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Language, the body and features of the material world as resources for resuming prior activities in multi-activity settings

This paper examines linguistic and embodied practices of resumption in everyday interactional settings where participants manage their engagement in multiple ongoing activities. These activities involve both talk and embodied conduct and often the manipulation of concrete objects in the participants' material environment (e.g. using a laptop, handling documents, preparing and serving food). In these settings participants are often required to temporarily suspend one activity to bring another into focus. The paper examines transitions where participants resume, or attempt to resume, an activity that was temporarily suspended in service of another activity.

The data consist of 15 hours of video-recorded, naturally occurring everyday interactions in English and Finnish, which have been examined using multimodal conversation analysis. Analyses show that participants frequently orient to an activity that they are resuming by shifting their body and gaze toward some concrete object(s) that they understand and treat as relevant for the suspended activity (e.g. by turning their gaze and body back toward a laptop and starting to type when resuming work on it after an interruption). Resumptions may also involve the use of linguistic markers (e.g. *um* or *so* in the English data) or recycled materials from prior activity-related talk. Participants often explicitly attend to a multi-activity situation by orienting to the two activity sequences simultaneously, so that the activities overlap briefly before an actual shift from one to another is accomplished.

Prior research on multi-activity in interaction has mostly concentrated on institutional, workplace or service encounter settings (e.g. Mondada 2008, LeBaron & Jones 2002), while everyday interactions have received little attention in the literature (but see e.g. Goodwin & Goodwin 1992). The paper also offers insight into the multimodality of resumption practices, as prior studies have focused primarily on the linguistic patterns of resumption in interaction (e.g. Wong 2000).

References

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