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# Space in social interaction. An introduction

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This issue addresses the relation between language and space by studying everyday settings of social interaction.<sup>1</sup> All contributions analyse video-recorded instances of interaction and focus, to different degrees, on the ways in which the available multimodal resources – talk, gaze, gesture, body positioning, objects, etc. – are used and coordinated for the practical purposes of the interaction. The authors employ research methods developed in empirically grounded approaches to interaction such as conversation analysis, interactional linguistics and multimodal interaction analysis. This issue is organised around four main thematic areas – *Spatialities*, *Interactional space*, *Place names and deictics*, *Evolving spaces* – that are also the *fil rouge* of the following state of the art developments on the relevance of space in linguistic investigations.

## **1. Spatialities**

In recent years linguists have shown a burgeoning interest in analysing how language relates to space. However flourishing this literature is, the concern

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<sup>1</sup> The language/space interface was at the centre of a research project entitled "The constitution of space in interaction: A conversation analytic approach to the study of place names and spatial descriptions" carried out at the University of Bern between 2008 and 2012. The project was directed by Elwys De Stefani and benefitted from the contribution of the two co-editors of this issue, Anne-Danièle Gazin and Anna Claudia Ticca. A former member, Roberta Iacoletti, contributed significantly in the first two years of the project by collecting and transcribing the data. We would like to express our gratitude to the Swiss National Science Foundation for their generous support of the project over the past four years (project number PP001-119138).

for the spatial dimension in studies on language is not new. Space has indeed been of central interest to philology since the very beginning of the discipline in the 19th century. The identification of the Indo-European language family (Bopp, 1816) – and the research on the sound changes that it underwent – inevitably related language evolution to geographical space. In his *wave theory*, Schmidt (1872) described language innovation phenomena as spreading in concentric circles from a central geographic region, while Bartoli's (1925) *theory of areal norms* described the relationships between language change and geographical features (e.g. isolated areas, fragmented areas etc.). Around the same time period, *linguistic geography* studied the spatial distribution of linguistic features represented in atlases, the most prominent examples being Wenker's *Sprachatlas des Deutschen Reichs* (begun in 1888 but never completed), Gilliéron & Edmont's (1902-1910) *Atlas Linguistique de la France*, and Jaberg & Jud's (1928-1940) *Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz*. Ever since, the anchorage of linguistic phenomena in space has been a central issue to research traditions such as dialectology or sociolinguistics. In these areas of research, space is conceptualised as a 'given' entity in which specific language uses are recurrently shared by the inhabitants.

The relevance of space in language has further been investigated from a cognitive perspective. Different languages provide different solutions to the expression of spatial relations (e.g. through prepositions); the underlying cognitive models may therefore be divergent (Talmy, 2000; Pütz & Dirven, 1996). In this perspective, language communities' *cognitive diversity* (Levinson, 2003) is visible in the different *frames of reference* that speakers use when locating objects in space (Senft, 1997; Levinson, 2003; Levinson & Wilkins, 2006). Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) work on the sedimentation of spatial metaphors in prepositions such as *in*, *on*, *over* etc. is a further field of interest within cognitive linguistics. In the German tradition, the label *Raumlinguistik* ('linguistics of space') has been used to describe the cognitive approach to language (Vater, 1991), and has also been combined with variationist queries (Berthele, 2006). Cognitive approaches to space have shown that speakers do indeed represent space in different manners. One upshot of this is that space is no longer seen as a sort of given entity, but rather as a cognitive representation of the environment. However, cognitive-oriented linguists and typologists relate this diversity to differences in language systems, disregarding the praxeological and social embeddedness of language uses.

The "space-as-a-container" view that dominated the scientific discourse in both philology and in geography during the 19th century was challenged in the second half of the 20th century. Space is no longer seen as an objectively describable receptacle in which life takes place, rather it is perceived as resulting from social life (Lefebvre, 1974). Such a constructivist understanding

of space (Casey, 1997) aims at analysing the social actions by which people give sense to a place, eventually leading to differentiating *space* from *place*: "enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a center of established values" (Tuan, 1977: 54). Human geography – as a branch of social sciences – studies space with respect to the activities that people accomplish there (e.g. in urban environments there are areas for working, shopping, dwelling...), but also with regard to language uses. The branch of *language geography* is just a further field of study situated at the interface between geography and linguistics (see De Blij, Murphy & Fouberg, 2007: 171-175).

