Looking into the future of Conversation Analysis - Report on the 5th International Conference on Conversation Analysis (ICCA) 2018

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1. Introduction

In 2018, the University of Loughborough hosted the 5th International Conference on Conversation Analysis (ICCA). With more than 330 presentations and 5 plenaries in 5 days, ICCA 2018 gave an overview of the up-to-date research in Conversation Analysis (CA) and multimodal interaction analysis. The topics comprised medical communication (classical doctor-patient interaction, interaction with people suffering from dementia and autism, as well as trauma-talk and palliative-interactions), school-interaction and in addition to that a range of other settings such as service encounters, theatre interactions and various kinds of family-talk.

The conference opened with a plenary by Jeffrey Robinson with the title Preference in context: responses to one type of positively formatted polar interrogatives, hence with a classical CA-topic. Besides the verbal responses he analysed the function of significant visual behaviour (such as gaze aversion) for indicating affirmative or disaffirmative responses and the difference between conditioned and unconditioned responses.

In her plenary The art and science of the deal: turning resistance into acceptance, Tanya Stivers presented medical interactions between physicians and parents of examined children. Moving from the prototypical organisation of medical encounters to the phases of recommendation, acceptance, consolidation / next steps and closing, she analysed interactions characterised by resistance instead of acceptance. She identified three different types of resistance activities: preference based, fear based and evidence based. Ultimately, Stivers has analysed communicative practices that contextualise the different deontic and epistemic domains and authorities negotiated by physician and parents.

Marja-Leena Sorjonen opened a door to cross-linguistic research and textlinguistics by exploring the translation of dialogues in fictional texts in her plenary on Turn design across languages and times: Literary translations and retranslations. She asked: a) how oral elements such as the particle oh are represented in four different Finnish translations of the novel "Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland", b) whether oh had been translated at all and c) what interactive actions are expressed by oh or any equivalent particle.

The conference showed that CA-research undergoes constant and fundamental changes. The development from analysing audio data towards working with videos and describing the multimodality of social interaction is heading towards doing research on the multisensoriality of interaction and investigating resources of perception beyond looking and hearing. In addition, ICCA 2018 opened the floor to a range of new fields of research that had not been under investigation within CA so far, like the analysis of interaction with and among deaf people.

This report will summarise three of the emerging fields: First, observations regarding multiactivity (section 2), second, the plenary of Aug Nishizaka and other talks on signed interactions (section 3) and third, this report will give an overview
of the discussion about technical developments and methodological aspects of interaction analysis that were continued and deepened at ICCA 2018 (section 4).

2. Multiactivity and Multimodality – new topics in interaction analysis

While classical CA had had its starting point in analysing spoken interaction (see Clift 2016), the focus of investigation soon shifted more and more towards an analysis of multimodal aspects and the complexity of multimodal interaction (Mondada 2016a:340). The main focus have been how interactants use multiple resources to perform a specific activity and – by redefining the term ‘multitasking’ – how multiple activities are conducted within social interaction at the same time (Haddington et al. 2014:13). Consequently, research on simultaneously used verbal and visual embodied resources has had a long tradition in CA (see the overview in Haddington et al. 2014:16f.). From the beginning on, the handling of objects within interaction has also been part of the research interests (see Goodwin 1981; Heath et al. 2010; Heath 2013).

In their talk Transfering objects in multiactivity situations: Multiple practices to avoid interruption, Pentti Haddington and Sylvaine Tuncer took a closer look into the sequential and temporal progression of two or more simultaneous activities and differentiated between intrapersonal (one person doing several activities such as talking and driving a car at the same time) and interpersonal multiactivities. In this context, they analysed how interactants carry out embodied requests for objects and how these objects then are being transferred from one person to the other. They illustrated that, depending on the degree of perception, the transfer of objects can be achieved completely with the help of bodily and therefore visual resources. Inspired by the discussion, they highlighted the relation between vision, talk and touch and that especially the quality of the handover must be the focus point of further analysis.

Antti Kamunen investigated the hierarchy of various interactional activities and practices which are performed parallel in his presentation Suspending manual activities during body torques in multiactivity situations. In one of his examples, one interactant suspended the activity of stirring a kitchen pot in favour of establishing focused interaction with a person entering the room and demonstrating recipiency. He argued that based on this observations one can see that interpersonal interaction is a higher ranked activity than cooking. As a consequence, following questions might be asked: When and how are activities marked by interactants as differently ranked? When and how are activities suspended or not and when are they re-established? When and how are two activities with perhaps different sequential organisation-structures realised simultaneously?

Similar questions might have been asked in the presentation Managing the distribution of multiple resources and temporalities while sightseeing by Jon Ayami. He analysed the role of cameras when doing sightseeing and how a group of three young girls uses cameras as objects to propose taking photos of the sights and of themselves. Besides some criticism regarding the research design, the discussion dealt with the sequential structure of walking, talking, making a proposal for taking a photo and then realising this activity. Furthermore, the discussants pointed out that the way the photos are taken (as a selfie or by a bystander; of only two of the girls or all three together etc.) has to be negotiated among the interactants.
Ann-Sylvie Horlacher finally presented data of a hair salon in her presentation on *Coordinating mundane talk and professional tasks in hairdressing service encounters*. Her focus was on how the hairdressers manage different activities such as cutting hair while talking to the client or demonstrating availability to a member of the hair-shop staff.

The panel illustrated that both the terms 'multimodality' and 'multiactivity', as well as the corresponding concepts of action, activity and practice, need to be precisely differentiated.

### 3. Interaction without speech – new fields for interaction analysis

Especially when analysing face-to-face interaction, aspects of visual perception (seeing), perception of perception (Hausendorf 2015) and the orchestration of different verbal, vocal and visual resources become relevant. This was convincingly demonstrated by Rebecca Clift in her plenary on *Signs of trouble: embodiment in dissent* as she talked about visual practices and resources of indicating trouble used in private mundane contexts as well as in institutional contexts. Within her data she detected several dissent-expressing visual resources such as facial gestures (especially the eye-rolling), position and movement of the head and gestures like the open palm hand position. All of them can either be used as stand-alone practice as well as in combination with verbal and vocal expressions. Besides the sequential position of these practices, Clift analysed the quality of visual resources such as duration and degree of visibility and perception of the open-palm gesture.

Quite a number of presentations then went one step further and demonstrated that also other channels of perception such as tasting and smelling can become relevant aspects of interaction (Mondada 2018). In this context, Aug Nishizaka in his plenary *Perception that matters in interaction: Its complexity and analysability* talked about professional vision and professional perception. By analysing settings where vision and touch are essential interactional resources (music lessons, lessons in learning Japanese calligraphy as well as interactions between a pregnant woman and a midwife; Nishizaka 2011 and 2017), he documented the interactional accomplishment of seeing and touching. Perceiving and perceiving the perception of the other person causes the way instructions are formulated and how people manage simultaneous and multisensory resources being used. The discussion then mirrored fundamental questions in dealing with visual and especially tactile perception: How can one access tactile resources analytically while video recordings only make the point of touch accountable but not its quality and intensity? How can perception-based instruction and knowledge-based instruction be differentiated? How are perception, ascription and knowledge linked? It became obvious that there are a lot of yet unresolved problems in widening the focus of interaction analytic research towards other perceptions besides speaking and seeing. Nevertheless, in most research settings, at some point of the interaction usually speech is involved, which leads to an interest in how the interactants use verbal, visual and sometimes tactile resources throughout the interaction. Situations entirely without any spoken word have been rarely part of the analysis so far for various reasons.

Anyhow, the discussion about multimodality opened the view towards studies done within sign language linguistics that deal with interactions and settings where visual resources such as hand movement, facial gesture, gaze, tactile movements
etc. are the dominant modalities of interaction (Pfau 2012; Müller et al. 2014; Jaeger/Junghanns 2018). Sign language in this respect is an independent language with its own phonology, morphology and syntax realised by visual signs and normally without any spoken word (see Ebbinghaus/Hessmann 2001; Mohr 2014). At ICCA 2018, two presentations demonstrated how fruitful it can be to use CA-terminology and methodology for the analysis of non-spoken interaction as well as the potentials sign language research can have for going further into CA-research. In her presentation The role of visual and gestural modality in achieving mutual understanding: evidence from signed and spoken interactions Elisabeth Manrique focused on question-answer-sequences and other-initiated-repair in dyadic interaction among deaf people and of a deaf with a hearing person. She showed that although in signed interaction visual elements like head and body position as well as (conventionalised) hand position and eye-brow movement become predominantly relevant as obligatory practices of interaction, there are similar bodily practices used in signed language as well as in spoken language when asking questions or initiating repair. It is therefore possible to transfer categories and terminology commonly used in CA-research for analysing interactions without any spoken word. Nevertheless, the presentation demonstrated the different qualities of verbal and visual resources and how these affect interaction. While visual aspects like hand positions, gaze directions, etc. can be held for longer durations of time, this is not possible for spoken words that have a much higher fleetingness. So, in signed interaction the duration of a gesture can indicate if a problem that caused a repair or a response has already been solved or is still ongoing – especially when the hold is produced in turn-final position. In this respect, Elisabeth Manrique campaigned for the connectivity of the terminology used for multimodal interaction analysis and the setting of signed interactions.

Shimako Iwasaki et al. used a similar approach in their presentation on Turn-begginnings in tactile signed conversations among deafblind people and demonstrated the potentials of using CA-terminology and CA-methodology for analysing a special setting of dyadic interaction where one of the interactants is a deafblind person. Therefore, the interacting people can use neither visual nor auditive resources but only resources such as touch, conventionalized hand movements (deafblind manual alphabet, Lorm-Alphabet), body movements and objects for interaction. Although tactile and haptic perceptions are the only channels they can use, there is a clear distinction between speaker and recipient depending on the position of the hands (dominant position (speaker) and receptive position (recipient)). This becomes especially relevant at the beginning of a turn and in repair-situations. In this regard, the presentation showed that interaction with the help of hand-movements has a similar sequential structure as spoken interaction and that similar phenomena such as repair-sequences and turn-taking mechanisms can be observed. They are solely realized with the help of specific resources (touch and touch quality and duration, body movements, etc.). Furthermore, the presentation highlighted that the interaction with a deaf-blind person is a multimodal interaction and that the interactants have to orchestrate different modalities and resources while being aware of the specific interactive structure of each modality.

Both presentations showed that due to visual resources being the main point of investigation, methodological problems emerge such as transcribing bodily resources and indicating that they are dominant in the interaction. These constitute
similar problems any researcher of multimodal interaction might have. In this re-
respect, sign language linguistics can give helpful points of reference for analysing
spoken interactions. In making such settings part of the analysis, the multimodal
turn gets a new twist which might be beneficial for the analysis of multimodality
and multisensoriality in general.

4. Big data and small cameras – new technology and methodology
for interaction analysis

The use of video cameras, the multimodal turn in CA-research and the enhancement
of conversation analysis to the point of multimodal interaction analysis opened up
questions about methodological, ethical and also technological aspects. The panel
"Between the Lab and the Wild: New Technologies for CA research" took a look
at the potentials and limits that new technologies offer for CA-research. Starting
with a condensed overview about various kinds of data and the continuum between
natural data on the one hand and experimental data on the other (Kendrick 2017:4;
see also Tuma et al. 2013:36f.), the panel investigated the relation between empiric
qualitative and empiric quantitative methods and how CA could and should be po-
positioned within this. The presentations demonstrated the fruitful impact quantitative
and experimental methods can have on interaction analysis. Furthermore, the panel
continued the discussion on the status of data in CA in the digital age by presenting
innovative ways and technologies for collecting and analysing big data sets and
scrutinising the thesis that CA research "should embrace a diversity of methods that
includes not only quantification but also experimentation and laboratory observa-
ation" (Kendrick 2017:2).

In their presentation Seeing the unseen: Discovering the cognitive processes un-
derlying conversation, Stephen Levinson and Sara Bögels drew a connection be-
tween CA and cognitive science from a psycholinguistic perspective. Opening up
CA research with its specific analytic mentality to aspects cognitive linguists are
interested in and combining the observation of accountable acts of communication
with the "study [of] the underlying cognitive processes enabling people to under-
stand and produce language" (Bögels/Levinson 2017:71) can offer a deeper insight
and new perspectives into interaction. Levinson and Bögels therefore argued
against the strict rejection of cognition in classical CA research and emphasized
that thinking and reflecting are constitutive elements of interaction. Based on data
collected with EEG-technology in an experimental setting, they illustrated that cog-
nitive processes concerning the planning and preparation of an utterance start quite
early during the turn of the partner (the 'crunch zone') and thus precede the account-
able actions realised by the interactants (Bögels/Levinson 2017:75). Respective re-
search questions might be: When does a question become answerable? When does
the cognitive as well as the physical production of an answer start? This includes
asking when recipients start with their tongue movement to produce a sound or
when they produce an inhalation etc. Furthermore, Levinson and Bögels presented
that with the help of neuroimaging methods they could find out that the duration of
a blink can be a contextualisation cue for interpreting the blinking either as an in-
teractive practice or as a bodily reflex (Hömke et al. 2017). In the end, Levinson
and Bögels advocated the idea that CA as well as neuroimaging studies can benefit
from each other and thus enrich analyses.
J.P. de Ruiter and Saul Albert, in their talk Getting a backchannel in wordwise: using 'big data' with CA, scrutinised the classical CA approach of analysing only single cases or small corpora and asked about the validity of the research findings. By means of the big data corpus CABNC, they presented their approach of combining qualitative and inductive CA methods with quantitative methods used in psychology by correlating naturalistic field recordings with artificial situations in the observation room. The ensuing discussion focused on the status of hand-made transcripts as an essential part of the analysis and how the process of analysis can be affected by automatic transcripts. In that respect, the attendants agreed on the high value of transcripts but acknowledged the opportunity of compiling transcripts and annotations for a higher amount of data by specially trained people – maybe using a Wiki. This leads to the following questions: How could annotators be trained and supervised, how should sensitive data be handled, and how aspects of context information and ethnographic background knowledge could be covered. Furthermore, the discussion dealt with the benefits of quantitative analysis for the research interests of CA and what the consequences of both correlating qualitative data from natural settings with data from experimental settings and the quantitative analysis of big data are. This might cause, but also allow for a change of perspectives, research questions and research foci. The lecturers recommended working with big data sets regarding the generalisation of findings and phenomena which were based on a previous qualitative analysis.

Beyond the sheer amount of data McIlvenny/Davidsen characterise 'big data' by "diverse paradigm shifts" (McIlvenny/Davidsen 2017:17) such as using multiple digital cameras instead of only one, using other recording devices from multiple perspectives and angles, and using alternative formats up to 360° and 3D-perspectives. (McIlvenny/Davidsen 2017:17). This will not only result in a growing complexity of recordings but also of editing and transcribing and finally of presenting the data. In the last years, the collection of audiovisual data has become an almost standardised approach within conversation analytic research and has entailed the extension of CA methodology and the development of new fields like multimodal interaction analysis. The benefits of videos aiming at detailed analysis of multimodality are obvious (Heath et al. 2010). Nevertheless, the limitations of video recordings were also part of the discussion. Especially the fact that videos are not an objective tool for data collection and therefore cannot act as a neutral representation of reality (Stukenbrock 2009:167; Mondada 2016b:112) as researchers influence the data by making decisions concerning the position of the camera, the angle etc. Paul McIlvenny presented a highly innovative opportunity for solving at least some of these problems in his talk Doing being a cyborg: Robot exoskeletons and reenactments of intercorporeality. He recorded meetings where actors talked about using exoskeletons in their next performance. For recording the meetings as well as the rehearsals, he used 360° cameras and later on special software to transform the recorded video into VR one. In contrast to conventional videos, it enables the viewer to change the perspective, to move around inside the shot scenery etc. and therefore lift the boundaries that two-dimensional and single perspective recordings have. This new way of recording interactions can apparently offer more neutral and intersubjective data that are less influenced by aspects of camera position and angle. The ultimate question, however, is if such data can really offer a better access to the
situation and which kind of research questions can be answered with the help of this new kind of data.

