

A methodology that allows to gain new insight into the study of language and interaction: Examining video conferencing among family members

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Multimodal (inter)action analysis is a holistic methodology in which language is viewed to build one system with other modes in interaction (Norris, 2013, 2015). The methodology takes the mediated action as unit of analysis (Scollon, 1998, 2001; Wertsch, 1998), and consists of an abundance of methodological tools with strong theoretical underpinnings (Norris, 2004, 2014 [2009], 2011a).

The methodology is being utilized in diverse areas such as studies into linguistic landscapes (Pietikäinen et al., 2011), artistic practice (Norris, 2011b), multimedia advertising (White, 2012); doctor-patient-translator interactions (Krystallidou, 2014), kitesurfing as mediation (Geenen, 2013a), the development from space to place (Geenen, 2013b), workplace job interviews (Kusmierczyk, 2013); the depiction of religious belief (Makboon, 2013), business coaching (Pirini, 2013), high school tutoring (Pirini, 2014) or sustainability (Kidner, 2015) to name a few.

In this presentation, I illustrate how the methodology allows us to gain new insight into language and interaction by investigating skype conversations between family members of different generations. Here, I am particularly interested in how interaction is conducted through the multiple modes from language to gesture or facial expression. The data comes from a large study of video recorded skype conversations among 20 families including approximately 120 participants.

Skype hosts the interaction of as many as 30 million people at one time (Skype, 2011). Its services, some free and others fee-based, are especially valuable to fragmented families' (Aguila, 2012). Besides Skype, other video conferencing technology such as Google hangouts, Facetime, etc. are popular, and all are available on different platforms from desktop, laptop, and tablet to smartphones, allowing families to enforce and re-enforce family identities and values (Bal-lagas, et al. 2009). While some thematic contributions exist, this is the first study that explores theoretical implications of the use of video conferencing by families with young children.

Here, I report on some findings, illustrating my examples with brief video clips and multimodal transcripts and argue that only when taking the multiple modes of communication in consideration, can we really understand how families communicate across long distances using new technologies.