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ABSTRACTS



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17th INTERNATIONAL PRAGMATICS CONFERENCE

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Gaze and turn-taking management in remote dialogue interpreting

Panel contribution

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In interpreter-mediated communication, interpreters play an important part in enabling smooth turn-taking. However, the smoothness of the interaction does not solely depend on the interpreters' actions, but rather on successful collaboration between all participants involved. To achieve mutual understanding, participants coordinate their communication by combining verbal utterances and embodied backchannelling resources such as gaze, gesture and body posture. By means of a subtle interplay of verbal utterances and backchannelling tokens, participants continuously express and monitor mutual understanding. In this process, gaze plays a central role (Mason, 2012; Vranjes et al., 2018).

In remote interpreting (by telephone and video), access to embodied communication, especially gaze, is extremely limited or lacking altogether. As a result, the interplay between verbal and embodied communication is affected. This can severely compromise smooth turn-taking and may lead to reduced mutual understanding or even communication breakdown (De Boe, 2020).

In this presentation, we analyse two studies on the role of gaze in turn-taking management in remote dialogue interpreting: (1) a series of nine doctor-patient simulations using face-to-face interpreting (F2F), telephone interpreting (TI) and video interpreting (VI); and (2) a data set of six naturalistic interpreter-mediated counselling sessions by means of video interpreting (VI), recorded with eye-tracking technology.

The analyses of both studies, which draw on a multimodal discourse-analytical framework, demonstrate substantial differences in gaze behaviour in remote interpreting compared with face-to-face interpreting. In the first study, gaze was a key element in achieving smooth turn-taking in F2F interpreting, whereas in VI, the participants appeared to rely rather on verbal information than on gaze. In TI, where gaze is obviously impossible between the primary participants and the remote interpreter, the interpreter slowed down the communication pace as a strategy for ensuring smooth turn-transitions. The second study, which focuses on the role of gaze in the management of turn-transitions between the primary speakers and the remote interpreter, shows how interpreting via video link affects both the interpreter's and the primary participants' gaze behaviour during turn-transitions and how interpreters display sensitivity to primary participants' gaze orientations at turn transitions. Both case studies confirm that the interpreter's gaze performs a less coordinative role when interpreting via video link than in face-to-face settings. These insights will contribute to our understanding of the interactional dynamics in remote dialogue interpreting and are useful to the training of users of remote interpreting services.

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