A recurrent gesture in multimodal stance-stacking: the "Negative-Assessment Construction"

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recurrent gestures – stance stacking – multimodal constructions

The goal of this talk is theoretical and methodological: Theoretically, it argues for multimodal stance-stacking as a dynamic, scalar, and temporally orchestrated phenomenenon. Methodologically, it pursues a 'gesture-first' approach to the analysis of multimodal phenomena. Research usually starts from verbal expressions of stance and only considers gestures in a second analytic step. The same holds for multimodal construction research (Schoonjans 2014; Zima 2014). The alternative offered, applies a linguistic, form-based approach to gesture (Bressem & Müller 2017). Dancygier's (2012) theoretical concept of stance-stacking resonates with positions of a dynamic and scalar nature of multimodal metaphoricity (Müller 2008, 2017b; Müller & Tag 2010). It directs our attention to the scalar dimension of meaning, that becomes so obvious, once language is studied in its natural habitat: multimodal language in use.

The talk illustrates these theoretical and methodological positions with an analysis of stance-stacking as it occurs with the multimodal "Negative-Assessment Construction" in German naturalistic discourse. Here the recurrent 'Throwing-Away' gesture ('acting as-if throwing away a crumbled sheet of paper') is the starting point of the analysis. We were able to show that recurrent gestures such as the Throwing-Away gesture (Bressem & Müller 2014) may build multimodal constructions with evaluative functions that we have characterized as negative assessment (Bressem & Müller 2017). Recurrent gestures come with a stable form-meaning pairing (Ladewig 2014; Müller 2017a) and many of them are evaluative, affective, or epistemic expressions of stance. In the "Negative-Assessment Construction", the 'Throwing-Away' gesture is used with nouns, verbs, and adverbs ("the tendency", "had", "always"), with expressions of Negation ("forget", "gone", "none"), with verbal modal expressions (such as "well", "yet", "never mind"), with interjections ("alas", "ah", "oh", "well"), and the gesture is also used without co-occurring lexical item (Bressem & Müller 2017: 4). The analysis shows that the 'Throwing-Away' gesture comes with different forms and grades of stance and connects this with a similar phenonemenon, the attentional foregrounding of metaphoricity. It, thus, supports, the idea of a gradiency of multimodal forms of stance-stacking.

It is concluded and offered for discussion that: (1) a gesture-first account reveals different forms and grades of stance-taking in the use of the "Negative-Assessment Construction"; (2) this scalar dimension of meaning is what Dancygier's notion of stance-stacking attempts to describe; and (3) particular forms and grades result from the interactive flow of attention on meaning-making and the shared communicative effort that a specific dimension of meaning receives from the interlocutors.

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