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Multimodal analysis of compliments in everyday English interactions

The current paper is part of a larger multimodal project on recurrent conversational patterns or turn-constructional formats in casual face-to-face interactions in English and Finnish. Our research has proceeded from types of action (e.g. 'noticing', 'offer', 'request', 'resumption') to explore the different lexico-syntactic, prosodic, embodied and other turn-constructional means for their accomplishment, and the possible division of labor in interactional work between them (e.g. Keisanen in press, Kärkkäinen & Keisanen in press, see also Couper-Kuhlen & Thompson 2005, Fox 2007). In this presentation we discuss compliments. We define them as social actions that positively assess one or more of the co-present discourse participants or their actions (cf. Manes & Wolfson 1981, Golato 2002, who define them more narrowly). The data come from a database of ca. 8 hours of video-recorded everyday interactions in English. The study employs the methodology of conversation analysis. Previous research appears to have focused on first-position compliments (Golato 2002, Manes & Wolfson 1981), whereas we also provide an analysis of compliments in responsive positions, and discuss not only their verbal construction but also their multimodal accomplishment and their reception.

The data show that compliments in responsive position provide an interpretation of the co-participant's actions as portrayed in their prior turns. These descriptions or tellings do not include an evaluative dimension as such, but they are conducive to being assessed positively. The embodied actions and prosody of those proffering compliments range from rather subdued to extreme and highly animated displays of affect. The preliminary results indicate that recipients may only briefly acknowledge compliments, for example, by producing *yeah* or by smiling.

References:

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