Intersubjectivity, phonetics and gesture in the design of turns at talk
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The phenomenon
In interaction speakers may employ manual gestures when trying to establish shared understanding. How are these gestures timed with speech to display whether or not shared understanding is achieved?

The method
Sequences of talk where participants work to achieve shared understanding are identified using the techniques of Conversation Analysis. Detailed analysis of phonetics, gesture and interaction is conducted. Participants’ orientation is the cornerstone of the analysis.

Example 1: Understanding check

Tor: (ja) her i Sverige (yes) here in Sweden
Lars: nei i Norge men Jeg [I am] no in Norway I mean
Tor: ja okay

Example 2: Searching for a word

Lars: har du hort om eh Panzerpappan faststen how you heard about the Panzerpappen by the way
Sigurd: eh om pt skj jag har jeg ahm take yes I have
Sigurd: det er han eh om pt skj han som driver that the one ahm take the one who runs

Example 3: What happens when an understanding is already available?

Anne: ja(hj) att du kan stamper skildesign yes you know the only way to learn a language properly
Anne: det er ja [it is] that is
Oscar: [det er] [det er] ja det er ja [it is] [it is] ja [it is] ja (language)

Data

Turn-transitions in 80 mins of Norwegian face-to-face interaction

Total: N=494
Manual gesture held into next turn: N=44 (8.9%)

The sequence
1. Action that brings shared understanding to the surface of interaction: Involving manual gesture
2. Orientation to co-participant understanding: Gesture hold displays hearership
3. Candidate understanding in progress: Gesture hold until candidate is available
4. Display of shared understanding: Gesture withdrawn followed by verbal response

Conclusion

• Intersubjective understanding is negotiated in real time, using speech and gesture.
• The precise timing of held gestures in relation to the speech of both participants is a resource for displaying hearership.
• The timing of gesture withdrawal displays whether or not the incoming talk contributes to shared understanding.
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