Johanne S. Philipsen and Sarah Bro Trasmundi

Gestural reuse as a resource for embodied conceptual transformation

Abstract:
In this talk, we investigate the intimate link between hands and minds – or rather: How the hands, as part of the human semiotic ecology of face-to-face interaction, are a means for extending and exploring thoughts in collaboration with others. Specifically, this study investigates a series of locally occurring instances of gestural re-use in interaction. The recurrence of gestural sequences and formats in interaction has been researched as serving primarily pragmatic functions of building cohesion (McNeill & Levy, 1993) and managing different aspects of turn-taking (e.g. Koschmann & LeBaron, 2002; Streeck, 2009). Taking a micro-analytic approach and building, in particular, on the work of C. Goodwin (2013, 2018), we show how re-using other participants’ gestures in the context of psychotherapy serve several additional functions: 1) accumulation of and co-operations on shared multimodal semiotic resources resulting in 2) co-produced, embodied conceptual transformations and 3) a high degree of co-participation and patient engagement. Furthermore, we show how these joint activities form an example of contextually situated, embodied, extended cognition for the patient and therapist dyad: Through their co-operations on the available linguistic, gestural and behavioral materials, the patient comes to see her behavior in a novel way. In these ways, the present study contributes to the growing body of research on gesture as a co-participated, co-operative and embodied phenomenon.

References: