Stance as multimodal, dynamic, and intersubjective phenomenon in interaction

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Stancetaking is an inherent facet of language and interaction. Besides representation and appeal, Karl Bühler (1934) names expression as basic function of the linguistic sign in his organon model. This multifunctionality is not restricted to language alone. Employed as partners of speech, gestures can equally be "used to express inner states, to appeal to somebody […], and to represent objects and events in the world" (Müller 2013: 204). It is the particular gestural performance which embodies the expressive quality of gestures and "our affective stance towards the object we are depicting" (Müller 2013: 202). Interacting, interlocutors thus constantly position themselves towards given issues, exchange and align their affective states.

These complex multimodal construals are, however, not to be considered as a succession of solipsistic sensations of individual speakers as, for instance, Paul Ekman's idea of distinct emotions suggests it (Ekman/Rosenberg 1997). Instead, the paper brings forward a view of stancetaking in face-to-face interaction that conceives of it as an intersubjectively emerging and unfolding process involving multiple stances and grounding processes of meaning-making. In this light, affective stance is considered to be embodied – and thus to become perceptible – in the dynamics of interlocutors' expressive behavior. This inextricable intertwining of expression and affective experience provides the embodied ground for intersubjectively shared meaning in face-to-face interaction (cf. Froese/Fuchs 2012).

The argument is illustrated by a conversation between three students discussing psychological problems during their studies, particularly by a three-minute sequence of confrontation around the question of content-related self-determination during one's studies. Along with this negotiation process in which all interlocutors engage affectively, metaphorical meaning emerges, formulating and escalating the controversial positions. The paper combines a descriptive and sequential method of analysis (Horst et al. 2014) of the interlocutors' interactive expressive behavior, e.g., speech, gesture, body movements, as an intersubjectively shared temporal process of "stance-stacking" (Dancygier 2012), with a Metaphor Foregrounding Analysis (Müller/Tag 2010), i.e., metaphoricity that is made interactively relevant in the conversation. By demonstrating the inseparability of metaphorical meaning from multimodal patterns of affective engagement in the interaction, stance turns out as a multimodal, dynamic, and intersubjective phenomenon that grounds meaning-making in face-to-face interaction. Such a perspective formulates a counter position to the common view of affective stance as being enclosed inside and therefore deciphered from outside, and a sender-receiver model of communication.

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