In this issue, different conceptualisations of space will be described in Lorenza MONDADA's paper about a participatory democracy meeting, while Heiko HAUSENDORF will examine the ways in which the particular architecture of a lecture room is used as an interactional resource by lecturers.

## 2. Interactional space

Interactionally-oriented researchers developed a strong interest in how individuals arrange themselves in space when engaging in a social encounter. Face-to-face interaction thus became an object of research in social and human studies, notably in anthropology, sociology and psychology. Within anthropology, Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead are commonly seen as pioneering figures of film-based interaction studies (Bateson & Mead, 1942). In psychology, Kurt Lewin and Arnold Gesell termed *cinemanalysis* their method of studying the body movements of very young children (Gesell, 1935), while Albert Scheflen explored the posture of his patients during therapy sessions (Scheflen, 1964). These approaches represent early attempts to use recording devices for analytic purposes, however in the field of sociology it was Erving Goffman's method – based on direct observation – that proved to be most influential for linguistics. Goffman was particularly interested in the ways in which individuals engage in a *focused interaction*, or an *encounter*, which he defined as "all those instances of two or more participants in a situation joining each other openly in maintaining a single focus of cognitive and visual attention" (Goffman, 1963: 89). Individuals who become involved in face-to-face interaction are systematically seen to reciprocally position their bodies to each other. Kendon's (1977) notion of *F-formation* captures the specific positioning of participants' bodies in what Clark (1973) calls a *canonical encounter*.

While these researchers have shown that spatiality is a relevant dimension for speakers in face-to-face settings, they have not sufficiently taken into account that participants constantly rearrange, alter, modify the positioning of their bodies in space, and that these rearrangements are sensitive to the specific actions they accomplish. Mondada (2005) therefore proposes the notion of

*interactional space* which emphasises the reflexive relationship between the action in which participants are engaged, the spatial arrangement of their bodies, and the 'given' spatial features.<sup>2</sup> The relevance of the latter has been at the centre of Charles Goodwin's studies, in which he looks at how the properties of space constitute a *semiotic field* within which interactions take place (Goodwin, 2000). These issues are discussed in Dirk VOM LEHN's contribution which shows how interactants visiting a museum achieve a common focus of attention, while Anna Claudia TICCA will look at how participants manage to dissolve the interactional space when ending a social encounter.

### 3. Place names and deictics

Practices of spatial reference have preoccupied both philologists and geographers since the end of the 19th century. *Place names* – or *toponyms* – were described very early as language units whose main function consists in identifying, and hence referring to, a unique place. Etymological analyses of place names were carried out by dialectologists rooted in the Italian research tradition, such as Flechia (1871) and Ascoli (1879). A similar interest developed in geography, where the scholars hoped to reconstruct the original topography of a place by analysing the etymological origin of a name (Hughes, 1867). It was actually a geographer, the Swiss Johann Jacob Egli, who published the first 'History of geographical onomastics' (*Geschichte der geographischen Namenkunde*) in 1886. Place names also captured the interest of a pivotal figure in anthropology: in 1934 Franz Boas published his study of the *Geographical names of the Kwakiutl Indians*. The historical analysis of (place) names is the core business of onomastics, a discipline that is nowadays sometimes accused of not keeping up with the developments that have occurred in linguistics.<sup>3</sup> There is, however, a substantial amount of research focusing on (place) names from recent perspectives of linguistic investigation, ranging from 'pragmatics of proper names' (*Pragmatik der Eigennamen*; Werner, 1995) to socio-onomastics (Pablé, 2009).

Place names have also become an object of research in interactionally-oriented approaches. They have been studied in particular as resources that speakers use to refer to a place or, as Schegloff (1972) states, to "formulate place". In his seminal paper, Schegloff analyses place names as one among other possible resources that interactants may use when referring to a place, as in geographical formulations (addresses, degrees of latitude and longitude),

<sup>2</sup> For another use of the notion *interactional space* within interactionally oriented research, see Enfield (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Levinson (2003: 69) states for instance that "[t]he study of placenames or onomastics is one of the older branches of linguistic enquiry [...]. But despite the long tradition of study, little of theoretical interest has emerged."



relation-to-members formulations (e.g. *Chuck's house*), relation-to-landmarks formulations (e.g. *near the bridge*) and course-of-action places (e.g. *where they put the rubbish*). The article focuses on how speakers choose between the different resources that the language system provides for formulating place and shows that the choice is sensitive to the interactants' location, the social categories that they make relevant, and the activity in which they are engaged. This approach to the analysis of spatial reference has been further developed within conversation analysis (Drew, 1978; Auer, 1979; Mondada, 2000; Myers, 2006; Heritage, 2007) and it has also been transferred to the field of onomastics, under the heading of *interactional onomastics* (De Stefani, 2009, 2012). Place names treated as objects of conversation will be at the centre of Elwys DE STEFANI's paper.

