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2018

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/16222>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Meyer, Christian; Schüttpelz, Erhard: Multi-Modal Interaction and Tool-Making. Goodwin's Intuition. In: *Media in Action. Interdisciplinary Journal on Cooperative Media*. Socio-Informatics (2018), Nr. 1, S. 189–202. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/16222>.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here:

<https://doi.org/10.25819/ubsi/8282>

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Multi-Modal Interaction and Tool-Making: Goodwin's Intuition

Christian Meyer, Erhard Schüttpelz

1.

We will comment on two important themes of the book in order to demonstrate that we can read and use Chuck Goodwin's radical book in an equally radical way. We will be concerned with the issue of the cooperative nature of the title and of *homo sapiens*. The title of the book could also have been "Human Co-operative Action"; another possible title would have been "Co-operative *Language*". For it is indeed one of the greatest books in linguistic theory after Karl Bühler (1934/1990), and we only wished this fact had become more apparent in its title or subtitle, for example as: *Human Cooperative Action: How Language Lets Us Inhabit Each Other's Bodies and Minds*.

In the book, we learn that and how, through language, we mutually "inhabit" our bodies and minds. Goodwin has shown in abounding detail how we do so by way of the "accumulative" property of verbal interaction. However, it is regrettable for linguistic theory that Goodwin emphasised the "accumulative" property of verbal interaction and language use in an intention to downplay the altruistic character of precisely this very property. As we view it, and we think that Goodwin's analyses make this overwhelmingly evident, both inseparably belong together, and one explains the other. Goodwin's examples excellently demonstrate that each "co-operative" action is dependent upon a mutual possibility of assistance, upon a mutual and, therefore, "publicly"—visibly and audibly—available assistability. Thus, we could go so far as

to say that “language” is nothing else than human “altruism”, or vice versa, that the altruism of human beings is primarily and finally embodied in their being creatures of language. Goodwin demonstrates that the *zoon politikon* is essentially a *zoon logon echon* and, conversely, the *zoon logon echon* is necessarily a *zoon politikon*.

In our view, and we have already extensively described this in another text (Meyer/Schüttpelz in press) on which we heavily draw in the next paragraphs, the familiar linguistic possibilities of “turn-taking” and “repair” are phenomena from a much more embracing dimension of cooperation: the dimension of mutually embodied and linguistic assistance, of “assistability”. This assistability is often rendered possible by the mutual anticipation of next turns, or generally “nexts”, that are fed by sequentiality, as Goodwin has shown in much detail. In particularly “hard cases”, the basic principles of assistability can even be expedited, as evident, for example, in the general matrix of a cooperative occurrence: “From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs.”¹ However, this matrix does not become effective as a “categorical imperative”, but in the context of practical circumstances (urgency, state of information, interactional memory, course of events so far). Reparability is always directed, as Goodwin emphasises rightly, towards the (incremental) “compositionality” of an occurrence. Only the reparable can be compositional and vice versa, as we have stressed above.

Even in situations in which one of the co-interactionalists is aphasic, this assistability can ensure that the aphasic person can participate successfully in an interaction. Chuck Goodwin has shown this in a number of his texts, most notably in his paragon of “co-operative action” that opens his text of 2013 just as well as his book, and that is discussed in the book at least five times and all in all in over more than 30 pages.

Chil, who after a stroke is only able to say “Yes”, “No”, and “Di”, directs through his gesture Candy, who lends him her voice for his con-

tributions. Subsequently to Candy’s own utterance that in Chil’s neighborhood it had not snowed much this year (line 1) in contrast to last year (line 10), Chil corrects her by saying “°yeah- No No. No.:", which he specifies with a gesture of his left hand. In this gesture, Chil performs a semicircle that depicts a step-like movement from one place to another.

