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Bodily Practices in Action Formation and Ascription in Multilingual Interaction: Introduction to the Special Issue

Arja Piirainen-Marsh¹, Niina Lilja² & Søren Wind Eskildsen³

¹University of Jyväskylä

²Tampere University

³University of Southern Denmark

Abstract

This special issue brings together empirical studies that investigate how bodily practices feature in action formation and action ascription in multilingual interaction (Schegloff, 2007; Levinson, 2013). Grounded in video-based conversation analysis and drawing on data from diverse sociomaterial settings, the articles investigate the contingent interactional processes through which speakers from different language backgrounds accomplish actions and achieve intersubjectivity. They demonstrate how specific constellations of linguistic resources, bodily conduct, spatial configurations, and material ecology are built into accomplishment of actions at different levels of interactional organization. Collectively, the articles illustrate how the participants draw on each other's expertise, including different languages (code-switching, translanguaging) and bodily conduct as an integral part of the "web of resources" that are mobilized when actions are formulated and managed in interaction.

Keywords: action formation, action ascription, bodily practices, multilingual interaction

1. Introduction

The action formation problem — how different properties and resources in interaction are assembled into configurations designed to be recognized as particular social actions — has been at the heart of conversation analytic research on human sociality (Schegloff, 2007: xiv; Levinson, 2013). In the last decade this problem has been addressed and debated from different perspectives, focusing in particular on the question of how “first actions” are built linguistically (through features of turn design) and what resources are used by recipients in assigning utterances as such actions (see, e.g., Heritage, 2012; Clayman & Heritage, 2014; Drew, 2013; Drew & Couper-Kuhlen, 2014a; Rossi & Zinken, 2016). There is now a large body of research investigating how questions, requests, offers, invitations, and complaints are designed through alternative linguistic forms in different languages (see, e.g., Couper-Kuhlen, 2014; Heinemann & Traverso, 2009; Robinson, 2013; Rossi, 2012, 2015; Fox & Heinemann, 2016; Couper Kuhlen & Selting, 2018). Following the visual and embodied turn in social interaction research (Drew & Couper-Kuhlen, 2014b; Nevile, 2015), video-based research has placed the study of action formation in its corporeal, spatial and praxeological context and renewed understanding of the dimensions that shape their interactional accomplishment. Studies have demonstrated that social actions are recurrently accomplished multimodally with embodied formats and bodily actions with or without talk (see, e.g., Rossi, 2014; Mondada, 2014a, 2015; Mondada & Sorjonen, 2016, for requests; Kendrick & Drew, 2016, for recruitments; Kärkkäinen & Keisanen, 2012, for offers; Rauniomaa & Keisanen, 2012, for responsive actions, and Mortensen, 2016 for repair initiation).

This special issue brings together empirical studies that investigate how bodily practices feature in action formation and action ascription in multilingual interaction (Schegloff, 2007; Levinson, 2013). By “multilingual interaction”, we refer to interactional encounters between speakers from different linguistic backgrounds. Taking a holistic, multimodal perspective, which looks at utterances as formed within interactive frameworks involving different participants using multiple intertwined resources (e.g., Goodwin, 2000, 2017; Mondada, 2014b, 2016, 2018; Keevallik, 2018), studies in this issue focus on the work that bodily practices do as an integral component of action accomplishment in interactions between the participants.

Conversation analytic research demonstrates that designing and attributing turns as particular actions involves multiple dimensions including the linguistic format and content, sequential position, the underlying project under way, features of the material environment, and the participants’ rights and obligations related to knowledge and decision-making (epistemic and deontic status and authority) (Levinson, 2013; Stevanovic & Peräkylä, 2012; Rossi, 2018). The articles in this special issue investigate how specific bodily practices, including constellations of hand gestures, gaze and body positions, enactments, and bodily displays,

contribute to making actions recognizable for recipients and further intersubjectivity in different social and material environments. The data analyzed in the articles comes from diverse everyday settings, including family interactions involving an au pair or visiting student who is a second language speaker, and interactions organized by institutions to support language learning such as language cafes, coffee break conversations and video-mediated conversations. In all settings the participants come from different language backgrounds and the language of interaction — French, Swedish, German, Finnish or English — is a second language to at least some of the participants.

