

Interactive decision making as distributed cognitive processing in multilectal mediated communication

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With the multitude of stakeholders in the language industry and its ever-increasing technologization, it appears that any truly productive analysis of cognitive aspects of multilectal mediated communication (MMC) (Halverson and Muñoz 2020) ‘in the wild’, needs to take into account the social and material conditions and constraints of such activities (cf. Risku 2010). Focusing on interactive decision making in real-life technical translation and audio description processes, this paper presents an empirical analysis of how language professionals jointly construct intersubjective agreement (Garfinkel 1967, Lindström et al. 2021) on decisions in the processes of producing translated texts and audio description scripts. Specifically, the paper zooms in to the interaction between human participants and between participants and technology/artifacts through a microanalysis of collaborative decision making in MMC. The data analysed comprise video recordings of face-to-face interaction, and real-time electronic interaction.

Connecting to socio-cognitive research within CTS (Muñoz 2010, 2016, Risku 2010, 2014, Risku, Apfelthaler and Windhager 2013, Risku and Rogl 2021), the study uses theoretical points of departure emphasizing the interdependence of human actions and interactions and the material environment for cognition, primarily Distributed Cognition (Hutchins 1995, 2006). Specifically, the notion of shared cognition (Resnick, Levine and Teasley 1991) is used to understand decision making as an interactional achievement, and the notion of cognitive artifacts (Hutchins 1999) serves to conceptualize the role of material objects in socio-cognitive processes. Importantly, cognitive artifacts are not seen to merely serve as external aids for individuals’ cognitive processing, but to constitute components of cultural-cognitive systems that reflect previous activities and structure current and future ones.

Methodologically, the paper develops the use of interaction analysis in CTS (Hirvonen and Tiittula 2018). It takes as point of departure the basic tenets of conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974, ten Have 2007), and uses multimodal interaction analysis (Hausendorf, Schmitt and Kesselheim 2016, Broth and Keevallik 2020) and microethnography (Streeck and Mehus 2005) to cater analytically for the integration of material resources in human interaction. The paper zooms in on two aspects of interactive decision making deemed central to socio-cognitive conceptualizations of MMC activities: how decisions are interactively co-constructed among the participants, and how cognitive artifacts are integrated into the decision-making process.

Through a detailed analysis of moment-to-moment activities, the paper develops current understandings in CTS of how cognitive processing can be seen as distributed among language professionals and how they orient towards cognitive artifacts in decision-making processes.

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