Transcript 1: The cooperative accomplishment of a turn

In spite of his heavily impaired faculty of language, Chil is able to produce a turn in the conversation that is both complex and accurate: In contrast to what Candy had originally suggested in line 10, it was not “last year” but in “the year before last” in which there was a lot of snow in Chil’s neighborhood. Chil’s “yes” and “now’s” have such a strong indexical component that they allow him to use them as resource for the detailed structuring of Candy’s utterance in line 14 and to integrate in it his own explicit gestural corrections. In the audio-visual recording, it is audible how precisely he puts his contradiction to Chuck’s utterance of line 12 with his contribution of line 13 and how he positions his agreement to what Candy says in line 14 with his utterance of line 15.

The participants have been discussing snow in the area where Chil lives

1 Candy: You haven’t had **that** much this year have you.

... ((8 lines omitted))

10 Candy: But *la* *st* year. Whooh!
 11 Chuck: [°mm
 12 In the l-ast year-
 13 Chil: [°yeah- **No No. No.**
 14 Candy: er the year before *la* *st*.
 15 Chil: [Yes.



Fig. 1: The cooperative accomplishment of a turn“ (Goodwin 2018:69, Fig. 5.1, edited).

It will be enlightening to quote Chuck Goodwin's analysis at length, to then paraphrase him in order to decompose his constructions and recompose them again. His best terminological ideas are often themselves composed like the stone-tools that he has presented in the introduction: They are laminated of several components and assembled to produce a specific repercussiveness. For the example above, his terminological suggestion is "indexical incorporation" (2017: 73). He explains the concept as follows:

By interrupting Candy's 'In the last year' before it has even reached completion, Chil vividly marks precisely that talk as what his "**No No. No.:**" Is emphatically objecting to. By using proximity in this way, he refers to Candy's talk indexically.

Indexical incorporation is among Chil's most powerful meaning-making resources. His operations on Candy's talk ... create a path ... through which what Candy said, including her use of rich language to state a specific proposition, can flow into Chil's utterance. Through indexical incorporation Chil's tiny lexicon can be used to create utterances with rich semantics, and to state varied, complex propositions. It is the key to his ability to reuse accumulatively for his own purposes complex resources created by others.

The practices being examined here are clearly relevant to Volosinov's arguments about how in reporting another's speech we simultaneously provide a new commentary on it, to Goffman's deconstruction of the speaker in 'Footing,' and to the Bakhtinian argument that the dialogic organization of language and culture is made possible by our capacity to rent and reanimate the voices of those who preceded us. There are, however, some crucial differences. The practices being examined here are not restricted to reported speech, or intertextual use of another's language, but emerge as a pervasive feature of the generic indexical organization of language and action. (2017: 73f)

How can we relate Chuck Goodwin's concept of "indexical incorporation" to the summary of the book given above? "Indexical incorporation" is an ad hoc concept for the ability to include what has been said just now, or even what is said simultaneously by *alter*, into *ego's* ongoing utterance. Conversely, it describes *ego's* possibility to chime into *alter's* ongoing utterance in such a way that it is commented upon and modified at the same time and that it is completed together with the joint knowledge of all participants. The "deixis" or "indexicality" that is necessary to do so is transversal to the variants identified by Bühler (deixis in absent space, pronominal deixis for linguistic reference, deixis ad phantasm). The reason for this is that the deixis of indexical incorporation *simultaneously* refers to absent or imagined content, to preceding linguistic units, and to the present space, which is used metaphorically to improvise a gesture of "leaping over something" by Chil. The leap (or step) was intended to signify a leap (step) over "last year" to "the year before last". But even the three types of signs of Charles Sanders Peirce (1935, 1958) that Goodwin presents at the end of the book are activated in Chil's gesture *simultaneously*: While "no" is a regular English word, the gesture is iconic, indexical, and symbolic at the same time. Any analysis of spoken language leads to this kind of analytic complexity, since everything that happens in verbal—multimodal—interaction fractalises and subverts the far too rough-grained semiotic or grammatical categories, which weren't, after all, developed in detailed sequential analyses of audio-visual footage, but in a world of written and invented examples. Chuck Goodwin was maybe the most productive scholar to remedy this situation, and we are grateful for the dozens of fine-grained concepts that he has developed to complement the vocabulary of language and interaction theory through detailed analyses of multimodal data.