Anja Stukenbrock presented her talk *Gaze-following: on the different phenomenologies of dual mobile eye tracking and seeing together* and described how eye-tracking technology can be used for multimodal analysis. In the last years, aspects of gaze, gaze direction and eye-movement have become prominent within multimodal interaction analysis and using eye-tracking devices has improved respective research accordingly. But it has also led to new questions about the influence of technology, on how to transcribe the data etc. While former studies had recorded data in more or less experimental and static settings (people sitting in a room instructed to talk to each other about everyday experiences; Weiß/Auer 2016), Stukenbrock presented data that was recorded in a more natural and mobile setting (Stukenbrock 2018).

Overall the panel promoted a thinking out-of-the-box regarding data (single cases vs. big data), new technologies of recording (360° cameras, mobile cameras, smartphones) and using additional methodologies (from cognitive linguistics and psychology). This would not only affect managing and storing data but also on how to deal with data in terms of editing, presenting and transcribing.

General and fundamental questions about transcription were also raised by Ruth Ayaß in her presentation *Transcribing and technology*. She first gave an overview concerning the status of transcription in CA research (Ayaß 2015). Furthermore, she highlighted that the development and the success of CA would not have been possible without technical innovations and how tightly linked CA research and technologies are. Her thesis concerning the topic is: Without technology no CA. She then demonstrated that different technical devices are part of every stage of analysis (from recording data to transcribing and presenting them) and that CA therefore actually is dependent on technology. This becomes especially relevant when thinking not only about how to record the data but when reflecting on the process of transcribing. Transcripts are an essential and constitutive part of doing CA and interaction analysis – and moreover, as Ruth Ayaß explained, CA research is identified by its transcripts. They indicate quality and authenticity of the analysis and represent the inductive and data-based mentality of CA. Although transcripts are important, the process of transcribing itself is a black box. In this respect, she presented a project of recording, transcribing and analysing people while transcribing. She stated that transcribing is a very physical and creative process in which the whole body is involved and where the body is more or less directly linked to the used technical device that becomes a kind of co-transcriber. The ensuing discussion involved questions about the fundamental role of technology and how one should reflect this in dealing with data. This led to the thesis, that one should sharpen the focus on the fact that transcripts are open-ended scientific artefacts.
5. Concluding remarks

What is the future of conversation analytic and multimodal interaction analytic research? ICCA 2018 gave hints for answering this question by presenting new fields of research and discussing methodological and technical opportunities, trends and challenges. The conference illustrated that the multimodal turn is vital and ongoing and is heading towards aspects of multisensoriality, the usage of objects and sequential organisation of different modalities used simultaneously in the interaction. This progression can be achieved by technological innovations. These would enable to go deeper into the interaction process and sometimes to take up not just a micro-perspective but a nano-perspective. The picture of what interaction is and how people manage to interact with each other becomes bigger and more colourful. Therefore, ICCA2018 opened a number of questions:

- What kind of data can people who are interested in (multimodal) interaction analysis work with? Should CA overcome the idea of working solely with natural data and instead discover the potentials more experimental data has for the analysis? What are the specific natural characteristics of experimental data? Etc.

- How do new types of data affect research questions and methodological and theoretical aspects?

- How can methodological and theoretical models of other disciplines such as cognitive linguistics, psychology and sign language linguistics make fruitful contribution to interaction analysis? This would in turn raise the question how research can be improved without losing the spirit of analysing data out of an inductive, data-driven and data-centred perspective.

Besides all the phenomena of interaction that CA research has been tackling already, ICCA2018 also made clear that there is still a lot of work to be done. Not only is the field of sign language underrepresented in interaction analytic research but also the analysis of essential resources like mimic in its own right. Although some presentations mentioned aspects of facial movement such as eye-rolling, there is still a lack of studies that take a closer look into the usage of facial resources to display not only emotions, affiliation and empathy but also the interactive role of facial gestures in terms of displaying epistemic and evaluative stances. Studies that started to analyse facial movements systematically within multimodal interaction analysis (Ruusuovori/Peräkylä 2009; Peräkylä/Ruusuovori 2012) were not represented at ICCA2018. So, ICCA 2018 showed that there is a vibrant and ongoing discussion on how to take CA into the 21st century and the digital age by finding new ways of making human interaction accessible for analysis. The next years will show how far this might go.
6. References


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