In studies of second language interaction the use of gestures has long been associated with resolving communicative problems. Early studies of second language communication examined “nonverbal behavior” as a compensatory strategy (Canale & Swain, 1980). Studies using experimental methods have suggested that gestures, specifically hand gestures, provide a window into the ways in which communicative and psycholinguistic features interact in shaping second language use (Gullberg, 2010). They have drawn attention to multimodal behaviors that are typical of second language speakers and found, for example, that L2 speakers gesture more than first language speakers, especially in moments of disfluency (Gullberg, 2011; Graziano & Gullberg, 2019). Conversation analytic studies, on the other hand, illustrate how gestures and embodied displays are connected to noticing, understanding, and learning new linguistic items (e.g., Markee and Seo, 2009; Mori and Hasegawa, 2009; Pekarek Doehler, 2010; Fasel Lauzon & Pekarek Doehler, 2013; Greer 2013, 2019). Eskildsen and Wagner (2013, 2015) demonstrate how return gestures, coupled with specific linguistic items, are used and reused by L2 speakers to display understanding and how this is related to learning of new vocabulary. Their findings suggest that linguistic constructions are deeply embodied, and changes in the use of specific kinds of gesture-word configurations over time are related to the learning process (Eskildsen & Wagner, 2015, 2018) and to action formation (Eskildsen, 2021).

Earlier conversation analytic research into second language interaction has shown that second language speakers deploy a wide range of resources in constructing turns, establishing reciprocity and formulating sequential actions. Olsner (2004) described embodied completions, i.e., gestural or embodied completions of actions in progress (see also Mori & Hayashi, 2006). Gestures, performed with or without co-occurring talk, also serve specific functions in repair sequences. For example, other-initiation of repair can be accomplished by head movements (sharp head turn with gaze, a head poke forward), leaning forward prior to verbal initiation of repair (Seo and Koshik, 2010) or a teacher’s “cupping the hand behind the ear” gesture (Mortensen, 2016). Studies of classroom interaction have shown that embodied practices are important resources in teachers’ explanations and definitions (see, e.g., Waring et al., 2013; Majlesi, 2015; Sert, 2017; Kääntä et al., 2018). Classroom studies demonstrate how accomplishment of turns and actions is sensitive to asymmetries of knowledge

as well as local contingencies of the interaction and the larger activity in which they are embedded. They shed new light on the way that gestures, embodied displays, trajectories of physical action and the handling of objects intertwine with the organization of turn-taking, participation, and the accomplishment of practical tasks (Ford, 1999; Olsher, 2004; Mori & Hayashi, 2006; Kääntä, 2010, 2014; Kääntä & Piirainen-Marsh, 2013; Jakonen, 2015; Majlesi, 2015; Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2019).

A common denominator among the articles in this special issue is that they draw on empirical material collected outside of traditional classrooms. In a recent volume on naturalistic L2 interaction and learning, Hellermann et al. (2019) presented a range of studies on what is becoming known as “L2 learning in the wild”. The chapters in that volume mapped out practices for accomplishing repair and doing noticing, learning behaviors, object orientations, and the development of L2 interactional competence in L2 speakers’ everyday lifeworlds (see also, e.g., Eskildsen, 2018; Svennevig, 2018; Theodórsdóttir, 2018; Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2019; König, 2020; Kurhila, Kotilainen & Lehtimaja, 2021; Greer & Wagner, 2022). However, L2 interaction in the wild is not a binary category, nor is the wild necessarily characterized by being the antithesis to the L2 classroom (see Theodórsdóttir & Eskildsen, 2022). This is also evident in the articles in this issue: Some articles draw on data from what is the prototypical wild, i.e., contexts without any pedagogical-institutional interference. These data come from a range of multilingual family life situations (Frick & Palola, 2022/*this issue*; Greer, 2022/*this issue*; Lilja & Eskildsen, 2022/*this issue*). Other articles use data from activities organized for practicing and learning the L2 in language cafés (Kunitz & Majlesi, 2022/*this issue*; Majlesi, 2022/*this issue*), via an online platform (Uskokovic & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2022/*this issue*), or through cooking classes (Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, 2022/*this issue*). Lastly, the article by Skogmyr Marian & Pekarek Doehler (2022/*this issue*) draws on data from a research project where the researchers asked L2 speakers to meet and talk for the purpose of collecting data.

The articles in this issue investigate the contingent interactional processes through which speakers from different language backgrounds accomplish actions and achieve intersubjectivity. They examine how specific constellations of linguistic resources, bodily conduct, spatial configurations, and material ecology are built into accomplishment of actions at different levels of interactional organization. Three articles (Frick & Palola, Lilja & Piirainen-Marsh, Greer) investigate how gestures and other bodily practices feature in multimodal action packages to accomplish first actions such as directives, instructions and apologies. Through detailed multimodal analysis they examine how these actions are designed to be understood and how they are interpreted by recipients. One article (Lilja & Eskildsen) elucidates the layered nature of actions by examining utterances that are sequentially designed as other-initiation of repair, but also accomplish teasing. Three articles (Skogmyr-Marian & Pekarek Doehler, Kunitz & Majlesi, Uskovic & Taleghani Nikazm) scrutinize how multimodal resources are