We do not know whether the concept of "indexical incorporation" will defy the terminological ravages of time. We will try, however, to paraphrase the terminology in full sentences:

Verbal interaction reveals itself to be here, just like anywhere else, an ever-unfolding process of mutual accomplishment. This accomplishment not only premises what has happened so far but provides it with a new usage, a new meaning, in a so far unforeseen way that was not yet designated in the repertoire. As soon as several persons start to attend to a linguistic or verbally previewed task, as, for example, to reconstruct a story or (as in our case) episode, several resources come to be deployed whose mutual assistance leads to surprising “coinciding elucidations” (our ad hoc paraphrase for Goodwin’s terminological invention of “indexical incorporation”). The co-operative accomplishment of components and compositions that continuously accumulate and vanish again (since they are tied to the moment) is itself a form of mutual assistance that becomes visible particularly well where the resources are distributed unequally but can be bridged and balanced through creative acts of assistance (as in the example of Chil and Candy). But this assistance is never one-sided, it is just “from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs”. And the “needs” and “abilities” of interaction are switching all the time, thus Chil’s improvised gesture becomes the heroic feat of the moment (and of Goodwin’s book).

This insight into the mutual constitution of co-operative and cooperative action entails consequences for linguistic theory that can be formulated in a weak and in a strong version. The weak version implies that natural linguistic “grammaticality” and compositionality is tied to demonstrable reparabilities, and that without mutual reparability, no “rules” can exist. The strong version goes a step further and implies that natural linguistic “grammaticality” is nothing else but a (talk-aboutable) manifestation of the mutual reparability and correctability of linguistic practices, and of the mutual assistability of practices in general. A theory of grammar that follows this intuition might develop some time by returning to the original program of EMCA that Garfinkel and Sacks (1970: 341) once defined as the study of “the rational properties” of “indexical expressions”. We know that philosophy, logic, and linguistics

for centuries (and in the case of philosophy and logic even millennia) have understood this question to be solved by asking ‘how any property of indexicality can become a reasonable part of rationality’. And we can learn from Goodwin’s book, time and again, that the practical questions of learning skills and of coping with a task or a situation are just the opposite: ‘how any rational (or linguistic) property can become an indexical part of being reasonable’. This practical question, to cut a long story short, should be the guiding theoretical question of grammar.

Furthermore, the example above demonstrates that verbal interaction, verbally guided interaction as well as interaction-in-its-being-talked-about can only be distinguished theoretically. All in all, language and interaction can only be distinguished theoretically. Of course, we may interact silently, as if there were no words. And we can talk in the dark or on the phone, as if there was no interaction. No, we cannot. We act as if there was interaction, and we act as if there were words. And there is, and there are. Because in reporting on the action involved in both cases, or in arguing about either, neither words nor interaction are missing: to talk about things, report, argue, describe, tell a story, analyse, compare, gloss, give reasons, justify, and so on. As soon as we are experiencing other beings and things and are able to inhabit and anticipate each others’ bodies, movements, and minds, and as soon as we learn to talk in intercorporeal relations, all of them become talk-aboutables. Goodwin’s book will be an important source of inspiration for undermining the separations of linguistic and social theory.

2.

