

Pointing gestures in L2-learners requests: Are they part of a multimodal construction?

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In this study, I examine whether pairings of a pointing gesture and a verbalization are multimodal constructions according to Ziem's (2017) criteria. A multimodal construction is a conventional pairing of a verbal and kinetic element with a specific meaning or a specific function (Ziem 2017: 1).

I study an educational situation, in which L2-learners perform shopping exercises in a classroom. My main interest is how learners express what they buy in the exercise. I call announcements of the item to be bought **requests**, because they are expressions which set an obligation to the recipient to act a certain way (Drew & Couper-Kuhlen 2014: 2). The study is based on circa 2.5 hours of video data, which is recorded in an intensive adults' Finnish as a second language course. The data includes 92 requests found in 11 video recordings with 25 learners in total. Requests are produced verbally in the data, but approximately half of the requests also include a pointing gesture. I study requesting as a multimodal action: besides talk, also gestures, gazes, body positions, environment and artefacts are important aspects in interaction (Kääntä & Haddington 2011: 11–12). I use construction grammar to describe form and meaning of requests and conversation analysis to examine interactional context and functions of the turns.

The pointing gesture's prototypical meaning is indexical, and it is used to create a mutual focus of attention. In my data, turns that include a pointing gesture can have more specific functions. For example, a pointing gesture can be used to solve a linguistic or interactional problem, like in a word search. Especially in the language learning context the pointing gesture can add its own meaning to a verbalization. Preliminary results show that pairings of pointing gestures and verbalizations of requests are conventionalized to some extent in my data, because of their frequency and the specific meaning which they can have in problematic situations. The amount of co-occurrences can indicate the existence of multimodal constructions.

References

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