

Multimodal forward-communication

In face-to-face interaction, interlocutors coordinate both verbal (e.g., lexical choices, syntactic structures, prosody) and non-verbal (e.g., posture, gestures, eye gaze, facial expressions) resources to accomplish communicative actions (Holler & Levinson, 2019). Notably, the intention behind a communicative action is often prefigured through these multimodal resources before it is verbally articulated—sometimes in overtly observable ways, and at other times in more subtle, less conscious forms (Schegloff, 1984; Streeck, 2009). We refer to this phenomenon as *forward-communication*. Given the inherently multimodal nature of human communication (Keevalik, 2018), a multimodal perspective is essential for understanding this process.

This panel explores the following key questions:

1. To what extent does multimodal forward-communication facilitate interaction—for example, by enhancing prediction, enabling smoother turn-taking, or preventing interruptions?
2. How are multimodal resources temporally coordinated in forward-communication?
3. How does forward-communication unfold over the course of an interaction—from initiation to closure?
4. Are there routinized or culturally specific forms of forward-communication across communities, contexts (e.g., doctor-patient, teacher-student), or language groups (e.g., children, L2 learners)?
5. What methods or technologies are most effective in studying forward-communication?
6. What analytical frameworks (e.g., turn-taking, sequential structures) are most appropriate for examining this phenomenon?
7. How might linguistic research on forward-communication inform and intersect with other disciplines—for instance, by contributing to developments in human-machine interaction?

The panel includes the following six studies:

1. *Managing ongoing relevance with composite bodily holds in Mandarin everyday conversations and in L2 classroom interactions* (Xiaoyun WANG & Hongyin TAO)
2. *Body movements in repair sequences in Japanese everyday conversation* (Yasuyuki USUDA)
3. *Projectability in gesture-speech cooperation: A corpus-based study of hand pointing gestures in natural Mandarin interaction* (Junfei HU & Liesbeth DEGAND)
4. ~~*Foreshadowing or pre-empting? Projective eyebrow and body movements in reconfirmation sequences* (Marit ALDRUP)~~
5. *Joint attention and deontics: How gaze behavior impacts deontic stance-taking and vice versa* (Julie JANSSENS, Geert BRÔNE, Dorien VAN DE MIEROOP, Bert OBEN)
6. *Body – Machine – Discourse: Investigation of multimodality and agency dynamics in CrossFit* (Luxi ZHANG)

They cover five languages—Chinese, Dutch, English, German, and Japanese—examining a range of communicative settings, including casual conversations, lab-based interactions, gym environments, museum dialogues, and second-language classrooms. Methodologies include conversation analysis, multimodal interaction analysis, and corpus-based quantitative approaches. Topics addressed include the role of gesture holds in projecting continuation or managing repair; the sequential and syntactic conditions that shape the projectability of gestures such as pointing; the use of eyebrow and body movements in reconfirmation sequences; the function of eye gaze in establishing joint attention and enacting deontic stance; and how material artifacts (e.g., gym equipment) co-structure interaction and culture.

This panel seeks to advance our understanding of how multimodal channels interact during language production, such as offering concrete insights into the interplay between multimodal semiotics and grammar. It also aims to contribute to research on language variation and evolution. In interaction, speakers generally strive to convey their communicative intentions as early as possible (Levinson, 2013). While languages may differ in the strategies they employ, the underlying motivation for forward-communication—and the coordination of multimodal resources in this process—plays a significant role in shaping language and may serve as a driving force in its evolution (Clifton & Carreiras, 2013; Heesen & Fröhlich, 2022).

References:

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