By way of conclusion, we return to Goodwin’s title and main theses. Did he solve the enigma of ‘accumulative invention’? With regard to language and linguistic theory, we think that he did, through his analogy of the “heterotechnic” compositionality of stone-tools and the *ad hoc* assembled linguistic and multimodal resources as well as through his presentation of linguistic reflexivity and his detailed exploration of the

acquisition of language skills. With regard to the fundamentals of historical knowledge, he hit the nail on the head, saying that if it is true that any improvised verbal interaction is also a learning process, then we find ourselves in historical time in any of these situations. In situations of verbal interaction, everything salient for learning processes and everything that stabilises our artifacts, our linguistic constructions, and our social relations, is present. If we want to know how “history gets done”, how accumulating knowledge and skill develops, how tools are assembled *ad hoc*, and how tools emerge, then nothing is able to instruct us better than the study of verbal, multimodal interaction realised in detailed analyses of audio-visual recordings in the way that Chuck Goodwin has shown us. There is no aggregation and no emergence that starts *from* these situations, for aggregation and emergence can only happen *within* situations, and so we are once again left to find our explanations of the social and the linguistic in them, and only in them. Either “emergence” is a process we can observe, or “emergence” camouflages as a process and is happening off-stage “when we are not looking”. The good news is that emergence happens all the time, and we are able to trace it empirically.

However, the difficulties start with concept building, not with empirical observation. Most of the established concepts, as we have already said above, are too rough-grained and fail in their promises of classifications: In fine-grained analyses like Goodwin’s, most of the time, the indexical is iconic and symbolic as well, Bühler’s three kinds of deixis apply simultaneously, and the conditions of speech act theory do not apply. This does not make the assessment of Goodwin’s claims about *homo sapiens* any easier. What do historical irreversibility, the accumulative or incremental usage of ongoingly improvised interaction components, and the emergence of tools through “heterotechnic cooperation” (Reynolds 1994: 412) have in common? We will try to define this common denominator in Goodwin’s own words.

As Goodwin demonstrates, human practices employed in interaction are always practices that are continuously talked-about, or, at least, are talkaboutable. Each verbally shaped or verbally-multimodally co-shaped interaction results in a double objectivation, the continuous double objectivation of language. For one, it develops a transience between language and the linguistically referenced world, which is achieved mainly through pointing gestures, deixis, “environmentally coupled gestures” and illustrations of “like this” (“it looked exactly like this”, “roughly like that”). Secondly, it acquires a permanent recursivity and reinterpretation of the linguistic variables used, i.e. the transitivity between language and talk about language. In general, we can say that all talk about language and commenting on talk makes an object of language for itself, and thereby it makes it its own medium. Manifestations of these linguistic properties in particular include quotes and comments, the quotability and commentability of each utterance. Quotability and explicability, as evident in the example of Chil and Candy and in others throughout the book, do not come to be added to the ongoing utterance as something external, but are properties intrinsic to the ongoing accomplishment of the utterance itself (or of practices in general). In interactions, all utterances are permanently mutually made and kept quotable and explicable.

In his comment on the Candy and Chil example quoted above, Goodwin refers to the basic statement on reported speech by Voloshinov, without directly citing him: “Reported speech is *speech within speech, utterance within utterance*, and at the same time also *speech about speech, utterance about utterance*” (1986: 115; partly our emphasis). Each utterance has to reckon that it becomes commented on by its reparability and quotability, i.e. it becomes the object of a possible repair or comment or of another re-usage in the ongoing interaction.

This is where Goodwin’s intuition about the homology of tool-assembly and verbal interaction accumulation comes into play: Quotability and being-commented-upon (and be they simply a short butting-in or

a repetition accentuated differently), mutual instrumentalisation and change of use as well as combinability are all chips of the same block. What are the parallels to the heterotechnic assemblage of stone tools? In his comment on Heidegger's analysis of *Zeug*—"equipment" (1962)—that he translates as "utensils", Aron Gurwitsch (1979) has reminded us that Heidegger's "totality of involvements", in which the usage of a "utensil" or of "equipment" is embedded, must be conceptualised in a much more flexible way than merely as a physical space like a workshop or a farm, as Heidegger had put it. In the usage of technology there exist ingrained sequences and fixed operational chains, but there are also everyday improvisations, be they in the workshop or at home.