assembled to accomplish specific interactional functions in repair and word search sequences. They shed new light on trajectories of multimodal conduct in solitary word searches, use of gestures in screen-based searches and methods through which participants reformulate prior speakers' turn to make them comprehensible to L2 speaking recipients. Collectively, the articles illustrate how participants draw on each other's expertise and constellations of multilayered resources, including different languages (code-switching, translanguaging) and affordances of the environment, in making their actions recognizable and understandable to recipients. They provide further evidence on bodily conduct as an integral part of the "web of resources" that are mobilized when formulating, designing, and interpreting actions. In so doing, they contribute to understanding action formation and ascription as an emergent, interactively negotiated process. They shed light on ways in which participants draw on multiple interactional repertoires in formulating turns and actions, and how resources from these repertoires interact with temporal and sequential features of multimodal conduct. In addition, they show how embodied features of turns are sensitive to linguistic asymmetries between the participants as well as other types of epistemic asymmetry, the participants' social positioning and the affordances of the environment.

2. Summary of the articles

Frick and Palola discuss the multimodal organization of directive actions and their sequential consequences in multilingual family interaction. They present a single case analysis of an interaction where a five-year-old child, his mother and an au pair negotiate an everyday task: going to the bathroom. The analytic focus is on the multimodal accomplishment of the adult's directive actions. Detailed analysis of the verbal and bodily actions illustrates how different resources are used to formulate and ascribe actions as directives, and how they display deontic authority, i.e., who has the right to decide or "set the rules" of what happens next (Kent, 2012; Stevanovic, 2013). The analysis shows that the au pair's directive actions take many different forms. The verbal practices used for issuing directives include proposals, ultimatums, conditions, or bribes, as well as imperatives and addressing the child by their first name. These are accompanied by bodily actions including smiling, raised eyebrows, pointing, or tapping the bathroom door. The findings shed light on the explicit and implicit negotiation of deontic rights. By resisting the directives, the child shows a strong orientation to his deontic autonomy, i.e., right to decide what to do. The two adults' orientations are different: While the au pair's actions are mostly mitigated and attend to the child's deontic autonomy, the mother's turns are formed as statements about the child's future actions with no mitigating elements.

Lilja and Piirainen-Marsh examine how depictive gestures are used as part of the multimodal design of instructions in cooking classes for participants who are

newcomers to Finland. The focus is on instructions that make relevant a complying manual-bodily action by the recipient as the next step in the larger project of preparing a dish. The article analyzes how actions are recipient-designed by the cooking instructor to be recognizable as instructions and ascribed by co-participants as such. The analysis shows that depictive gestures feature in the multimodal design of instructions by providing specific, locally relevant information about how the instructed action should be performed. The gestures contribute to action formation and ascription by providing details that are not specified in the linguistic design of turns, but are relevant for (fluent and appropriate) bodily accomplishment of the expected next action. For example, they depict specific hand movements, ways of using tools and handling ingredients. The recipients attend to these cues in performing the instructed actions. The findings underscore the multiple dimensions that are involved in action ascription: In addition to tracing the linguistic unfolding and embodied enactment of turns and their content, the participants orient to the underlying project, epistemic and deontic status as well as features of the material environment.

The article by **Greer** investigates the multimodal accomplishment of an apology in L2 interaction. The analysis focuses on instances where Japanese L2 speakers of English use the Japanese “gassho” gesture (placing the palms of both hands together at approximately chest level) in a verbal turn formulated as apology in English. The data are drawn from video recording of everyday interactions during homestays in the US. Analysis of three extended apology sequences shows how apologies are performed as multimodal gestalts accomplished through mixing verbal elements in English talk and gestures from the L2 speakers’ own culture. The analysis illustrates that the participants do not orient to the mixing of verbal and embodied resources as problematic. The article argues that the lamination of talk and gesture serve to calibrate the action by upgrading or downgrading the apology. In this way it displays the participants’ orientation to the severity of the offense. The study contributes to conversation analytic research by providing a richer understanding of the sequential unfolding and interactional ecology of apologies in intercultural settings. It demonstrates that action formation in L2 and multilingual interactions can involve the use of resources from different interactional repertoires. In these data, L2 speakers flexibly employ “semiotic assemblages” that include a culture-specific gesture and L2 talk in a manner similar to translanguaging (Li, 2018) to address misdemeanors and (re)establish rapport.

The paper by **Lilja and Eskildsen** focuses on participants’ embodied work in teasing sequences. Their analysis is motivated by the observation that as a strategically ambiguous social action, teasing is intriguing in terms of action ascription. They analyze sequences in which the teasing activity is sequentially organized as an other-initiated repair. The other initiations of repair (OIRs) are used as vehicles for carrying out the teasing actions (see also Schegloff, 1997, 2007; Rossi, 2018 on the double-barreled nature of social actions). They target

the non-standard language use by a L2 speaker and use it as a resource for teasing. The analysis shows that the double-barreled OIRs are designed as multimodal action packages in which the verbal part is delivered in a serious manner and combined with embodied conduct that typically characterizes repair environments, such as head turns and tilts, forward-leaning, and gestural holds, but produced in an exaggerated or a pretended manner. The embodied exaggeration and pretense are the key elements in making the tease recognizable for the recipients and thus central elements contributing to action ascription in teasing environments.

Skogmyr-Marian and Pekarek Doehler's study sheds light on the practices through which second language speakers hold the floor and assemble bodily resources in word search sequences. The focus is on temporal trajectories of multimodal resources in solitary word searches by L2 speakers of French. Drawing on a longitudinal dataset from "conversation circles", the analysis demonstrates a recurrent multimodal trajectory through which the participants manage entry into a search, display a search in progress and hold the floor, and bring the search to completion. The participants deploy different types of gestures at different stages of the search. Search openings are characterized by aversion of gaze from the recipient and suspension of hand movements. During the search process, vocal and verbal resources co-occur with small pragmatic gestures that index cognitive search (e.g., self-touch). The resolution stage also involves co-speech pragmatic gestures, but of a different kind: the gestures are directed to the recipient and convey "having found" or "offering" a solution. In the second part of the study, the authors scrutinize changes in the temporal unfolding of the word searches in the longitudinal data set. The comparison of practices deployed at different points over the 15-month recording period shows a gradual transition towards smooth and successful word searches completed by the L2 speakers themselves. At the start, solitary searches are often abandoned or completed by using languages other than the L2 or depictive gestures that facilitate understanding and invite turn-entry by coparticipants. Later the data show increased use of pragmatic gestures for floor-holding. At the end of the recording period, the word searches are brief and rapidly solved. The changes point to a redistribution of repair practices that involve multimodal gestalts.

Uskovic and Taleghani Nikazm examine word search practices in video-mediated interactions between L1 and L2 speakers of German. Their focus is on the use of a specific gesture (upward extended index finger) to manage extended word searches that involve screen-based search activity. Their data come from semi-pedagogical conversations between German native speakers and German language learners. The analysis shows how the L2 participants use the focal gesture either independently or together with a verbal alert (*ein moment*) to suspend the talk in progress and create space for conducting a screen-based search. The findings contribute to understanding how word searches as situated practices are tied to the affordances of the digital environment. The L2 participants use the gesture as an attention-getting device to show commitment

to completing the search and bringing the turn to completion themselves rather than soliciting assistance from co-participants. Use of the gesture with or without the verbal alert contributes to making the orientation to the screen-based search recognizable to the recipients and secures the possibility for conducting the search using the affordances of the technologically enhanced setting.

Kunitz and Majlesi examine interactions in language cafés where L2 speaking visitors meet volunteers who speak Swedish as their first language. The analytic focus is on unsolicited other-formulations; that is, embodied turns through which a first language speaker reformulates (some parts of) another speaker's turn in a recipient-designed way to make their content recognizable and understandable to an L2 speaking coparticipant. The analysis describes how reformulations of prior turns are achieved through lamination of different resources (e.g., illustrative use of gestures, simplification of language forms, delivering turn content in installments) such that they form multimodal gestalts within the material ecology of the language cafés. These combinations of resources highlight relevant parts of the prior turn (e.g., specific lexical items) and make the turn more comprehensible. The reformulations in focus show orientation to linguistic asymmetries between the participants: The volunteers, who are L1 speakers, orient to an issue of comprehensibility of the prior turn and reformulate the turn in a more tangible and recognizable way. The article argues that linguistic and embodied composition of reformulations together with their sequential position accounts for the recognizability of the actions that they accomplish. The findings shed new light on the way that co-present participants other than the current speaker can offer language-related assistance and contribute to research on pre-emptive and proactive practices employed in interactions between first and second language speakers.

The article by **Majlesi** discusses gestural matching in responsive turns in interactions between L1 and L2 speakers of Swedish in the same language café data. Language cafés are informal environments set up by voluntary organizations to support language learning. The data comprise word search or word explanation sequences initiated by L2 speakers and addressed to L1 speaking volunteers. The analysis focuses on cases where the L1 speaking recipient of the turn picks up and recycles iconic gestures as well as verbal elements used in the previous turn. The responsive recycling of elements that the L2 speaker has inquired about is also sequentially expanded to talk focusing on the linguistic items. The article argues that the recycling contributes to foregrounding salient features of the prior turn and highlights them as shared, locally achieved pedagogical focus. In this way, the recycling involving gestural matching turns the interaction into an instructional project. The findings align with earlier studies that show how gestures and their repetitions contribute to understanding and building coherence across turns. They also show how gestural matching works as part of the procedure whereby the linguistic objects targeted in the sequence evolve into objects of learning and teaching.

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