Another domain of investigation focusing on the establishment of reference is defined by the study of deixis. In linguistics, Karl Bühler's (1934) work is generally considered to be the starting point of the analysis of the deictic properties of language.<sup>4</sup> (Space) reference is seen as emanating from a central reference point – the *origo* in Bühler's terms – and can be realised in three different ways: as *demonstratio ad oculos*, referring to the immediate situational context in which the conversation takes place; as *Deixis am Phantasma*, in which speakers refer to an imagined space; and as *anaphora*, in which the speakers' talk is the object of reference. Bühler's research has had a marginal impact among English-speaking researchers (see Lyons, 1977; Fillmore, 1997) but remains dominant in the German tradition. For many authors, (space) deictics share with (place) names the properties of being semantically void and of directly referring to an object. It is therefore not surprising that some scholars – typically language philosophers – treat deictics as an instance of proper names. In Bertrand Russell's theory of descriptions, the philosopher distinguishes *ordinary proper names* from language units that are *logically proper names*, the latter being all those expressions that directly refer to an object – such as the deictics *this* and *that* (Russell, 1905).

One major criticism that has been formulated with regard to Bühler's theory relates to the egocentricity of the notion of *origo*. According to Levinson (2003: 14) "the tradition in which the human body is the source of all our notions of orientation and direction is a major ethnocentric error". The social dimension of deictic practices has indeed long been ignored. It is notably in the American tradition, where the notion of deixis meets the concept of indexicality, that the sociocentricity of deictic reference is described (Hanks, 1990). Consequently, Hanks (1990) refuses the notion of *origo* and speaks instead of the *indexical ground* which he describes as dynamic and interactively construed (see also

<sup>4</sup> However, see Jespersen's (1922: 123-124) notion of *shifters*, used to define those language units that can refer to diverse objects depending on the communicative situation in which they are used.

Hausendorf, 2003). In her paper on reference to imagined spaces, Anja STUKENBROCK will address precisely these issues.

#### 4. Evolving spaces

Talk is produced, in the vast majority of cases, in mobile settings of interaction. People can be seen to engage in social actions that are achieved through collective movement, such as walking-together (Relieu, 1999), running-together (Collinson, 2006), driving-together (Haddington, 2010). While accomplishing these activities, the interactants continuously alter their positions in space, and constantly modify their orientations. In recent years, interactionally-oriented researchers have significantly contributed to understanding how participants manage to accomplish what Goffman (1963: 98) calls a *we-rationale*, i.e. a sense of doing a specific activity *together*. The *togetherness* is displayed by the interactants and at the same time perceived by co-present individuals who not only recognise them as a *participation unit* (Goffman, 1963), but also as a *vehicular unit* (Goffman, 1971).<sup>5</sup> Empirically based interactional researchers have been looking at how the different resources available to interactants – talk, gesture, gaze, body movement, object manipulation, etc. – are used to accomplish collective actions in accountable ways. The organisational practices of individuals engaging in collective mobility have been examined in different kinds of settings, such as in guided tours (Mondada, 2005; Stukenbrock & Birkner, 2010; De Stefani, 2010; Pitsch, 2012; De Stefani & Mondada, in press), visits to museums and art gallery exhibits (Heath & vom Lehn, 2004; Hindmarsh et al., 2005). Couples navigating in space have been studied during car rides (Laurier et al., 2008; Haddington & Keisanen, 2009; Haddington, 2010; De Stefani & Gazin, submitted) and as they shop in a supermarket (De Stefani, 2011). Navigational practices (Psathas, 1976; Hutchins, 1995) are particularly appealing for linguists as well: indeed, space-related uses of language (spatial descriptions, space deictics, etc.) have systematically been described either within a disembodied, theoretic framework or, as in empirically grounded research, on the basis of stationary settings of interaction. These studies have shown that mobility crucially affects the ways in which interactants use language: the syntactic organisation of turns-at-talk is indeed sensitive to the changing environment in which the interaction takes place. In addition, participants engaging in practices of reference have to come to terms with the fact that both the *origo* and the object of reference are unstable in time and space, and that the position of the interactants with respect to the referent is constantly changing. These topics will be addressed by Anne-Danièle GAZIN's paper on instruction sequences in driving school lessons.

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<sup>5</sup> Ryave & Schenkein (1974) have shown that interactants display their recognisability as vehicular units by moving in space in specific ways.

A further understanding of mobility is central to interactional studies: even in predominantly stationary settings of interaction, participants can be seen to engage in short-range repositionings and reorientations of their bodies, their gaze, etc. How these reorientations are intertwined with the organisation of talk has been studied early on the basis of video footage (Goodwin, 1979; Schegloff, 1998) and has developed into studies on multimodality (Schmitt, 2007).

Finally, mobility has proven to be consequential with respect to the current use of various technological devices such as mobile and smart phones, and related communication platforms such as SMS, E-mail, Facebook, Twitter, etc. Mobile communication is remarkably different from landline telephone calls, which constitute the primordial data in the epistemogenesis of conversation analysis (see Schegloff, 1967; Sacks, 1972). Indeed, while in landline communication the location of the caller and the call-taker is generally not at stake, in mobile telephone conversations, sequences in which the participants localise each other are frequent (although it has been shown that queries about what the other "is doing" occur even more frequently; Weilenmann & Leuchovius, 2004). Mobile phone conversations thus provide an ideal setting for the study of place formulations, which may occur while the participants are on the move (Arminen, 2005; Hutchby & Barnett, 2005; Licoppe, 2009). In addition, modern communication devices are equipped with cameras, so that interactants are not only able to formulate a place but also to actually show the location in which they are situated to their interlocutors (Morel & Licoppe, 2009). How such practices of display are prepared, negotiated and eventually accomplished will be discussed in the paper authored by Julien MOREL and Christian LICOPPE.

## 5. The contributions to the issue

### *Spatialities*

Lorenza MONDADA analyses excerpts taken from a workshop of participatory democracy in which some inhabitants of a neighbourhood in Lyon (France) discuss an urban development project under the guidance of a chairperson. The author focuses on the emergence, the sustainment and the final resolution of a controversy among different participants who debate the construction of a park recommended by the project. The analysis allows for the reflection on three conceptualisations of space that the participants treat as relevant for the interaction in which they are engaged: a) the *represented space* ("espace décrit") is understood as the space the participants talk about; b) the *interactional space* ("espace interactionnel") is organised by the chairperson and makes different participation frameworks visible; c) the *inscriptional space* ("espace textuel") is the area in which the chairperson writes down statements, suggestions, etc. expressed by the participants. The



author's analysis shows that these spatialities are layered and intertwined and that they are constantly transformed, reshaped and sequentially organised with regard to the interactional needs at hand.

Heiko HAUSENDORF explores the architecture of university lecture rooms that he understands to reflect sedimented solutions of recurrent interactional problems, and that he captures under the notion of *archaeology of interaction* ("Archäologie der Interaktion"). He addresses this topic with regard to a specific sequential environment, i.e. the opening of university lectures, and with respect to a particular object of the lecture hall, namely the lecture desk. The author's analysis begins with the intricate problem of deciding when a lecture actually starts: he shows that the beginning of a lecture is already exhibited with the spatial arrangement of the participants, while the lecturer's talk comes in only at a later stage. His analysis furthermore illustrates that the lecture is perceivable by the students as a social event thanks to the specific architecture of the lecture hall. Attendees can be seen to perceive the lecture as "ongoing" even if lecturers engage in interaction with other co-present participants (e.g. teaching assistants); also, lecturers may deliver their lesson without making use of specific spatial resources provided by the local architecture (such as the lecture desk).

### *Interactional space*

Dirk VOM LEHN's contribution analyses the spatial orientation and configuration of visitors to art exhibitions. His study shows how visitors position themselves in relation to a work of art, and how people's positioning contributes to configuring not only the visibility of paintings, but also the involvement of the co-participants with the exhibit. The author describes how two or more visitors navigating together approach and place themselves around a work of art. By examining the transition from a mobile to a stationary setting of interaction, the author shows how participants embody a proposal to stop in front of a work of art and how co-participants align with such a proposal. This is possible due to continuous monitoring of each other's actions, which also accounts for the ongoing transformations of visitors' visual orientation. The adoption of a standpoint, the author argues, provides grounds for a common examination of the piece of art. Therefore, rather than being an individual experience, the exhibit appears to be interactively negotiated in concert with the co-participants; it is thus fundamentally intersubjective.

