the study of social interaction the description of language, gesture, gaze and the body. In this special issue, this project is implemented by looking at various institutional contexts – which are all related to training activities or activities taking place in educational settings (such as air traffic control sessions, driving lessons, dance lessons, self-defense training and broadcast cooking courses, university study counselling meetings, and interactions with communicatively impaired individuals). The phenomena studied are diverse, although some of them relate to instructional actions (trainers' prompts in air control simulators, navigational instructions in cars, cooking instructions, dance demonstrations). The papers raise issues concerning bodily constituted TCUs (Keevallik, 2014), gesture holds at turn-final position (Groeber and Pochon-Berger, 2014), body postures such as leaning forward as a repair initiators (Rasmussen, 2014), embodied second pair parts (Arminen et al., 2014), embodied sequences initiated with linguistic forms (such as the German ''so'', Stukenbrock, 2014), object manipulations in exploring alternative registers of objects affordances (Hazel and Mortensen, 2014). Thus, the analyses offered by the papers either start from a linguistic form, an embodied practice, a turn format or a sequence, and deal with practices in which either talk co-occurs with embodied resources or embodied resources are used autonomously from talk. The issue attempts to investigate how CA methodology and terminology deals with the challenges posed by the inclusion of non vocal, non verbal, bodily cues (Hazel et al., 2014).

The issue raises several important questions that concern the conception of multimodality/embodiment/non verbality/vocality, the way in which CA deals with them, the definition of what a resource is, and the challenges raised by the detailed study of video materials. In this commentary, I first address the multiplicity of terms used in the field to refer to the complex resources participants use to build their actions (section 1) and situate them within the Conversation Analytic perspective (section 2). Second, I elaborate on the notion of 'resource' and the way in which resources are packaged in *complex multimodal Gestalts* (section 3): on the basis of video materials, I tackle some of the issues raised in this special issue, by discussing how these resources are assembled in an emergent way, responding to the contingencies of the progressivity of the action (section 3.1); how they are plastically shaped and adapted within specific ecologies of action (section 3.2); how they are alternatively chosen by the participants to build sequences of actions (section 3.3); and how they are specifically distributed within multiactivity (section 3.4).

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1. Multimodality, embodiment and non verbal conduct

The introduction to the special issue points to the fact that various terminologies co-exist to designate the phenomena at hand: multimodality, embodiment, non-verbality – and indeed most of the authors use them. All address the relation between language and talk and other resources, although they may vary in the ways in which they are approached.

Multimodality is a term that has been used in very different ways within several epistemological and disciplinary fields (such as computer sciences, logistics and transports, semiotics, and studies of interaction). While in cognate disciplines 'multimodality' might refer to ''channels'' and ''medias'', as well as material representations and signs providing and affording diverse semiotic effects – such as texts, fixed images, moving images, multimedia messages within multimodal semiotics (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001) – within CA the term has been used to refer to the various resources mobilized by participants for organizing their action – such as gesture, gaze, body postures, movements, prosody, lexis and grammar. The plurality of ''modalities'' referred to in this term treats *multi*modality as constitutive and primary; moreover it considers that these modalities are constitutively intertwined. Consequently, in the literature there are almost no references to *mono*modality – although for the practical purposes of a study scholars have sometimes focused their analytical attention on one single resource. Taking seriously the constitutive plurality of these resources has an important consequence: to consider that language is integrated within this plurality and that it is one among other resources, without any a priori hierarchy. *In situ*, participants might use these resources in a way that is selective and that prioritizes one of them.

The term *embodiment* is also used in several disciplines, with different theoretical implications (Streeck et al., 2011). For example, Andy Clark (1997) uses the term of 'embodied cognition' in order to propose an alternative agenda for cognitive sciences (''putting brain, body and world together again'' as featured in the subtitle of his book), criticizing a computational representational abstract conception of the mind, contrasted with a vision that recognizes the primacy of sensory, perceptual and motor experiences both for the mind and the brain. In CA, the reference to embodied resources tends to focus specifically on the body – as distinct from linguistic forms – covering gestures, facial expressions, gaze, head movements, body movements, postures, etc. This might raise issues such as the distinctive *vs.* integrated organization of these resources as well as the specificity of embodied practices when compared to linguistic ones – the former affording simultaneous and continuous forms of conduct that are distinct from the successive, linear and discretely segmented forms of the latter. This also raises the question of the embodied dimension of language: the mere fact that speakers breathe in and out, articulate and animate their speech shows that uttering words is an embodied phenomenon.

More radical interpretations of the notion of embodiment have been inspired by phenomenology. On the basis of the idea that the body is the vehicle for being in the world, Merleau-Ponty (1962) developed a primarily tactile – rather than linguistic or visual – epistemology around the notion of *intercorporeality* (Moratto, 2013). Interested in the role of the flesh for the construction of self and other, he uses it for a critique of the phenomenological notion of *intersubjectivity*, implicitly conceived in logocentric, idealistic and cognitive terms, as a form of intercomprehension largely mediated by language; on the contrary, intercorporeality refers to a pre-reflexive, pre-linguistic embodied engagement with the world and the other. The notion is currently being evoked by researchers wishing to go beyond the study of gesture (Streeck, 2009:206), emphasizing the role of the body in social relationships, as well as by scholars interested in activities involving first of all the interplay of bodies and bodily contact – like sports, dance, religious ceremonies, care and healing practices (*e.g.* Tulbert and Goodwin, 2011:89), as well as micro practices like kissing, hugs and hand-shaking (treated by Merleau-Ponty, 1964, fr. 187; transl. 142 as the *paragon* of the inter-body relation with another incarnated self). Interestingly, the concept has also been used for a reading of Goffman's *Relations In Public*, emphasizing the incarnated management of social contact (Crossley, 1995).

The original title of the special issue, then revised by the editors, also featured the term *non verbal*, and some of the authors use it. Although there is a large literature, especially in psychology (see for example Knapp et al., 1972/2014), on 'non verbal behavior', the term was criticized from very early on within gesture studies (McNeill, 1985; Kendon, 1972) for various reasons. The opposition between 'verbal' *vs.* 'non verbal' organizes human conduct or human communication in a bipartite way, opposing language on the one hand and other conduct on the other. The opposition is asymmetric, since the second term is the mere negation of the first. Paradoxically, even in attempts to focus on practices that would be organized by conduct other than language, the reference to 'non verbal' implicitly recognizes language as a definitional starting point and fails to attribute to the body its own positive and specific characterization. Moreover, the negative particle in 'non verbal' might imply that body resources are not related to the verbal. As stated by Kendon, ''it makes no sense to speak of 'verbal communication' and 'nonverbal communication.' There is only communication'' (1972:443). Although research on the 'verbal' and the 'non verbal' has been historically carried out separately, the need for an integration of the strands has been repeatedly evoked and demonstrated in studies that show how they are coordinated, synchronized, finely tuned, mutually adjusted, etc.