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Trouble Sources in Norwegian Sign Language Conversation

Abstract:

Since the seminal work on other-initiated repair by Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977), a variety of aspects of these phenomena have been described in a wide range of contexts and different languages (see e.g. Hayashi, Raymond & Sidnell, 2011, Enfield et al., 2013 and Dingemanse, 2015). Other-initiated repairs (OIR) are among the social-interactional practices that most clearly constitute evidence of negotiation of mutual understanding, and as such, pertain to both language usage in social interaction and in the mind.

The practices employed in OIR represent a set of vital skills within communicative competence in any language. Still, such skills are rarely given their due in curricula for learning languages (Kasper, 1985; Young, 2011), except formulaic expressions considered to be polite, but rarely used in informal conversation (Dingemanse et al., 2015). With the exception of a minor Norwegian pilot study (Skedsmo, 2018), the only signed language that has so far been thoroughly examined for its OIR is Argentine Sign Language (Dingemanse et al., 2015; Manrique & Enfield, 2015; Manrique, 2016; Manrique et al., 2017).

The various trouble-sources that lead to initiation of repair have been examined as part of a project on OIR in Norwegian Sign Language (NTS) studying the practices of identifying and resolving problems of perception and understanding in dyadic and multi-party conversations. The research project is conducted with corpus data consisting of multi-camera video recordings of naturally occurring dyadic and multi-party conversations among adult, deaf, NTS using colleagues, in the physical environment of their workplaces. The video-annotation program ELAN (Sloetjes & Wittenburg, 2008) and analytic tools from conversation analysis (Sacks, Jefferson, & Schegloff, 1995) are used.

This presentation sheds light on the kinds of linguistic and communicative actions, circumstances and environments that occur prior to reported problems of perception and understanding among proficient signers of NTS; a largely understudied language. Early findings indicate that linguistic categories such as names of persons or places and temporal markings are potential trouble sources. The interpretation of these preliminary results explores the possibility that some problems with perceiving and understanding are also related to the visual modality of signed languages.
References:


