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The field manuals were originally intended as working documents for internal use only. They were supplemented by verbal instructions and additional guidelines in many cases. If you have questions about using the materials, or comments on the viability in various field situations, feel free to get in touch with the authors.

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RESPONSE SYSTEMS AND SIGNALS OF RECIPIENCY

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Project	Multimodal Interaction
Task	Relying on video recordings of spontaneous, naturally occurring interaction, isolate sections of talk which involve the use of signals of reciprocity.
Goal of subproject	The goal of this project is to gather cross cultural information on listeners' feedback behaviour during conversation. Listeners in a conversation usually provide short signals that indicate to the speaker that they are still "with the speaker". These signals could be verbal (like for instance "mm hm" in English or "hm hm" in Dutch) or nonverbal (visual), like nodding. Often, these signals are produced in overlap with the speaker's vocalization. If listeners do not produce these signals, speakers often invite them explicitly (e.g. "are you still there?" in a telephone conversation). Our goal is to investigate what kind of signals are used by listeners of different languages to signal "reciprocity" to the speaker.

Background

As Levinson & Brown outlined during the feedback workshop, a response system is a set of rules and expectations about how to do minimal responses during conversation.

They are constituted by (taken from Levinson & Brown, 2004)

- a) An inventory of special response items (like "uh huh" etc., in English)
- b) An inventory of kinesic behaviours (e.g. nodding, blinking)
- c) Rules about *who* responds *when* and *how*

Listeners' signals of reciprocity, such as "Mm-hm" or "uh-huh" in English are the most elementary or *minimal* "conversational turns" possible. Minimal, because apart from acknowledging reciprocity and inviting the speaker to continue with his/her next turn, they do not add any new information to the discourse of the conversation.

These unique properties make it likely that a) these signals are universal, and b) both verbal and nonverbal (visual) signals exist which serve the same signaling function(s). However, there might well be differences between cultures with respect to the frequency of giving off signals of reciprocity, and/or the inventory of visible behaviours that are used as signals of reciprocity.

Research questions

The initial research questions of this project are a direct reflection of the outline of the notion of a "response system" in the previous section. Specifically, we want to find out, for the culture under investigation:

- a) What inventory of verbal reciprocity signals exists.
- b) What inventory of nonverbal reciprocity signals exists.
- c) Whether a) and b) are used redundantly or as replacements for each other.

Note that c) above is (also) interesting because using nonverbal signals in temporal overlap with the speaker's turn is acoustically less *interruptive* than using verbal signals.

Task

a) Relying on video tapes of maximally informal speech events (see “Building a corpus of multimodal interaction in your field site”, Enfield, Levinson, de Ruiter & Stivers, this volume, p 32-36), researchers are asked to identify verbal (lexical or non-lexical) signals that listeners produce during a turn or between two successive turns of a speaker. For example, in Dutch, the most frequent of these signals are “hm-hm” and “ja”, with a distinct low-high pitch contour. Beware that these tokens can often be used to signal agreement as well, especially (but not exclusively) if they are a response to a yes/no type question. So, in the sequence

A: *Are you married?*

B: *Mm hm*

the second turn signals a confirmation (yes-answer), whereas in the sequence

A: *So I went to see my father?⁴*

B: *Mm hm*

the second turn normally signals reciprocity and an invitation for the speaker to continue talking. The latter type of signal has been called *back-channel* by Yngve (1970), and *continuer* by Schegloff (1982). It is primarily the use of this kind of signal that we want to record and study. Note that tokens that are used as indicators of agreement (e.g. “Ja”, in Dutch, or “Yeah” in English) are often also used as continuers in other contexts. If you are in doubt whether a specific signal is a continuer or an agreement signal, please incorporate the example in your data collection. We’d rather have too many instances and weed out later, than leave out too much during the data collection stage.

Apart from recording informal conversations on video, it would also be very useful if the researcher collects field notes about the verbal tokens (words or short phrases) that are used by listeners in informal conversations to signal reciprocity.

b) Try to find *nonverbal* signals (produced kinesically, perceived visually, for instance, head nods, short gaze-at-other signals, eyebrow motions, etc.) that appear to perform the same function as the verbal signals collected in a). These signals could either be employed redundantly, (in temporal overlap with the verbal “continuers”) or act as “stand alone” replacements for each other.

⁴ The question mark here indicates a rising pitch at the end of the utterance, not that the utterance is a question.

Analysis

Step 1: Creating a collection of instances.

The data for this project will be the transcriptions and media files associated with the collections of instances described above, plus possible categorizations of those instances.

NOTE: In preparing the collection, researchers should be aware that although any number of examples will be useful, we would prefer to have as many examples as possible, preferably more than a hundred.

Step 2: Present collections.

Once collections have been prepared, a series of MI meetings will be reserved in which every researcher involved in this sub-project will present his/her collection and categorizations to the colleagues. The goal of these meetings is to sharpen the analysis, and try to find generalizations that may emerge from comparison of signaling reciprocity across languages.

Step 3: Write a paper.

We would ask researchers to write a descriptive and publishable paper on signals of reciprocity in the language/culture under study. In this paper, the researcher would describe the analysis of the recorded fragments, and provide transcriptions of supportive examples. The focus of this paper would be the types of signals most frequently used, the differential reliance on verbal vs. visible signals, and what type of signal is typically used in which conversational context.

Outcomes

- 1) Researchers will have an analysis of how signals of reciprocity are done in their language/culture. They will have at least one descriptive and publishable paper
- 2) The Multimodal Interaction Project would have results for an article that compares the practices asking signaling reciprocity cross-linguistically. This article would be co-authored by the researchers who were actively involved in the comparative work.
- 3) An edited volume is planned for this sub-project where researchers would be asked to contribute a chapter on their language-specific results.

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