One can still make use of a spoon in another meaningful way; a physician, for example, does this when he turns the spoon around and uses it to depress the tongue and examine the throat; similarly one can use a box for packing—but when the box is set on end, one can also climb up on it to get something from the cupboard. (1979: 68)

Is the box the *same* box when, on one occasion it serves for packing my books and is at the center of my vectorial comportment, and on another occasion it is used as an object on which I can stand? ... And does the cane with which I support myself remain the same when I use it to reach something, when both times I manipulate it and when, so to speak, it presents itself as an 'extension' of my arm? (1979: 82)

Gurwitsch has answered this question in Heidegger's terms, but against the grain.

As a consequence, it is already asserted that there is no identity of the utensil-piece in contrast to the changing utensil-totalities and manipulatory situations. The particular utensil-piece is always different from situation to situation in accordance with the utensil-to-

tality in question; it is what it is only in respect to its usage. What one does with a utensil and what one uses it for *in concreto* is determinative for what that concrete utensil is *hic et nunc*; but it is not determinative for that for which it can serve in other constellations and situations. (ibid.)

These remarks by Gurwitsch touch on Goodwin's question about the laminated or compositional tool from the other side. They entail that for verbal, material, bodily, or mutually verbal-material-bodily work-arounds, ad hoc solutions, improvised aids to understanding, figurative labellings or glosses that are assembled once-only, no other principle is necessary than for inventions that are methodically found and perpetuated, for incremental enhancements or accumulative installations. The nature of human cooperative processes is co-operative right from the start, as Goodwin shows, and can therefore, in one situation or beyond one situation, adopt the property of "accumulative" assemblage that in another situation will vanish or not be relevant at all. This is because by far, most of our innovative improvisational expressions and most of our technical makeshifts have situationally solved our problem only to afterwards vanish into oblivion. And it is because, as Gurwitsch has made clear, there is no identity criterion that determines the identity of the meaning or usage of technical and linguistic *ad hoc* components, that an accumulative history of tools is possible and a quotable language change is happening each day. The box may remain the same, and the phrase may be repeated. The box may be "laminated" as an "ad hoc" stepping stone for once or for longer. Because we can switch between transitory and permanent "utensil-pieces", transitory "utensil-pieces" may become permanent "utensil-pieces", transitory technical work-arounds may become regular devices, and this is how permanent "utensil-pieces" are invented in the first place, and how permanent "utensil-pieces" give rise to new transient "laminations". Because "there is no identity of the utensil-piece in contrast to the changing utensil-totalities and manipu-

latory situations”, tools and utterances can be transformed ad hoc, and they can be used to build new incremental resources that can outlast the situation and be part of mutual learning processes. Technical and linguistic co-operative action both thrive on this common principle. This is what we learn from Chuck Goodwin’s book about what historical irreversibility, the accumulative or incremental usage of continuously improvised interaction components, and the emergence of heterotechnic tools have in common. The difficulty of understanding his (and Gurwitsch’s) proposal seems to lie in the fact that it was all much simpler than we thought.

Goodwin’s concept of “co-operative action” does not crucially depend on this identification of the fundamentals of linguistic quotability and human tool use. Still, we believe that his intuition is right and that it can shed light on the highly disputed question about language history in prehistory. Once tools were not only used without identity criterion but were produced in series to adopt different identities (the “blades”)—once they were combined and laminated—, a language that was equally repercussive in its quotability, mutual change of use, reparability, and correctability and assistance, either became or already was a necessity. The rigorous change of use of an *ad hoc* assemblage and the rigorous change of use of a verbal gesture (like Chil’s) are indeed closely related and we hope that our excursions into Voloshinov and Gurwitsch will help to re-specify this relationship. However, further archeological, cognitive-psychological, linguistic, sociological, and anthropological research is needed to give justice to Goodwin’s intuition. At least, now that we have used Goodwin’s book to unpack his box of theoretical insights and turned it over and stood on the box to take some quotes from the shelves, we do believe it is the same box after all.

Notes

- 1 Which, as David Graeber (2014: 95) has reminded us, is the basic definition of “communism”.

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