Multimodal feedback signals: Comparing response tokens in co-speech gesture and sign languages

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S2LAC SKILLS AND STRUCTURES IN LANGUAGE AND COGNITION

Introduction

Feedback signals (see Yngve 1970, Schegloff 1987)

Interactional moves that display some kind of uptake of the information represented by another person's utterance and can be marked by various multimodal cues: **vocal** (e.g., *mmh*), **manual** (e.g., gestures) and/or **non-manual** (e.g., nods, eye gaze, body movements, facial expression) and may indicate active involvement, comprehension or trouble.

Response tokens (see Gardner 2001:2)
- continuers
- acknowledgment tokens
- newsmarks
- assessments

Sequential context of continuer vs. acknowledgment (inspired by Dingemanse et al. 2022)

Continuer

| sind dann mim taxi dahin gefahren weil kein bus und so mehr fuhr | also nach marhofen wel da noch ne bekannte von dem anderen von – hans heißt der | ehm dort war |

nod nod / nod nod mhm

Acknowledgment

| ja das problem war ja auch wegen dieser wegen dieser malariaprophylaxe | äh genau |

nimmste ja tabletten / nod nod mhm

Data and annotations

Comparison of two signed and two spoken languages

Annotated in ELAN (The Language Archive, MPI Nijmegen, e.g. Brugman & Russel 2004)

Russian Sign Language (RSL) (Burkova 2015)

22 minutes
2 dyads
2 men, 2 women

Russian (Bauer forthc.)

26 minutes
3 dyads
5 women

German Sign Language (DGS) Hanke et al. 2020

28 minutes
3 dyads
3 men, 3 women

German (Hoffmann & Himmelmann 2009)

20 minutes
3 dyads
2 men, 3 women

Tier "feedback category"

acknowledgement	*mm, yeah*
continuer	*mm, hm*
newsmark	*really? Oh?*
assessment	*cool! WOW!*

Tier "head movement"

sn	small nod
mn	mixed nod
lnn	multiple large nods
ln	large nod
htf	head tilt forward
hs	head shake
hnn	multiple head nods
hb	head back

Tier "feedback type"

lexical	*yes*
lexical_nonmanual	*yes*, nod
nonlexical	*mm, huh*
nonlexical_nonmanual	*mm*, head shake
nonmanual	head, eyebrows, mouth movement, eyes (except blinks), body
manual	YES, Palm-up
man_lap_nonmanual	sign, gesture in the lap
manual_nonmanual	

Results

Feedback type: Nonmanual cues pervasive in signed and spoken
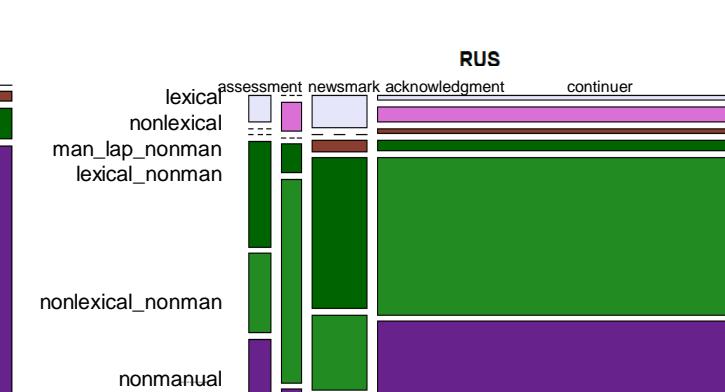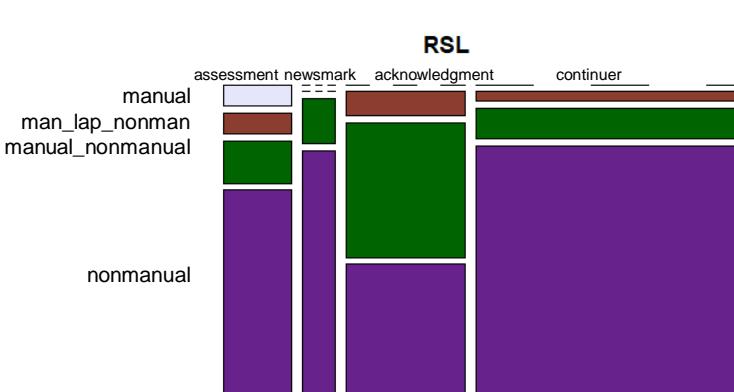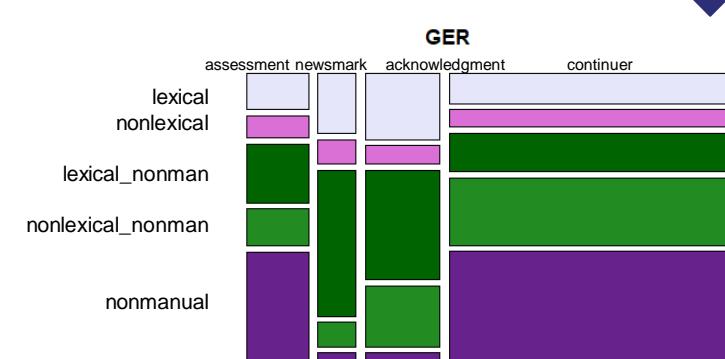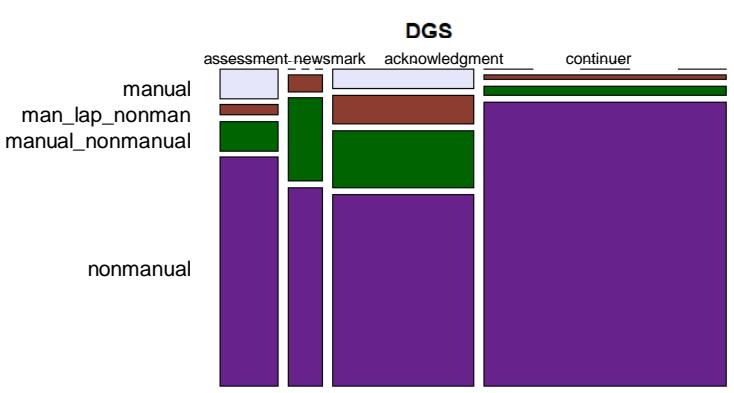
Signed / Spoken

Head movements

Preliminary findings

Feedback type

Feedback type

Do addressees produce similar feedback signals in different language modalities?

YES!

- **Nonmanual feedback** is pervasive in both language modalities -> spoken languages rely on visual cues just as sign languages

- **Continuers** are the most frequent type of feedback response tokens

- In signed languages, nonmanual only feedback signals are more common than in spoken languages, consistent with Mesch (2016)

face-to-face interaction

- **Continuers and acknoweledgments** are predominantly expressed by multiple shallow head nods in all languages

- Head nodding mostly marks continuers and acknowledgments, other head movements are mostly reserved for **assessments** and **newsmarks**

Head movements

Do head movements differentiate feedback categories?

YES!

Head movements
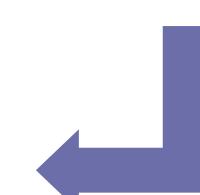
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