

A Universal of Human Interaction?  
**Manual Movement as  
Interactional Practice  
in Spoken and Signed  
Conversation**

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Academic dissertation in linguistics, to be publicly defended, by due permission of the dean of the Faculty of Arts at University of Gothenburg.

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When humans interact, they may make use of a range of resources, such as head movements, facial expressions, manual movement, body posture and speech. It is assumed that participants both produce and perceive this stream of information in a differentiated way: Some segments are attended to as belonging to the content of the discourse while others are rather backgrounded and may serve to regulate the interaction in terms of speakership and turn-taking.

This thesis is an anthology comprised of four studies that all touch upon the role of these backgrounded segments of behaviour in both spoken and signed interaction. In particular, I analyse manual movement phases as well as self-touching behaviour in the area of the face and the head. It is found that participants may tweak individual movement phases (such as withholding the retraction to a stable rest position or transforming the manual movement into a self-touch) that provide an in situ interpretation of the sequential structure (e.g., that a given line of action is complete) and may occasion the emergence of hierarchically structured levels of degrees of involvement (e.g., it may indicate suspension of a given line of action).

As a result, I suggest that speakership

is best understood as a continuum, rather than a binary concept (i.e. speaker and listener). It turns out that all roles within this spectrum are not static ones but have to be enacted and performed in order to be perceived as such.

I show that participants in signed and spoken conversation exploit the same resources, i.e. segments of manual movement, as part of the same practices in order to regulate speakership and turn-taking. Some of these resources are apt to be ascribed a linguistic status as part of the system of a given sign language (e.g., Swedish Sign Language and American Sign Language), while in spoken language they are often regarded as an add-on to vocal resources. This a priori divide between what counts as sign and gesture respectively obscures areas of overlap (cf. Kendon, 2008) and, in the light of the results, it is suggested to treat them in the same way.

Furthermore, with regard to the geographic distance and linguistic diversity of the languages herein analysed (Swedish Sign Language, Japanese and German), I discuss whether the use of manual movement phases as interactional practice may be considered a universal in human interaction.