The study presented by Anna Claudia TICCA examines the closing sequences of service encounters in an Italian travel agency. The author focuses on both dyadic and multiparty interactions and shows the relevance of participants' alignment in closing the interaction and the customers' departure from the agency. Such closings are achieved through the coordination and mutual monitoring of both visual and vocal resources. The practices deployed to bring

the encounter to an end are sensitive to the type of visit – "last visit" and "follow up visit" – and to the number of participants taking part in the encounters. In this regard, the author shows how the manipulation of travel documents, which typically occurs in (potential) "last visits", represents a useful resource for projecting the closing of the interaction. The analysis shows that participants need to display alignment (in talk, in the orientation of their bodies, in the manipulation of objects, etc.) for successfully closing their encounter. As for "follow up" visits, where no closing-routine practices such as the delivery of the travel documents occur, it appears that closing sequences are more extended, with re-openings occurring more frequently.

### *Place names and spatial deixis*

The analysis of how place names are used in two different settings of naturally occurring interaction is the focus of Elwys DE STEFANI's paper. By confronting a corpus of guided tours through the city of Naples (Italy) with data collected during a committee for place name standardisation (Ticino, Switzerland) meeting, the author observes two recurrent practices. While tour guides can be frequently observed formulating a multitude of names for the same place, the standardisation committee members work towards obtaining a unique place name. Apart from being central for accomplishing the specific social activity in which the interactants are engaged, these practices allow the participants also to exhibit their locally relevant social identities. Besides the interactional analysis of these excerpts, the author reflects on the contribution that interactionally-oriented methods can give to the synchronic analysis of proper names, which has been disregarded, the author argues, by the main linguistic approaches. In contrast to dominant language philosophic stances, the article shows that place names, and proper names in general, are far from being referentially 'evident' units of language.

Drawing on a corpus of self-defence training sessions for adolescent girls which took place in Germany, Anja STUKENBROCK analyses the construction and reference to perceptually inaccessible objects and persons. Indeed, in these sessions the trainer can be seen to repeatedly construct imagined scenarios in which a "victim" is confronted by an "aggressor". The author bases her analysis on Bühler's conceptualisation of deixis. She begins her analysis with an occurrence of *demonstratio ad oculos* and hence discusses two cases of *Deixis am Phantasma*, in which the trainer constructs an imagined space in two different ways. The author discusses first a case in which the trainer refers to a perceptually absent person (the victim); subsequently she examines an excerpt in which she embodies the actions of an imagined aggressor. While these excerpts reflect two types of *Deixis am Phantasma* as described by Bühler, the author points out that no clear boundaries can be drawn between what is perceptually accessible and what is

perceptually inaccessible. Participants appear to constantly change between different deictic modes.

### *Evolving spaces*

In her contribution, Anne-Danièle GAZIN analyses instructional sequences occurring in driving lessons recorded in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. Her article begins with the description of a recurrent syntactic phenomenon that she observes in instruction formulations, namely the juxtaposition of grammatically unconnected clauses. She then proposes a contextualised, multimodal analysis of these occurrences and illustrates how this specific turn-constructive procedure is highly sensitive to concomitant spatial and temporal contingencies. While interacting, participants indeed continuously orient themselves not only to the changing perceptual surroundings, but also to the progressing time and to co-occurring actions performed by the participants. This article thus contributes both to the study of instructional sequences in a mobile setting of interaction and to the understanding of grammar and turn construction as an emerging, unfolding phenomenon that materialises in real time.

In their study on video phone conversations, Julien MOREL and Christian LICOPPE observe that participants orient towards the necessity of showing each other's heads on the screen, which results in a default configuration that the authors describe as the 'speaking heads' arrangement. But participants occasionally modify the default configuration, e.g. when they show each other an object situated in their perceptual environment. In their article, the authors study how participants organise the transition from the 'speaking heads' configuration to an arrangement in which one participant uses the video phone device to show some object to his or her interlocutor. The authors describe how these reorientations are sequentially organised. Preface-structures (in which showing an object is offered, asked for, etc.) are systematically observable. Participants formulate preface-structures not only to make the vision of a specific object expectable, but also to deal with the irrelevance of transitional images, produced while the camera is being reoriented. In addition, the authors show that the progression and organisation of showing and viewing an object is interactionally organised by both participants.

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